Harmonizing Complete Phrases

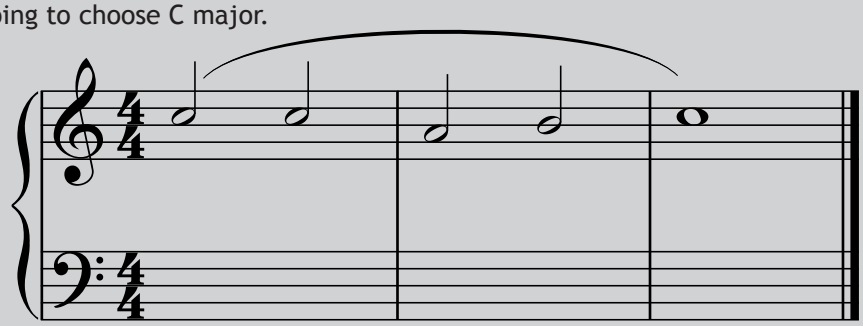
Basic steps to harmonization:

Step 1. Determine the key
Step 2. Write down the chords you have available on a scrap piece of paper
Step 3. Choose an appropriate cadence for the conclusion, and the ends of other phrases
Step 4. Choose chords that suit each note in the soprano line
Step 5. Fill in the bass line
Step 6. Fill in the inner parts
Step 7. Check thoroughly for errors: consecutive fifths and octaves, crossing parts and distance between parts.

A Worked Example

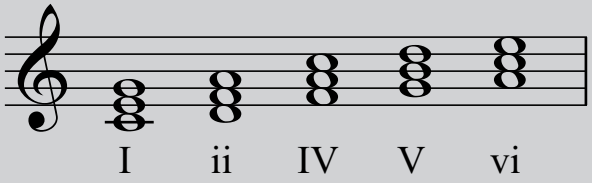
Step 1. Determine the key.

There is no key signature, so that suggests C major or A minor. As the piece starts and ends on a C we're going to choose C major.



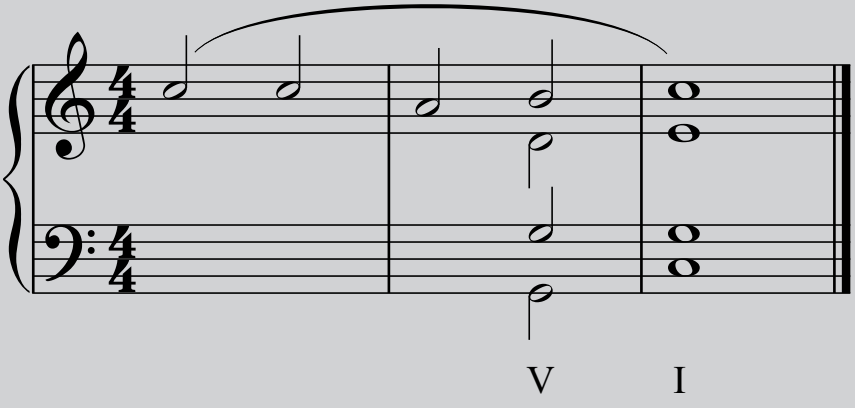
Step 2. Write out chord choices.

For this example we are just going to use I, ii, IV, V, and vi. Having the chords written down as a visual reference really helps you to know which chord you can use.



Step 3. Cadence points

As this example is only one phrase, and the notes are B - C (leading note to tonic) it is pretty clear that a perfect cadence will work well. Fill in the bass line first, then the other notes as you've learned how to do already.



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A Worked Example

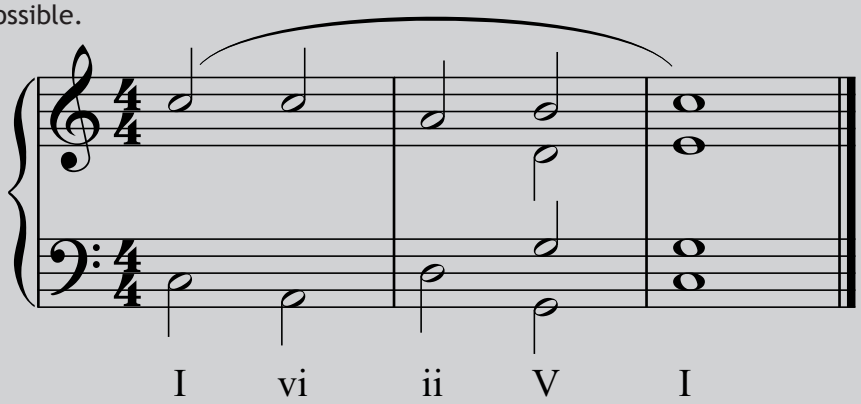
Step 4. Choosing other chords

Nearly every piece begins on a tonic chord, unless it has pick up notes. Therefore always start with chord I on the first chord, as long as it fits the soprano note given.

On the second half note of this example is a repeated C. This may suggest that the chord should change, as otherwise the composer of the melody probably would have just held the note through. Chord vi also has a C in it, so it would be a good contrast.

