

The sonata idea

The **most important underlying principle of sonata form**: material which occurs in some **non-tonic** key creates a large scale "tonal dissonance" which will eventually be resolved by the recurrence of that material in the **tonic** key.

Sonata form, also called **sonata-allegro form** and **first movement form**, represents the **height** of musical drama in the opposition and eventual resolution of different themes and keys. Charles Rosen writes: "The advantage of sonata forms over earlier musical forms might be termed a dramatized clarity: sonata forms open with a clearly defined opposition . . . which is intensified and then symmetrically resolved." (*Sonata Forms*, p. 12). Many people refer more to the **sonata idea**, since each sonata "form" movement has its own special idiosyncracies and qualities.

Here is how Rosen relates the "textbook" definition of sonata form (*Sonata Forms*, pp. 1-2, with a few modifications by Cummings):

"Sonata form, as that term is most frequently encountered, refers to the form of a single movement rather than to the whole three- or four-movement sonata, symphony, or work of chamber music. It is sometimes called **first movement form**, or **sonata allegro form**. In its standard meaning, it is a three-part form, in which the second and third parts are closely linked so as to imply a two-part organization. The three parts are called **exposition**, **development**, and **recapitulation**: the two-part organization appears most clearly when, as often happens, the exposition is played twice (the development-and-recapitulation section is also sometimes, but more rarely, repeated).

The exposition presents the principal thematic material, establishes the tonic key, and modulates to the dominant or to some other nearly-related key. (In works in minor, this will generally be the relative major). The **first theme** or **first group of themes** is stated in the tonic. The opening statement is sometimes immediately repeated (a **counter-statement**), and this counter-statement often leads without a break into a modulation or **transition**: this section ends either on the dominant or more often with a half cadence on V/V (or, V/III in minor). The **second theme**, or **second group**, is stated in the dominant (or relative major in minor-mode movements): it is traditionally supposed to have a more lyrical and tranquil character than the first group, and is sometimes said to be more 'feminine.' At the end of the second group, there is a **closing theme** (or several closing themes) with a cadential function. The final cadence of the exposition, on the dominant (or III in minor mode movements), may be followed by an immediate repetition of the exposition, or by a short transition leading back to the tonic, then followed by a repeat, or — if the exposition is not repeated — by the development.

The development section may begin in one of several ways: with the first theme now played at the dominant; with an abrupt modulation to a more remote key; with a reference to the closing theme; or — in rare instances — with a new theme. It is in this part of sonata form that the most distant and the most rapid modulations are to be found, and the technique of development is the fragmentation of the themes of the exposition and the reworking of the fragments into new combinations and sequences. The end of the development prepares the return to the tonic with a passage called the **retransition**. [The retransition often includes a long passage with much emphasis on chords of dominant function — thus called a **dominant prolongation** — which heightens the listener's anticipation of the return of tonic at the beginning of the recapitulation].

The recapitulation starts with the return of the first theme in the tonic. The rest of this section 'recapitulates' the exposition as it was first played, except that the second group and the closing theme appear in the tonic, with the transition suitably altered so that it no longer leads to the dominant but prepares what follows in the tonic. Longer works are rounded off by a **coda**."

Sonata forms may be considered an extension of the basic principles of (rounded) binary form; in a very real sense, sonata form evolved out of the rounded binary:

: A1	A2	: : B	A1	A2	:
: I	V	: : (various)	I	I	:
: i	III	: : (various)	i	i	:

turns into:

Exposition	Development	Recapitulation
: P T S K	(from Expos.) P T S K	
: I → V	(various,	I I
: i → III	leading to V)	i i

Notice the symbols used here (originally created by Jan LaRue in *Guidelines for Style Analysis*): P T S and K. These are the symbols we will use in this class. **P** stands for **principal theme**, **T** for **transition**, **S** for **second theme** (note that it's **not** really "secondary" — it's just as important as the principal theme), and **K** for **closing theme** (it's 'K' because 'C' is used for so many other things in analysis).

Each key area (especially the keys in which P and S are written) may have more than one theme, thus: P1 P2 P3, and so forth. This would then be called the **P theme group**. Theme groups are called such because they may include **several** themes, **all of which are still in the prevailing key**.

Bear in mind, however, that in addition to the historical evolution from rounded binary form, there's also a definite element of "ternary-ness" to sonata form, in that there are three distinct, important sections.

