RULES FOR FOUR PART WRITING

The music of the common practice period did not appear overnight. The principles that govern it were the result of almost 1000 years of scientific research and artistic experimentation. One of the principles is that of equal emphasis on both harmony (vertical) and line (horizontal). The process of writing music that addresses both of these aspects is referred to as **voice leading** or **part writing** (these two terms are used interchangeably). Four-part choral music is most often used to demonstrate and teach voice leading, since it addresses most of the problems, methods, and principles for writing for more or fewer voices. Four voice choral part writing is often referred to as **SATB** (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) part writing.

The common practice style is the beginning of using Roman numeral chord analysis as harmonic language

http://smu.edu/totw/partwrit.htm

Preparation and Resolution

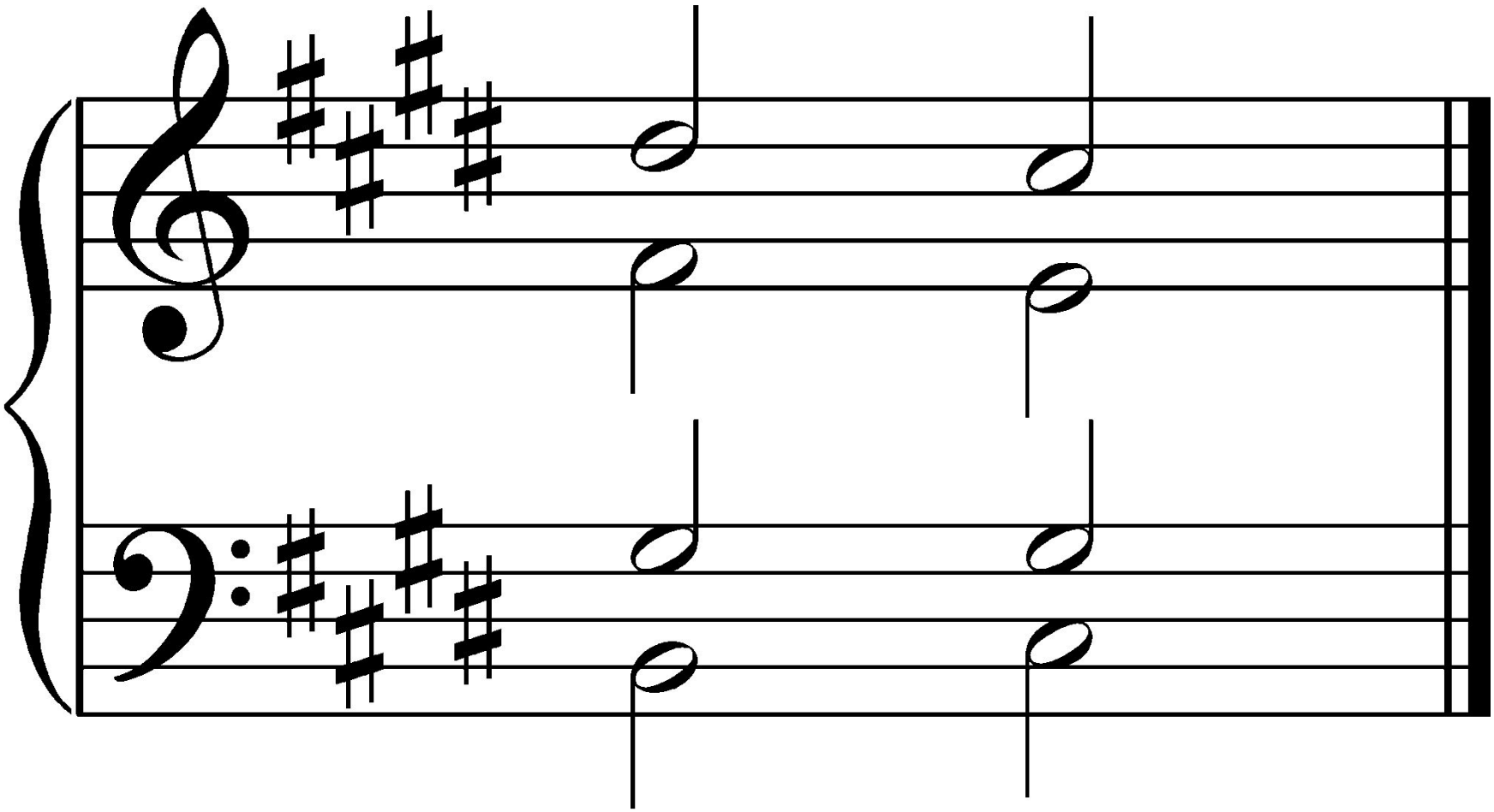
Where are you going and how will you get there?

