

First inversion triads

Main points

- Diminished triads are usually found in first inversion (ii and vii^o)
- The vi and iii chords are almost never inverted
 - vi sounds a I chord with a mistake in it
 - iii sounds like a V chord with a mistake in it
- Other first inversion chords are common:
 - I⁶ ii⁶ IV⁶ V⁶ and vii⁶ in major
 - i⁶ ii⁶ iv⁶ V⁶ and vii⁶ in minor

The basic phrase

- The most basic phrase in tonal music is I-V-I
 - (tonic-dominant-tonic)
- We can expand this basic phrase slightly by adding a predominant chord such as IV
 - (tonic-predominant-dominant-tonic) or TPDT
- I⁶ frequently precedes the V chord
 - This is called a “cadential six-four chord” and has a dominant rather than a tonic function in this case
- ii⁶ often substitutes for IV in the basic phrase

Inverted chords

- There are different reasons for using chords in first inversion:
 - To improve the contour of the bass line, making it less “leapy” and more melodic
 - To lessen the importance (or “weight”) of chords that do not serve as strong harmonic goals
 - To arpeggiate harmonies in the bass line

“Passing” and “neighbor” chords

- Some inverted chords serve as “neighbor” or “passing chords” (with an embellishing function)
 - The V⁶ chord is often used as a neighbor to the tonic
 - The vii⁶ chord is often used to pass between I and I⁶
 - The IV⁶ chord can be used to pass between V and V⁶ or as a lower neighbor to V⁶

Voice-leading for first inversion chords

- Since first-inversion chords have no fifth, there can be no parallel fifths, but you still need to avoid parallel octaves
 - HINT: don't double the same two voices twice, or you'll still get parallel octaves
- For first inversion chords, you can double anything—as long as it isn't the leading tone
 - It is most common to double the soprano tone or the bass tone with an inner voice
 - It is less common to double the outer voices or the two inner voices