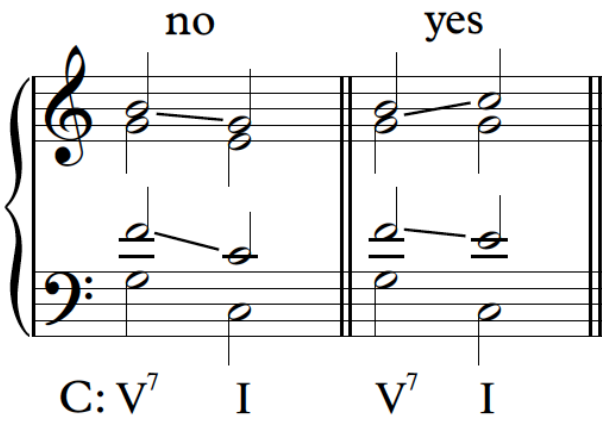
Voice Leading Summary

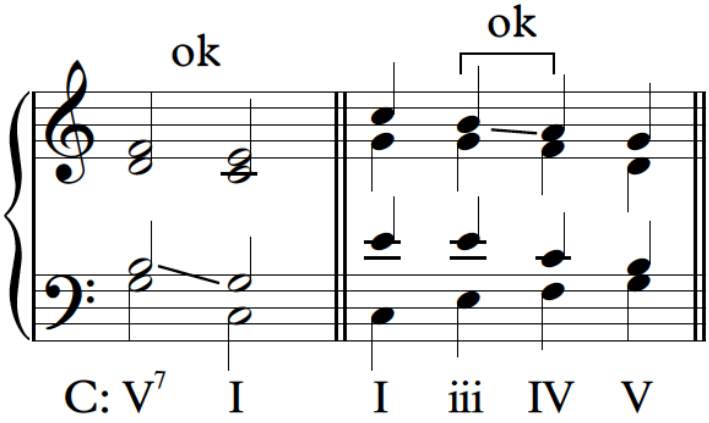
Rules cannot be broken, but guidelines may be for aesthetic reasons.

Move the Voices as Little as Possible When Changing Chords

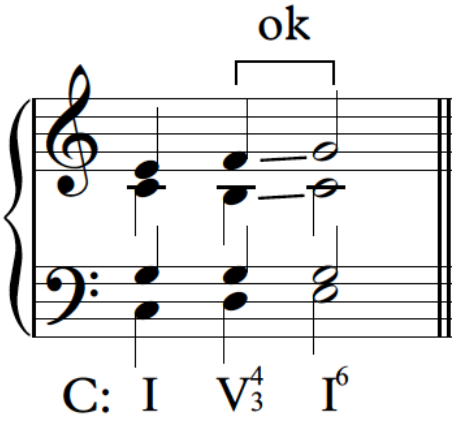
Rule 1 Resolve tendency tones by step. Generally, the leading tone ($\hat{7}$) resolves up and the chordal seventh ($\hat{7}$) resolves down.



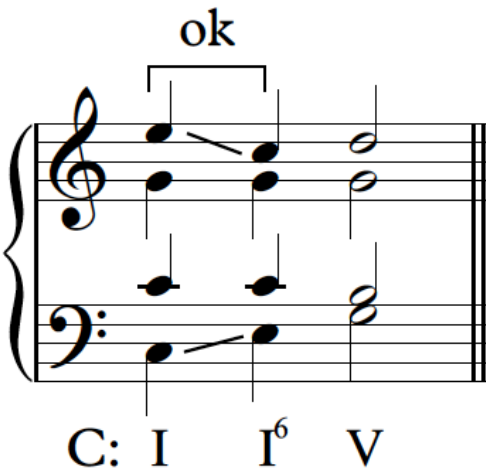
Exception: The leading tone ($\hat{7}$) does not need to resolve up to $\hat{1}$ when it is in an inner voice (we call this a "frustrated leading tone"), or as part of the falling line $\hat{8}$-$\hat{7}$-$\hat{6}$-$\hat{5}$ (often used with the mediant chord, iii, on $\hat{7}$).