Preparation: The consonant pitch or chord which precedes a dissonant nonharmonic tone (the approach)

Resolution: The movement of a note or chord from dissonance to consonance

COMMON TONES

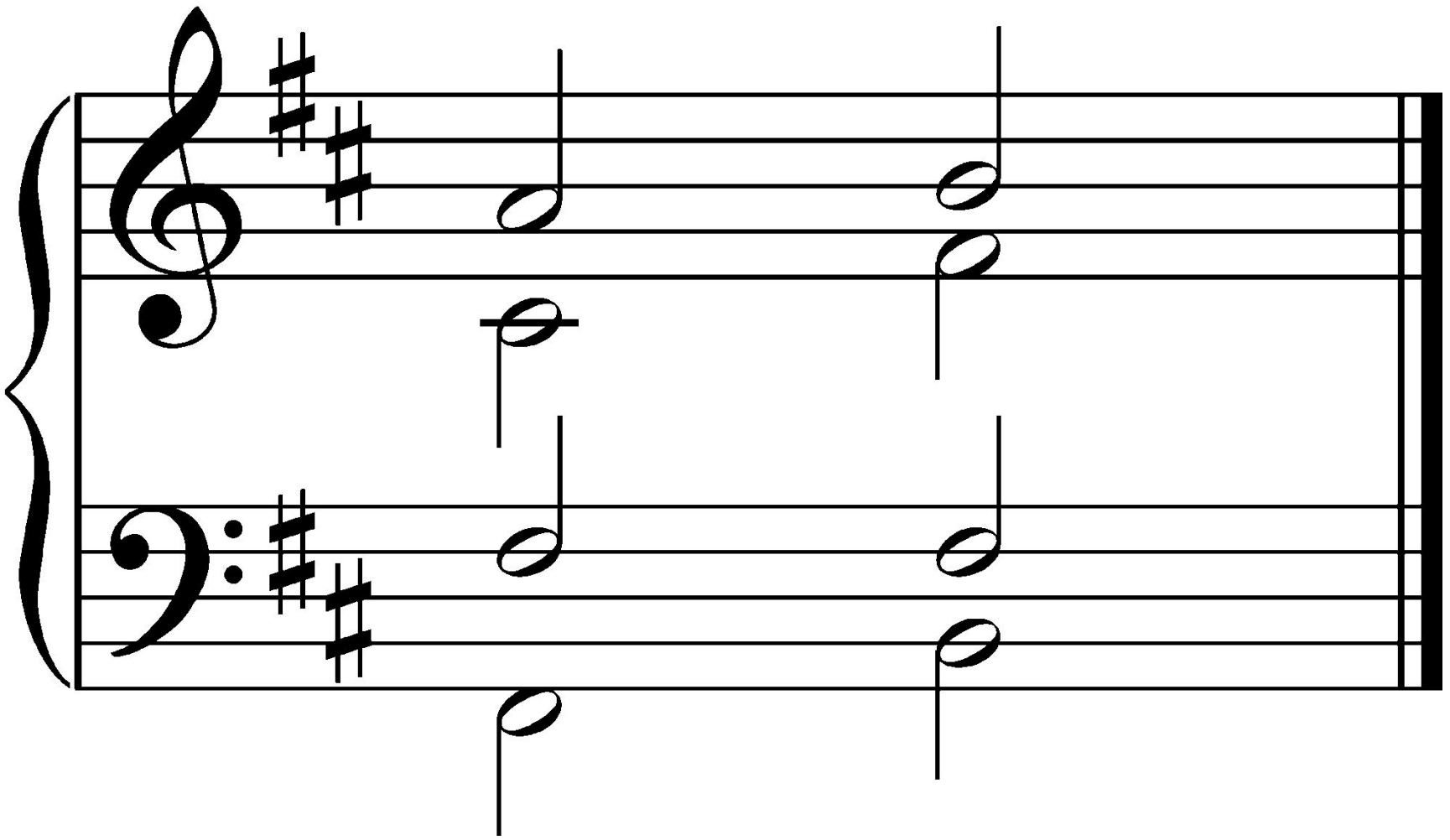
•Keep common tones when possible in your inner voices

