

Guidelines for Part-Writing

I. Chords: Prefer full triads. You may omit the fifth of any chord (triad or seventh) as necessary. You cannot omit the root or third.

II. Melodic behavior of the voices:

SOPRANO (melody): Rules of good melody apply. Favor stepwise, singable melody, with a few leaps and a point of interest. If there's a leap of a fourth or larger, try to balance by reversing motion afterward.

INNER VOICES: BORING. Smooth as possible. Favor **Common tones**. No point of interest necessary.

BASS: Provides harmonic support. Can **leap** around a fair bit (though no forbidden leaps allowed. No leaps bigger than an octave, and no successive big leaps in the same direction. Arpeggiation is okay).

***On top of that: NO AUGMENTED MELODIC INTERVALS (A2, A4, etc.)**
Diminished leaps are okay, as long as they are handled musically (me-ti-do is okay!)

III. Overarching Rules that always apply

1. Treat tendency tones carefully

Tendency tones = Leading tone of the key, the seventh of **any** seventh chord, and tones of suspension.

Treating these carefully means:

- Do not double them
- Follow the specific rules for their resolution.

LT – must go up if in an outer voice. (Can be denied in an inner voice)
chordal seventh – must resolve down by step, no exceptions
suspensions – must resolve down by step, no exceptions

2. No **parallel** octaves or fifths between voices.

unequal fifths OK, particularly when P5 → D5

3. Avoid hidden fifths & octaves:

NO OK NO

Hidden fifths/octaves are not problematic unless **both** of the following conditions apply:

1. There is similar motion between Soprano and Bass
2. The Soprano is leaping. (Stepwise motion can create desirable “horn fifths”)

Helpful Guidelines:

1. Never move all the voices in the same direction at the same time.
2. Avoid simultaneous big leaps in multiple voices. When students do this, it creates all sorts of problems of parallels, spacing, and it sounds like they couldn’t come up with a good solution.
3. You will always need an accidental for writing the correct dominant chord for a cadence to tonic in minor. Always. Always. Always. No really: always.
4. Do not send le – ti ever. Le ---> sol in minor.

5. Checking for parallels:

A. Technically, you should check all six pairs of voices for parallels.
(Sop/Alto Sop/Tenor Sop/Bass Alto/Tenor Alto/Bass Ten/Bass)

B. More practically. . .

1. look for Perfect fifths and octaves inside a given chord.
 2. Look at the next chord: are there any P5s or P8s (Pus)?
 3. Are they between the same two voices? If yes, you have a problem.
6. In general, it is best to write the outer voices first. Then fill in the triads with boring inner voices.
 7. Be aware of what type of chord motion you’re writing

Motion by fifth: 1 common tone

Motion by third: 2 common tones (these are easy!)

Motion by step: 0 common tones (I-ii, IV-V, vi-V, etc.)

8. Sing/play everything you write. Be prepared to start over and over as you realize the spacing you chose at chord #1 isn’t going to work. A pencil with eraser is essential.