About listening to sonata form

Let's concentrate for the moment on expositions. Much of what to listen for is the melodic, rhythmic, and textural characteristics of the various themes. Unless you have perfect pitch or at least a very good ear for tonality, you need to develop additional strategies for **distinguishing** among the various themes and musical ideas; if you can't tell **where** the different themes are, describing them is impossible. Here are a few hints:

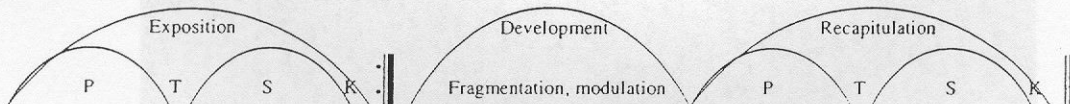
1. **Most important:** work on distinguishing between tonally **stable** and tonally **unstable** sections; the **P theme** will generally be **stable**, while the purpose of **T** is **instability** — to modulate to the new key. The S theme is often "signalled" by a full cadence on V or a half cadence on V/V immediately preceding it, and both the S and the K themes will then sound more tonally stable (but in the new key).
2. Listen for **texture**: composers often "signal" new sections or themes by significant (but sometimes subtle) changes in texture.
3. Listen to the **quality** of the different themes: P themes often sound a bit agitated; T themes are hard to characterize, but are often somehow derived from P; S themes often are more lyrical; K themes often sound less "tuneful" and may feature simple figuration of some kind. Work on distinguishing between "real tunes" and mere figuration — scales, arpeggios, broken thirds, and so forth.

A schematic representation of sonata form and some possible variants

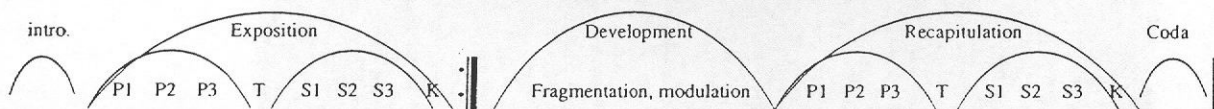
(adapted from course materials by Allen Winold)

Note: this simply shows a "normal" sonata form and just a few common variants on the "model." Bear in mind that there are as many sonata forms as there are pieces.

1. Complete, "normal" sonata form.



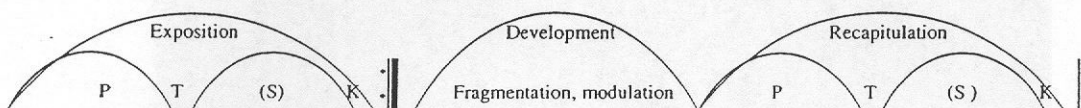
2. Expanded sonata form (may include any of the following: P and S **theme groups**, introduction, multi-sectioned and lengthy development, multi-sectioned and lengthy coda). More common in the 19th century--Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Mahler, etc.



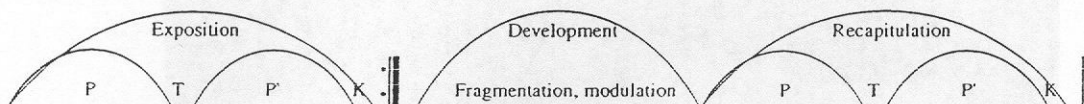
3. **Sonatina** form: drastically reduced or even omitted development--a simple, brief transition (usually with a modulation back to the tonic key) takes its place. More common in early sonata forms (18th century).



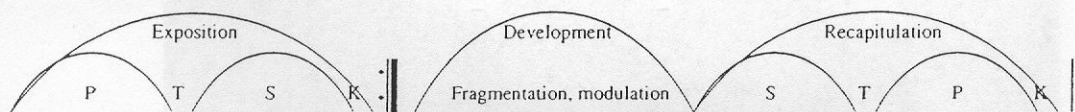
4. No clear second theme (recall that one must always consider **tonal structure**; that is imperative here). Probably more common in the 18th century, especially Haydn et al.



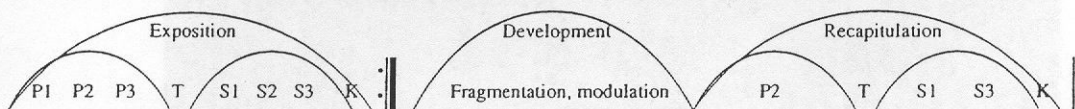
5. Second theme identical to (or a slight variant of) the first theme--this is the so-called **monothematic** sonata form. Again, tonal structure is critically important. Haydn was fond of monothematic sonata forms.



