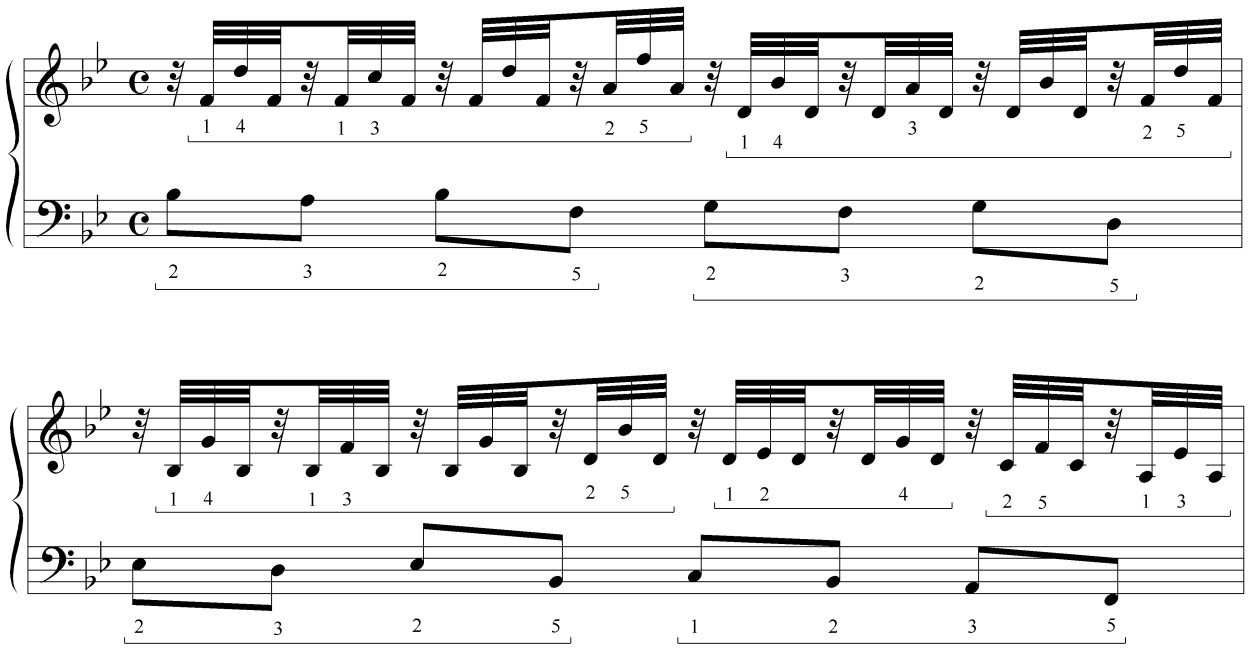
Use Blocking as a Fingering Technique

Blocking is a technique that is used to find fingerings by organizing and grouping notes within hand positions. This is the way we learn fingering when we first start to play, using five-finger hand positions that encompass the first five keys of the major or minor scale. Blocking produces secure fingerings because the player conceives of groups of notes in relation to hand positions, the block being a set structure that organizes the grouping.

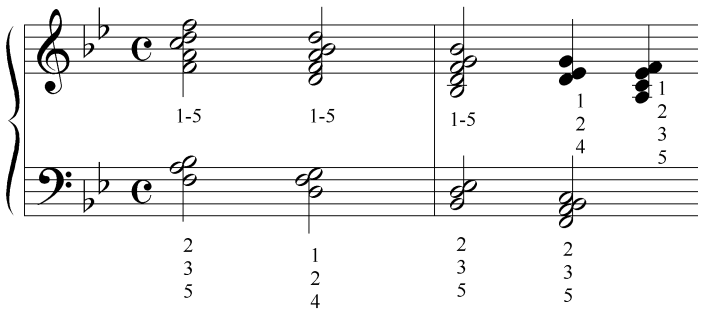
Blocking involves the process of finding fingerings for melodies as one would for chords. It is easier to find fingerings for chords than individual notes since there are fewer possible finger choices available for each note. One simply conceives of melodic passages as chordal ones, as if it were necessary to play all the notes of a melody or figure at the same time.

When fingering choices are guided by the technique, the hand often moves less. When the hand does move, the block helps the player to set up groups of notes rather than one note at a time. As long as the hand is comfortable and not strained as a result of unusual stretching, the player will often benefit from fingerings that take in as many keys as possible in one hand position.