The first chord of the next bar has an A in the soprano. If we look at the chords we wrote down the three chords that contain an A in C major are ii, IV, and vi. We know that chord ii works well as a lead up to a perfect cadence, so let's choose ii.

Step 5. Fill in the bass line
We then fill in the bass line. Try to have the bass flowing in **contrary motion** to the soprano part where possible.

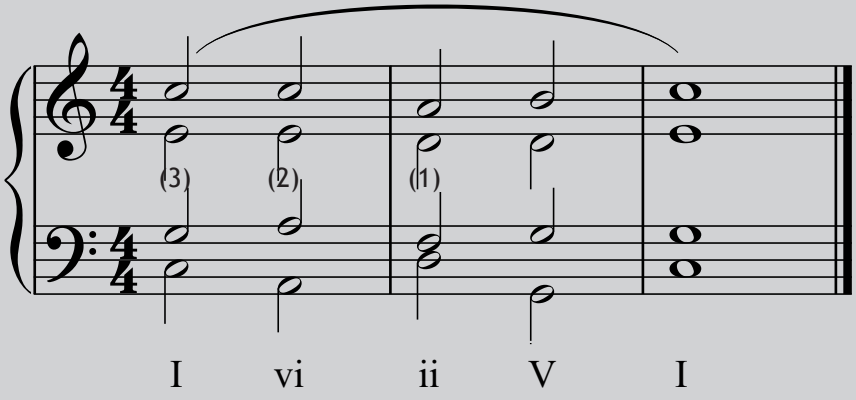


Step 6. Fill in the other parts.

(1) Working back from the cadence, we notice that chord ii has one tone in common with chord V, the D, so we put it in the alto part. This leaves the F for the tenor.

(2) We then have an A and an E to put in chord vi, so we write an A in the tenor and E in the alto. To do it any other way would result in a gap of more than an octave between alto and tenor.

(3) Chord I and chord vi have two common notes - C and E, so we write the E in the alto, and complete the chord with a G in the tenor.



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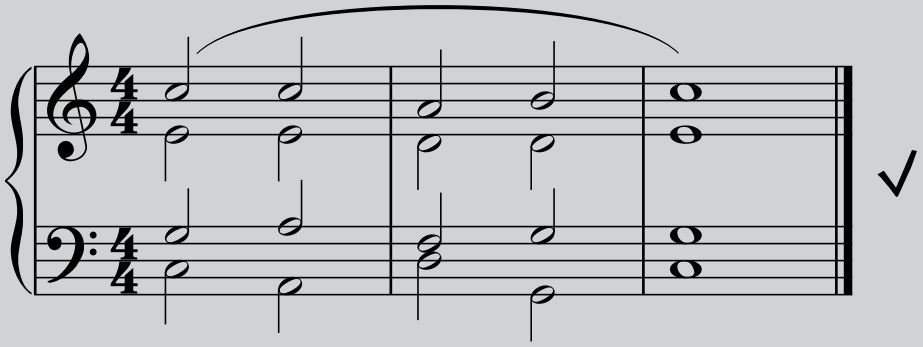
A Worked Example (cont'd)

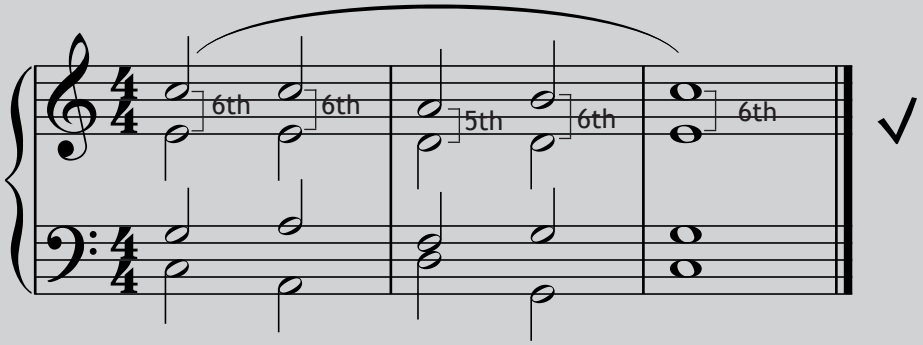
Step 7. Check thoroughly for errors

It is very important to look through your hamony example for common four part writing errors.

1) Look for gaps of more than an octave between soprano & alto, alto & tenor, and parts crossing one another.

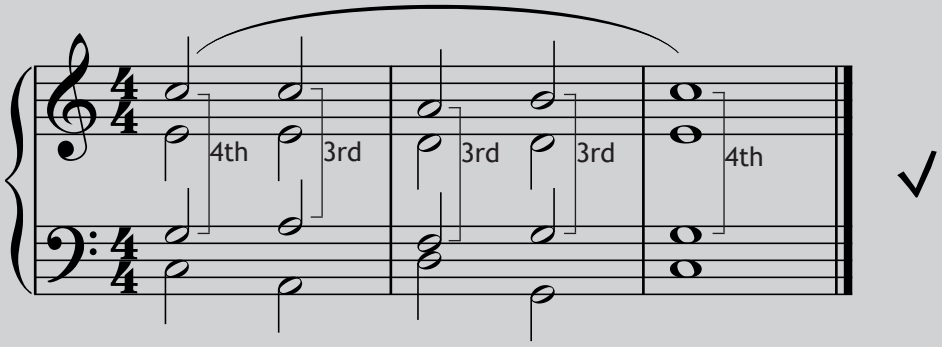


2) Look for consecutive 5ths and octaves between soprano and alto, alto and tenor, and tenor and bass. These should be quite easy to see.