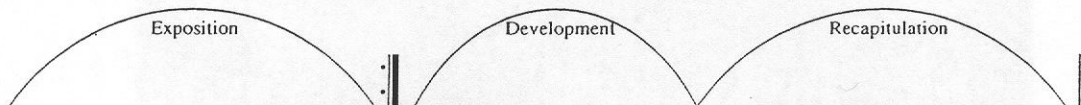
6. Reordering of themes in the recapitulation. The schematic shown below, in which the second theme comes before the first, is called an **inverted recapitulation**. Other possibilities here may include switching the order within theme groups. For example, perhaps the P group includes themes P1, P2, and P3 in the exposition, while they are reordered to be P2, P3, and P1 in the recapitulation. The possibilities are endless. More common in the 19th century.



7. **Omission** of themes in the recapitulation. As with the previous example, the possibilities are endless. One possible reason for omitting a theme: if it is used **extensively** in the development section, a composer may elect to omit it altogether from the recapitulation.

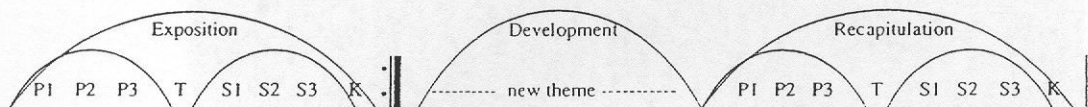


8. Unusual tonal structure. The first example is called a **subdominant recapitulation**. Note the abundance of third-related keys in the other examples.

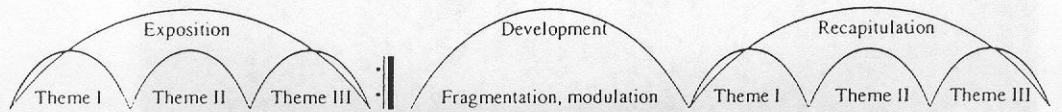


Mozart K. 545, I:	P I	S V		P IV	S I	
Beethoven Op. 53, I:	P I	S III		P I	S VI ----- I	
Beethoven Op. 130, I:	P I	S bVI		I ----- recap -----		
Schubert D. 956, I	P I	S bIII		P I	S bVI ---- I	
Schubert D. 703	P i	S1 bVI	S2 V	S1 bVII	S1 III	S2 I

9. Introduction of a new theme in the development, recapitulation, or coda. This occurs most frequently in the development, much less frequently elsewhere. A famous example occurs in the first movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony.



10. **Three key exposition** (also called a **tripartite exposition**): an exposition (and usually recapitulation) with three relatively equal themes in three **different keys**. Note the symbology change from P-T-S-K to Themes 1, 2, and 3. There may still be transitions (between themes 1 and 2 and/or themes 2 and 3) and a closing passage. Rarely seen in 18th-century movements; more common in the 19th century (Schubert in particular was fond of them).



11. Introductions

A. Functions

1. **Preparation** for the main portion; does not stand on its own
2. **Prologue** or frontespiece to the main portion; could stand on its own as an independent piece

B. Thematic relationship to the main portion: is the introduction **clearly** related, **subtly** related, or **not** related to later themes or motives?

C. Tonal relationships

1. Entirely in the key of the main portion
2. Beginning in the key of the main portion, ending on the dominant
3. In a different key or mode (for example, an introduction in d minor, followed by a main portion in D Major)

12. **Transitions** (function: modulate to the new key; often ends on the dominant of the new key)

- A. **Dependent** transition: one which develops straight out of P theme material; may often begin like a counter-statement of the P theme then continue with modulatory passage
- B. **Independent** transition: new material (perhaps *motivically* related to P theme, but not *literally* a restatement) the function of which is to modulate
- C. The transition within the recapitulation: this presents a problem--if the function of the transition is to modulate, but the recapitulation is entirely in the **tonic** key, then something has to change--the T material cannot modulate here. Solutions: 1) rewrite the T material so it does not modulate; 2) omit (or greatly shorten) the T material; 3) use a subdominant recapitulation (rare); 4) other?

13. Development sections

- A. May (in fact, usually **do**) contain several distinct subsections
- B. Sometimes conclude with a **retransition**, whose tonal function often is a **dominant prolongation**--a long emphasis on the dominant and sometimes other dominant-related chords: I_4^6 , $^{\circ}7/V$, V/V , +6 chords, all of which **point** to the dominant as the most structurally important chord in this passage. This passage heightens the listener's anticipation of the return of tonic at the recapitulation.

14. Codas

A. Functions

1. **Ending** for the main portion; does not stand on its own
2. **Epilogue** for the main portion; could stand on its own as an independent piece

B. Thematic relationship to main portion

1. Clearly related to themes or motives of the main portion
2. Like a second development section (Beethoven was especially fond of this)
3. New material--thematic or motivic

Remember the sonata principle: material which occurs in some **non-tonic** key will eventually recur in the **tonic** key.