

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.

C Major IV vii°6 I_{6/4} iii

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

CLOSE POSITION

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

OPEN POSITION

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^o in F minor (harmonic)
3. IV in B \flat Major
4. iii in E Major
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. I⁶ in G Major
2. vii^{o6} in E \flat Major
3. iv^{o6} in C minor (harmonic)
4. ii^{o6} in F \sharp minor (harmonic)
5. v⁶ in D \flat 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

F Major I vi IV V iii vi ii V I

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 so.

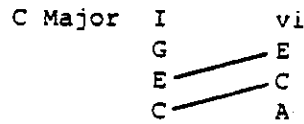
1. Move a voice to its next note as smoothly as possible.
2. If there are one or two notes which are the same, try to keep "the common tones," that is, repeating them in the same voice.

Example 5.4



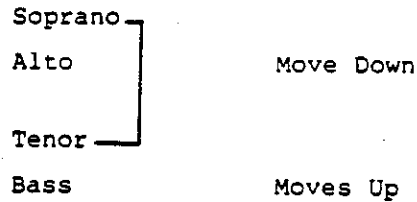
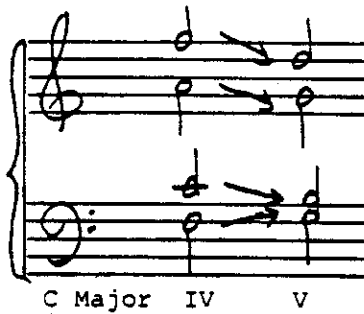
Both chords in root position.

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



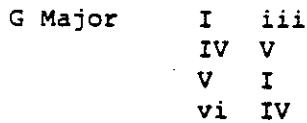
- If there are NO common tones between the two chords, use contrary motion. Contrary motion is implemented by having the upper three voices (soprano, alto, tenor) move in the opposite direction that the bass is moving.

Example 5.5



Drill 5.5

Write the chord progressions observing the three guidelines just discussed.



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

G Major I 1 vi 2 IV 3 V 4 I

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.

D Major I IV V iii vi ii V I

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

<p>INCORRECT (with parallels)</p> <p>C Major IV V</p>	<p>CORRECT (no parallels)</p> <p>IV V</p>
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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 and soprano, and they are considered correct. The only objectionable parallels are those with intervals of primes, fifths and octaves.

Example 5.9

Parallel Primes	Parallel 5ths	Parallel Octaves

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

PROBLEM A SOLUTION PROBLEM A SOLUTION

C Minor ii° V ii° V V VI V VI

1 2 3 4

1. Keeping common tone in soprano causes Aug. 2 in tenor (Ab to B \sharp).
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 \sharp 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

F Major I V⁶ I I⁶ ii⁶ iii⁶ IV⁶ ii⁶ V V I

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

Leading tone in soprano resolves Leading tone in bass resolves Melody descends stepwise so L.T. does not need to resolve

F Major

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

1. Move voices as smoothly as possible.

¹Piston, 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 I⁶ ii⁶ iii⁶ V I

D minor (harmonic): i iv ii^o V iv⁶ ii⁶ V i

Bb Major: I vii^{o6} I⁶ ii⁶ 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

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The notes are G, B, D, F#, G, B, D, G. Handwritten figures 6, 6, and 6/4 are written below the notes.

6 6 $\frac{6}{4}$

(continued
next page)



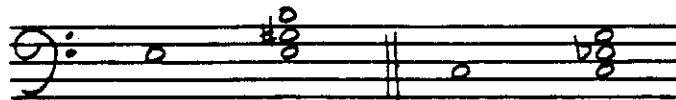
D Major I I⁶ ii⁶ I⁶ V I

Other symbols used in figured bass:

#, b, or ♯

Indicates a triad in root position with the 3rd above the bass note sharpened, flatted, or naturalized 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, b6, ♯6 #6
4 b4

An accidental beside or on either side of a number indicates that the interval above the bass note should be sharpened, flatted or naturalized.

