Binary Form

Binary form is a musical form consisting of two main sections, commonly labeled A and B, or A and A'. The two sections are distinguished by their tonal organization, cadential goals, and relationship to the musical material.

Simple Sectional	Simple Continuous
‖: A :‖ ‖: A′ :‖ IAC or PAC PAC I I X I i i X i	‖: A :‖ ‖: A′ :‖ not tonic PAC I V X I i III X i i v X i
‖: A :‖ ‖: B :‖ IAC or PAC PAC I I X I i i X i	‖: A :‖ ‖: B :‖ not tonic PAC I V X I i III X i i v X i

Simple Sectional with Balanced endings	Simple Continuous with Balanced endings
‖: A (x) :‖ ‖: dig. (x) :‖ IAC or PAC PAC I I X I i i X i	‖: A (x) :‖ ‖: dig. (x) :‖ not tonic PAC I V X I i III X i i v X i
‖: A (x) :‖ ‖: A′ (x) :‖ IAC or PAC PAC I I X I i i X i	‖: A (x) :‖ ‖: A′ (x) :‖ not tonic PAC I V X I i III X i i v X i
‖: A (x) :‖ ‖: B (x) :‖ IAC or PAC PAC I I X I i i X i	‖: A (x) :‖ ‖: B (x) :‖ not tonic PAC I V X I i III X i i v X i

(X) [Structural X] The melodic or thematic material introduced in the latter half of the A section (A[: ... **X**:]) is brought back to close the B section (B[: ... **X**:])

- **X** [Tonal X] represents the opening tonal destination of the B section. A placeholder indicating a transitional, unstable, or secondary tonal center that departs from the home key (I) and the secondary key (often V, III, or ii). This can also be a digression on the micro level.

Rounded Sectional	Rounded Continuous
‖: A :‖ ‖: dig. A′ :‖ IAC or PAC HC PAC I I X I i i X i	‖: A :‖ ‖: dig. A′ :‖ not tonic HC PAC I V X I i III X i i v X i
‖: A :‖ ‖: B A′ :‖ IAC or PAC Var. Cad. PAC I I X I i i X i	‖: A :‖ ‖: B A′ :‖ not tonic Var. Cad. PAC I V X I i III X i i v X i

- The term **balanced** is not applied to rounded binary.
- **Var. Cad.** (short for various cadences) Various cadences may be used at the end of the B section.
- A **digression** is a short, transitional, or developmental passage that moves away from the home key—often utilizing a sequence—without establishing a stable, independent tonal center or a closed thematic phrase, ultimately driving toward an open cadence (like a HC) to set up the return of the opening material (A′ or (X)). Digressions can occur on both the macro level and the micro level. For example, if an A' or B section has multiple phrases, a digression can be one of those phrases.
- Binary form may also include: introductions, codas, and interpolations (inserted middle sections).
- An **arrow sign** → is used to indicate a modulation toward a new tonal center.

How to Diagram Binary Form

Example 1: Simple Continuous

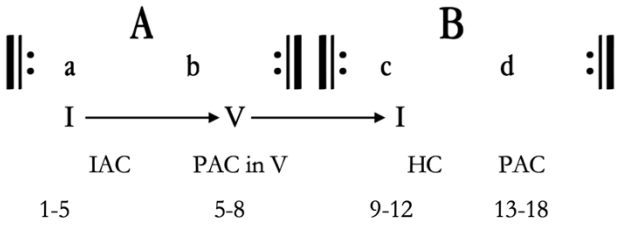
Macro structure

Micro structure

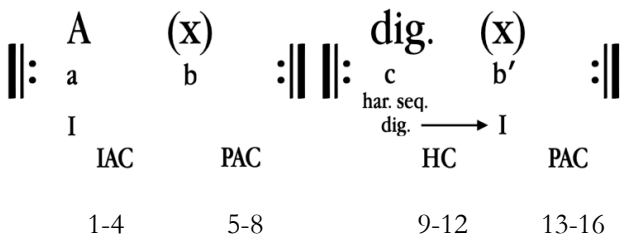
Tonal areas

Cadences

Measure numbers



Example 2: Simple Sectional with Balanced Endings



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