

## Voice Leading for 4 Voices (Parts)

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### Unstylistic Departures Inviolable

There are no exceptions to these practices under any conditions:

1. Avoid *parallel perfect octaves (P8ths)*, *parallel perfect fifths (P5ths)*, or *parallel unisons*. Successive perfect intervals containing the same pitches are not considered parallel.
2. Never double the leading tone (7th) of the scale.
3. Do not write pitches out of the range of that particular voice. Keep all four voices within their ranges at all times.
4. Avoid the melodic augmented second (A2) and fourth (A4) in all voices.

### Occasionally Broken

These practices should be carefully observed unless particular situations permit no other alternative:

5. Avoid crossing voices. Keep voices in *proper order* (from highest to lowest): soprano, alto, tenor, bass. On rare occasions, *crossing of voices* is justified if it improves voice leading.
6. *Spacing* between adjacent voices should not exceed an octave in the three upper voices. The spacing between bass and tenor voices can be of any reasonable interval (never greater than two octaves).
7. Do not *overlap* two adjacent voices more than a whole step. An overlap occurs between two chords when one voice moves above or below the previous pitch of an adjacent voice. Overlaps of a half or whole step may be employed if it improves voice leading.
8. Do not move in the same direction to perfect intervals in the two outer voices (soprano and bass). Such motion, especially in outer voices, is thought by some theorists to create the effect of parallel perfect intervals.
9. Unequal fifths, P5ths to d5ths or vice versa, are found in chorale harmonizations and may be used sparingly. The progression vii<sup>o6</sup> to I, under certain circumstances, requires the use of unequal fifths.
10. Melodic augmented seconds and fourths are almost never found in choral literature of the eighteenth century.
  - a. The melodic descending d5th appears sometimes in bass voices, but rarely in the soprano.
  - b. The d4th is a diatonic interval in the harmonic minor scale (from the third down to seventh scale degrees) and may be written in isolated situations.
11. The leading tone should progress upward to tonic when in an outer voice (soprano or bass).

Figure 10 shows examples of the preceding *unstylistic departures*—*inviolable and occasionally broken*.

**Figure 10**

Unstylistic Departure

1. Avoid parallel P5ths    Same pitches okay    2. Doubled leading tone    3. Tenor and alto out of range

GM: I    V    GM: I    I    GM: V    I    GM: vi

4. Augmented 2nd    5. Voices out of order    6. Spacing alto-soprano    7. Overlap soprano-alto

bm: V    VI    GM: I    GM: V    GM: vi    I<sup>6</sup>

8. Hidden parallels    9. Unequal 5ths    10. Diminished 5th skip in bass    11. Leading tone in outer voice

CM: I<sup>6</sup>    vi    cm: vii<sup>o6</sup>    i<sup>6</sup>    cm: i<sup>6</sup>    IV<sup>6</sup><sub>3</sub>    CM: V<sup>6</sup>    I

**Voice Ranges**

In choral writing, the voices are divided into four general categories: *soprano*, *alto*, *tenor*, and *bass*. In figure 11, whole notes indicate the best usable ranges. Black notes represent pitch ranges that should be used sparingly.

**Figure 11**

## Assignment 1

Each exercise is a chorale phrase with the tenor and alto omitted. You are to complete a four-voice setting in chorale style using the principles for four-voice writing.

### Keyboard Assignment

If your instructor requests that this be a keyboard harmony assignment, you may do it at the piano. Play the soprano, alto, and tenor with the right hand and the bass with the left hand. This arrangement is not only more comfortable if piano is not your major instrument, but it also maintains voice-leading integrity. The following illustration represents correct procedure.

Keyboard Style.

1. (Ex.)

AM:            I        V        I        IV        V        I

### Written Assignment

Even if you complete this assignment at the keyboard, doing it on paper also has its advantages. Your instructor may request it.

