

## Chapter 15 The Smoothest Voice Leading: Common Tone-Stepwise and Contrary Motion-Nearest

In this chapter you will:

1. Study a phrase of choral music
2. Connect two chords with Common Tone-Stepwise (CTS) voice leading
3. Write more chords with CTS; one common tone, root by 5th (4th)
4. Write more chords with CTS: two common tones, root by 3rd (6th)
5. Harmonize a phrase using CTS
6. Identify contrary, oblique, similar and parallel motion
7. Connect chords with Contrary Motion-Nearest (CMN) voice leading; root by step
8. Harmonize a phrase using CTS and CMN

### 15.1 Study a phrase of choral music

The image shows two musical examples side-by-side. The left example, labeled 'common' and 'smooth voice leading', shows a treble and bass staff with notes moving in a stepwise fashion. The right example, labeled 'avoided' and 'voice leading with large skips', shows notes moving in a way that creates large leaps between adjacent notes in the same voice part.

•To write a series of chords typical of what you might hear in a church choir, you must look at each note and be aware of how that voice is moving. Is the voice going up, going down, or staying the same? Does it move by step or by skip? This melodic movement is called voice leading.

•The ideal voice leading in this style is smooth. See the examples above and the Christmas carol at the bottom of the page. In the carol the voices usually stay on the same note or move by step. No voice has a melodic leap of more than a fourth. This kind of writing creates a flowing sound that is easy for the singers to read. Chapter 15 will teach you to write in this way using two techniques:

Common Tone-Stepwise (CTS) and Contrary Motion-Nearest (CMN).\*

WRITE the key and Roman numerals in the blanks for this Christmas carol. The key is MINOR.

The image shows a musical score for a Christmas carol in 3/4 time. It consists of a treble and bass staff with a series of chords. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat).

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\*The terms “Common Tone-Stepwise” and “Contrary Motion-Nearest” are taken from the books *Scales, Intervals, Keys, Triads, Rhythm and Meter* and *Basic Harmonic Progressions*, both by J. Clough and J. Conley.

## 15.2 Connect two chords with Common Tone-Stepwise (CTS) voice leading

Given:

The diagram shows two measures of music. The first measure contains a G major triad (G, B, D) in root position. The second measure contains an F major triad (F, A, C) in root position. The top three voices are shown. Arrows and numbers 1-5 indicate the steps for writing the second chord using CTS voice leading:

1. Identify the chord tones with dots.
2. Find the common tone, and identify it among the top three voices of the first chord. Write it in the second chord in the same voice in which it appeared in the first chord.
3. In the remaining voices, draw arrows from the notes in the first chord to the lines and spaces that represent chord tones one step away.
4. In the voice with one arrow, write the note indicated by that arrow.
5. In the remaining voice, write the note which completes the triad--one chord tone will be missing.

• Common Tone-Stepwise (CTS) is a kind of voice leading which keeps the movement of the top three voices as smooth as possible. These voices either stay stationary or move by step. (Unlike the other voices, the bass will skip to the next note.) CTS can be used whenever the chords are in root position and there is a common tone between the chords.

• To write the top three voices of a second chord using CTS voice leading, refer to the above example and follow these steps:

1. Identify the chord tones with dots.
2. Find the common tone, and identify it among the top three voices of the first chord. Write it in the second chord in the same voice in which it appeared in the first chord.
3. In the remaining voices, draw arrows from the notes in the first chord to the lines and spaces that represent chord tones one step away.
4. In the voice with one arrow, write the note indicated by that arrow.
5. In the remaining voice, write the note which completes the triad--one chord tone will be missing.

WRITE the top three voices for the second chord using CTS voice leading. USE all five steps.

G: I    IV    F: vi    iii    \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in keys and Roman Numerals.

### 15.3 Write more chords with CTS; one common tone, root by 5th (4th)

C: ii      vi

•With practice you will be able to skip some of the steps in the previous worksheet and remember just three basic steps:

1. Find the common tone and keep it in the same voice.
2. Move the voice with no choice by step.
3. Move the remaining voice by step to complete the triad.