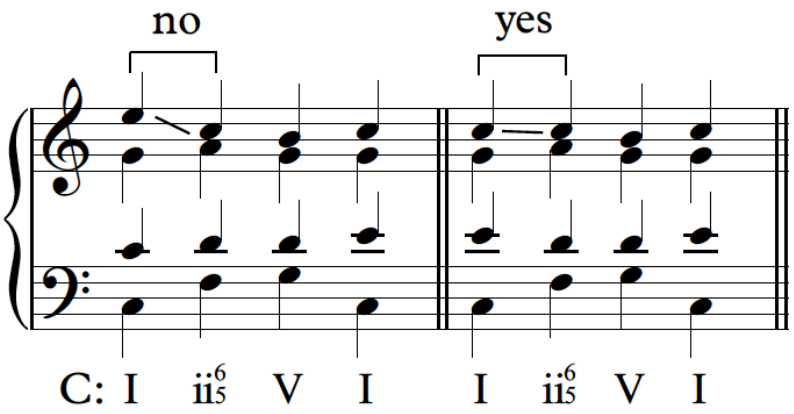
Exception: The chordal seventh ($\hat{4}$) may resolve up when outer voices move in parallel tenths with the soprano line $\hat{3}$-$\hat{4}$-$\hat{5}$, resulting in a diminished 5th to perfect 5th. This is the "Parallel 10ths" paradigms.



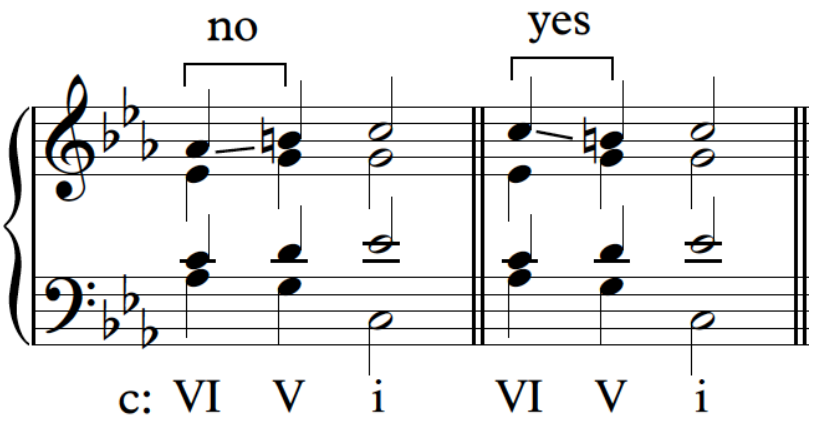
Guideline 1 In general, retain common tones, unless you are using a voice exchange, as shown.



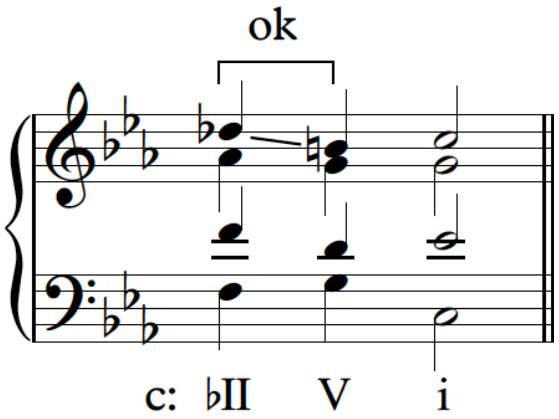
Reminder: Prepare the chordal seventh of seventh chords by common-tone, when possible. (Think of it as a dissonance in fourth species counterpoint.) If not possible, approach by step.



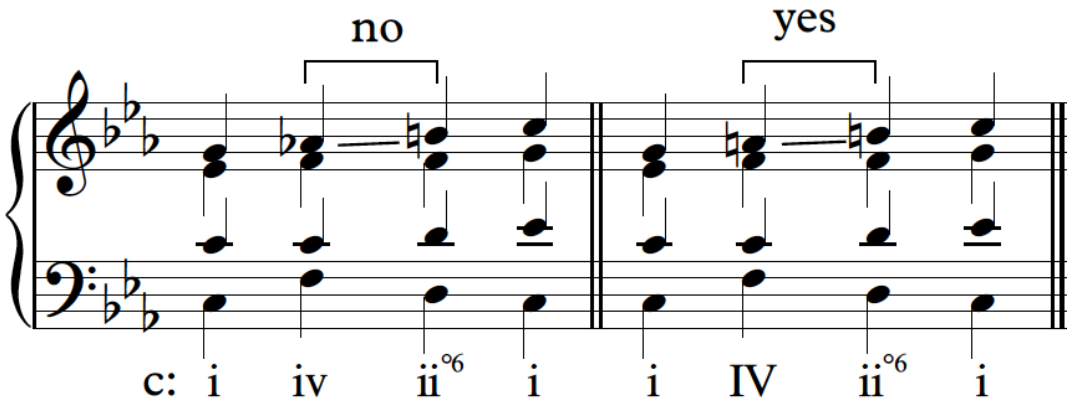
Guideline 2 Move upper voices mostly by step, avoiding melodic leaps involving dissonant intervals. If you must leap a dissonance, recover it by step in the opposite direction.



