

**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

The image shows a musical score for piano in G major, consisting of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a brace on the left. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The score is divided into two measures. In the first measure, the treble staff contains a whole note chord (G4, B4, D5) and the bass staff contains a whole note chord (G2, B2, D3). In the second measure, the treble staff contains a whole note chord (G4, B4, D5) and the bass staff contains a whole note chord (G2, B2, D3). The notes G4, B4, and D5 in the treble staff are common to both chords and are held across the measure. The notes G2, B2, and D3 in the bass staff are also common to both chords and are held across the measure. This illustrates the concept of keeping common tones in the inner voices.

PARALLELS

No parallel fifths or octaves

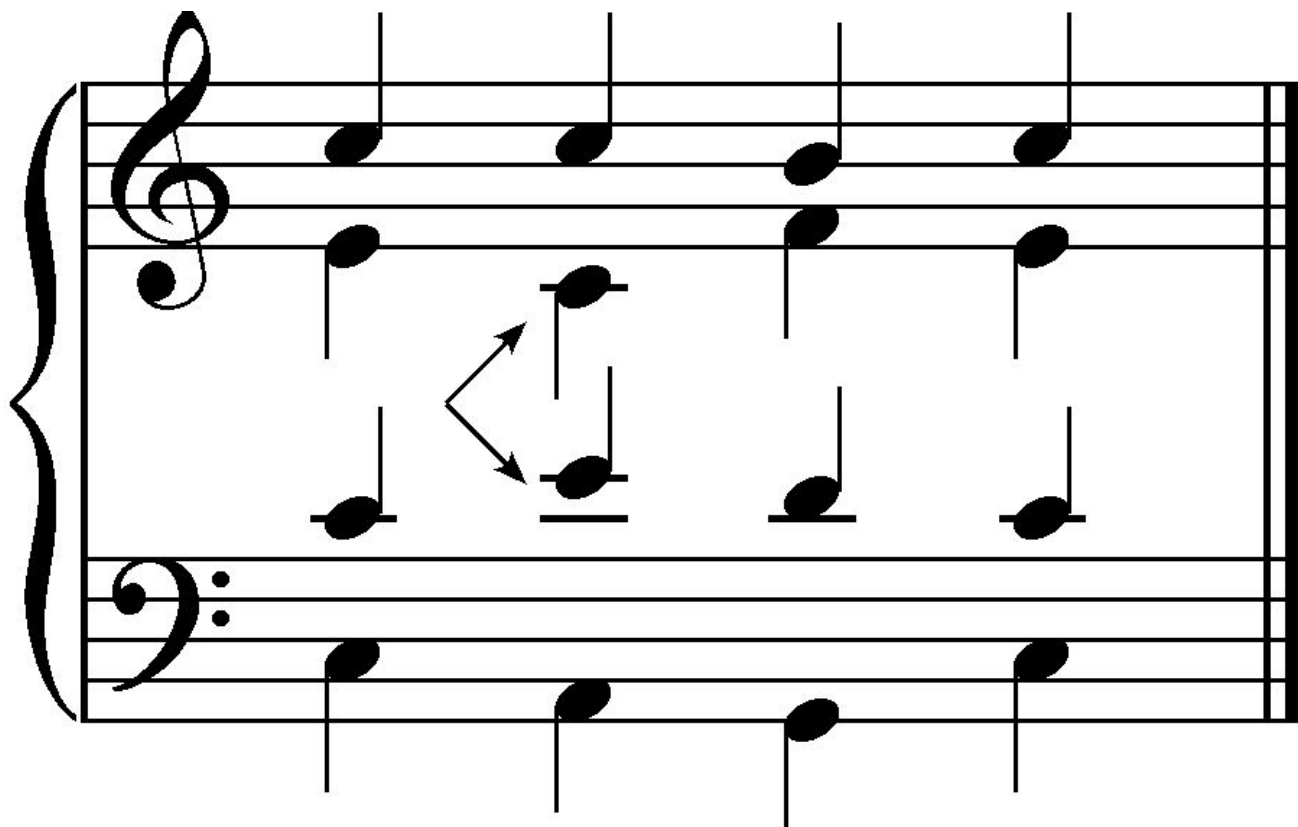
*notes have to move to be parallel

A musical score for piano, consisting of two staves (treble and bass clefs) joined by a brace on the left. The key signature is G major, indicated by two sharps (F# and C#) in both staves. The time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be common time (C). The score contains four measures of music. The first measure begins with a treble clef and a bass clef. The melody in the treble staff starts on G4 (first line) and moves to A4 (second space). The bass staff starts on G3 (second line) and moves to A3 (second space). The second measure continues the melody in the treble staff to B4 (third space) and the bass staff to B3 (third space). The third measure continues the melody in the treble staff to C5 (fourth space) and the bass staff to C4 (third line). The fourth measure concludes the phrase with a treble staff note on B4 and a bass staff note on A3. The piece ends with a double bar line.