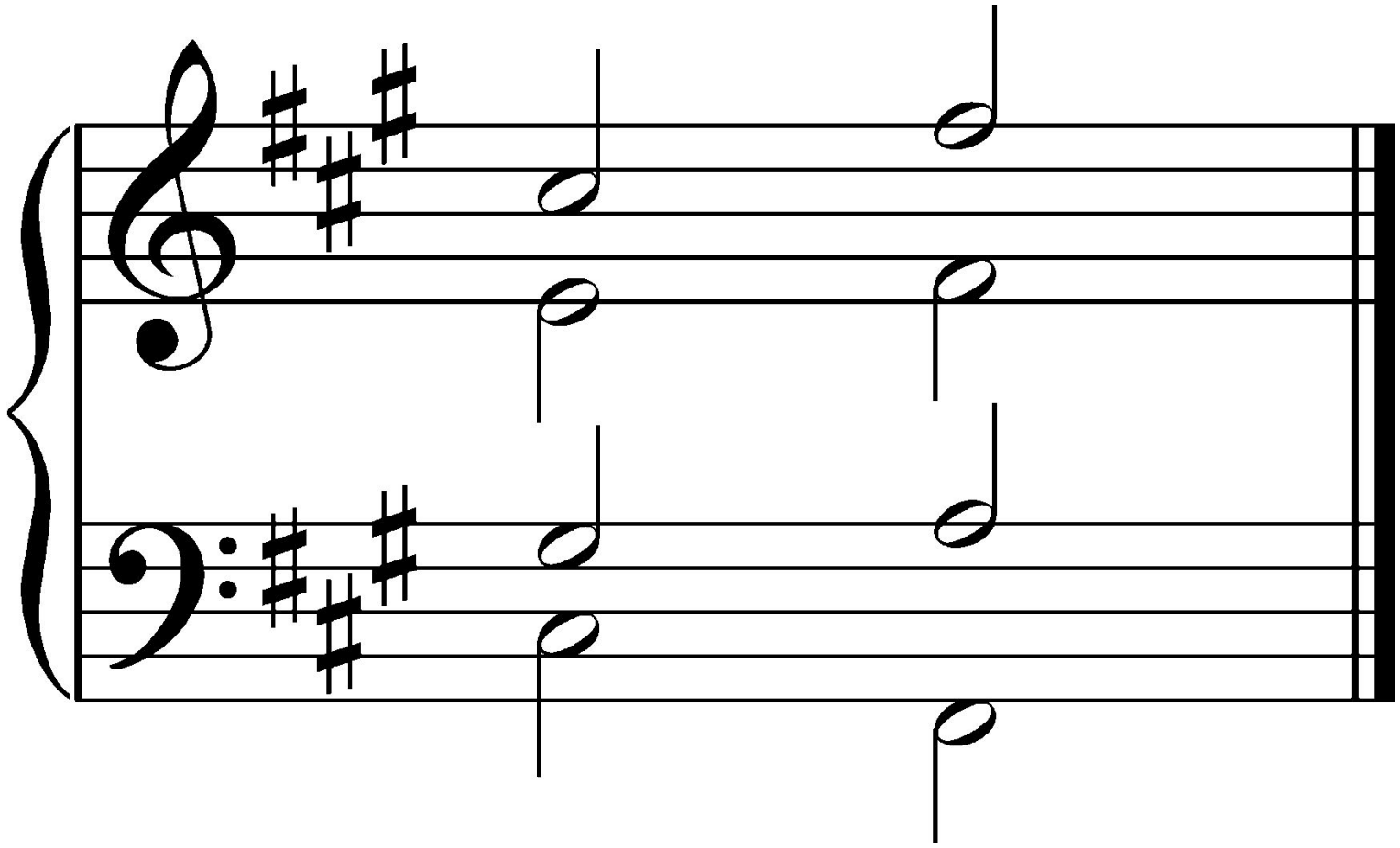


PARALLELS

No parallel fifths or octaves

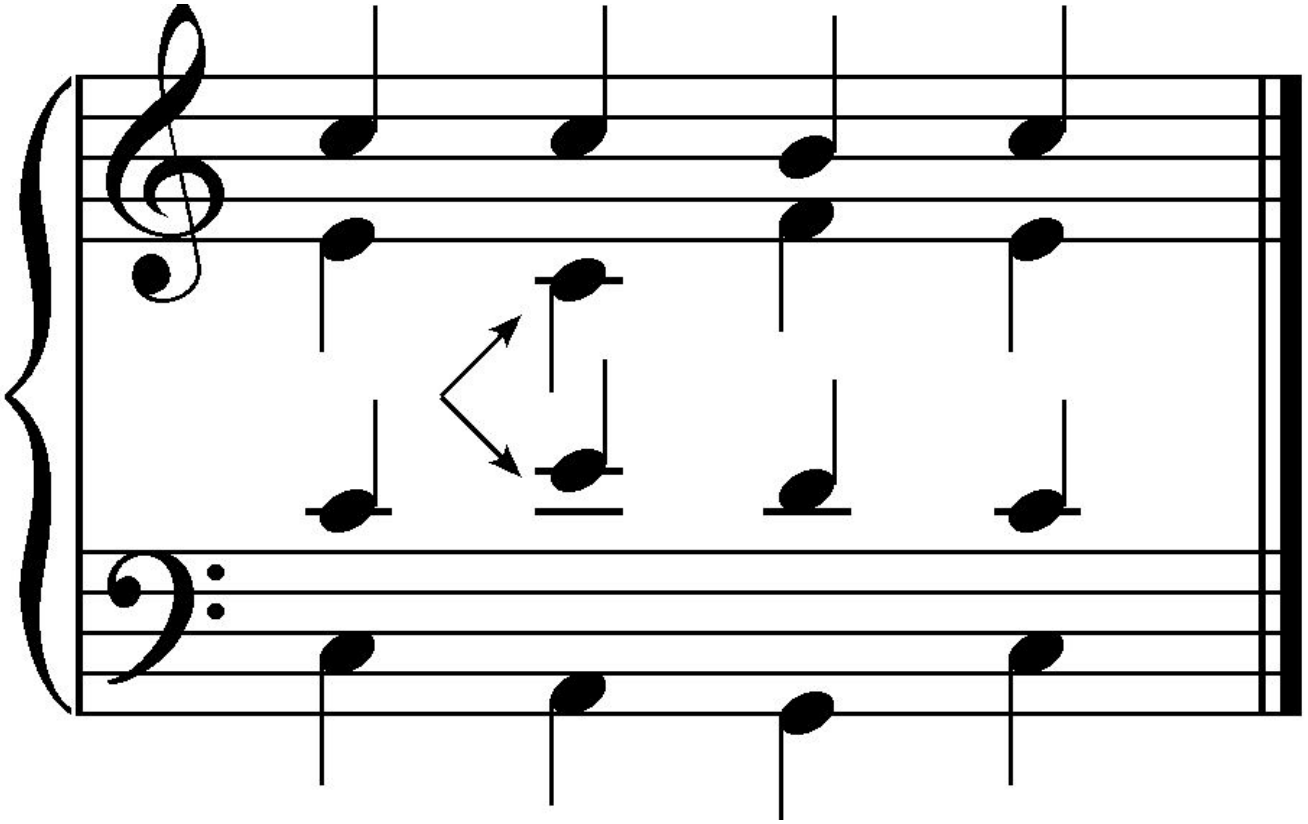
*notes have to move to be parallel





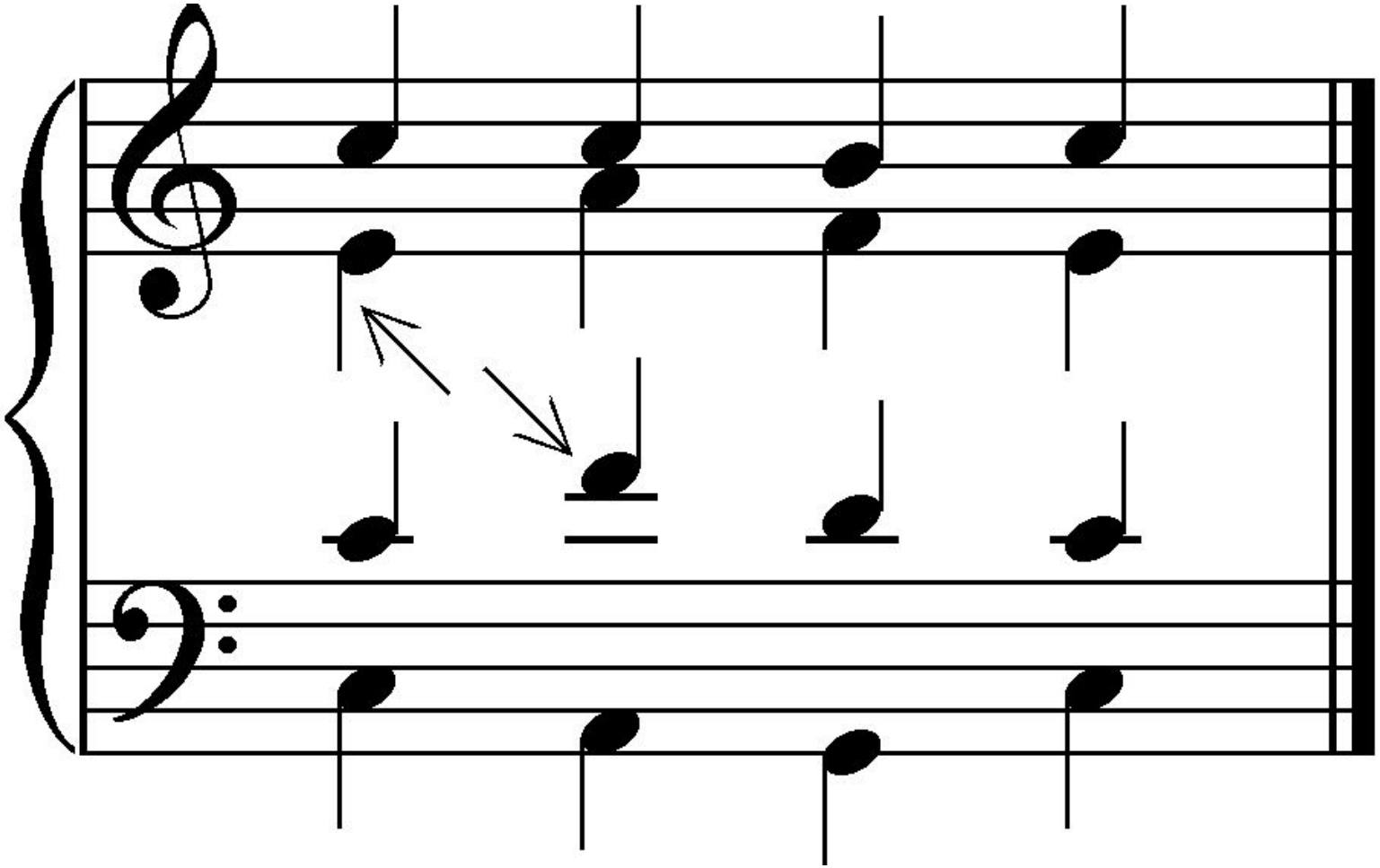
VOICE CROSSING

Voice Crossing is harmonic crossing between parts (when a higher voice becomes lower than a lower voice). Voice crossing blurs the distinction between the parts, especially when played on a keyboard instrument. Notice how when the voices cross in this example, the first two beats will sound as though the alto and tenor repeat the same pitches.



