

PART WRITING EXPLAINED BY HARMONIC FUNCTION

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All chords may be classified as tonic (T), subdominant (S), or dominant (D). Tonic chords are relatively stable, contain at least scale degree 1 or 3, and tend to be used at the beginning and end of a piece of music. Subdominant chords tend to push forward toward cadence points and frequently contain scale degree 4 or 6. Dominant chords are relatively unstable and contain at least scale degree 5 or 7. Dominants frequently demand resolution to a tonic-function chord, but they can also be used as a point of tentative repose. Most musical phrases begin with tonic function, move through one or more subdominant chords, and then feature a cadence, either on the dominant, or using a dominant to resolve back to tonic. Table 1 gives a list of the circumstances under which music may move against the progressive flow (P) of tonality back to the previous function. This is called retrogressive motion (R).

Table 1: Cases when retrogressive motion is allowed

1. Passing (P) and neighboring (N) chords
2. Plagal (PC), deceptive (DC), and half (HC) cadences

Every diatonic scale degree can be used within a chord of any function. The use of some of these scale degrees, however, is restricted. Table 2 shows the functions each scale degree plays within each type of harmony. This chart should be studied and memorized, since it summarizes all of the necessary information for understanding scale-degree function.

Scale Degree	Tonic	Subdominant	Dominant
1̂ Do	Foundation	Stabilizer/Chordal Diss.	Non-Chord Tone
2̂ Re	Non-Chord Tone	Stabilizer	Stabilizer
3̂ Mi	Active Tone	Chordal Dissonance	Stabilizer/Non-Chord Tone
4̂ Fa	Non-Chord Tone	Foundation	Chordal Dissonance
5̂ Sol	Stabilizer	Non-Chord Tone	Foundation
6̂ La	Stabilizer	Active Tone	Non-Chord Tone/Chordal Diss.
7̂ Ti	Chordal Dissonance	Non-Chord Tone	Active Tone

Table 2: Table of All Scale Degree Functions

Foundation notes (f) are the central scale degrees of the function. Strong harmonic progressions use these notes frequently in the bass line. When writing triads in a four-voice texture, the foundation note of the current function should be doubled under ideal circumstances.

Active tones (at) are the “color notes” that determine whether the music is major or minor. They are also the notes that help propel the music forward to the next function. Consequently, these notes are sensitive and have a specific way or resolving when the next functional category is achieved.

Stabilizers (s) combine with foundation and active tones to produce complete triads. Most of the time they are inert, but sometimes they may also act like dissonances in terms of how they need to be resolved.

Chordal dissonances (cd) are notes that clash mildly with the current harmonic function, even though they still form relatively stable chords built in thirds. All chordal dissonances resolve down by step when the music progresses (P) to the next harmonic function. (If the music moves retrogressively (R), then this is not required.)

Non-chord tones (nct) cannot coexist with the stable notes in the current function. Therefore, they must be resolved using traditional melodic patterns either before or sometimes right when the next function is achieved. Melodic patterns include passing tones (pt), neighboring tones (nt), appoggiaturas (app), escape tones (et), anticipations (ant), suspensions (sus), and retardations (ret).

Table 3 gives a procedure for determining which note to double in a chord.

Table 3: Doubling Procedures

1. If the chord’s stabilizer is in the bass voice, double it.
2. If not, then if the foundation note is in the chord, double it.
3. If not, then double the root of the chord.
4. Do not double leading tones, dissonances, or inflected scale degrees.

Table 4 lists all of the types of scale-degree functions, and gives a voice-leading procedure for each. Figure 1 shows all of the correct resolutions of active tones according to whether the harmonic motion is progressive (P) or retrogressive (R).

All part-writing and analysis exercises may be labelled using the abbreviations for each function. Figure 2 gives an example of some of these labels. Each chord should be marked with its harmonic function followed by the bass scale degree. For secondary dominants and modulations, add a slash and the roman numeral of the key in which the chord is functioning. Further, any non-chord tone, chordal dissonance, active tone, or inflected foundation note or stabilizer should be labelled with an arrow that shows its direction of resolution.

Table 4: Voice-Leading Procedures

1. Non-chord tones must follow traditional melodic patterns.
2. Chordal dissonances resolve down by step when the music achieves the next function.
3. Active tones resolve by step to the nearest foundation note (progressive) or stabilizer (retrogressive) when the music moves to another function.
4. Inflected foundation notes and stabilizers resolve by minor second in the direction of their inflection.
5. Otherwise, try to avoid leaps by sixth or seventh, generally preferring stepwise motion over leaps.

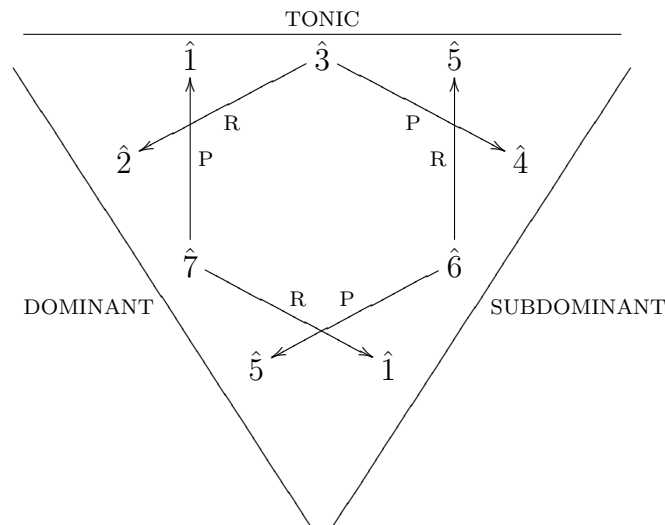


Figure 1: Chart of Active Tone Resolutions

BM: D7 T1 T3 D4 T_b3 D2 T1 D4/IV S6 S_b6 D5 D7/vi S6 S4 D5 D5 T1

Figure 2: Example of a Complete Functional-Bass Analysis

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