UNIT 5: PART WRITING

A. DOUBLING

Much of the music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is conceived on a harmonic framework of four parts or four voices (not necessarily to be sung). These four voices are commonly referred to as soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. Since the triad has only three different pitches, Root, 3rd, and 5th, one of the pitches must be doubled to obtain a fourth voice. The note which is to be doubled is chosen according to the position of the chord and is usually as follows:

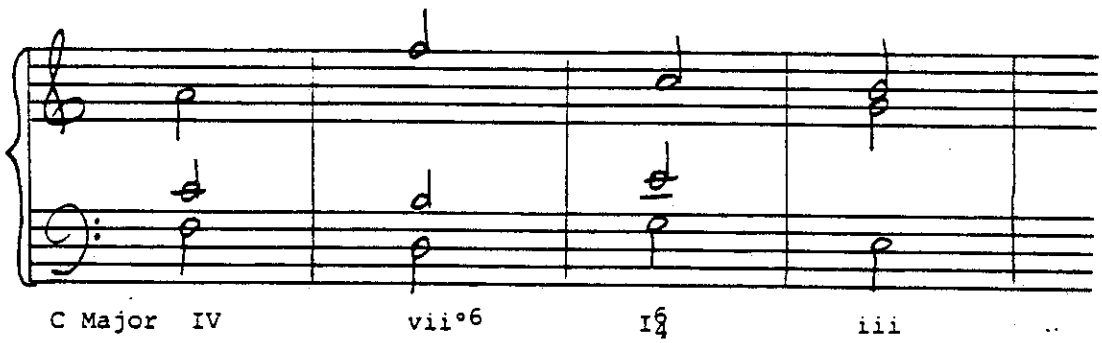
Root Position Chord - double the root

First Inversion Chord - double the soprano or the bass

Second Inversion Chord - double the fifth

Drill 5.1

Observing the rules of doubling, fill in the note which is needed. Soprano (stems up) and Alto (stems down) are written on the treble staff. Tenor (stems up) and Bass (stems down) are written on the bass staff.

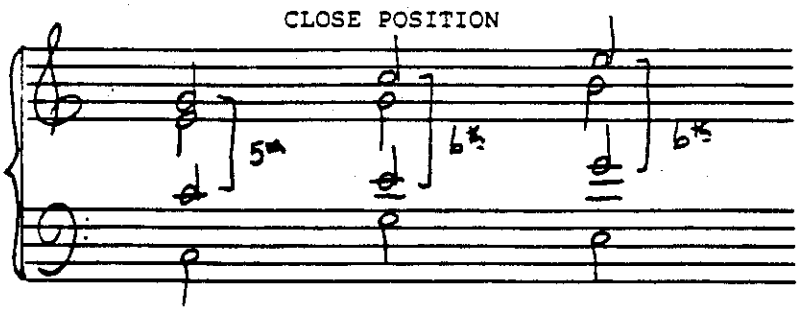


B. SPACING

There are also conventions pertaining to the spacing between the notes of the chord. Generally, the widest intervals are toward the bottom and the narrower intervals are at the top. The position of the notes must also be in accord with the range of the voice or instruments performing the composition.

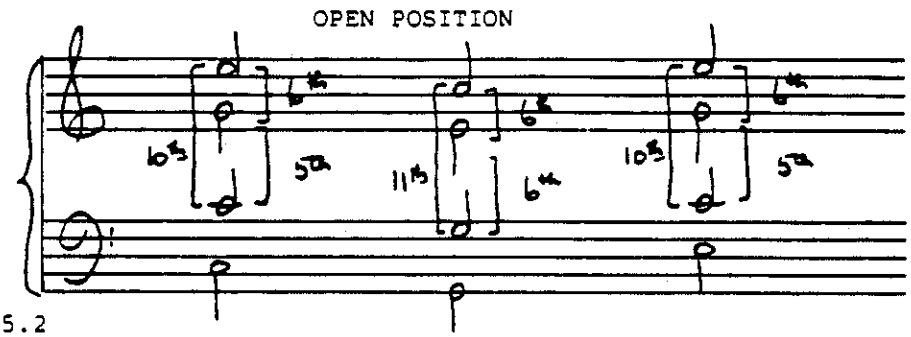
The most common spacing of parts are Close Position and Open Position. CLOSE POSITION occurs when the upper three voices (Soprano, Alto, and Tenor) are as close together as possible and are within the range of an octave. The distance between the tenor and bass is unrestricted.

