Voice Leading Summary

Rules cannot be broken, but guidelines may be for aesthetic reasons.

Move the Voices as Little as Possible When Changing Chords

**Rule 1** Resolve tendency tones by step. Generally, the leading tone (♭1) resolves up and the chordal seventh (♭7) resolves down.

![Example notation](image)

*C: V⁷ I V⁷ I*

*Exception:* The leading tone (♭7) does not need to resolve up to ♭1 when it is in an inner voice (we call this a “frustrated leading tone”), or as part of the falling line 8-7-6-5 (often used with the mediant chord, iii, on 7).

![Example notation](image)

*C: V⁷ I I iii IV V*

*Exception:* The chordal seventh (♭4) may resolve up when outer voices move in parallel tenths with the soprano line 3-4-5, resulting in a diminished 5th to perfect 5th. This is the “Parallel 10ths” paradigms.

![Example notation](image)

*C: I V⁴ I⁶*
Guideline 1  In general, retain common tones, unless you are using a voice exchange, as shown.

Reminder: Prepare the chordal seventh of seventh chords by common-tone, when possible. (Think of it as a dissonance in fourth species counterpoint.) If not possible, approach by step.
Guideline 2  Move upper voices mostly by step, avoiding melodic leaps involving dissonant intervals. If you must leap a dissonance, recover it by step in the opposite direction.

Exception: Lowered 2 to 7 (crossing a dissonant diminished third) is acceptable in the Neapolitan chord (bII).

Reminder: In minor, try to approach raised 7 from above. If you must approach from below, raise 6 to avoid a dissonant augmented second.
Maintain the Independence and Musical Territory for Each Voice

**Rule 2** A pair of voices cannot move from one unison, octave, or perfect fifth to another interval of the same size in parallel or contrary motion.

*Reminder:* Unequal fifths (P5 to d5) are acceptable if the diminished fifth resolves to a third (following Rule 1). The reverse (d5 to P5) should be avoided, except in the case of outer voice parallel tenths.

**Rule 3** Keep adjacent upper voices (S-A and A-T) within an octave of each other. (T-B may be more than an octave apart.)
Guideline 3  Avoid voice crossings and voice overlaps to maximize the independence of voices.

Guideline 4  Avoid direct octaves and fifths between the soprano and bass.

*Exception:* Outer voice direct intervals are acceptable when the soprano moves by step.
Construct Chords Logically

**Rule 4** Never double a tendency tone (leading tone or chordal seventh) or a chromatically altered tone. Resolving both voices correctly will result in parallel octaves.

**Guideline 5** In general, write complete chords. In triads and seventh chords, only the chordal fifth may be omitted.

*Exception*: Inversions of seventh chords must be complete.
Guideline 6 In general, double the root. The next best choice is the fifth, and as a last resort, the third.

Exception: Deceptive motion (V-vi) will always double the third of vi.

Exception: Double the third in a vii\(^6\) chord to avoid doubling tendency tones.
Exception: Always double the bass (chordal fifth) of a six-four chord.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{no} & \text{yes} \\
\hline
f: V_4^6 & V_4^6 \\
& 5 \quad 3 \quad i \\
& 5 \quad 3 \\
\end{array}
\]

Exception: Proper resolution of \( \text{vii}^o7 \) and its inversions will result in a triad with a doubled third.

\[
\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{no} & \text{yes} \\
\hline
f: i & i \\
\text{vii}^o6 \quad i & i \quad \text{vii}^o6 \\
\end{array}
\]

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Tips for Avoiding Problems

**Guideline 7** Write the outer voices first. They provide the structural framework.

**Guideline 8** Move the upper voices in contrary motion to the bass.

*Reminder:* When the bass moves by step between root position chords, all other voices must move contrary to the bass.

*Exception:* The bass moves up by step in deceptive motion (V-vi), but the leading tone usually rises as well, resolving to I.

**Guideline 9** -Begin part-writing exercises with a complete chord in keyboard style (close position in the upper three voices) and remain in keyboard style when possible.

**Guideline 10** If any pair of upper voices leaps simultaneously by more than a third, try revoicing a chord to smooth things out.
**Guideline 11** Subordinate harmonies, such as inversions of V7, usually occur on metrically weak beats.

**Guideline 12** Prepare chromaticism by common tone. Failure to do so results in a *cross relation*. When necessary, conceal cross relations between inner voices or between one inner and one outer voice.

**Guideline 13** Remember to raise the leading tone (7) in minor on dominant-functioning chords (V and viio).
Guideline 14  Try to "recover" melodic leaps (intervals greater than a third) by step in the opposite direction, especially when leaping a dissonance.

Guideline 15  Vocal music is the model. When in doubt, make sure you can sing what you write.