

Partwriting Basics

Ensemble

For chorale style, four-part choir, SATB, notated on grand staff, two voices per staff.

On each staff, upper voice always stems up, lower voice always stems down.

Accidentals apply to the rest of the measure in the same voice. If the bass has a leading tone in minor and goes back to the same note later in the measure, the original accidental still applies. If the tenor has the leading tone in the same register later in the measure, it will need a new accidental.

Vocal ranges: S: C4-G5 A: G3-D5 T: C3-G4 B: E2-D4 >M2 outside range is an error

Chord Construction

Octave max btw voices; exception is T-B, which may be any distance.

No voice crossings, no overlaps. (Overlapping occurs when the higher voice goes lower than the lower voice's immediately preceding note – or vice versa.) (Unisons are ok.)

In root position triads, double the root. This holds for most chords, and for all of those we start with (some chords learned later will have exceptions to this).

In general, never double the leading tone, no matter what part of the chord it is. Dissonant additions to triads, like sevenths, should also not be doubled.

[Be aware of keyboard style, an alternative to chorale style. It's still four voices, but it's understood that the right hand takes S, A and T. Alto and tenor voices are on the upper staff, stemmed together (down). The tenor range is unrestricted and overlappings are allowed. The one new restriction is that the maximum space between tenor and soprano (the span of the right hand) is an octave.]

Melodic Motion (single voice)

Leaps larger than P5 must go back by step in the opposite direction (except for octave leaps in the bass).

No augmented leaps.

Diminished leaps must be followed by step in the opposite direction.

Use a maximum of two consecutive leaps in the same direction. They must outline a major, minor, or diminished triad. (Three leaps in the same direction can occasionally be ok so long as they add up to an octave. And again the bass is an exception, as two consecutive leaps often split an octave into a fifth and a fourth, not outlining a triad.)

Make inner voices as smooth as possible. If you leap more than a P4 in the inner voices, chances are you're making a mistake somewhere.

Relative Motion (two voices)

No parallel fifths or octaves. Parallel 12^{th} 's ($12^{\text{th}} = 5^{\text{th}} + 8^{\text{ve}}$) = parallel 5^{th} 's, etc. Parallel P1 = parallel P8. The notes must change: repeated notes a fifth apart are not parallel fifths.

d5-P5 (or unequal fifths) is equivalent to parallel fifths; P5-d5 is not.

Direct (or hidden) fifths and octaves: similar motion into a perfect consonance. Three important qualifications: 1) They are only problematic between the outer voices. 2) They're ok if the upper voice moves by step. So: direct fifths and octaves are only a problem when they involve the bass and a leaping soprano. (Scarpia and Tosca?) 3) Even with a leaping soprano, direct fifths and octaves are ok if there is no change of harmony.

No consecutive fifths or octaves. Consecutive fifths and octaves are parallel fifths and octaves that try to avoid the error by changing octave; they involve contrary motion and the octave spacing changes. (For example: E5 in soprano and E3 in tenor move to D5 in soprano and D4 in tenor. Substituting the seventh up for the step down in the tenor does not eliminate the error.)

Completing Inner Voices with I, IV and V in Root Position

All chords should be complete, and the root should be doubled. Complete inner voices so that all chord construction and voice-leading rules are followed.

Take special care when IV goes to V – parallels are particularly likely! In general move the upper voices down against the rising bass; when the soprano goes up from $\hat{6}$ to $\hat{7}$, the inner voices compensate by going down even further, skipping and leaping.

In minor always use the leading tone, not the subtonic, in the V chord (i.e. not $\flat 7$). Beware of augmented leaps (especially from $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{4}$) into the leading tone.

In minor you will occasionally see a raised $\hat{6}$ indicated in a IV chord, and you will also sometimes see a raised $\hat{3}$ for a final I chord – this latter is called a Picardy third.