This musical score is for a piano exercise in G major, 4/4 time. It consists of two staves, Treble and Bass clef, with a brace on the left. The key signature is G major (one sharp, F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody in the Treble clef starts on G4 (first line) and moves stepwise: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter). The bass line in the Bass clef starts on G2 (second space) and moves stepwise: G2 (quarter), A2 (quarter), B2 (quarter), C3 (quarter), B2 (quarter), A2 (quarter), G2 (quarter). The piece concludes with a double bar line.

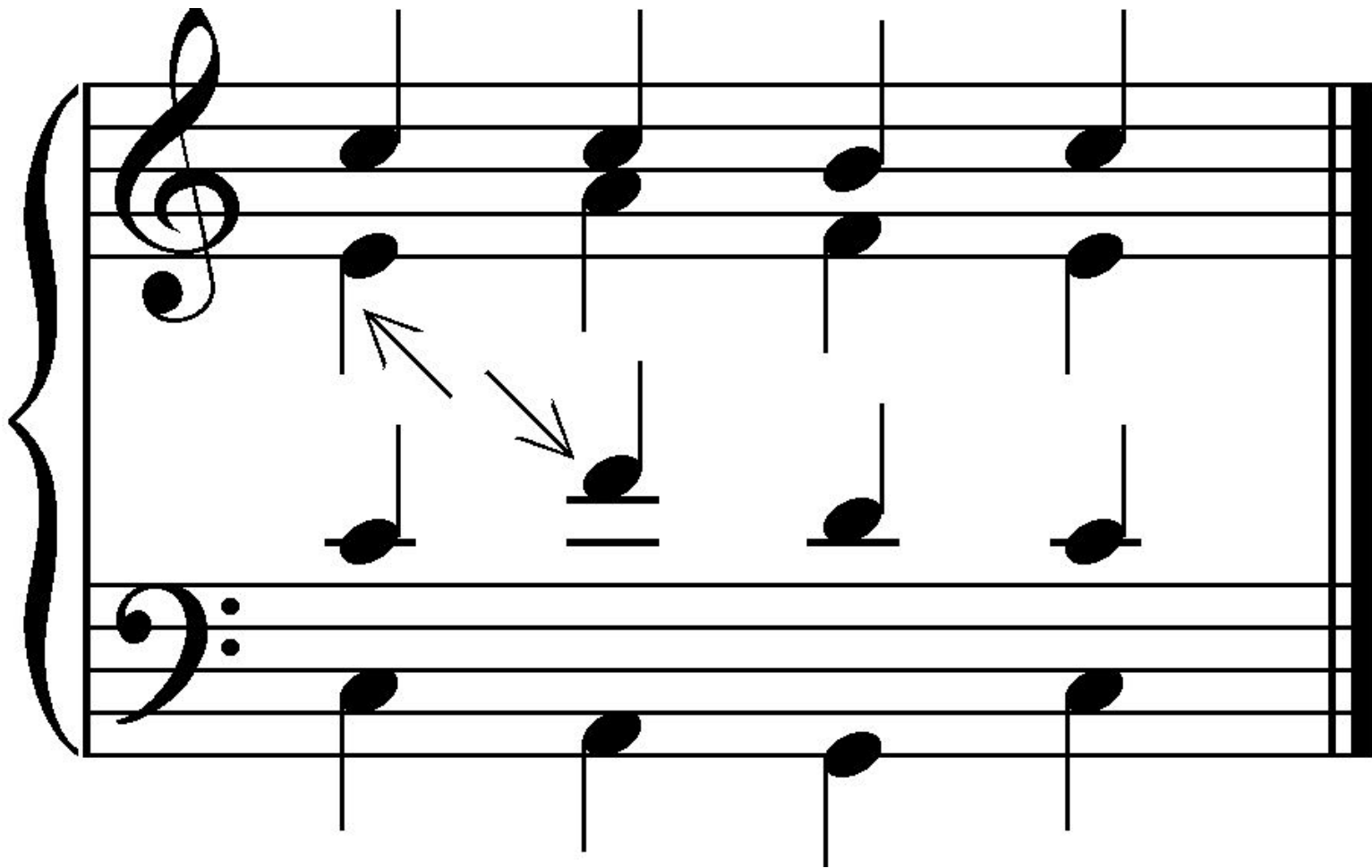
VOICE CROSSING

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.

