

# Procedures of Four-Part Writing

## Chord Construction and Voice-Leading



# Four Voices

- Soprano
- Alto
- Tenor
- Bass

Soprano                      Alto                      Tenor                      Bass

The musical score is written on a grand staff with four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The piano part consists of a right-hand staff with a treble clef and a left-hand staff with a bass clef. The vocal staves are labeled Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The Soprano staff has a treble clef, the Alto staff has a treble clef, the Tenor staff has a bass clef, and the Bass staff has a bass clef. The score is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines. In the first measure, the Soprano and Alto staves have a half note and a quarter note, while the piano accompaniment has a half note and a quarter note. In the second measure, the Soprano and Alto staves have a half note and a quarter note, while the piano accompaniment has a half note. In the third measure, the Soprano and Alto staves have a half note and a quarter note, while the piano accompaniment has a half note and a quarter note. In the fourth measure, the Soprano and Alto staves have a half note and a quarter note, while the piano accompaniment has a half note and a quarter note.



# Notation Style



- 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



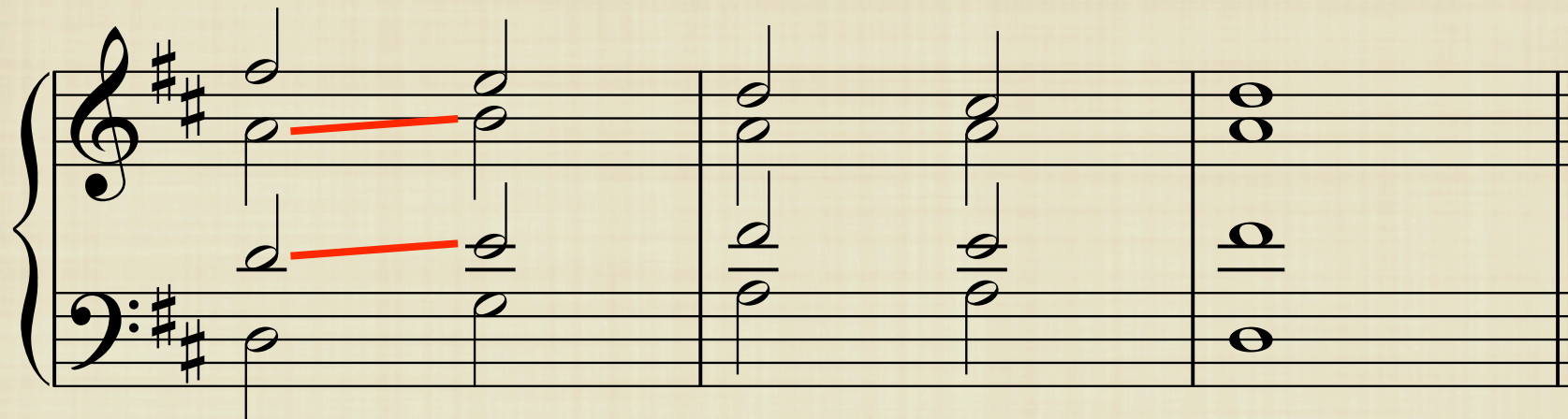
# Doubling

- 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



# 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



Open



# Identifying Close and Open



Open



# Identifying Close and Open



Close



# Identifying Close and Open



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

- Conjunct Motion
- Disjunct Motion



# 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!)
  - Generally after a larger leap, return stepwise in the opposite direction whenever possible
- Do not allow a leap of an augmented second