1. WRITE the missing notes using CTS voice leading. DO NOT DRAW arrows.

2. FILL IN the missing information.

d: V3#    i      e: i      V3#    E:    \_ \_ \_ \_

write key signatures      open spacing      close spacing      open spacing

Bb:    \_ \_ \_    G:    \_ \_ \_ \_      minor key



## 15.5 Harmonize a phrase using CTS

•To harmonize a phrase of music, always connect each chord to the previous chord, even over the bar line.

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1. WRITE the top three voices in this phrase using CTS voice leading.

D: I vi ii V I

2. PLAY or ASK someone to play your phrase, or COPY your phrase on a computer.  
LISTEN to it.  
HOW DOES IT SOUND?

## 15.6 Identify contrary, oblique, similar and parallel motion

The image shows four musical staves illustrating different types of motion between two voices:

- Contrary motion:** The upper voice moves up while the lower voice moves down.
- Oblique motion:** One voice moves while the other remains stationary.
- Similar motion:** Both voices move in the same direction, but by different intervals.
- Parallel motion:** Both voices move in the same direction by the same interval.

Below the parallel motion examples, a table provides guidelines:

Parallel thirds OK	Parallel perfect fifths AVOID THIS	Parallel perfect octaves AVOID THIS
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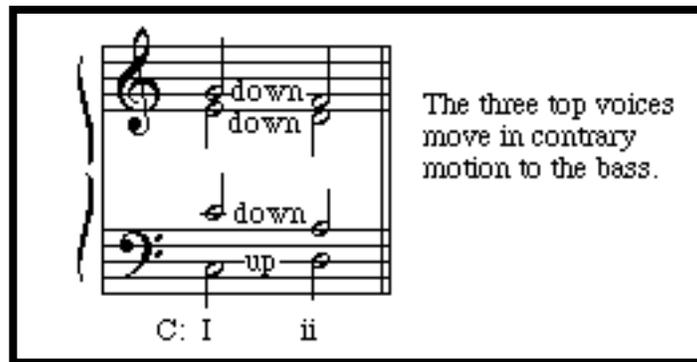
- When two voices move in different directions, the motion is called contrary.
  - When one voice remains the same while the other moves, the motion is called oblique.
  - When two voices move in the same direction the motion is called similar.
  - When two voices move in similar motion by the same amount, the motion is called parallel.
- Always avoid parallel perfect octaves and fifths in the four part music for these workbooks.

LABEL the motion in these exercises.

The exercise consists of a single staff with five measures of music. Below each measure is a horizontal line for labeling the motion type.

Measure 1: Parallel motion (Perfect Third)  
 Measure 2: Parallel motion (Perfect Fifth)  
 Measure 3: Similar motion (Perfect Fourth)  
 Measure 4: Contrary motion (Perfect Fourth)  
 Measure 5: Oblique motion (Perfect Fifth)

## 15.7 Connect chords with Contrary Motion-Nearest (CMN); root by step



The three top voices move in contrary motion to the bass.

- Contrary Motion-Nearest (CMN) is a kind of voice leading which is used when root movement is by step (or 7th) and there are no common tones. CMN provides the smoothest possible voice leading while avoiding parallel octaves and fifths.
- In CMN voice leading, the top three voices move contrary to the bass to the nearest chord tone. Two voices move by step and one voice skips a third.
- CMN can be used for leaps in the bass of a 7th in root position chords, but this melodic interval is rare and will not be used in the following exercises.

WRITE the missing voices and FILL IN the missing information.



F: iii IV A: I ii Eb: vi V Eb: iii ii

choose soprano and spacing



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## 15.8 Harmonize a phrase using CTS and CMN

When deciding between CTS and CMN, first see if there are any common tones in adjacent chords.

- If there are any common tones, you must use CTS. Do not use CMN if there are common tones.
- If there are no common tones, you must use CMN.

1. FILL IN the chords' Roman numerals in the spaces below the staff
2. WRITE the top three voices in this phrase using CTS and CMN voice leading, where appropriate.

F: I    \_\_\_\_\_

3. PLAY or ASK someone to play your phrase, or COPY your phrase on a computer.  
LISTEN to it.  
HOW DOES IT SOUND?