

# Part-Writing: The Horizontal Rules



THE **SUPREME GOAL** OF PART-WRITING IS **GOOD VOICE LEADING**...  
MAKING EACH INDIVIDUAL VOICE PART **EASY TO SING** BY AVOIDING  
**AWKWARD INTERVALS** OR **LARGE LEAPS**!

BEFORE WE GET TO THE SPECIFIC **DOS** AND **DON'TS**, LET'S TAKE A LOOK  
AT SOME **IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS** OF FOUR-VOICE PART-WRITING:

NOTE HOW EACH VOICE MOVES  
AS **LITTLE AS POSSIBLE**, GOING  
TO THE **NEAREST CHORD TONE**  
IN EACH SUBSEQUENT CHORD!

IN SOME CASES, THE VOICE  
CAN SIMPLY STAY ON THE **SAME**  
**NOTE**. THIS IS CALLED  
**KEEPING THE COMMON TONE**,  
AND IT'S **ALWAYS COOL**!

IT'S COMMON FOR THE BASS TO  
MOVE IN THE **OPPOSITE DIRECTION**  
OF THE **UPPER THREE VOICES**.  
THIS IS CALLED **CONTRARY MOTION**  
AND IT HELPS MAINTAIN  
**VOICE INDEPENDENCE**.

THE BASS LINE, SINCE IT PROVIDES  
THE **FOUNDATION** OF THE **HARMONY**  
IN EACH CHORD, TENDS TO INCLUDE  
**LARGER LEAPS** THAN THE OTHER  
THREE VOICES, BUT THAT'S OKAY.



VOICE INDEPENDENCE?

FOUR-VOICE HARMONY IS A FORM OF **COUNTERPOINT**,  
WHICH IS THE COMBINATION OF **MORE THAN ONE**  
**MELODY** PLAYED SIMULTANEOUSLY. IN COUNTERPOINT,  
EACH VOICE IS **EQUALLY IMPORTANT**; NO VOICE IS  
GIVEN A ROLE OF ACCOMPANIMENT TO ANOTHER VOICE.

IN COUNTERPOINT, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR EACH VOICE TO  
BE **INDEPENDENT**; THAT IS, NO TWO VOICES SHOULD BE  
DOING THE **EXACT SAME THING**. IF TWO (OR MORE)  
VOICES WERE MOVING IN **PARALLEL**, THE **RICHNESS**  
OF THE **TEXTURE** WOULD BE **REDUCED**.

AS A RESULT, COMMON PRACTICE COMPOSERS WERE  
**VERY CONSISTENT** IN AVOIDING TWO OR MORE VOICES  
THAT MOVED IN **PARALLEL PERFECT OCTAVES**, **PARALLEL**  
**PERFECT FIFTHS**, OR **PARALLEL PERFECT UNISONS**!

PARALLEL  
OCTAVES!

PARALLEL  
FIFTHS!

PARALLEL  
UNISONS!

THERE ARE ALSO A FEW OTHER  
RULES THAT APPLY TO THIS STYLE:

WHEN YOU HAVE THE **LEADING TONE**  
IN AN **OUTER VOICE** (SOPRANO OR  
BASS) IT MUST **RESOLVE** TO THE  
**TONIC** IN THE NEXT CHORD.

YOU MAY NOT **MOVE ANY VOICE**  
BY AN INTERVAL OF AN  
**AUGMENTED SECOND**  
OR AN **AUGMENTED FOURTH**.

THE **GOOD NEWS**:  
YOU CAN AVOID ALL THREE OF  
THESE BY DOING THE FOLLOWING  
**WHENEVER POSSIBLE**:

1. **KEEP THE COMMON TONE!**
2. **MOVE TO THE NEAREST CHORD TONE!**
3. **USE CONTRARY MOTION!**