1. Write the alto and tenor voices at the same time. You will need to consider both parts to get good doubling and spacing of chords.
2. Don't double the leading tone.
3. Check your alto and tenor melodies often to see if they are good melodies. Remember, however, that the inner voices are often less interesting than the outer voices in a four-voice setting.
4. Check carefully for parallel unisons, fifths, and octaves between each pair of voices (bass-tenor, bass-alto, tenor-alto, tenor-soprano, and alto-soprano).
5. All chords should be in root position.
6. Check your voice leading to see if it observes the principles of voice leading discussed in the chapter.
7. All sharp signs below the bass are figured bass symbols indicating accidentals to be applied to the third of the chord.
8. Try to double the root of each chord.

2.

AM:            —        —        —        —        —        —

3.

Musical notation for exercise 3, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb) and a 4/4 time signature. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The melody in the top staff consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, followed by a half note G5 with a fermata. The bass line in the bottom staff consists of quarter notes: G3, F3, Eb3, Eb3, D3, C3, Bb2, A2, followed by a half note G2 with a fermata.

gm.

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4.

Musical notation for exercise 4, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb) and a common time signature. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The melody in the top staff consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, followed by a half note G5 with a fermata. The bass line in the bottom staff consists of quarter notes: G3, F3, Eb3, Eb3, D3, C3, Bb2, A2, followed by a half note G2 with a fermata.

E♭M:

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5.

Musical notation for exercise 5, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The melody in the top staff consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, followed by a half note G5 with a fermata. The bass line in the bottom staff consists of quarter notes: G3, F3, Eb3, Eb3, D3, C3, Bb2, A2, followed by a half note G2 with a fermata.

f#m:

\_\_\_\_\_

6.

Musical notation for exercise 6, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F#, C#) and a common time signature. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The melody in the top staff consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, followed by a half note G5 with a fermata. The bass line in the bottom staff consists of quarter notes: G3, F3, Eb3, Eb3, D3, C3, Bb2, A2, followed by a half note G2 with a fermata.

DM:

\_\_\_\_\_

7.

B♭M:    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

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**Assignment 2**

Check each of the following four-voice settings for errors in voice leading. Discuss your findings in class with your instructor.

1.

2.

3.

## Voice leading in 4 parts Overview

If you want to write music like the great master composers, here is a guideline for you to follow. Learning part writing rules takes time and practice. Listening to chorales and other music by Bach is an excellent way to learn how to apply these principles.

### **Voice leading in 4 parts**

There are certain rules of voice leading that should be followed in order to write music according to the 18th century practice that Bach set forth.

### **Chord Construction**

1. Double the root in any root position chord.
2. Double the soprano in a first inversion chord.
3. Double the bass in a first inversion diminished triad.
4. Double the bass in a second inversion chord
5. Do not double the leading tone or any altered note.
6. Keep one octave between the soprano and alto and the alto and tenor voices. More than an octave may exist between the tenor and bass voices.

### **Voice Leading Rules**

1. Repeat tones when possible.
2. Avoid perfect 5th, parallel unisons and octaves.
3. Resolve active tones to stable ones.
4. Do not cross voices.
5. Avoid large melodic skips with the exception of an octave leap in the bass voice.
6. Strive for a balance of similar, contrary, oblique, and parallel motion between parts.

## **Motion**

There are various ways in which a musical line can be written. Try for smoothness of your melody.

### **Similar Motion**

Two or more voices are said to be in similar motion when they move in the same direction.

### **Parallel Motion**

Two or more voices are said to be in parallel motion when they move in the same direction with the same interval.

### **Contrary Motion**

Contrary motion occurs when one voice moves in one direction, and the second voice moves in the opposite direction.

### **Oblique Motion**

Oblique motion occurs when one voice stays the same and another voice moves to it or away from it.

## **Principle of Proximity**

The principle of proximity refers to moving each voice as little as possible.

### **Closed Position**

Closed position results when the top three voices are found in one octave.

### **Open Position**

Open position results when the top three voices are found outside of one octave.