

Crimes Against Humanity and Voice-Leading

In order, from most offensive to least

Parallel Octaves and Fifths

Two voices move in parallel motion from a P8 to a P8 or from a P5 to a P5. These are always bad; never write them. Note that repeating notes does not constitute bad parallels; you must move.

Resolution of Seventh

Sevenths always resolve down by step. Only one exception exists – the V4/3. All others resolve normally. If a chord looks like it has a seventh and it does not resolve down, it usually can be analyzed another way.

Consecutive (Contrary) Octaves and Fifths

Two voices move in contrary motion from a P8 to a P8 or from a P5 to a P5. These are also unacceptable, although on occasion you will see them at final cadences.

Direct Octaves and Fifths

Two voices move in the similar motion from any interval to a P8 or P5. Acceptable if it involves an inner voice. Also acceptable in the outer voices if the soprano moves by step. Not allowed if between the outer voices and the soprano leaps.

Melodic Use of Awkward Intervals

The melodic use of intervals such as tritones, A2's, 7ths, and 9ths. These intervals become more palatable melodically if used within a single chord that supports both tones. Avoid when moving between chords.

Cross-Relation

Two forms of a note (i.e., F-natural and F-sharp) occur in two different voices on adjacent beats. Avoid between the outer two voices.

Resolution of Tendency Tones

Most notably, the leading tone moves to tonic, and the lowered submediant moves to the dominant. In some contexts, the resolution is not necessary. (For example, in a descending scale, the leading tone does not have to move up. These resolutions usually hold, though.) In an inner voice, you may leave the leading tone unresolved and move to scale degree ^5 instead.

Voice Crossing

A lower register voice moves above a higher register voice (i.e., the tenor moves above the alto) or vice-versa. They cause more problems when an outer voice is crossed, but better to avoid all together.

Voice Overlap

Similar to a voice crossing, but the lower register voice crosses where the higher register voice was on the preceding beat (or vice-versa). Often happen at the start of a new phrase or where the melody jumps up abruptly. Write a note if you opt to do this.

Range

Voices should stay within their ranges. On rare occasions, you may push an extra step, but write a note.

Spacing

The distance between adjacent upper voices (i.e., between the soprano and alto and between the alto and tenor) should be an octave or less. Occasionally voices will move farther apart for a single beat. You may do so, but write a note.

Doubling

Generally, double the most stable pitch in a chord. Typical doublings are in the order Root-Fifth-Third. Exception: in diminished chords you double the third, which is the only pitch not involved in the tritone. Never double the leading tone. Avoid doubling dissonances like sevenths and fourths. You need not write a note if you use an atypical doubling on a simple, stable triad.