Example 5.1



OPEN POSITION occurs when the upper three voices exceed the range of an octave, but the adjacent voices (Soprano and Alto, Alto and Tenor) are within the octave. Again, the distance between the tenor and bass is unrestricted.

Example 5.2



Drill 5.2

Write three different arrangements in open position and three different arrangements in close position. Since all chords are in root position, double the root.

1. V in G Major
2. ii° in F minor (harmonic)
3. IV in Bb Major
4. iii in E Mjaor
5. VI in B minor (harmonic)

Drill 5.3

Write two different arrangements in open position and two in close position. Since the chords are in first inversion, double the soprano or bass.

1. I^6 in G Major
2. $vii^{\circ 6}$ in Eb Major
3. $iv^{\circ 6}$ in C minor (harmonic)
4. $ii^{\circ 6}$ in F# minor (harmonic)
5. V^6 in Db Major

Drill 5.4

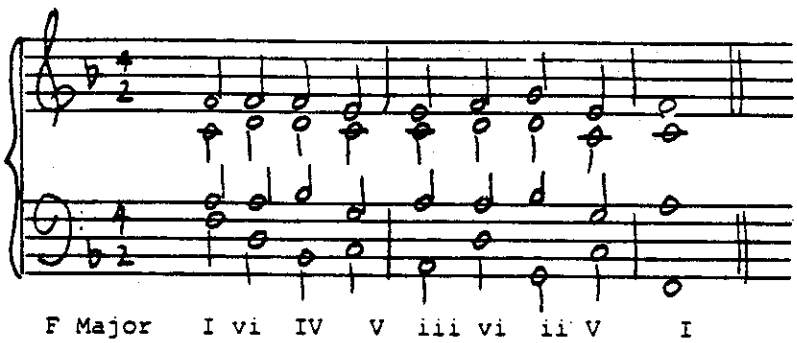
Write two different arrangements in open position and two in close position. Since the chords are in second inversion, double the fifth.

1. I_4^6 in D Major
2. iii_4^6 in Bb Major
3. iv_4^6 in C# minor (harmonic)
4. V_4^6 in F minor (harmonic)
5. ii_4^6 in Gb Major

C. VOICE LEADING

Having explored the technique of writing notes of a single chord on the staff, we now proceed to the process of connecting one chord to another. The next example is a phrase consisting of root position chords written in four parts.

Example 5.3

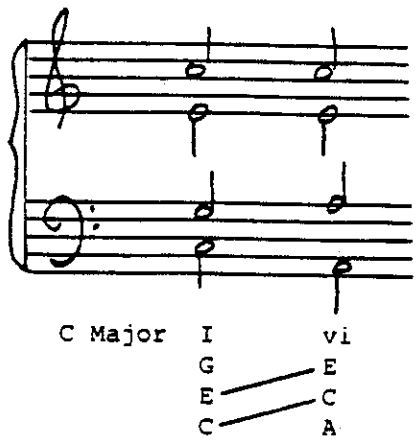


Sing and/or play each voice part separately. That is, play the soprano part from beginning to end, then all the notes of the alto, then tenor, and finally bass. Observe the smoothness of each voice part; most often each voice repeats the note or moves by seconds or thirds. Leaps of fourths and fifths are more rare.

In developing the technique of part writing it is simplest to begin by connecting two chords. Follow these guidelines in doing do.

1. Move a voice to its next note as smoothly as possible.
2. If there are one or two notes which are the same, try to keep "the common tones," that is, repeating them in the same voice.

Example 5.4

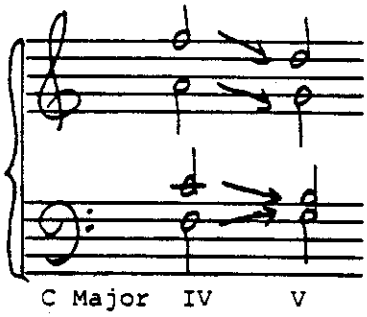


Both chords in root position.

