

# Introduction to 4-part Writing

Same harmony. Which is easier to sing? Why?

# Setting Up the Choir

The look of the staff and analysis

A musical staff in 2/4 time with a treble clef. It contains four parts: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. The soprano part has three notes: G4, A4, and B4. The alto part has three notes: E4, F4, and G4. The tenor part has three notes: C4, D4, and E4. The bass part has three notes: G3, F3, and E3. Below the staff, the Roman numerals C: I, V<sup>7</sup>, and I are written under the first, second, and third measures respectively.

note: time signature, key signature, stem direction, analysis, double bar

Ranges of each voice

A musical staff in 2/4 time with a treble clef. It shows the ranges of four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The Soprano range is from G4 to B4. The Alto range is from E4 to G4. The Tenor range is from C4 to E4. The Bass range is from G3 to E3. Lines connect the notes to their respective voice labels.

Spacing

Never more than an octave between adjacent voices.  
Between tenor and bass, anything goes.

Which is ok / not ok?

A musical staff in 2/4 time with a treble clef. It shows two examples of voice spacing. The first example shows a soprano note (G4) and an alto note (E4) with a line between them, which is labeled as 'ok'. The second example shows a soprano note (G4) and a bass note (G3) with a line between them, which is labeled as 'not ok'.

Open vs. closed position; an orchestration thing...

A musical staff in 2/4 time with a treble clef. It shows two examples of chord positions. The first example shows an open position chord (C major) with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, G3, and F3. The second example shows a closed position chord (C major) with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, and G4.

### Voice crossing (marked "VX" on your homework)

Keep the voices in their hierarchical space! e.g. the alto should never go above the soprano, etc.



Harder to see between alto and tenor

A musical score snippet in C major, 2/4 time. The top staff (treble clef) shows a soprano line with notes G4, A4, B4, and A4. The bottom staff (bass clef) shows a tenor line with notes G3, F3, E3, and D3. Arrows indicate the soprano moving from G4 to A4 and then to B4, while the tenor moves from G3 to F3 and then to E3. The crossing occurs between the second and third measures where the soprano's B4 is above the tenor's E3.

### Voice overlap

This happens when a voice climbs above the pitch that the voice above it just sang (or dips below the pitch that the voice below it just sang).

Bach occasionally had a voice overlap, but it is almost always possible to avoid - sorry, Bach, but there is almost always a better solution.

A musical score snippet in C major, 2/4 time. The top staff (treble clef) shows a soprano line with notes G4, A4, B4, and A4. The bottom staff (bass clef) shows a tenor line with notes G3, F3, E3, and D3. Arrows indicate the soprano moving from G4 to A4 and then to B4, while the tenor moves from G3 to F3 and then to E3. The overlapping occurs between the second and third measures where the soprano's B4 is above the tenor's E3.

**Harmonies**, or chords, are moments in time made up of simultaneously sounding pitches, so these exist on the *vertical time axis*. Since you now know the basic building block of 18th Century harmony is the triad, you know you have three notes to assign to your 4 singers. Therefore, someone must double one of the pitches.

When you learn the do's and don'ts of how to distribute the three notes of a chord across the 4 singers, you are learning principles of **doubling**.

Melodic **lines** exist on the *horizontal time axis*.

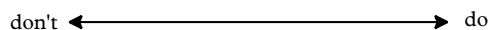
When you learn the do's and don'ts of how to write lines, you are learning principles of **voice leading**.

Ok, so you might say that all semester, you are building a model in your head like....

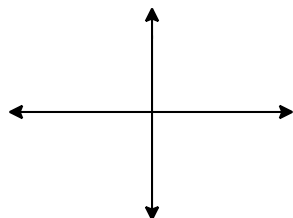
## Doubling



## Voice leading



...and that's like building a compass...



...so as you learn from these sheets this semester, whenever there is an important big-picture principle of doubling or voice leading that applies to all chords, you will see the graphic of a compass shown below. When you see this, add that principle to the compass you are building in your mind to guide you in all of your writing. Eventually, you will see that each new chord doesn't have it's own rules that you have to tediously remember; rather, your mind's growing compass will guide you to write effectively for any new chords you encounter.



This handout is an introduction to most of the big-picture concepts that you should immediately get going on understanding and placing upon your compass.

This handout doesn't contain all the principles you will learn this semester, but it is a whole lot of them! For an introduction, this is pretty advanced!

So indeed, it might feel like a lot all at once.

You are bound to make mistakes well into the semester, but eventually this will all become almost second nature. You get better at these principles by actually writing.

You will find that each new chord is a new flavor; however it is also really just another opportunity for you to refine your ability to apply the principles contained within this packet, as well as more advanced principles you will learn along the way. With a little work and review, your compass will become extremely refined.

And away we go...



Know the notes in your chord, the paint in your bucket.

In general, usually if you know the voice leading, you can figure out the doubling and thus not have to memorize doubling rules explicitly.

But there are some important basic principles you should know, as reviewed on the following pages.

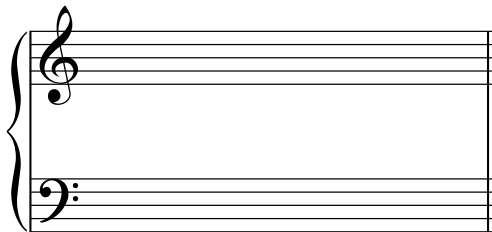
## How to begin and end



There are two situations with very little choice:

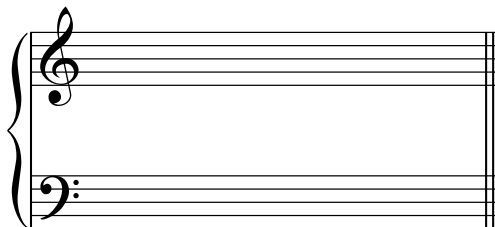
- 1) 1st tonic: 2 roots  
1 3rd  
1 5th

**No exceptions ever!**



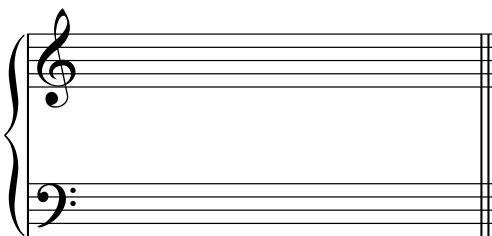
- 2) Final tonic: you have two options...

- 2 roots
- 1 3rd
- 1 5th



...or...

- 3 roots
- 1 3rd



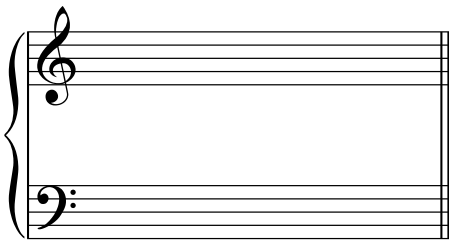


# Doubling

## Basics of doubling / omitting

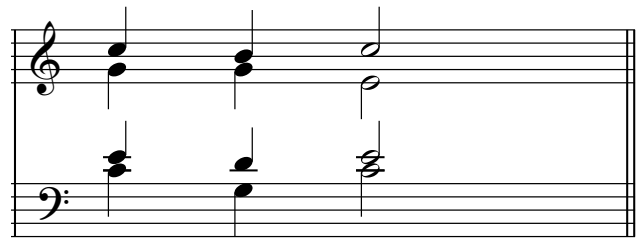


- Other than the first tonic chord of the piece, you can usually double whatever you want (you'll later see things like avoid doubling 6 in minor, etc). But for now, other than the first tonic of the piece, you don't need to bend over backwards to double the root.



usually, avoid the Communist doubling: 2 roots  
2 3rds

...later in the course, you'll see this sometimes can't be avoided, but don't do it without having a reason. For now you have no reason.



don't ever omit the 3rd.



(Sometimes you can omit the 5th, but we'll get to that when you start learning actual chords).



# Doubling

## Tendency tones

Dissonances are:

- the 7th of a 7th chord
- 2nds, 4ths or 7ths above a bass

Tendency tones include this whole group of dissonances, and also LTs



never ever ever ever ever ever double a tendency tone  
- you'll first see this as "never double the LT"



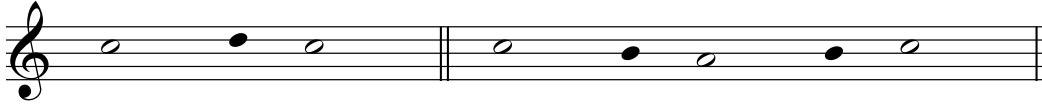
# Voice leading (horizontal time)

Intro: types of motion

individual lines, if moving stepwise:

**neighbor**

**passing**



two lines moving against each other...