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

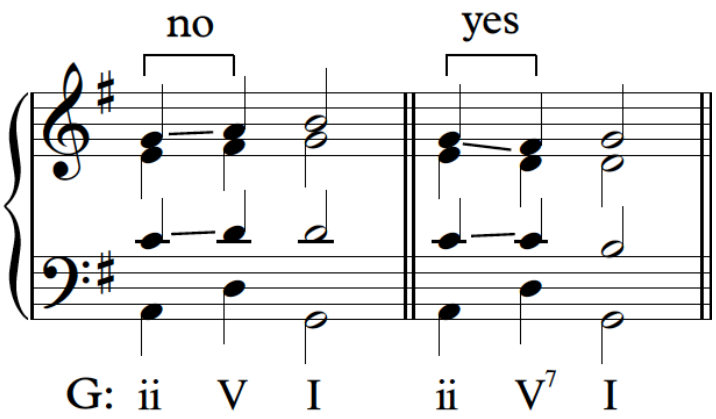


Reminder: In minor, try to approach raised $\hat{7}$ from above. If you must approach from below, raise $\hat{6}$ to avoid a dissonant augmented second.

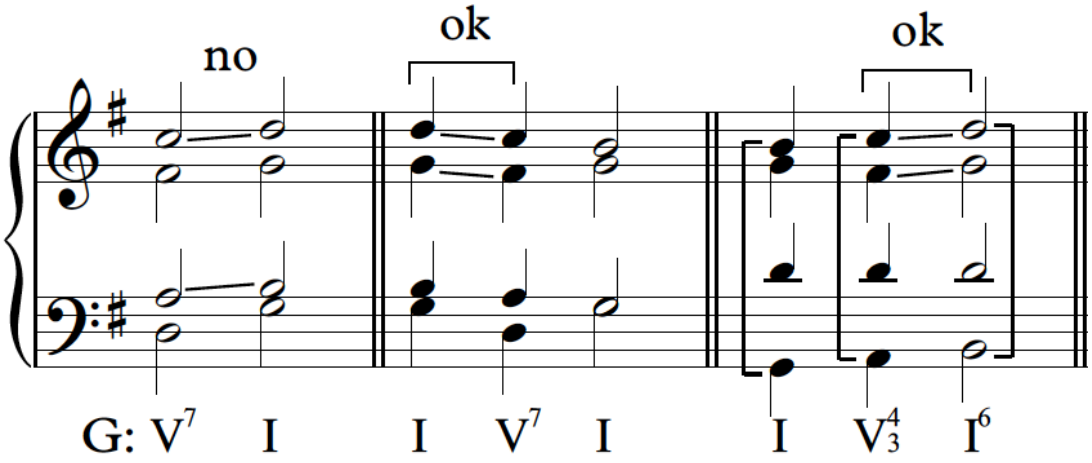


Maintain the Independence and Musical Territory for Each Voice

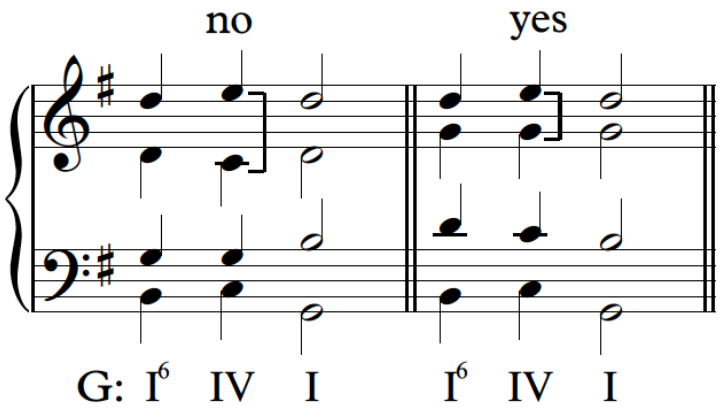
Rule 2 A pair of voices cannot move from one unison, octave, or perfect fifth to another interval of the same size in parallel or contrary motion.



