Procedures of Four-Part Writing
Chord Construction and Voice-Leading
Four Voices

- Soprano
- Alto
- Tenor
- Bass
Notation Style
Soprano and alto in the treble clef
Notation Style

Soprano and alto in the treble clef
Bass and tenor in the bass clef
Soprano and alto in the treble clef
Bass and tenor in the bass clef
Stems distinguish one voice from another
Soprano and alto in the treble clef
Bass and tenor in the bass clef
Stems distinguish one voice from another
Note the unison on the third beat
Doubling

All else being equal, it’s best to double the root.

However, any note of a chord may be doubled *unless* it is a note which requires a specific resolution, such as:

- The 7th of a seventh chord
- The leading tone
Doubling

Do not think of “double the root” as a hard-and-fast rule.

A progression can be vastly improved sometimes by doubling notes other than the root.
Doubling

In this first example, doubling the root of the first two chords results in a parallel fifth (an illegal motion) being written between the two inner voices.

In this revision, the third of each chord is doubled (between tenor and soprano in the first chord, and between bass and tenor in the second chord) and solves the problem.
Complete and Incomplete Chords

- Chords are *complete* when they contain at least one instance of each chord element (root, 3rd, 5th, etc.).
- Chords are *incomplete* when one of those elements is missing.
Incomplete Chords

It is sometimes necessary to write incomplete chords to avoid problems with voice-leading.

- Do not write incomplete chords in inversions
- Generally speaking double (or triple) the root and omit the fifth of the chord
- *Never* omit the 3rd of a chord!
Spacing

- Do not allow more than one octave between two adjacent voices.
- Between bass and tenor, the distance may be as much as two octaves.
Exercises: Tonic Triad
Exercises: Dominant Triad
Exercises: Dominant 7th Chord
Open and Close Position

- Open: a chord element could be placed between any two of the upper three voices
- Close: no chord elements could be placed between any of the upper three voices
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open

Open
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open

Close
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open

Open
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open
Identifying Close and Open

Close
Keyboard Style

- Comes from the old system of “realizing” a figured bass line
- The right hand is used to play the upper three voices, while the left hand plays the bass
- The upper three voices are written in the treble clef, while the bass line is written in the bass
- The soprano line may or may not be stemmed separately from the alto and tenor
Keyboard Style
Melodic Motion
Melodic Motion

Conjunct Motion
Melodic Motion

- Conjunct Motion
- Disjunct Motion
Leaps
Leaps

Small leaps (up to about a fifth) aren’t much of a problem
Leaps

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- Larger leaps need to be handled more carefully.
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  The octave is the maximum distance.
Leaps

- Small leaps (up to about a fifth) aren’t much of a problem
- Larger leaps need to be handled more carefully:
  - The octave is the maximum distance
  - Avoid two in a row in the same direction, unless they arpeggiate a triad (and even then be careful!)
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- Larger leaps need to be handled more carefully:
  - The octave is the maximum distance
  - Avoid two in a row in the same direction, unless they arpeggiate a triad (and even then be careful!)
  - Generally after a larger leap, return stepwise in the opposite direction whenever possible
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  - Generally after a larger leap, return stepwise in the opposite direction whenever possible
- Do not allow a leap of an augmented second
Leaps

These are all good
Leaps

These are leaps involving sixths and above
Leaps

Multiple leaps, some good, some not

\[ \text{poor} \quad \text{good} \quad \text{good} \quad \text{good} \]
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

**Parallel Motion**

Both voices move in the same direction and retain the same interval between them.
Simultaneous Motion

**Parallel Motion**
Both voices move in the same direction and retain the same interval between them

**Similar Motion**
Both voices move in the same direction, but the interval between them changes
Simultaneous Motion

- **Parallel Motion**
  - Both voices move in the same direction and retain the same interval between them

- **Similar Motion**
  - Both voices move in the same direction, but the interval between them changes

- **Oblique Motion**
  - Only one voice moves while the other remains stationary
Simultaneous Motion

- **Parallel** Motion
  - Both voices move in the same direction and retain the same interval between them

- **Similar** Motion
  - Both voices move in the same direction, but the interval between them changes

- **Oblique** Motion
  - Only one voice moves while the other remains stationary

- **Contrary** Motion
  - The voices move in opposite directions
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Similar
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Contrary
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Parallel
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Oblique
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Parallel
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Contrary
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Trick Question! No motion at all
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Oblique
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Contrary
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion
Simultaneous Motion

Similar
Forbidden Parallel Motions
Forbidden Parallel Motions

- Motion by octaves
Forbidden Parallel Motions

- Motion by octaves

- Motion by unisons
Forbidden Parallel Motions

- Motion by octaves
- Motion by unisons
- Motion by fifths
Forbidden Contrary Motions
Forbidden Contrary Motions

Octaves
Forbidden Contrary Motions

- Octaves
- Fifths
Hidden (Direct) Motions
Hidden (Direct) Motions

- Fifths
Hidden (Direct) Motions

- **Fifths**

- **Octaves**
Hidden (Direct) Motions
Hidden (Direct) Motions

- Hidden, or direct, motion is a problem only if:
Hidden (Direct) Motions

Hidden, or direct, motion is a problem only if:

1. It occurs between the outer voices AND
Hidden, or direct, motion is a problem only if:

1. It occurs between the \textit{outer voices} AND
2. The \textit{soprano} is moving by leap
Hidden (Direct) Motions

Hidden, or direct, motion is a problem only if:

1. It occurs between the **outer voices** AND
2. The **soprano** is moving by leap

Otherwise, don’t worry about it
Voice Crossing
Voice Crossing

Forbidden for now
Overlapping
Overlapping

Forbidden for now
Practice

The following progression contains many mistakes of chord construction and voice-leading. Find as many as you can.

Hint: there are at least 23 errors!
Parallel octaves between soprano and bass
Doubled leading tone between bass and soprano
Incomplete chord: no 3rd
Parallel fifths between soprano and bass
Hidden octave between soprano and bass
Parallel unison between tenor and alto
Hidden octave between bass and soprano
Overlap between alto and soprano
Spacing error between tenor and alto
Parallel fifth between bass and alto
Parallel fifth between bass and alto
Improperly incomplete chord: no 3rd
Parallel fifths between tenor and alto
Parallel octaves between bass and soprano
Fifths by contrary motion between bass and tenor
Voice crossing between tenor and alto
Voice crossing between tenor and alto
Parallel fifths between bass and tenor
Doubled leading tone in tenor and soprano
Voice crossing between tenor and alto
Parallel octaves between alto and bass
Voice crossing between tenor and alto
Incomplete chord: no 3rd