Common tones are C and E and are repeated in soprano and alto.

3. If there are NO common tones between the two chords, use contrary motion. Contrary motion is implemented by having the upper three voices (soprano, alto, tenor) move in the opposite direction that the bass is moving.

Example 5.5



Soprano
Alto — Move Down
Tenor
Bass — Moves Up

Drill 5.5

Write the chord progressions observing the three guidelines just discussed.

G Major	I	iii
	IV	V
	V	I
	vi	IV

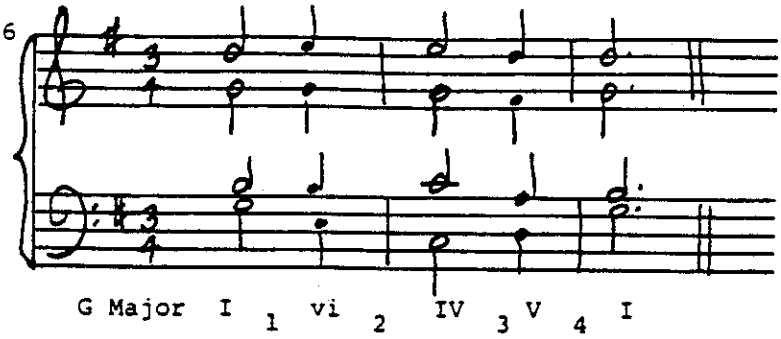
D. CHORD PROGRESSION IN A MAJOR KEY

The process of part writing an entire phrase is a simple task if one thinks of writing a succession of two-chord progressions.

The progression: I vi IV V I may be divided into

I progressing to vi, then vi progressing to IV, then IV progressing to V, then V progressing to I. See Example 5.6

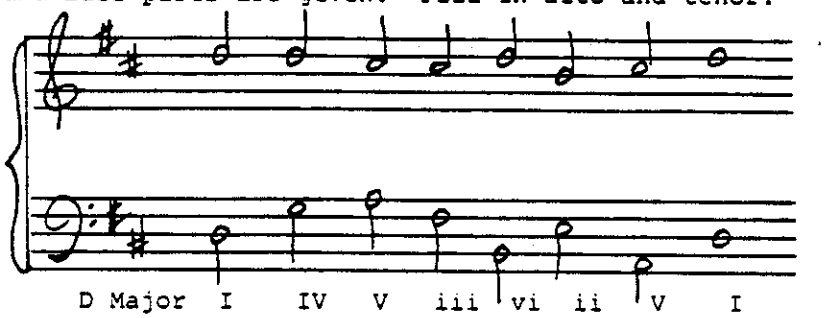
Example 5.6



1. Keep 2 common tones.
2. Keep 2 common tones.
3. Contrary motion between bass and upper three voices.
4. Keep 1 common tone.

Drill 5.6

Soprano and bass parts are given. Fill in alto and tenor.



Drill 5.7

In the key specified, write the progressions in four-part harmony.

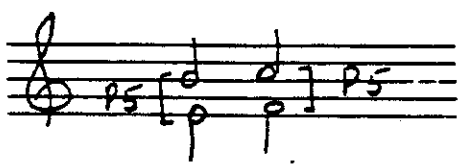
Bb Major: I iii IV ii vi V I

A Major: I V iii IV ii V I

In writing Drill 5.6 and 5.7 be sure that you have observed smooth voice leading. Also, when it is not possible to keep a common tone, have you used contrary motion? If not, a problem described as Parallel Fifths or Parallel Octaves may have appeared which is not acceptable.

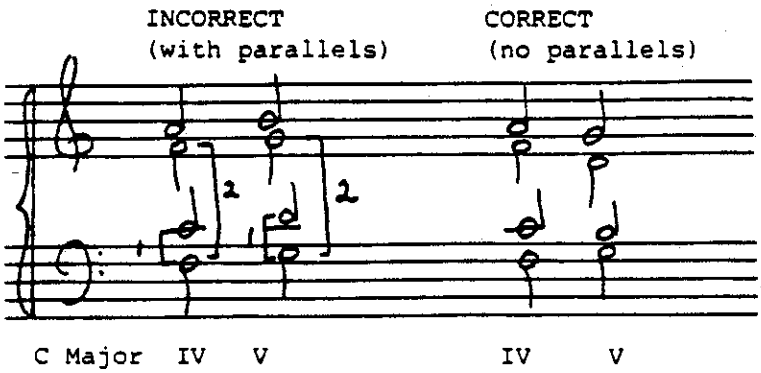
A PARALLEL FIFTH is when two voices are a Perfect 5th apart and they both move the same interval to another note so that they are still a Perfect 5th apart.

Example 5.7



This difficulty could occur in a progression such as IV V illustrated in Example 5.8

Example 5.8

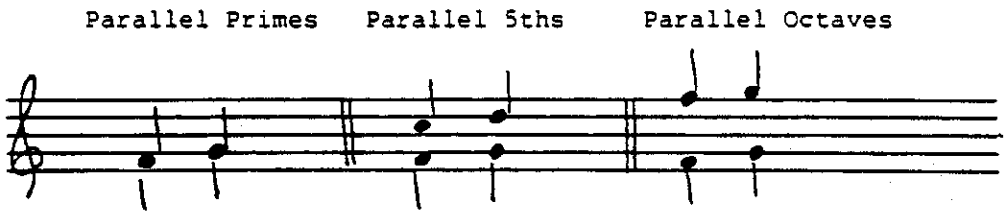


Here, in Example 5.8, are two sets of objectional parallels!

1. Parallel 5ths between bass and tenor.
2. Parallel octaves between alto and bass.

Note that there is a set of parallel thirds between the alto an soprano, and they are considered correct. The only objectionable parallels are those with intervals of primes, fifths and octaves.

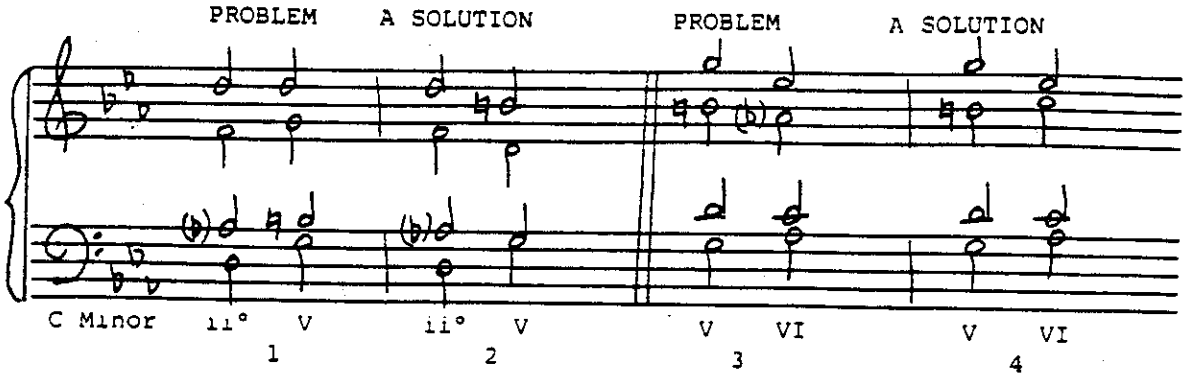
Example 5.9



E. CHORD PROGRESSION IN A MINOR KEY

It is also important to avoid augmented and diminished intervals in the same voice part. Such intervals may occur when writing in the harmonic form of the minor mode. Avoid writing a voice part which passes through the 6th and 7th scale steps. Use contrary motion or alter the doubling of the chords to avoid those unmelodic intervals. The progressions in Example 5.10 illustrate the problem and a solution.

Example 5.10



1. Keeping common tone in soprano causes Aug. 2 in tenor (Ab to B♮).
2. Use contrary motion between bass and upper three voices.
3. Contrary motion between bass and upper three voices causes Aug. 2 in alto (B♮ to Ab).
4. Alter doubling in VI.

Drill 5.8

Write the progression in the key of G Minor. Be sure to avoid the augmented and diminished melodic intervals.

