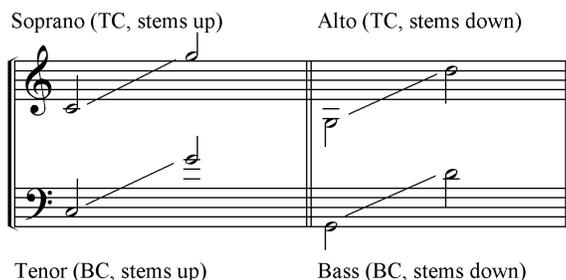


Guidelines for Traditional Four-Part Vocal Writing

General Rules: Keep in mind the goal of part-writing/voice leading: four independent, singable melodic lines that together form the harmony of the chorale.

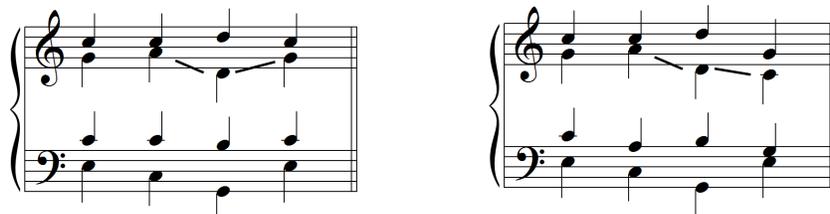
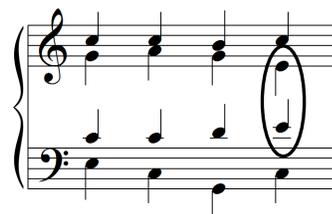
1. Voice relationships (S = soprano, A = alto, T = tenor, B = bass. S/A/T = upper, S/B = outer, A/T = inner)
  - a. Guidelines for voice ranges (vocal writing only):



- b. No more than one octave between adjacent upper voices (S/A, A/T).
  - o The tenor counts as an upper voice, it can be more than an 8ve above the bass.
  - o When the bass is low, the tenor should stay high as an upper voice. Avoid small intervals between B-T when the bass is low.

- c. No unisons (see example at right); octaves are ok.
- d. Emphasize contrary or oblique motion between S/B.
- e. A and T should be mainly stepwise.

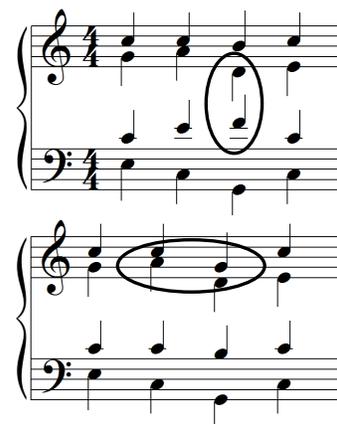
- o No consecutive leaps in A/T (below left).
- o Leaps in A/T should resolve by step in the opposite direction (below right – unresolved leap).



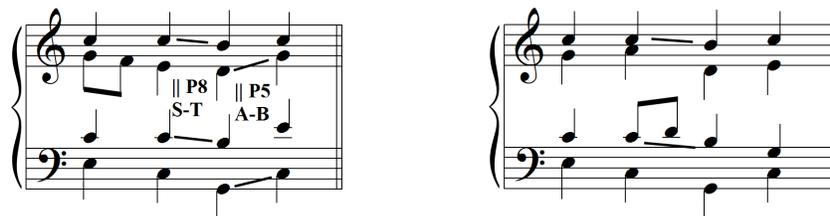
- f. No more than three of the same interval class in a row between any two voices.
- g. If two neighboring chords have notes in common, keep the common tones in the same voice whenever possible.
- h. Avoid melodic leaps of A2/A4 in any voice, and leaps larger than a fifth in A or T.