# Leaps

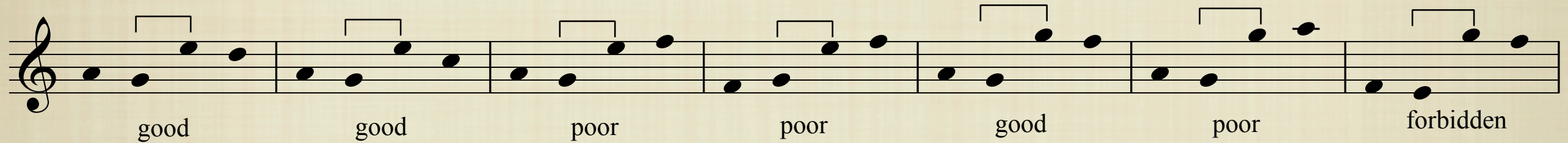
These are all good





# Leaps

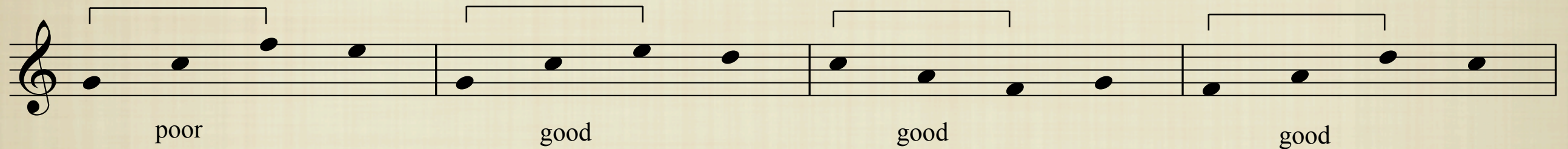
These are leaps involving sixths and above





# Leaps

Multiple leaps, some good, some not





# 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

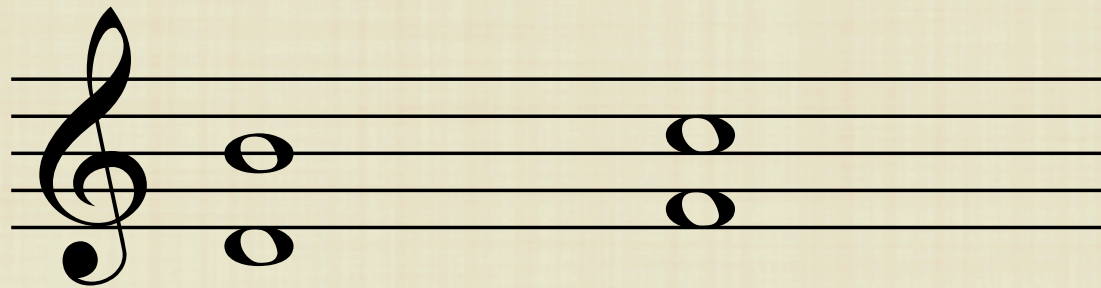
- Only one voice moves while the other remains stationary