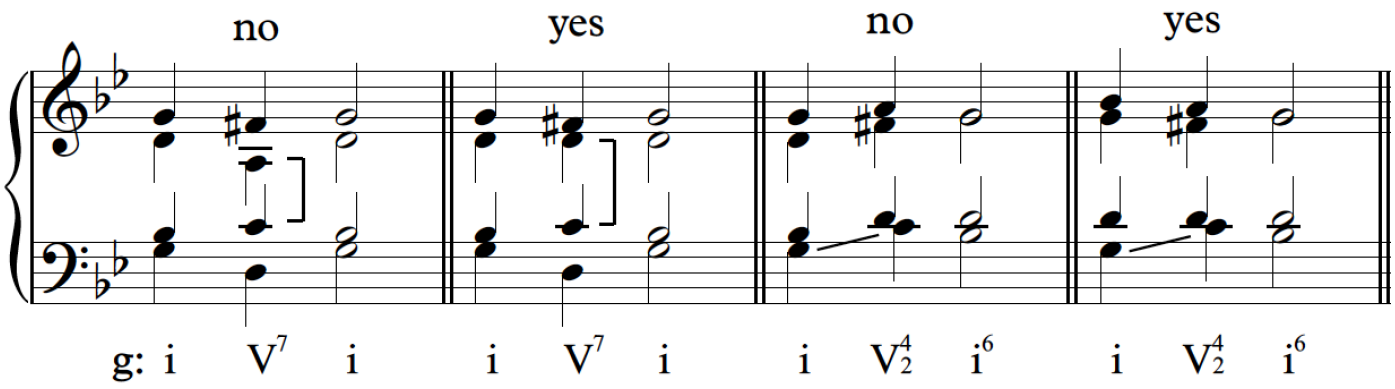
Reminder: Unequal fifths (P5 to d5) are acceptable if the diminished fifth resolves to a third (following Rule 1). The reverse (d5 to P5) should be avoided, except in the case of outer voice parallel tenths.



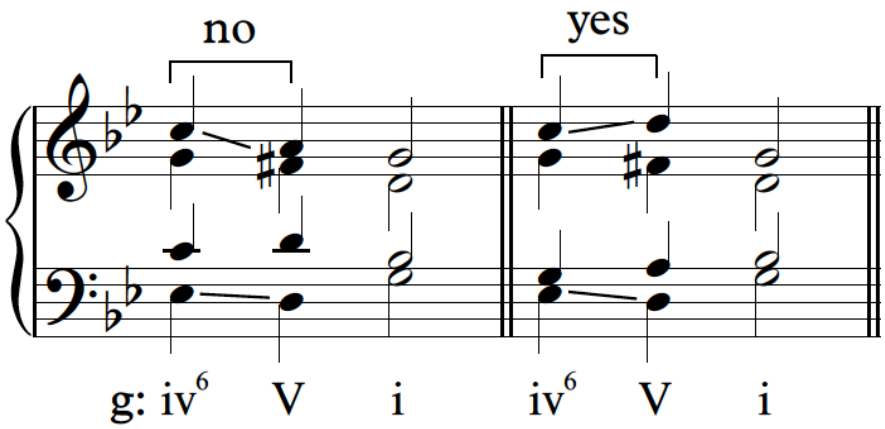
Rule 3 Keep adjacent upper voices (S-A and A-T) within an octave of each other. (T-B may be more than an octave apart.)



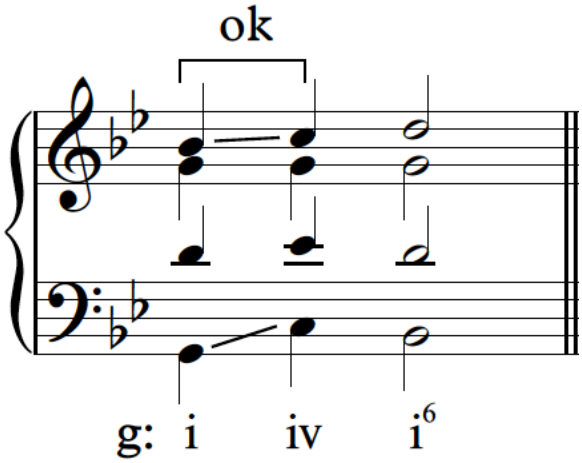
Guideline 3 Avoid voice crossings and voice overlaps to maximize the independence of voices.



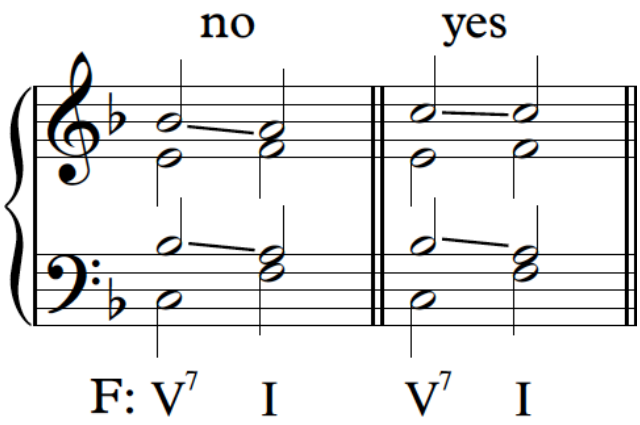
Guideline 4 Avoid direct octaves and fifths between the soprano and bass.