Example 5.16



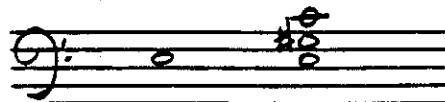
#6 means

#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 sharpened, flatted or naturalized.

Example 5.17



6
means

♯ 3 4

A slash mark or a plus sign indicates that this interval above the bass note should be raised 1/2 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.

The image shows a musical exercise for Drill 5.10. It consists of two parts. The top part is a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The bass staff contains a sequence of notes with figured bass symbols underneath: ♯6, 6, 6, ♯, 6, 4. The treble staff shows a single note in the first measure, which is the first chord of the sequence. The bottom part of the image shows a single bass staff with a bass clef, containing a single chord with two notes, representing the first chord of the sequence.

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.

The image shows a musical exercise for Drill 5.11. It consists of a single bass staff with a bass clef. The staff contains a sequence of notes with figured bass symbols underneath: 6 4 6, 6 5, 6 4 4. The first measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The second measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The third measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The fourth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The fifth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The sixth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The seventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The eighth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The ninth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The tenth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The eleventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The twelfth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The thirteenth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The fourteenth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The fifteenth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The sixteenth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The seventeenth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The eighteenth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The nineteenth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The twentieth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The twenty-first measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The twenty-second measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The twenty-third measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The twenty-fourth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The twenty-fifth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The twenty-sixth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The twenty-seventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The twenty-eighth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The twenty-ninth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The thirtieth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The thirty-first measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The thirty-second measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The thirty-third measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The thirty-fourth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The thirty-fifth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The thirty-sixth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The thirty-seventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The thirty-eighth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The thirty-ninth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The fortieth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The forty-first measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The forty-second measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The forty-third measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The forty-fourth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The forty-fifth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The forty-sixth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The forty-seventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The forty-eighth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The forty-ninth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The fiftieth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The fifty-first measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The fifty-second measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The fifty-third measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The fifty-fourth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The fifty-fifth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The fifty-sixth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The fifty-seventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The fifty-eighth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The fifty-ninth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The sixtieth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The sixty-first measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The sixty-second measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The sixty-third measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The sixty-fourth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The sixty-fifth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The sixty-sixth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The sixty-seventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The sixty-eighth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The sixty-ninth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The seventieth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The seventy-first measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The seventy-second measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The seventy-third measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The seventy-fourth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The seventy-fifth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The seventy-sixth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The seventy-seventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The seventy-eighth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The seventy-ninth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The eightieth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The eighty-first measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The eighty-second measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The eighty-third measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The eighty-fourth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The eighty-fifth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The eighty-sixth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The eighty-seventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The eighty-eighth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The eighty-ninth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The ninetieth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The ninety-first measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The ninety-second measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The ninety-third measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The ninety-fourth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The ninety-fifth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The ninety-sixth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The ninety-seventh measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The ninety-eighth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note. The ninety-ninth measure has a flat sign (b) before the first note. The hundredth measure has a sharp sign (#) before the first note.

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 precede any chord, but it does not follow any chord. To write a strong progression, it is necessary to observe the interval between roots of successive chords.

Example 5.18

The musical notation shows a progression of four chords: I, V, I, and V⁶. The first two chords are shown in two different voicings, separated by the word "OR". Below the chords, a line labeled "ROOTS:" shows the root notes of each chord: C, G, C, and F. The interval between C and G is a perfect fifth up, and between G and C is a perfect fifth up, and between C and F is a perfect fifth up.

Root Movement Even though the V is in first inversion is Perf. 5 up. 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

The musical notation shows a progression of four chords with the following root movements: 4th Up, 5th Up, 2nd Up, and 3rd Down. Below the chords, a line labeled "ROOTS:" shows the root notes: C, G, A, and F. The intervals are: C to G (4th up), G to A (2nd up), A to C (3rd down), and C to F (5th down).

Therefore a strong progression may be as follows:

I vi IV V I or I ii⁶ iii⁶ vi ii V I

Drill 5.12

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