VOICE OVERLAP

Voice overlap is melodic crossing between parts (when a line crosses above or below a pitch recently sounded by another voice). The ear may still hear the voices as overlapping, and the independence of line is diminished.



SPACING

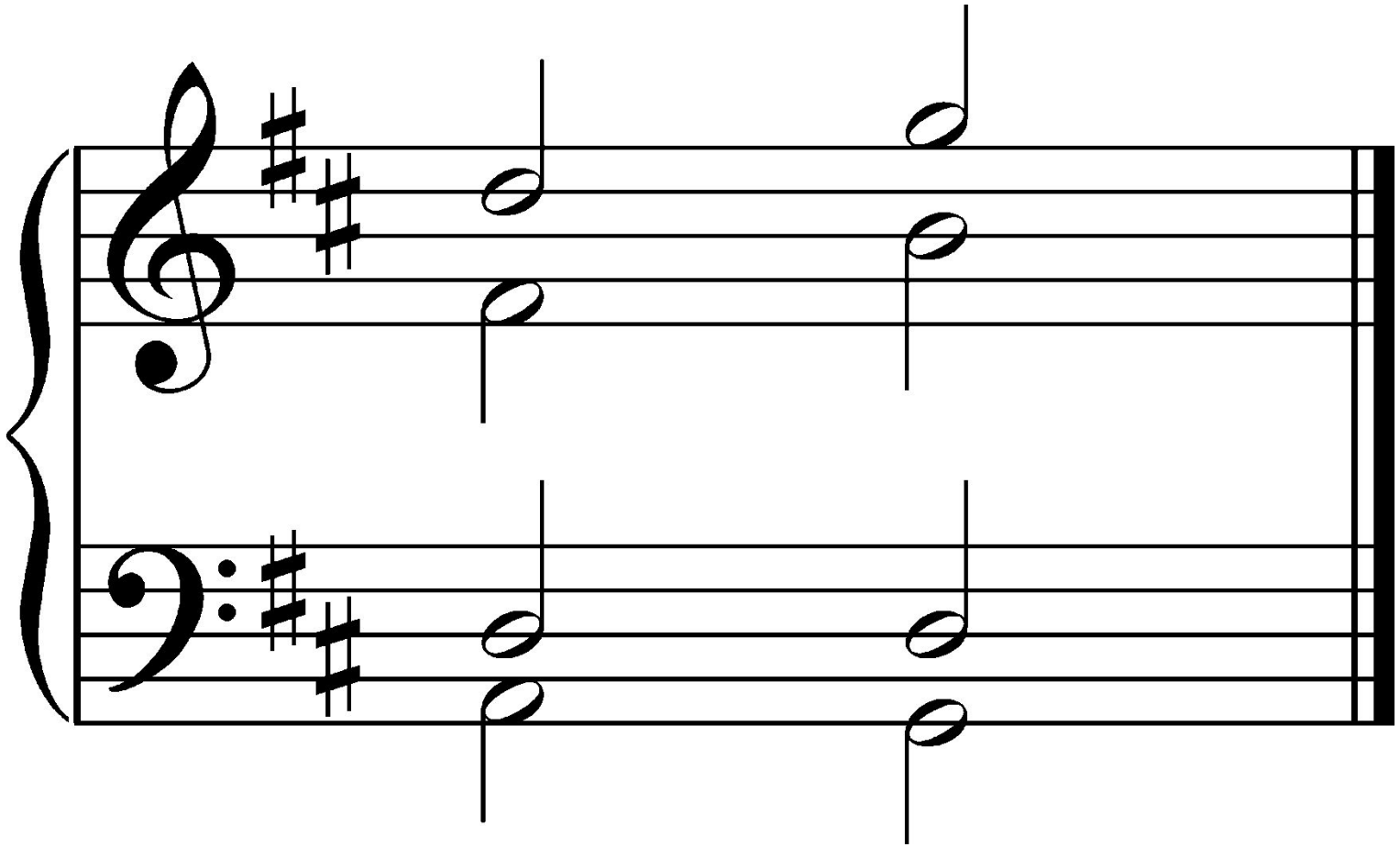
Close Position - Notes within a chord are arranged within a narrow range, usually with no more than an octave between the top and bottom notes