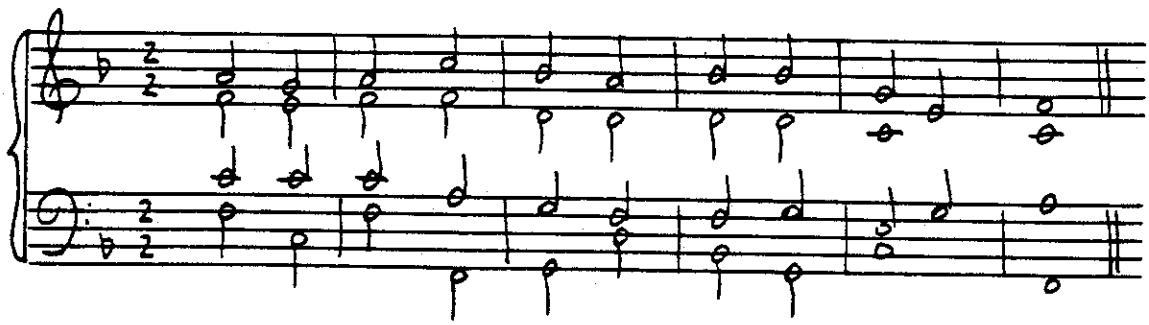
i V VI iv ii° V i

F. HARMONIC PROGRESSIONS USING FIRST INVERSION CHORDS

The use of first inversion chords in a progression is an asset in three ways: a) adds variety, b) gives a lighter effect than root position, and c) allows the bass part to move more often in seconds and thirds, thereby giving the bass a more melodic quality.

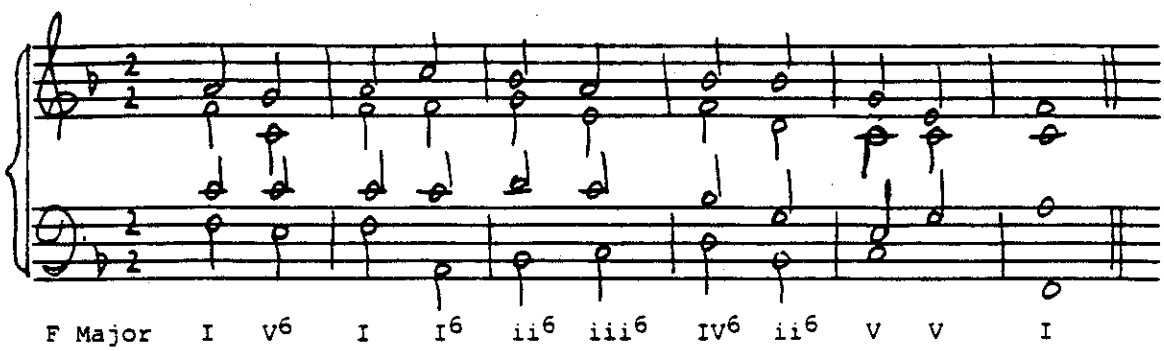
Example 5.11

Analyze the following progression. Determine key and indicate chords with Roman numerals.



In the next progression (Example 5.12) the same melody has been reharmonized using first inversion chords.

Example 5.12

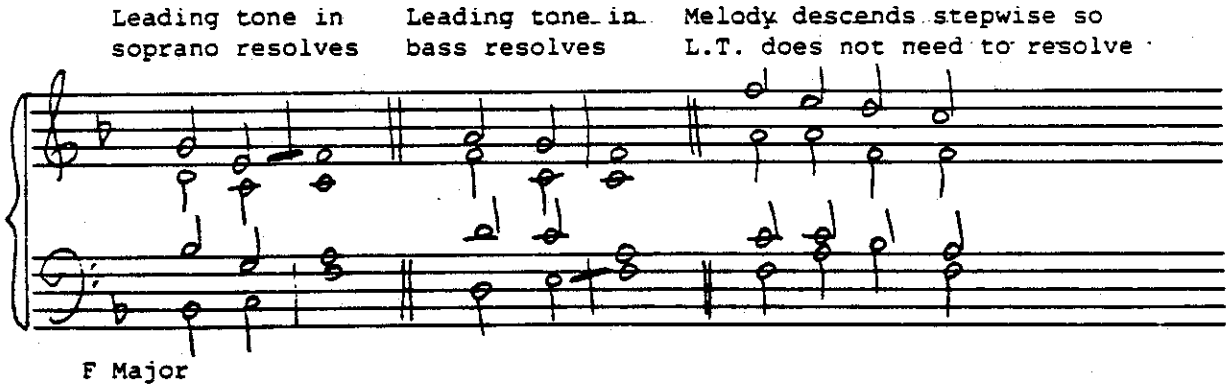


In another section of this unit it stated that the bass or soprano is doubled in first inversion chords. This system of doubling, although usable most of the time, is not the only system in practice. Walter Piston's Harmony states that in doubling first inversion triads, "if the bass is a tonal degree (i.e. 1st, 4th, 5th degree of the scale) it is doubled. If the bass is not a tonal degree, a tonal degree in the chord is chosen for doubling."[1]

