Perfect Cadences

A **cadence** is a progression of chords that is usually found at an end of a phrase, a section or a piece of music.

A **perfect cadence** is the most common "ending" progression of chords which is found in all types of music.

Its chord progression is:

$$V - I$$

(Or sometimes V7 - I)

This is a dominant chord, followed by a tonic chord. It gives a sense of completion to the music or the phrase.

Example: Beethoven: "Ode To Joy"

Example: "All Through The Night"

How to Write a Perfect Cadence

When you write a perfect cadence the idea is to have each voice lead smoothly from one note to another, so that there are not any large jumps.

You may find it helpful to write down the notes of each chord in this fashion, then cross them out as you use them. Notice that we have doubled the root in both chords:

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G        C
D        G
B        E
G        C

V        I
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Step 1: Bass Notes

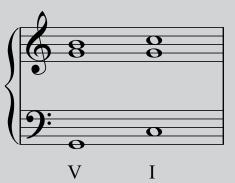In these simple root position cadences the bass always sings the root, so there is no choice to be made here.

Step 2: Leading note > Tonic

The leading note, always present in Chord V, must lead to the tonic. Here we have put it in the soprano voice:

Step 3: Common Tones

In a perfect cadence there is always a common tone - i.e in this example G appears in both chord V and Chord I. Put this in one of the remaining voices:
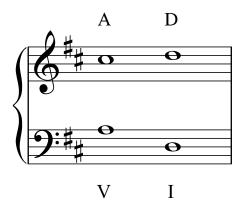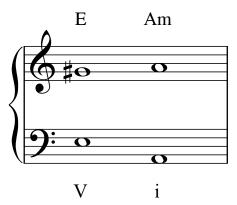

Step 4: Remainder Notes

Complete the cadence by filling in the remainder notes in the final voice:
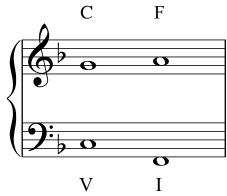
Writing Perfect Cadences

Fill in the alto and tenor parts of these two perfect cadences, following steps three and four from the previous page (as steps 1 and 2 have already been done for you).
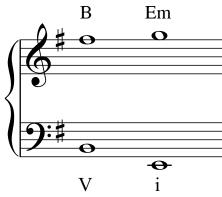

It is preferrable to have the leading note rising to the tonic in the soprano voice. However if we are given the top part to harmonize without this in the soprano then it can be placed in the alto or tenor parts.

Harmonize the following perfect cadences: