

FIGURED BASS

Arabic numbers that indicate the intervals, and non-chord tones above a given bass note.

“Figured bass” — also known as “thorough bass” — was a practice used for certain *accompanying, chordal* instruments (mainly keyboards and various precursors to the guitar) during the Baroque period (ca. 1600 - 1750). (In fact, some figured bass was also occasionally used by Mozart and his contemporaries.)

It was a specific kind of musical shorthand — analogous, in some ways, to today's jazz fake sheets — that made life a little easier for the composer, and allowed for some creative improvisation on the part of the performer. (Improvisation was far more prevalent in Baroque practices — especially in melodic and rhythmic ornamentation — than was the case in classical music from that time until the 1960s).

Realizing the Figured Bass - means "making it real" or filling out the four-part harmony given the symbols and numbers indicated.

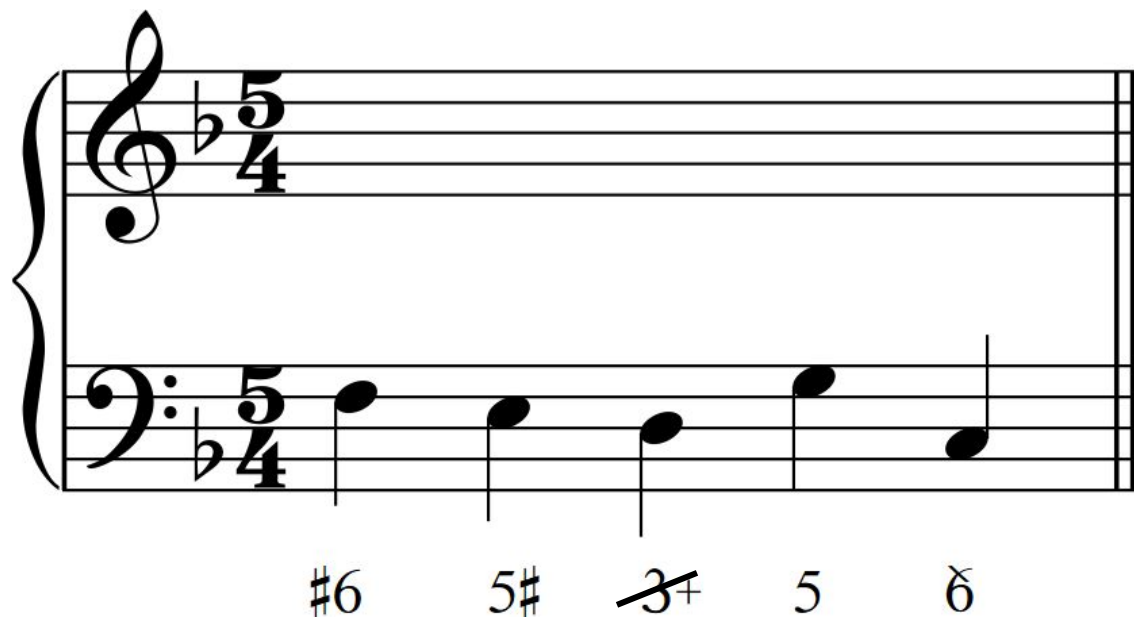
The numbers or symbols represent diatonic intervals that should be written above the given bass note.

The numbers and symbols below the bass note do not indicate the order the notes should be placed on the staff. They simply indicate which notes must be there.

No symbol - means the note is a triad in root position and you should double according to the common practice.

The following symbols indicate the note referred to should be raised by a half step from the key signature:

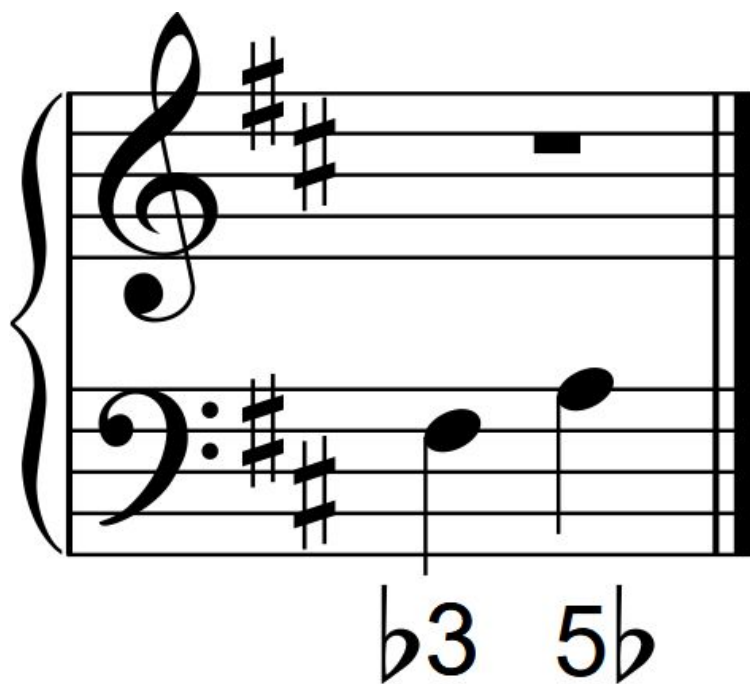
- A slash through a number or part of it
- A + sign before or after a number
- A # sign before or after a number (it won't necessarily make the pitch a # it will simply raise it a half step)



The image shows a musical staff in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a time signature of 5/4. The staff contains five notes: G2, F2, E2, D2, and C2. Below the staff, five fingering symbols are aligned with the notes: #6, 5#, ~~3~~+, 5, and 6̂.