**oblique motion**

**parallel motion**

**similar motion**

**contrary motion**



Creates the most independent voices



# Voice leading

Tendency tones  
(again, dissonances and LTs)



Tendency tones must resolve correctly

...for now, just know how to resolve the LT:

outer voice LTs must resolve up to tonic

ex: resolve to tonic correctly

C:    V            I

an inner voice LT doesn't have to resolve to tonic,  
but it can only do one other thing:

          V            I

\* later on, you'll learn what to do with 7ths of a  
7th chord and 4ths above a bass



# Voice leading

## Intervals to avoid



-- // 8ths, // unisons, // 5ths

I      V<sup>6</sup>      IV      V

-- // 4ths happen all the time in uppers, no problem  
// 4ths not ok between bass and another voice

-- hidden 8ths or 5ths



*only when the soprano leaps:*

...and the bass moves in same direction,  
...check the interval they landed on.  
...no good if a 5th or octave.

vi      V      IV      V

so, are these ok?

ii      V      I<sup>6</sup>      ii<sup>6</sup>



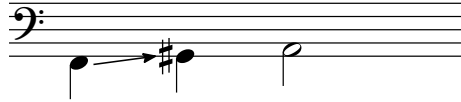
## Voice leading

### Intervals to avoid (cont.)



you may not tell one of your poor singers to sing an A2

later, you will see this is a challenge of writing in minor, but you'll be given a trick so you never have to directly edit for A2's.



The previous pages deal with a lot of nitty-gritty about what to write and what not to write with your pencil. There is also a method, process, or order of operations of writing or a way into the writing, that you should follow especially when you are learning. If you trust this every single time, even if your intuition resists at first, you will make it easier on yourself.

- a) Come up with a harmonic plan based on what's given (a soprano or bass line imply certain harmonies as you'll learn).

For now, do not go chord by chord linearly. Instead, start with the big picture, and keep zooming in to the details. To put it another way, first write in the chord at the beginning and then the ones at the end. Time flows linearly when you hear music, but it doesn't have to when you write it.

This means you'll write the opening chord (tonic - I) then move your eye to the end and write in the ending (V - I). Then write in the harmonies at all the cadences in between (usually some inversions of V and I).

Zoom in further: identify all the details in between, which you'll learn how to do.

You don't yet know enough for all of this to make sense, so just bookmark the idea expressed above: work from the big picture to the details and do not go chord-by-chord.

- b) Next, write your outer voices in their entirety. Never all 4-voices at once, chord-by-chord!

Know the notes in each chord, the paint in each bucket. Keep this active in your mind as you sculpt.

Outers are guided by:

- 1) stepwise motion
- 2) contrary motion
- 3) goal-oriented lines with a nice shape

\* Even when you sculpt outers, your voice leading and doubling compass is activated.

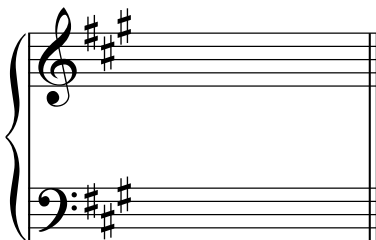
- e.g., in V know if the leading tone is in your line, and what to do with it

- c) Now you are 90% there. Finally write the inner voices, which are easy!

Inners are guided by the principle of going nowhere. That is...

- 1) keep common tone whenever possible
  - 2) ...or move to the nearest chord tone, which will usually be stepwise
- \* the nitty-gritty of your voice leading and doubling compass is always activated.

ex: try it out by writing this progression...



A:     I     V

## Editing

After all this, your job is not quite over until you edit for illegal parallels one last time.

....do it.

....it takes 5 more minutes, DO IT.



Editing for illegal parallels is like training your eye to find Waldo in those Where is Waldo puzzles.



Go through, and spot any parallel motion between pairs of voices. You'll get more fluid at it with practice.

When you spot parallel motion, check the interval between those voices.

Move merrily along with 3rds, 6ths, or upper voice 4ths.

But when you find illegal parallels, that pesky Waldo, destroy him. You haven't learned enough yet to know all the tricks. But for now, follow this: do anything other than the bad thing. Make someone move somewhere else so you don't have, for instance, a parallel 5th.