

Example Handout: Improvisation guidelines

Improvisation of upper voices for a given functional bassline

Harmonic classes

Within certain stylistic conventions, all harmonies can be grouped into three functional “classes”:

- _____: typically includes ____, ____, and ____; we will ONLY use ____ for now
 - Solfège “collection”:
- _____: typically includes ____, and ____
 - Solfège “collection”:
- _____: typically includes ____, ____, ____, and ____;
 - Solfège “collection”:

Phrase model

A typical “complete” phrase model moves through zones which are structured around the classes listed above: ____-____-____-____. A phrase model does not have to contain all four zones to be complete, but we will primarily deal with “full” phrases for now.

Expansions

Within the first tonic zone, _____ chords can be used to expand or prolong the original tonic zone. These tonic _____ follow specific bassline patterns and may make use of the ____, ____, ____, ____, and _____. Because these chords do not belong to the tonic function class, introduction of any of these chords within the tonic zone introduces a type of “dissonance” or expectation which helps to propel the phrase forward.

NOTE: The ii harmony should _____ be used to expand tonic unless it is paired with a dominant-functioning chord within the expansion.

Possible tonic expansions (defined by bass motion)

1. ____ ____ ____ = _____ motion
2. ____ ____ ____ = _____ motion
3. ____ ____ ____ = _____ motion
4. ____ ____ ____ = _____ motion

“Rules”: Most of the guidelines from counterpoint still apply when moving to contexts that imply tonal contexts and additional parts (i.e., preparing for four-part writing).

- Objectionable parallels:
- Dissonances above the bass:
- Prioritize _____ motion within your line
- Prioritize _____ motion between the lines
- Some lines may carry a weaker balance of tones, if repetition of notes fit the implied harmonic context
- NEW—function of tendency tones in dominant-functioning chords
 - Ti resolves ____ to ____
 - Fa resolves ____ to ____ except when included in a string of parallel thirds

Sample basslines (modelling what you might be “asked” on an assessment)

Construct two possible upper voice lines which fit the harmonic implications of the phrase model bassline provided below. Your solutions should prioritize stepwise motion in your line, contrary motion against the given bassline, properly resolve any tendency tones, and avoid objectionable parallels. (Some other counterpoint rules, such as the avoidance of 4ths, may be relaxed in certain cases.) Play the bassline on the piano and sing each of your solutions above the bassline.

Do Re Mi Fa So Do

Do Ti Do Re So Do

Mi Re Do Fa So Do

Do Fa Do Re So Do

Do So Do Fa So Do

Do Ti Do Fa So Do