Finally, the leading tone is a strong note in the scale and must be treated carefully.

1. The leading tone should not be doubled. More than one leading tone causes the pitch to diminish in strength.
2. If the leading tone is in an outer voice (in four parts, soprano or bass) it should resolve to the tonic unless the prevailing melodic line pushes the pitch in another direction. See Example 5.13.

Example 5.13



Before writing the next Drill, review the following principles of part writing:

1. Move voices as smoothly as possible.

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[1]Piston, Walter. Harmony. W. W. Norton, 5th Edition, Revised and Expanded by Mark DeVoto, p. 72.

2. Use contrary motion between bass and upper three voices where possible, but particularly when there is no common tone between chords.
3. Avoid parallel primes, fifths, and octaves.
4. Observe rules of doubling but be prepared to alter the common usage if voice leading demands it.
5. Do not double leading tone.
6. Resolve leading tone when it is in an outer voice.
7. Avoid Aug. 2nds and Aug. 4ths in melodic line of any voice part.

Drill 5.9

Write the progressions in the key specified.

A Major: I IV V I^6 ii^6 iii^6 V I

D minor (harmonic): i iv ii° V iv^6 ii^6 V i

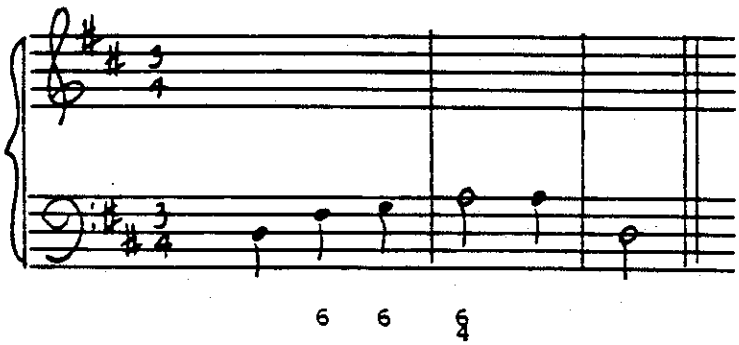
Bb Major: I $vii^{\circ 6}$ I^6 ii^6 V I

G. FIGURED BASS

During the Baroque Period (1600-1750) it was the practice to use a keyboard instrument in ensembles of various vocal and/or instrumental combinations. Since it was expensive and time consuming to write out all the notes which the keyboard player would play, a kind of shorthand was devised known as "Figured Bass." This consisted of numbers and symbols written beneath a single bass line which indicated the notes of the chord and inversions. The keyboard player "realized" the figured bass by playing the chords according to the figures and accidentals. (The verb "to realize" is the term used in figured bass to mean that the player is executing the part according to the symbols.)

In the previous unit it was stated that certain figures indicated inversions, that is 6 means first inversion, $\frac{6}{4}$ means second inversion. Here is an example of these symbols and their realization.

Example 5.14



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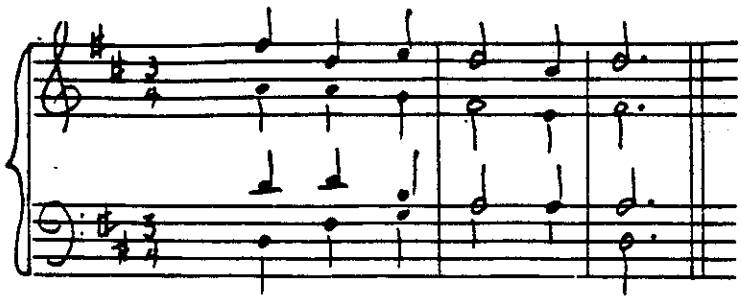
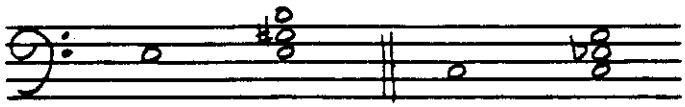


D Major I I^6 ii^6 I^6_4 V I

Other symbols used in figured bass:

#, b, or ♮ — Indicates a triad in root position with the 3rd above the bass note sharped, flatted, or naturaled according to which accidental is used. Note that the 3rd above the bass indicates a particular pitch which may be placed in any octave, not just three notes above the bass.