A flat sign indicates the interval referred to should be lowered by a half step from the key signature:

*A flat sign before or after a number won't necessarily make the pitch a flat it will simply lower it a half step.



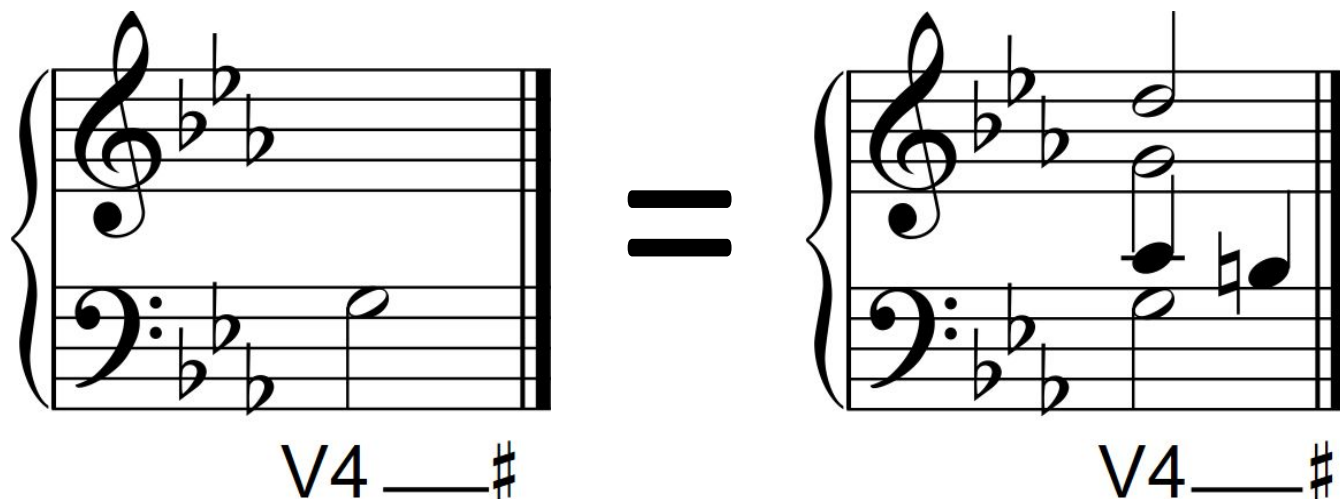
A natural sign indicates the interval should be natural regardless of the key signature. It overrides the key signature.

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece. The score is written on two staves, treble and bass clef, with a brace on the left. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The treble staff contains a whole note chord consisting of B-flat, E-flat, and A-flat. The bass staff contains a whole note chord consisting of B, E-flat, and A-flat. The B note in the bass staff has a natural sign above it, indicating it should be played as a natural B despite the key signature. Below the bass staff, three chord symbols are written: Bb, Eb6, and 2Bb, corresponding to the chords in the treble and bass staves.

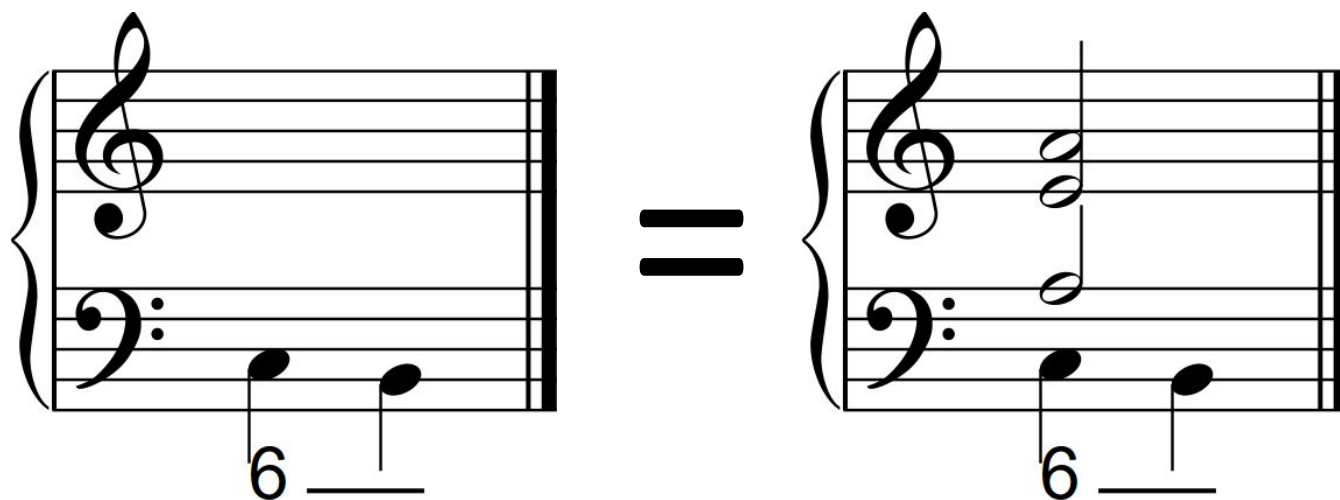
Any symbol or accidental with no number is applied to the 3rd above the given bass note (not necessarily the 3rd of the chord). If the symbol (sharp, flat or natural) is by itself it is always a root position chord.

