e-z Theory: Phrasing and Slurs

In this section, we will look at slurs and what makes a musical phrase.

1

More on slurs

If you have done the worksheet on staccato and legato, you will remember that one of the ways in which composers show that the music is to be played legato is to use a slur:



Slurs are also used to show us that the music can take a short breath before beginning again.

Say the following, rhythmically but without stopping to breathe:

I like fish and chips and mushy peas and chicken.

It's quite hard to do this and it sounds rather unnatural. We have used 'and' too many times, so everything becomes a bit jumbled up.

This time, say it again using a comma after chips.

I like fish and chips, mushy peas and chicken.

Can you see that it is much easier to say, since it has two distinct parts? We call these phrases.

Here we have the words again, this time written out with a short melody:



- 1. Sing the phrase, ignoring the comma.
- 2. Put a tick after chips where the comma comes.
- 3. Sing it again, taking a breath where the tick comes.

Can you see that we have allowed you and the music to breathe? We have two separate phrases.

This time, add slurs over the notes to show the beginning and end of each phrase. Now we have a piece of music that is less jumbled and makes more musical sense!



More on slurs

In the following, you will have four-bar melodies each with two phrases. Decide where the music naturally breathes and draw slurs to show each.



3 Compose your own

On the empty stave below, write two different four-bar melodies. These will each contain two phrases, which you will mark with slurs. You can choose the key and time signatures yourself.

