

“Rule of the Octave”: A rough guide to figuring out what figures to add to a bass.

A. When basses move by step in major:

going up by step... going down by step...

6 6 6 6 6 6 6 #6 4 6 6

or or or or or or or or 2 6 6

3 5 5 5 5 5 5 #6 3 6 6

(or root)

B. When basses move by step in minor:

Remember: Accidentals conform to the key signature.

6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

(or 6 to root) or 6 or 6 or 6 4 2 6 6

(or root) 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 3 6 6

C. When basses move by leap prefer root position

all triads in root position.....

or: 7 7 7 7 7 7

all triads in root position.....

or: 7 7 (7) 7 7 7

D. When basses include chromatically raised pitches:

Raised pitches get 6 followed by root:

Raised pitches get 6 followed by root: Note change of key to relative major

Note:

1) It is essential to know the local key; follow stepwise rules for each local key.

2) Sequences are common exceptions to these guidelines; two examples:

a) ascending 5-6

a) descending 7-6 over lament bass

5 — 6 5 — 6 5 — 6 5 — 6

5 — 6 7 — 6 7 — 6 6