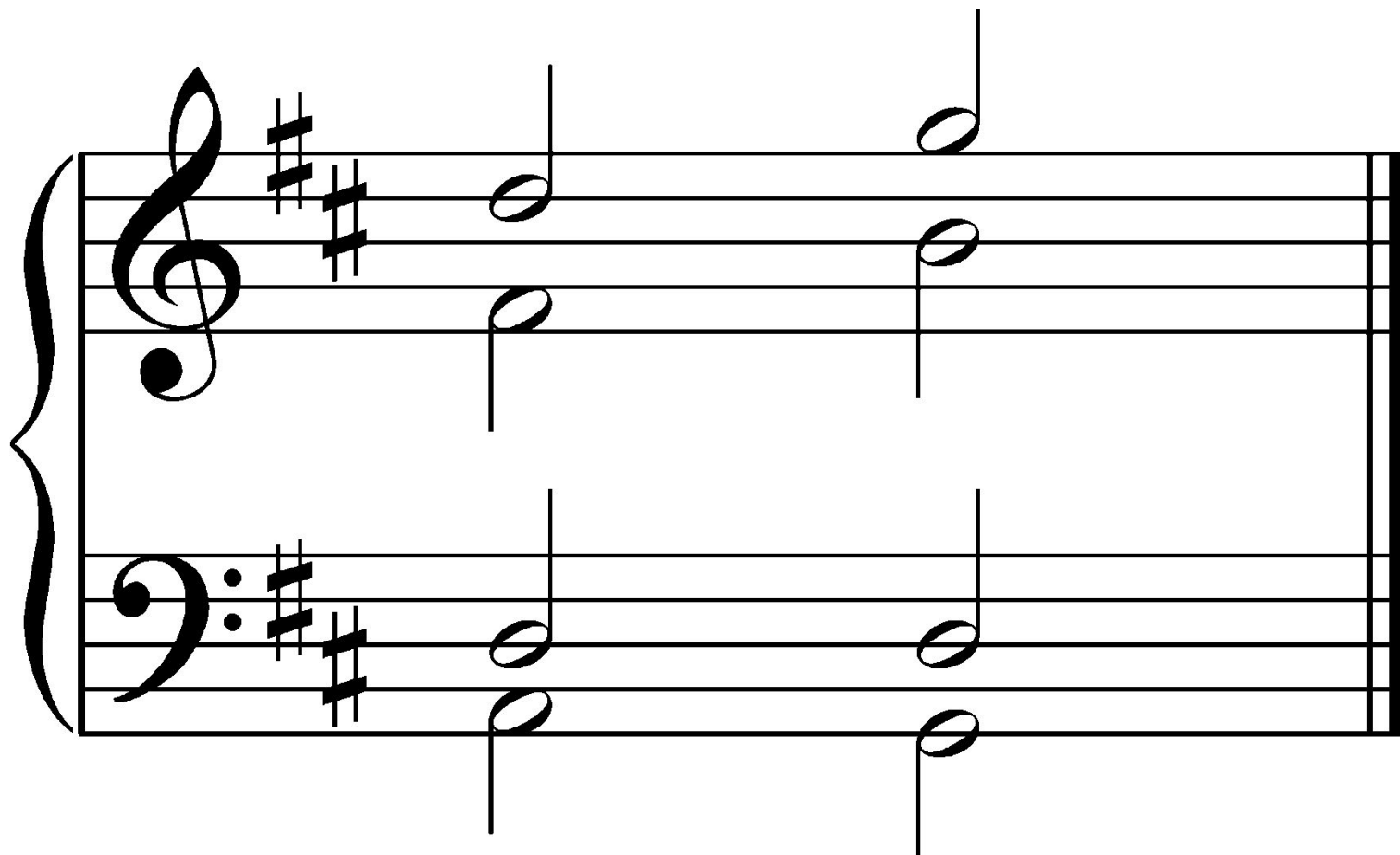


SPACING

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

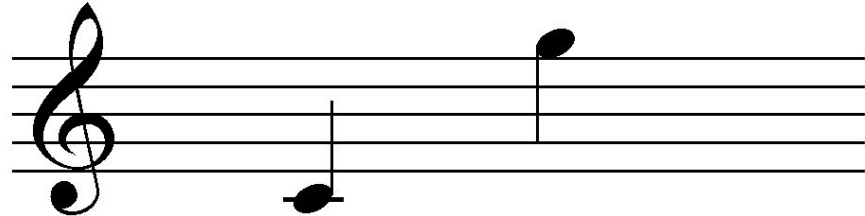


**SPELLING
ACCURACY**

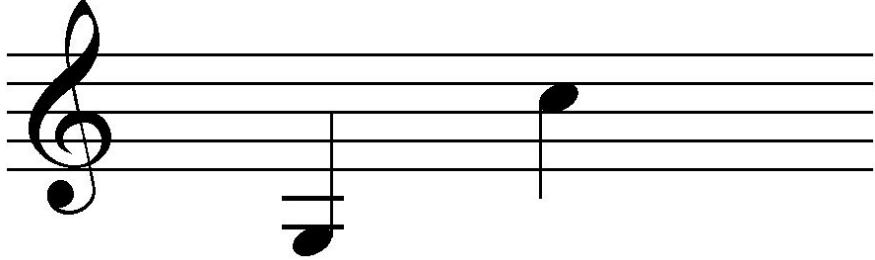
RANGES