Open Position - Notes within a chord are spread out

•Try to keep the soprano and bass lines at least an octave or more apart

•No more than an octave between Soprano and Alto

•No more than an octave between Alto and Tenor

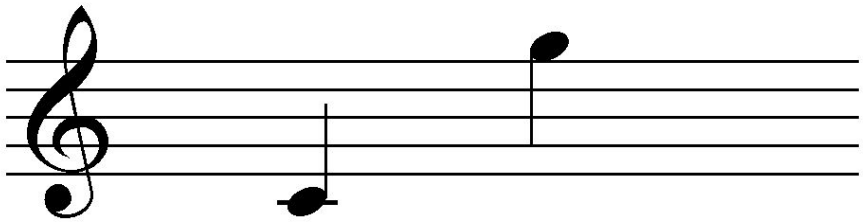


SPELLING ACCURACY

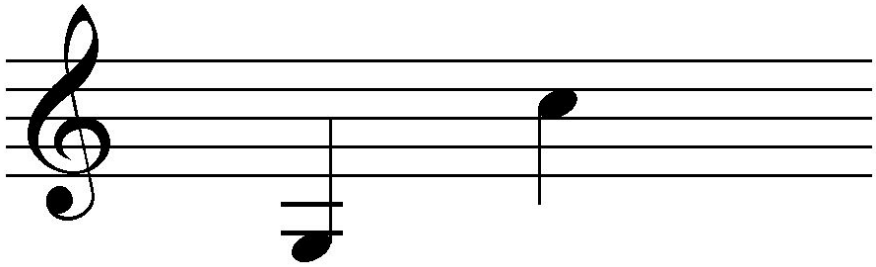
RANGES

The following are the ranges allowed for each voice (SATB)