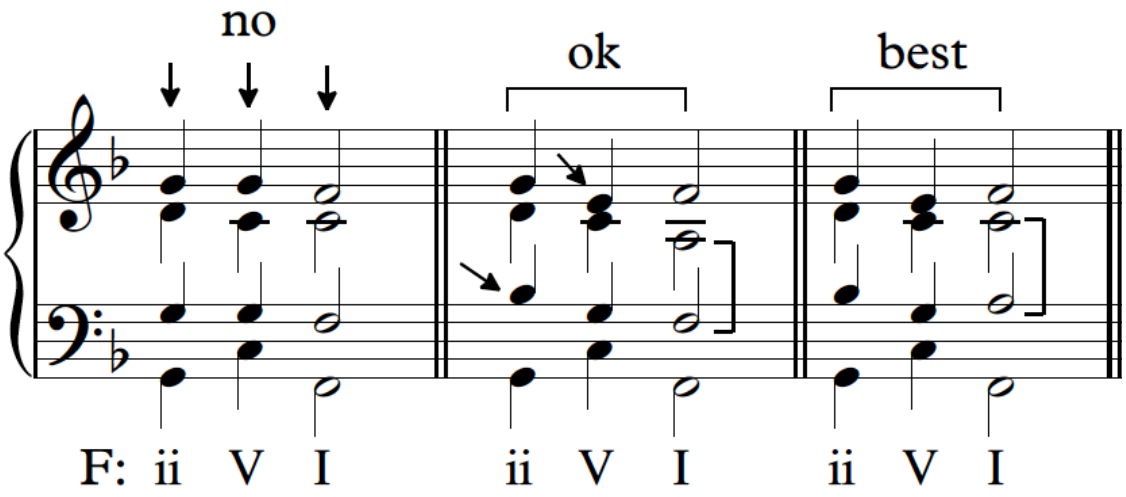
Exception: Outer voice direct intervals are acceptable when the soprano moves by step.



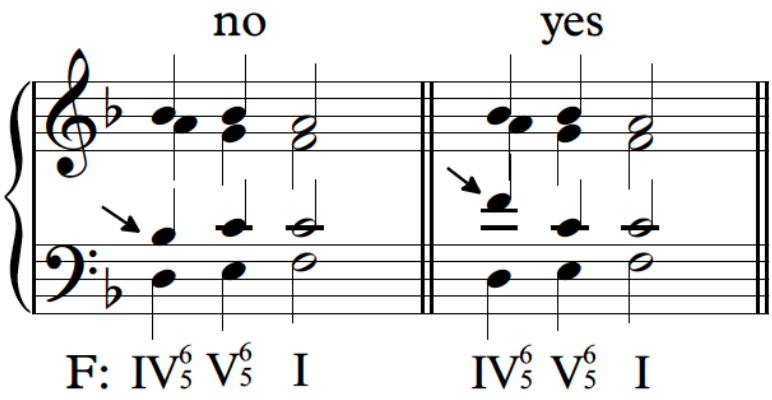
Rule 4 Never double a tendency tone (leading tone or chordal seventh) or a chromatically altered tone. Resolving both voices correctly will result in parallel octaves.



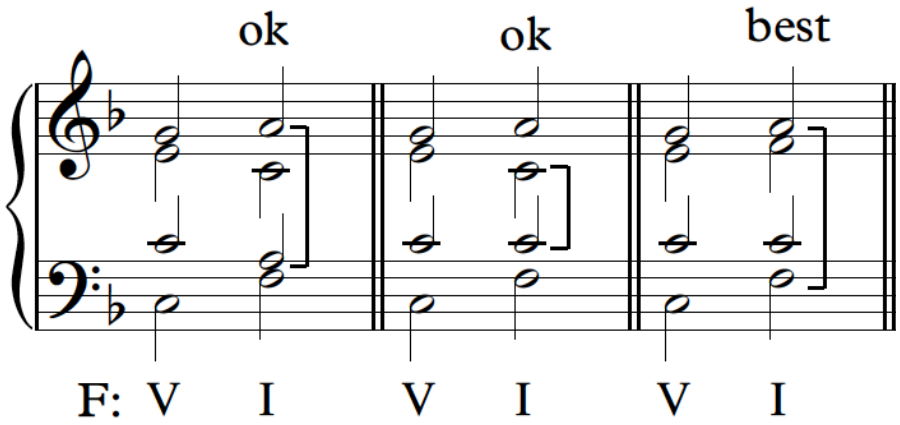
Guideline 5 In general, write complete chords. In triads and seventh chords, only the chordal fifth may be omitted.