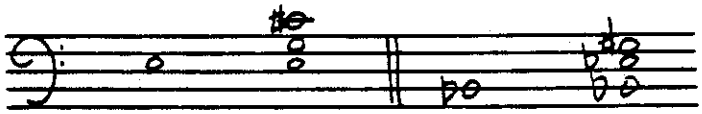
Example 5.15



means b means

#6, $\frac{b6}{4}$ ♮6 $\frac{\#6}{b4}$ — An accidental beside or on either side of a number indicates that the interval above the bass note should be sharped, flatted or naturaled.

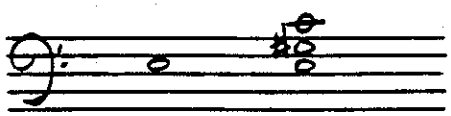
Example 5.16



#6 means $\frac{\#6}{b4}$ means

6 6 6
\# b ♮ — An accidental below a number gives two different meanings: 6 indicates first inversion chord; the accidental indicates a 3rd above the bass is sharped, flatted or naturaled.

Example 5.17



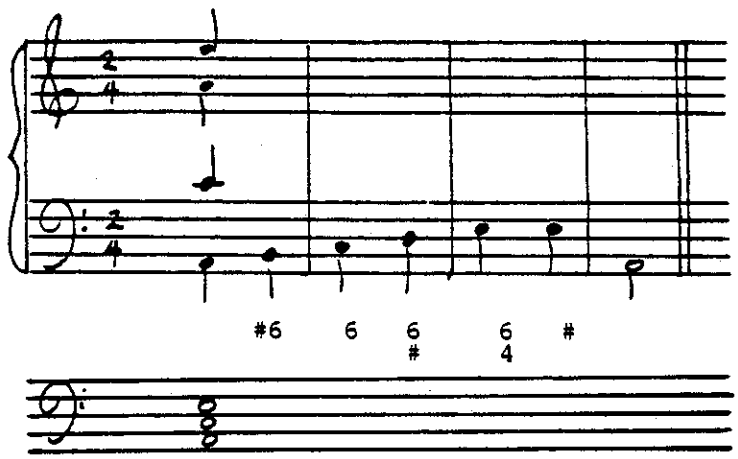
$\frac{6}{\#}$ means

♯ ♯ 4	A slash mark or a plus sign indicates that this interval above the bass note should be raised ½ step. It means the same as a sharp beside a number.
8 5 5 5 3 3	Any one or more of these numbers indicate root position chords. If there is no symbol beneath the note, that also indicates a root position chord.

Be prepared for variations in the way composers and textbook authors employ figured bass. Sometimes there are different ways of expressing the same chord. Use common sense and trust your ear to determine what the writer had intended.

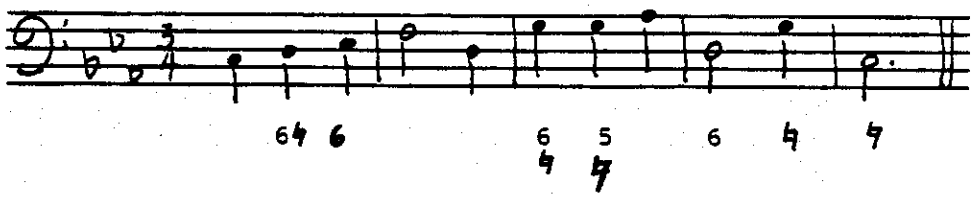
Drill 5.10

Realize the figured bass in four part harmony. It is easier to write the pitches needed in the chord on the staff below before distributing the notes to the various voice parts. See the first chord as an example.