2. Avoid voice crossing or overlap (most likely between A and T).

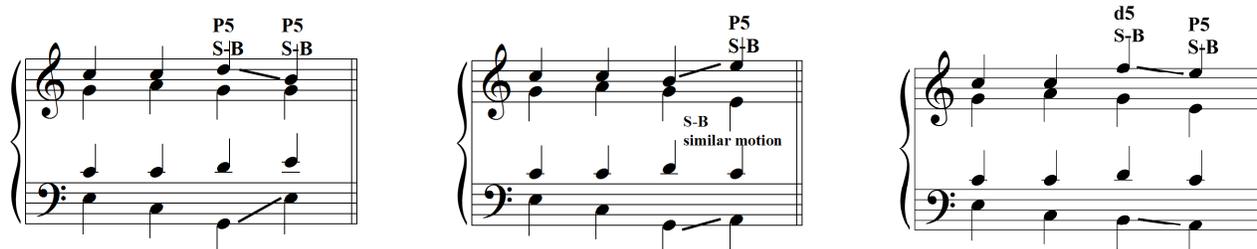
- a. Voice crossing: one voice goes higher than one of its neighboring voices at the same time (at right – A-T).
- b. Voice overlap: one voice goes higher than (or the same as) the preceding note in an adjacent voice. This is ok if there is at least one chord between the overlap; it is also ok immediately after a cadence (at right: S-A).



3. Obey chord and note tendency. Tendency tones must resolve by step in the proper direction, in the same voice, as soon as possible. In particular:
  - a. Chord 7ths resolve down.
  - b. The leading tone resolves up to tonic (exception: Ti may fall to Sol at the end of a phrase).
  - c. Altered notes resolve in the direction they were altered.
  - d. Weaker tendencies within the scale: Re-Do, Fa-Mi, La-Sol.
  
4. Avoid parallel motion by P1, P5, P8 between any two voices; parallel P4 or non-perfect 5ths/8ves ok.
  - a. Repetition of an interval is not a problem – only parallel motion by that interval (below left).
  - b. The parallel motion is between chords (think about harmonic rhythm), so parallel P5/P8 cannot be disguised with a passing tone or other non-chord tone (below right).



- c. Other related problems:
  - Parallel P5 or P8 by contrary motion – avoid (see below, left).
  - Hidden or “direct” P5/P8 – moving to a P5 or P8 by similar motion (instead of parallel) – avoid between S/B, otherwise ok; but, ok between S/B if S moves by step (below, center).
  - Unequal 5ths (for example, d5-P5 or P5-d5) – avoid between S/B, otherwise ok (below, right).



5. Summary: certain part writing errors are particular to either outer or inner voices only.
  - a. Outer voice issues: hidden fifths, unequal fifths
  - b. Inner voice issues: no leaps larger than P5; no consecutive leaps; leaps must resolve by step in the opposite direction
  - c. All other errors apply to all voices.

Doubling: Since we are writing in four-voice texture, and a triad has only three notes, one note of the triad must be played simultaneously in two voices. We say that this note has been “doubled.” Seventh chords can also have a doubled note, if another note has been left out.

1. General rules for doubling:
  - a. **Don't double tendency tones.** They both resolve the same way, creating parallel octaves.
  - b. It is usually ok to double the bass.

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- c. If a note must be left out, it is most often the 5<sup>th</sup> (the 3<sup>rd</sup> is needed to establish chord quality).
  - All chords must have a root and a third, and seventh chords must have a seventh, so these notes can't be left out.
  - In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we begin to see "rootless" chords and "indeterminate" chords (no 3<sup>rd</sup>), but not in the Common Practice period.

## 2. Guidelines for doubling:

- a. Any chord note may be doubled, as long as it is not a tendency note (leading tones, accidentals, chord sevenths), and as long as it doesn't create a voice leading problem. We tend not to double non-chord tones.
- b. Doubling in root position: usually doubling the root is preferred, but any note may be doubled subject to the previous point.
- c. Doubling in first inversion:
  - diminished and Augmented triads usually are in first inversion with the third (the bass) doubled.
  - When a major or minor triad is in first inversion, choose which tone to double in this order: soprano (first choice); bass (second choice); an inner voice (last choice).
- d. Doubling in second inversion: when a triad is in second inversion, double the bass.
- e. Seventh chords: many seventh chords are fully-voiced, meaning they have four different notes and so no doubling is needed. If you want to leave out a note, the fifth is the best note to omit. Then, follow the doubling guidelines above depending on the chord's inversion.