

Guidelines for Two-Voice Writing¹

NB: Ignore Gauldin, p. 27, Rule #1

Consonances: unison, m3, M3, P5, m6, M6, 8ve, and compounds thereof

Endings: Final interval must be unison or 8ve, approached by step following a 7–6 or 2–3 suspension

Cadences: As above. See also: “A Guide to Cadences” handout. Possible cadential pitches:

- (1) Upward-moving voices ascend by half step to C, D, F, G, A and with a B^b signature, B^b;
- (2) Phrygian cadences: E and A

Imitation: Generally at the distance of one, two, or three beats (beat=semibreve=whole note) and at the 8ve, 5th, 4th, or, less frequently, the unison.

Before you begin

- Choose a mode and mensuration sign. Choose a text.
- Choose complementary clefs/voice ranges. Voices are generally spaced roughly a 5th apart, though you may instead place two voices in roughly the same range or as much as an 8ve apart.
- Begin either with a point of imitation or on a unison, P5, or 8ve.

Avoid

- excessive **similar, contrary, or oblique** motion. Aim for a mixture of all types.
- excessive **homorhythm**.
- **8ves and unisons**, except: (1) at beginnings/endings; (2) at cadences; (3) on off-beats.
Allowed occasionally on strong beats, but never for longer than a minim (half note)
- approaching or leaving a **unison** by similar motion
- approaching or leaving a **5th** by similar motion, unless one voice moves by step
- **parallel** unisons, 5ths, and 8ves.
- more than three **consecutive parallel 3rds or 6ths**, except in semiminims (=quarter notes)
- an **interval** between the voices larger than a 13th
- keeping the voices more than an 8ve apart for extended stretches
- any **white-note dissonance** other than:
 1. **unaccented passing tones** (with other voice holding a note since *before* the dissonance)
 2. properly prepared 7–6, 2–3, and, less often, 4–3 **suspensions** (in 4–3 suspensions, the 4th must not be a tritone)
- any **semiminim** (=quarter-note) **dissonance** other than:
 1. **unaccented passing tone**: that is, a passing tone falling on the 2nd, 4th, 6th, or 8th semiminim in a measure in Cut-C. (The same rule applies to *fusae*=eighth notes.)
 2. **descending accented passing tone**, with the dissonance falling on semiminims #3 or 7
 3. **unaccented neighbor**, with dissonance on semiminims #2, 4, 6, and 8. Prefer lower neighbors; use upper only rarely. (The same rule applies to *fusae*=eighth notes)
 4. **cambiata** (dotted minim–stepwise motion to semiminim–3rd leap, where only the middle note is dissonant)
 5. **unaccented anticipation** (*portamento*), usually part of the resolution of a suspension
 6. **suspensions**, as above

¹ Drawn from a handout by Jesse Rodin.