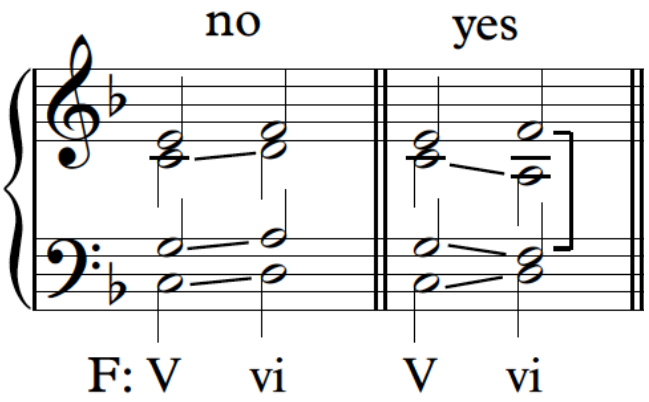
Exception: Inversions of seventh chords must be complete.



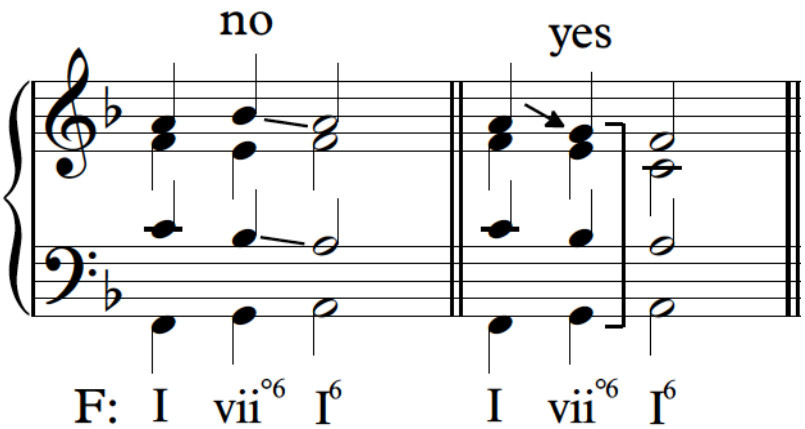
Guideline 6 In general, double the root. The next best choice is the fifth, and as a last resort, the third.



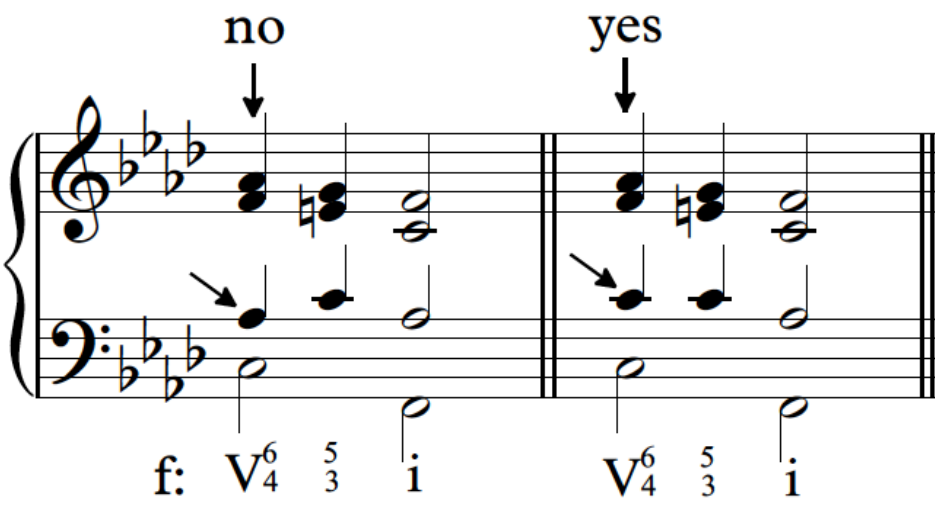
Exception: Deceptive motion (V-vi) will always double the third of *vi*.