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff, both in 4/4 time. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The treble staff begins with a treble clef and contains a whole note chord in the first measure, consisting of the notes G4, B-flat4, and D5. The bass staff begins with a bass clef and contains a whole note chord in the first measure, consisting of the notes G3, B-flat3, and D4. In the second measure, the bass staff has a whole note chord with a sharp sign (#) above the bass line. In the third measure, the bass staff has a whole note chord with a flat sign (b) above the bass line. Below the bass staff, there are three accidentals: a sharp sign (#), a flat sign (b), and a natural sign (n), each aligned with the corresponding measure of the bass staff.

A line is used to indicate when the bass note changes but the notes in the chord above it are to be held in the same voice.



The image shows two equivalent musical notations for a V4 chord. On the left, a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) is shown. The bass clef contains a single half note, with a horizontal line underneath it. The treble clef contains three notes: a half note on the second line (F4), a quarter note on the second space (G4), and a quarter note on the second space (G4). An equals sign is placed between the two notations. On the right, the same grand staff is shown, but the bass clef contains two half notes: the first is on the second line (F4) and the second is on the first space (E4). The treble clef notes remain the same as in the left notation. Below each grand staff is the label "V4" followed by a horizontal line and a sharp symbol (#).



The image shows two equivalent musical notations for a V4 chord. On the left, a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) is shown. The bass clef contains two half notes: the first is on the second line (F4) and the second is on the first space (E4). The treble clef is empty. An equals sign is placed between the two notations. On the right, the same grand staff is shown, but the bass clef contains a single half note on the second line (F4), with a horizontal line underneath it. The treble clef contains two notes: a half note on the second space (G4) and a quarter note on the second space (G4). Below each grand staff is the label "6" followed by a horizontal line.

Suspensions - Two figures arranged horizontally under one bass note indicate movement in the same voice above the given bass note. For example, in the following, the note an octave above the bass note is to move to the note a seventh above the bass. A dash under a movement indicates that voice does not move. The movement is usually accomplished by notes of equal value. In the example below, the 8-7 movement is shown in quarter notes -- note values half the length of the other voices. Suspensions can be in any voice except bass.

G: 6 8-7
4 5 -

Suspension Types:

- 8-7 melodic movement in any voice except bass from and octave to a 7th above the bass note
- 9-8 suspension with resolution in any voice except bass
- 7-6 suspension with resolution in any voice except bass
- 4-3 suspension with resolution in any voice except bass
- 2-3 A Bass suspension with resolution (MUST BE IN THE BASS)

The image displays musical notation for four different suspension types, each with its own chord progression and resolution:

- 9-8 sus:** Treble clef, C: V (C4, E4, G4) to I (C4, E4, G4). The G4 note is suspended from the previous chord and resolves down to F4.
- 7-6 sus:** Treble clef, C: I (C4, E4, G4) to IV⁶ (F4, A4, C5). The A4 note is suspended from the previous chord and resolves down to G4.
- 4-3 sus:** Treble clef, C: IV (F4, A4, C5) to I (C4, E4, G4). The C5 note is suspended from the previous chord and resolves down to B4.
- 2-3 sus (always in BASS):** Bass clef, C: I (C3, E3, G3) to V⁶ (C3, E3, G3). The C3 note is suspended from the previous chord and resolves up to D3.

Each example includes a 'P' (Preparation) note, an 'S' (Suspension) note, and an 'R' (Resolution) note. The 2-3 sus example also includes a triplet of notes in the bass line.

FIGURED BASS

Arabic Numbers		Indication
5 3		Root Position
6 3	6	First Inversion
6 4		Second Inversion
7		Root Position 7 th Chord
6 5		First Inversion 7 th Chord
4 3	6 4 3	Second Inversion 7 th Chord
4 2	2	7 th Chords With the 7 th in the Bass
# b		Raise or lower the 3 rd above the bass note according to the symbol used.
♮		Make the 3 rd above the bass notes natural regardless of the key
9,8,7,4,2		Indicates a interval that must be placed above the bass note
\ / or #		Indicates the slashed number is raised a half step
4-3, 9-8		Indicates a Suspension
_____		Indicates a note to be held