

## Phrases and Periods

In music a *phrase* is a structural unit and represents a complete musical thought, like the grammatical sentence. With musical phrases however, the “completeness” of a phrase can have either a conclusive or inconclusive quality.

Consider the first part of *Over The Rainbow*:

First phrase:           Somewhere over the rainbow  
                              Way up high

Second phrase:       There’s a land that I heard of  
                              Once in a lullaby

The first phrase is a complete thought, but it feels far less conclusive than the second phrase (also a complete thought).

These two phrases form a bigger structure called a *period*. A musical period is a structure composed of at least two phrases where the last phrase sounds the most conclusive. It is comparable to the grammatical paragraph, which is composed of multiple sentences. By delaying the sense of completion/conclusion, a period keeps the listener engaged while the music unfolds—until the final point is made. As long as phrases end inconclusively, the listener is made to feel that there is more music to come...until the final phrase. Then a new period can start.

Here is an example of a four-phrase period: *Puff The Magic Dragon*.

### Puff The Magic Dragon

The image displays two lines of musical notation in 4/4 time, illustrating a four-phrase period. The first line contains the first two phrases: 'Puff, the ma-gic dra-gon lived by the sea and' (1st phrase - somewhat conclusive) and 'frol icked in the au-tumn mist in a land called Hon-ah Lee.' (2nd phrase - inconclusive, the halfway point of the period). The second line contains the last two phrases: 'Li-ttle Ja-ckie Pa-per loved that ra-scal Puff, and' (3rd phrase - somewhat conclusive, like the 1st phrase) and 'brought him strings and seal ing wax and o-ther fan-cy stuff.' (4th phrase - the most conclusive, completes the period). Brackets above the notes group each phrase, and a larger bracket above the entire second line groups the last two phrases as the final part of the period.

While each phrase is an idea unto itself, it is only the 4<sup>th</sup> phrase that completes the whole musical “paragraph”—the period.