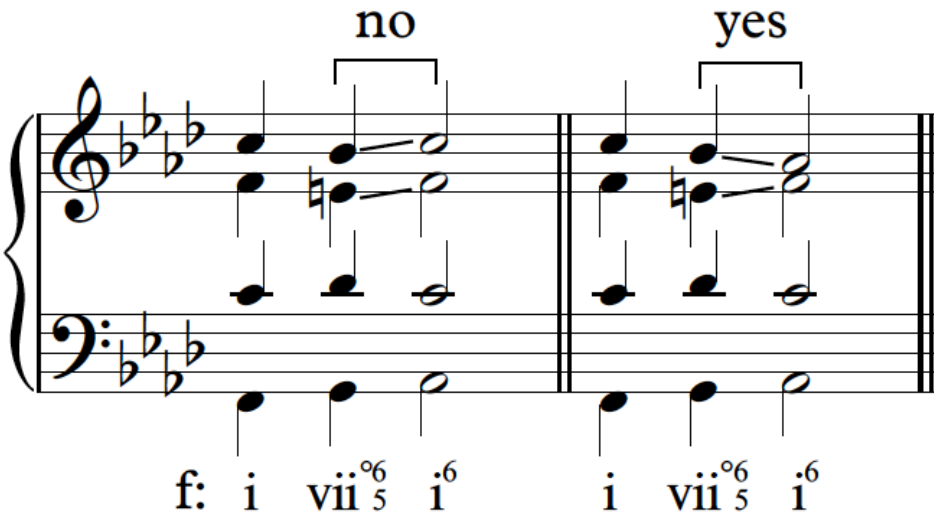
Exception: Double the third in a vii^{o6} chord to avoid doubling tendency tones.



Exception: Always double the bass (chordal fifth) of a six-four chord.



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

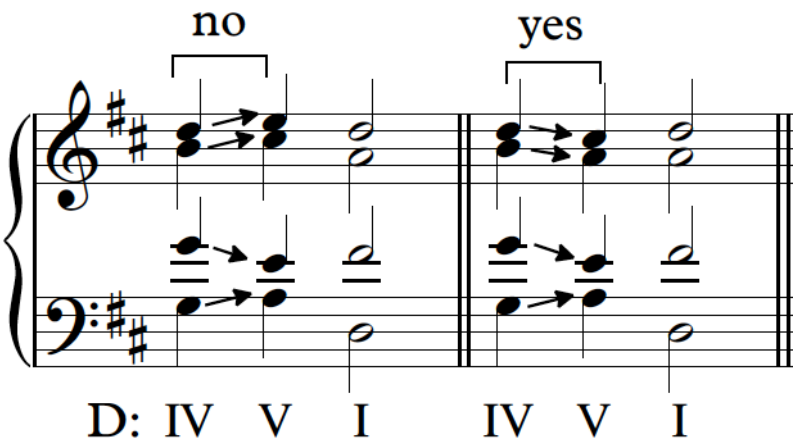


Tips for Avoiding Problems

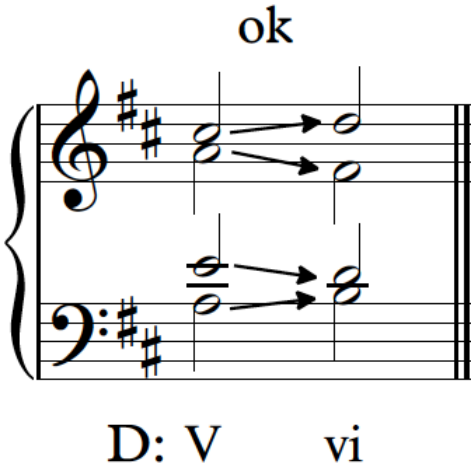
Guideline 7 Write the outer voices first. They provide the structural framework.

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 Î.

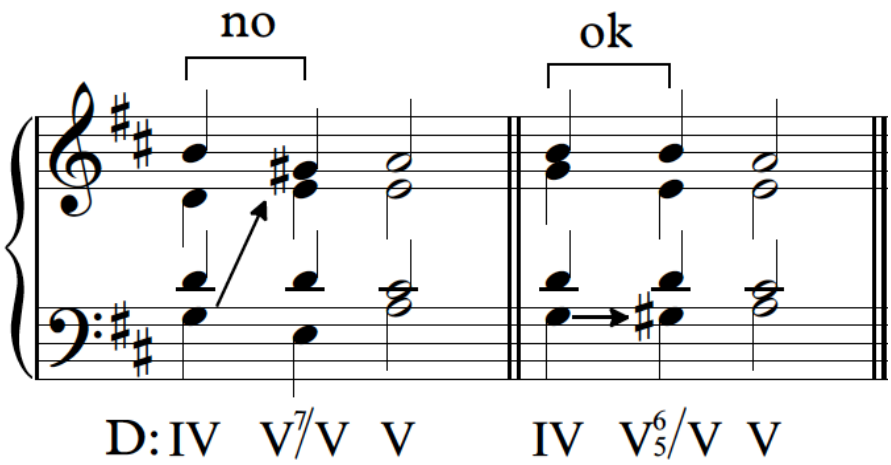


Guideline 9 -Begin part-writing exercises with a complete chord in keyboard style (close position in the upper three voices) and remain in keyboard style when possible.