- **Contrary** Motion

- The voices move in opposite directions



# Simultaneous Motion



Similar



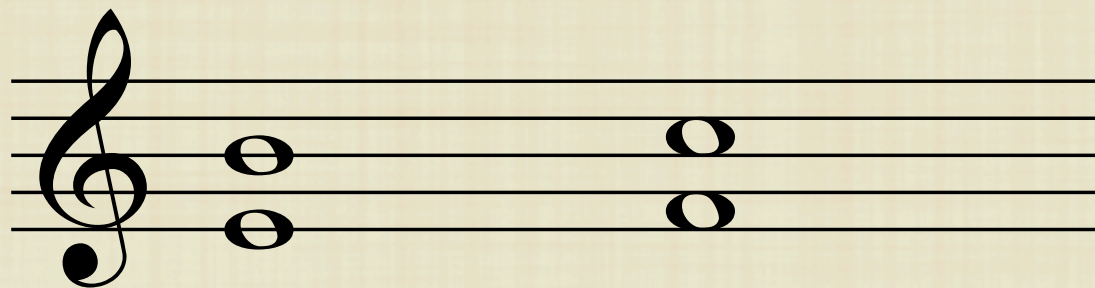
# Simultaneous Motion



Contrary



# Simultaneous Motion



Parallel



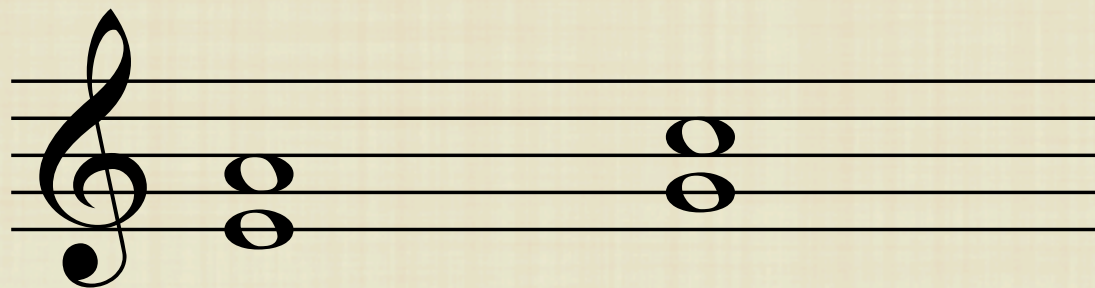
# Simultaneous Motion



Oblique



# Simultaneous Motion



Parallel



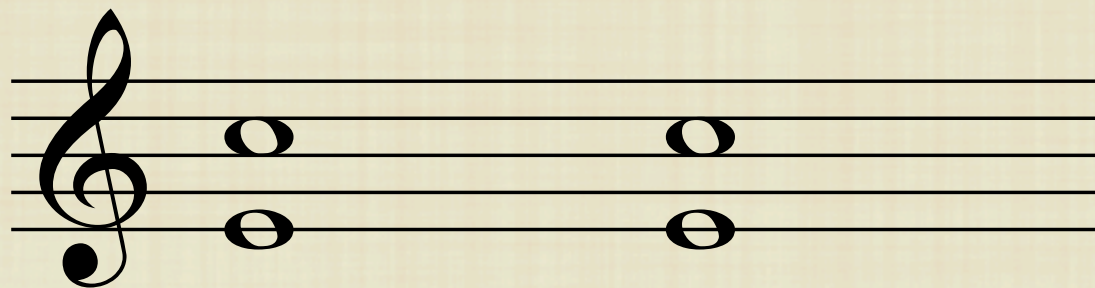
# Simultaneous Motion



Contrary



# Simultaneous Motion



Trick Question! No motion at all



# Simultaneous Motion



Oblique



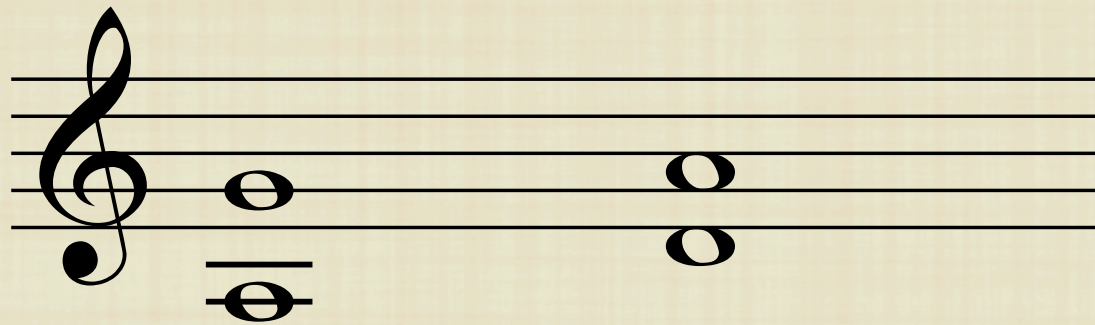
# Simultaneous Motion



Contrary



# Simultaneous Motion

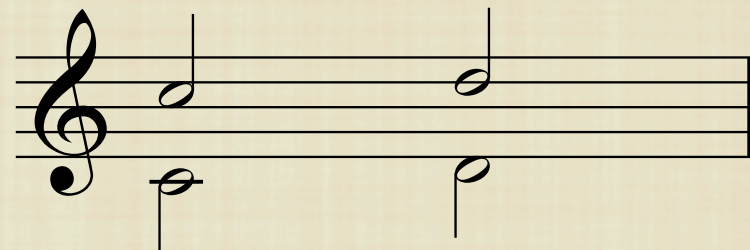


Similar



# Forbidden Parallel Motions

- Motion by octaves



- Motion by unisons



- Motion by fifths





# Forbidden Contrary Motions

- Octaves



- Fifths





# Hidden (Direct) Motions

- Fifths



- Octaves





# 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

- Forbidden for now





# 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!