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

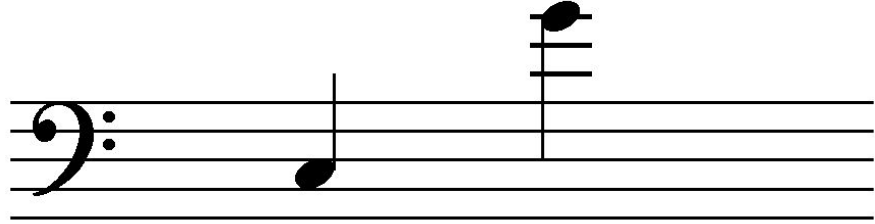
Soprano



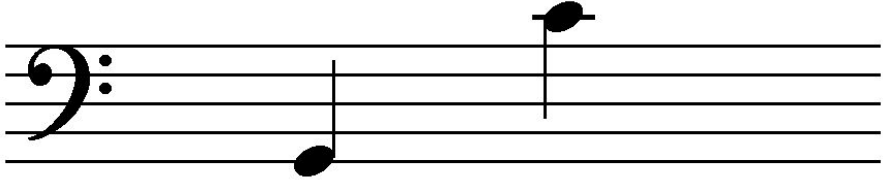
Alto



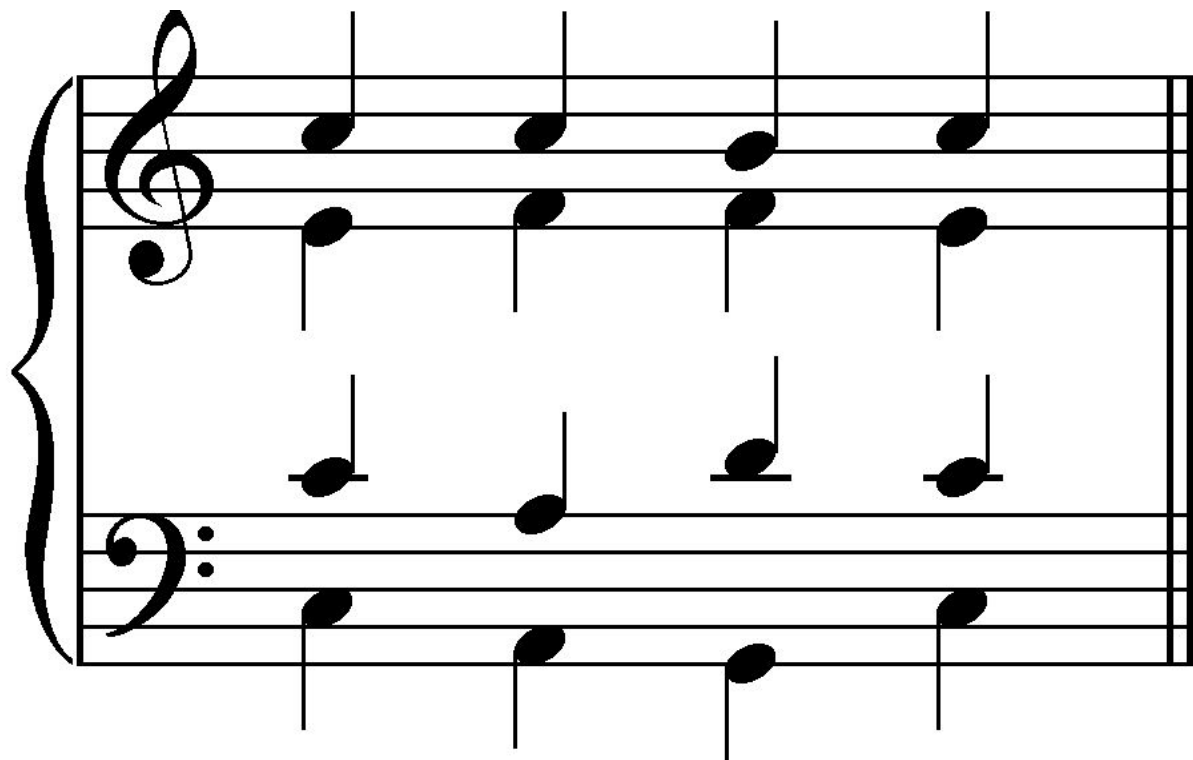
Tenor



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