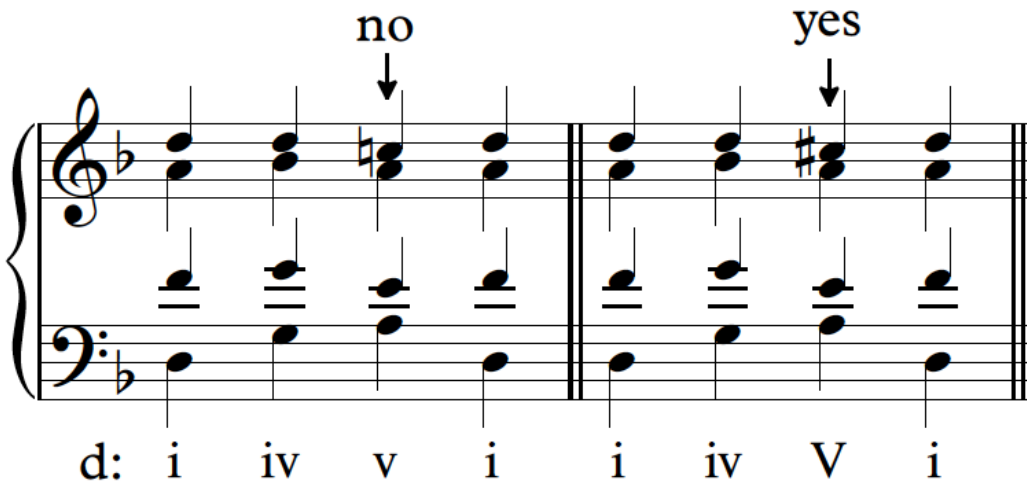
Guideline 10 If any pair of upper voices leaps simultaneously by more then a third, try revoicing a chord to smooth things out.

Guideline 11 Subordinate harmonies, such as inversions of V7, usually occur on metrically weak beats.

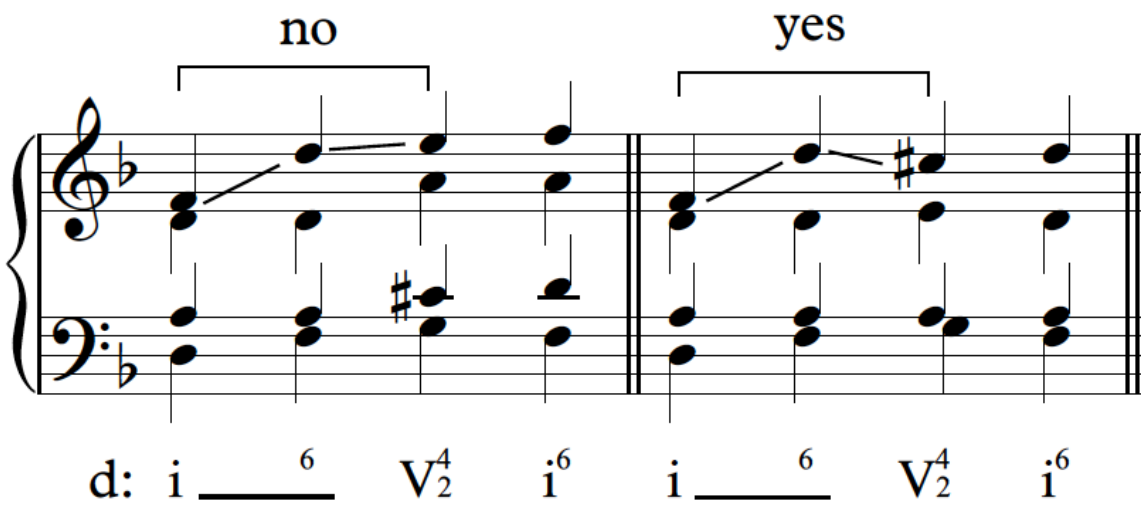
Guideline 12 Prepare chromaticism by common tone. Failure to do so results in a *cross relation*. When necessary, conceal cross relations between inner voices or between one inner and one outer voice.



Guideline 13 Remember to raise the leading tone ($\hat{7}$) in minor on dominant-functioning chords (V and vii^{o}).



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.