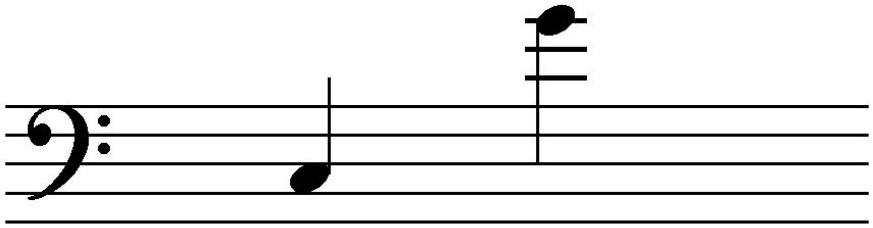
Soprano



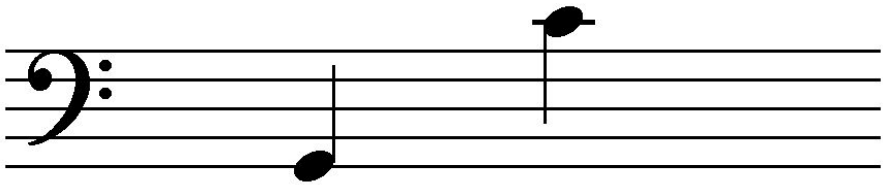
Alto



Tenor

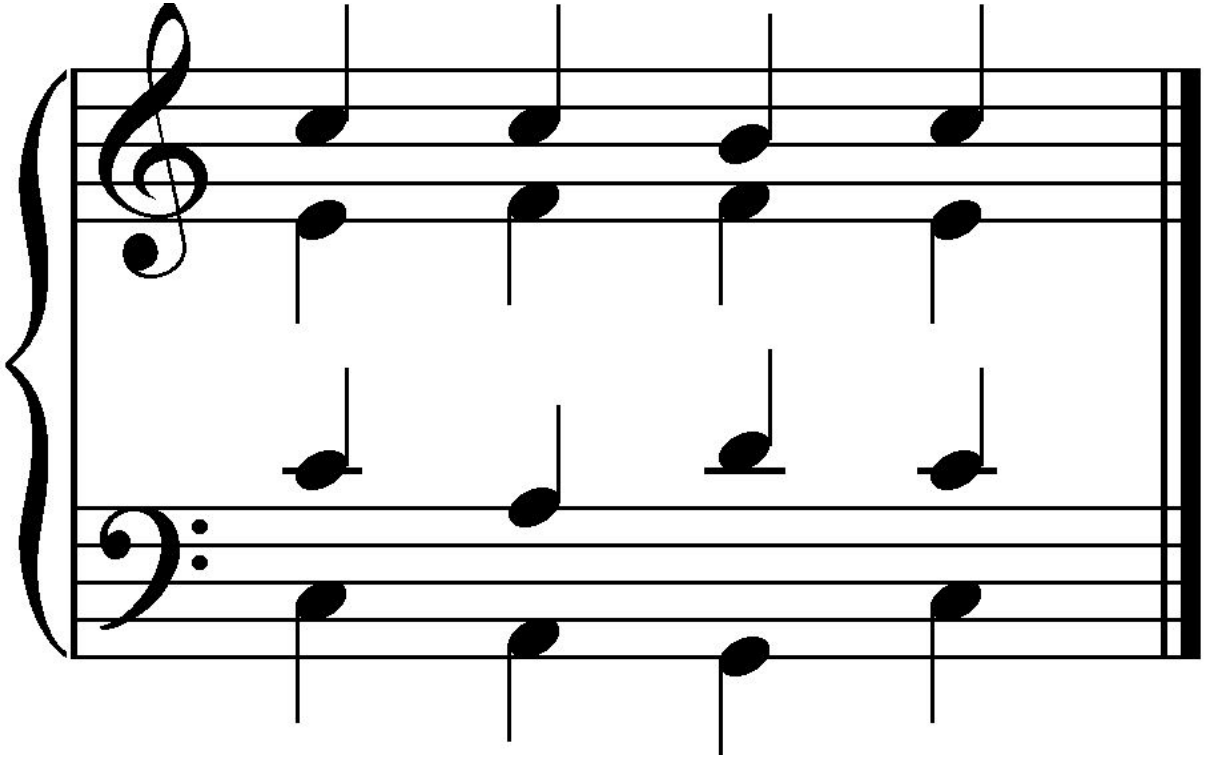


Bass



- Alto and Bass = stems down no matter where they are placed on the staff. Ranges for both parts are from G to C.

- Soprano and Tenor = stems up no matter where they are placed on the staff. Ranges for both parts are from C to G.



TENDENCY TONES

Be sure all tendency tones resolve properly!

The 7/7 rule:

- *scale degree seven* (the leading tone) should resolve to tonic (always when in an outer voice, unless a part of a line proceeding down from tonic to dominant, (i.e.: 1-7-6-5))

- the chordal seventh (*seventh of a chord)* should always resolve down by second.

- Leading tone always goes to do

- fa likes to go to mi

DOUBLING

When writing triads, there are only three pitch classes but four voices. This means that two or more voices will have the same pitch class.

- Double the root first
- The 5th second (especially in a chord in second inversion)
- Rarely if ever double the 3rd *(the only acceptable time to double the 3rd is in a minor chord or especially in the vi chord when you move from V to vi)
- Never double the 7th

MOTION

- The soprano line should be a perfect melody

- The alto and tenor lines should be static. Tenor – is from the word tenere which means “to hold”. These lines should have very little movement.

- The bass line should move in contrary motion to the soprano line to avoid parallel perfect intervals.

- When you must move, move the inner voices in contrary motion to the bass by the smallest interval whenever possible. This one simple step eliminates most part writing errors.

- Each line should be singable

LABELING

- Always label the key (beneath the bass clef with a colon)
- Always label all chords with Roman Numerals and Inversions
- Always label any cadences