3) A little harder to spot are those between soprano & bass, alto & bass and soprano & tenor. Go through and check each parts relationship with each other part to see if consecutive fifths or octaves appear.

Here we are looking at the intervals between soprano & tenor. Do this process again for soprano & bass, and alto & bass.



For more examples and practice exercises looking for errors in four part writing, refer to level three of this course, pages 58, 59, 66, 67.

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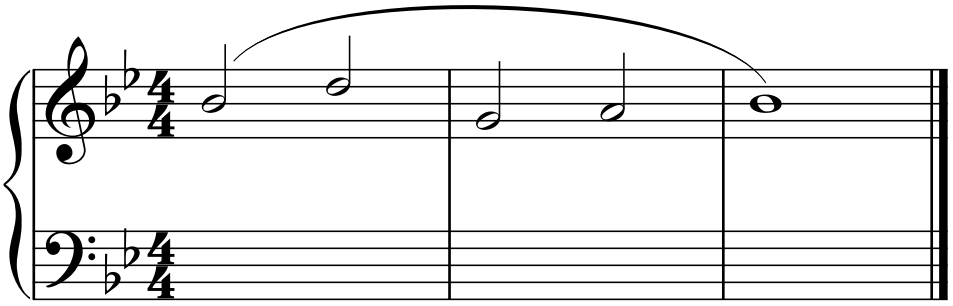
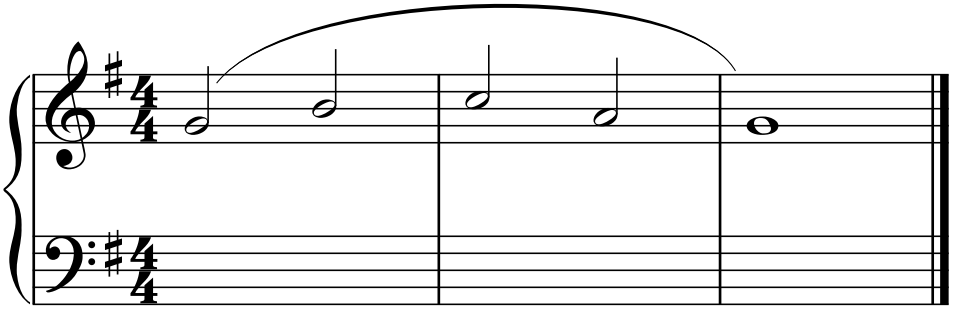
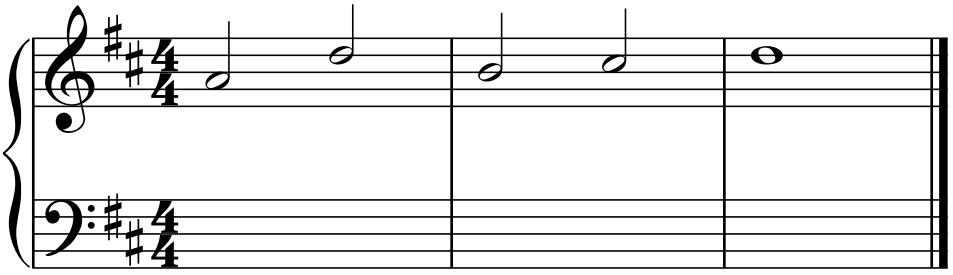
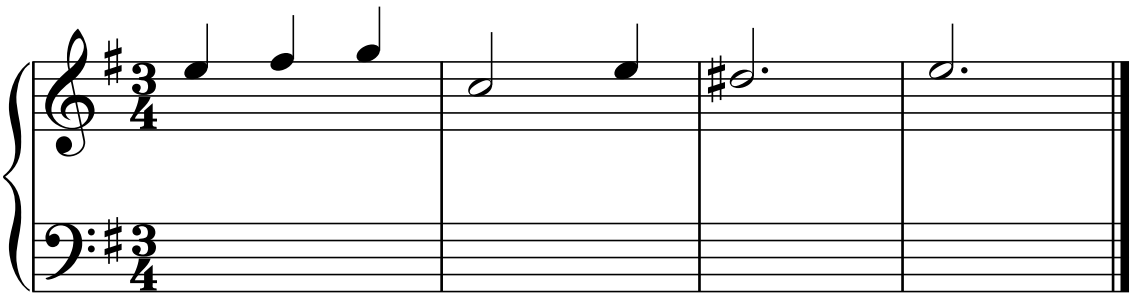
Simple Phrases For Harmonizing

Harmonize these phrases using just chords I, ii, IV, V and vi.









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