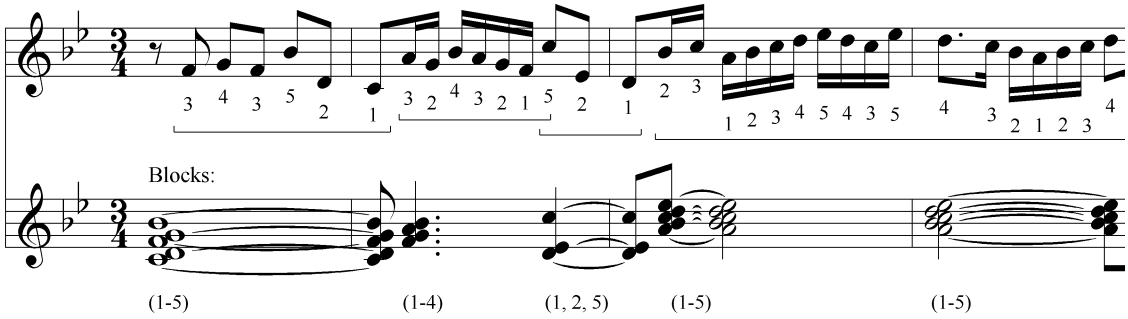
Bach's Prelude and Fugue in Bb Major from Book I of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* provide examples of the technique. In the Prelude, the first two measures can be fingered using five blocks in the right hand, and four in the left:



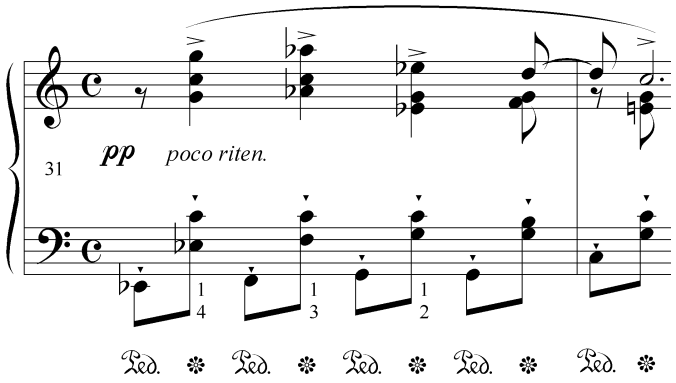
The structure of the blocks can be seen in the example below. Here, the single note passages are reduced to chordal structures forming the blocks:



The first four measures of the right hand of the fugue, with the fingering below, reduces to four blocks:

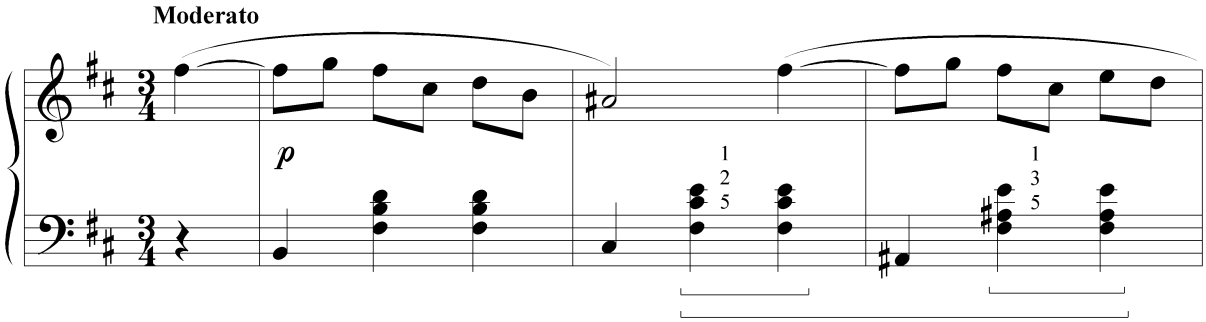


Blocking can also be an effective technique, even when the blocked grouping is interrupted by notes in a different register. In Chopin's Etude in A minor op. 25 no. 4, the left hand forms a comfortable four note block, even though pairs of notes from the block are interrupted by bass notes in a different register:



The blocking is effective in this instance not only as an organizing feature of the fingering, but because the left hand moves to the same hand position after each bass note. This can also be seen in

Chopin's Waltz in B minor op. 69 no. 2, where the left hand moves to the same block, playing different notes the second time:



Keep in mind that blocking is not a fingering technique that can be applied in every situation, or on a regular basis. The search for effective fingerings is often a complicated and endeavor requiring much thought, and the application of many different techniques and approaches. Blocking technique, however, will contribute to your ability to find workable, secure, and appropriate fingerings.