Drill 5.11

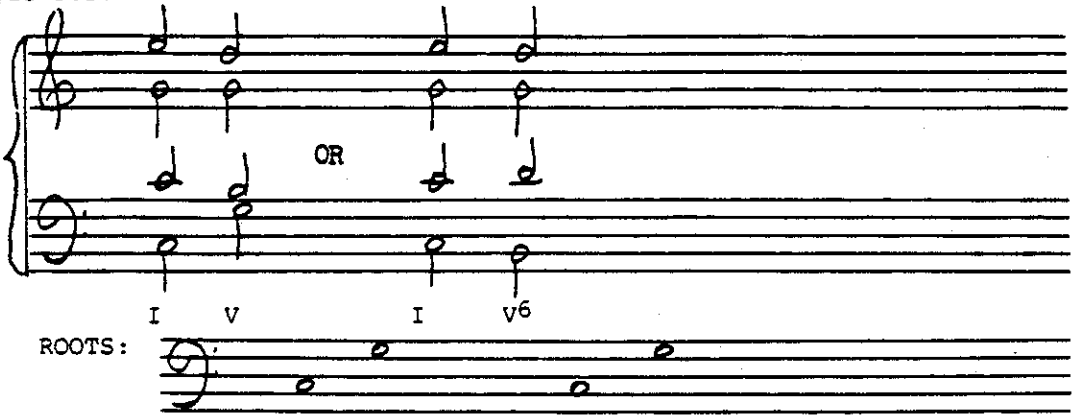
Write in four part harmony according to the figured bass symbols. Determine Key. Analyze chords and accidentals and write Roman numerals beneath the figured bass.



H. SELECTING CHORDS IN A PROGRESSION

Having mastered the conventions of voice leading, it is time to study the choice and order of the Roman numerals. Not all chords in tonal music sound well beside each other. For instance, a I may <u>precede</u> any chord, but it <u>does not follow</u> any chord. To write a strong progression, it is necessary to observe the interval between roots of successive chords.

Example 5.18



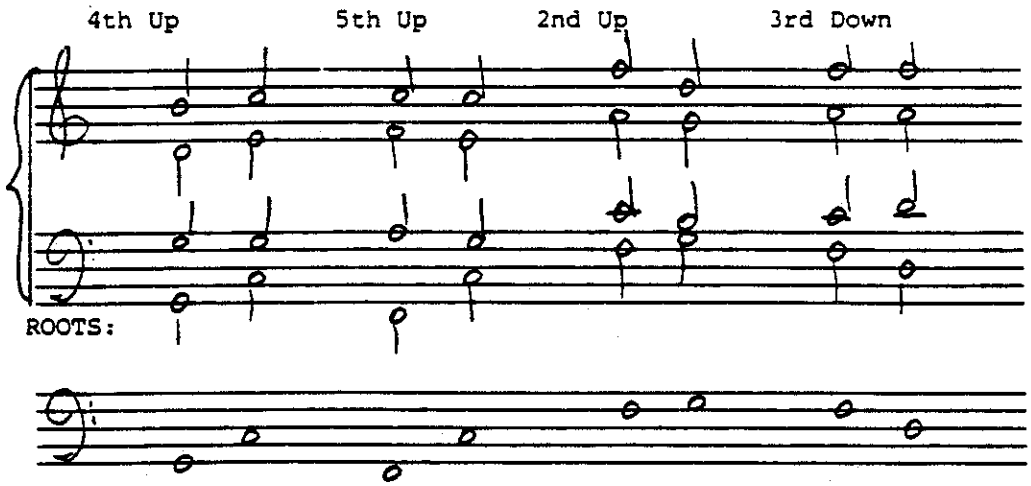
Root Movement is Perf. 5 up.

Even though the V is in first inversion the roots are still moving up a Perf. 5

Strong root movement may be summarized according to intervals and direction as listed below.

Frequently used:	4ths or 5ths Ascending or Descending
	2nds Ascending
	3rds Descending
Less frequently used:	3rds Ascending
	2nds Descending

Example 5.19



Therefore a strong progression may be as follows:

I vi IV V I or I ii^6 iii^6 vi ii V I

Drill 5.12

Write several different chord progressions in four part harmony and play them on the piano.