

GENERAL RULES OF PARTWRITING

A musical score in 3/4 time, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains two voices: Soprano and Alto. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains two voices: Tenor and Bass. The notes are: Soprano (G4, A4, B4, C5), Alto (F4, G4, A4, B4), Tenor (G3, F3, E3, D3), and Bass (C3, B2, A2, G2).

The Four Voices

Soprano and Alto written in treble clef, soprano stems up, alto stems down.

Tenor and Bass written in bass clef, tenor stems up, bass stems down

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Range of Voices

normal range then extreme range.

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Open and Close Structure

When there is an octave or less between the soprano and tenor the music is said to be in closed structure.

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When there is more than an octave, the music is said to be in open structure.

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Distance between Adjacent Voices

The distance between the soprano and alto, and between the alto and tenor, should usually be limited to one octave. (This limitation does not exist between the tenor and bass.)

Crossing Voices

The voices should maintain their normal order in regard to range. However the tenor may occasionally cross the alto if a more interesting melodic line results.

Motion Defined

- Similar motion results when two voices move in the same direction
- Parallel motion results when two voices move in the same direction while retaining the same vertical interval.
- Contrary motion results when two voices move in opposite directions
- Oblique motion results when one voice moves while the second voice is retained (stays the same).

Parallel Fifths, Octaves and Unisons

Parallel Fifths occur when any two voices move parallel from one perfect fifth to another perfect fifth. These should be avoided.

Parallel octaves and unisons should also be avoided.

Parallel 5ths Parallel Octaves Parallel Unisons

The image shows three musical examples on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in 4/4 time. The first example, labeled 'Parallel 5ths', shows two voices moving from a perfect fifth (C4-G4) to another perfect fifth (E4-B4). The second example, labeled 'Parallel Octaves', shows two voices moving from a perfect octave (C4-C5) to another perfect octave (E4-E5). The third example, labeled 'Parallel Unisons', shows two voices moving from a unison (C4-C4) to another unison (E4-E4). Each example consists of two measures.

Consecutive Imperfect Fifths

Consecutive imperfect fifths (the moving of two voices from a perfect fifth to a diminished fifth, or vice versa) are not as objectionable as consecutive perfect fifths.

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Consecutive Octaves and Fifths by Contrary Motion

Consecutive octaves (or unison to octave) and consecutive fifths by contrary motion should be avoided.



Melodic Leaps

Any melodic movement (in any voice) which is not scale wise (or chromatic) is considered a leap.

Excessive leaps are to be avoided in vocal writing, especially those greater than a M3. The bass part is often the exception to this rule.

Leaps are less objectionable in chord repetition.

Leaps greater than a third should usually return scalewise in the direction opposite the leap.

Augmented Intervals

There should be no melodic movement of augmented seconds or augmented fourths. These intervals are "out of the style" and are difficult to sing.