

EXAMPLES OF COMMON PART-WRITING ERRORS

a. bad b. bad c. bad d. bad e. good

The image shows five examples of part-writing errors and a good solution, labeled a through e. Each example is written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor). Example a shows parallel fifths between the bass and tenor voices. Example b shows consecutive fifths between the bass and tenor voices. Example c shows a leading-tone in the soprano voice that is not resolved, and a direct fifth between the outer voices. Example d shows an improperly incomplete chord where the tonic triad has no third. Example e shows a good solution with smooth voice-leading in all upper voices and doubling of the root.

- Parallel fifths between the bass and tenor.
- Consecutive fifths (also known as “antiparallel” fifths) between the bass and tenor.
- Leading-tone in soprano not resolved. Also causes direct fifth between outer voices.
- Improperly incomplete chord — tonic triad has no third.
- Good solution. Notice the smooth voice-leading in all upper voices. Also notice that doubling the root doesn’t usually require any special effort.

f. good g. good h. bad i. bad j. good

The musical score consists of five measures, each with a label above it. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The notes are as follows:

- Measure f: Treble clef has notes G4, G4, G4, A4. Bass clef has notes F#3, G3, A3.
- Measure g: Treble clef has notes G4, A4, G4. Bass clef has notes F#3, G3, A3.
- Measure h: Treble clef has notes G4, A4. Bass clef has notes F#3, G3.
- Measure i: Treble clef has notes G4, A4, G4. Bass clef has notes F#3, G3, A3.
- Measure j: Treble clef has notes G4, A4, G4, F#4. Bass clef has notes F#3, G3, A3.

- f. Tripled root in tonic triad is not unusual in a situation like this. It is generally acceptable to omit the fifth from a root-position triad as long as there is a good reason (in this case, the chance to resolve the alto's leading-tone).
- g. Unresolved leading-tone is acceptable as long as it is in an inner voice and there is some good reason not to resolve it (in this case, the desire for a complete triad).
- h. Improperly incomplete chord — tonic triad has no third.
- i. Leading-tone in soprano not resolved. Also causes direct fifth between outer voices.
- j. Good solution. Leading-tone in soprano does eventually resolve. It would be impossible to resolve sooner because the dominant is repeated.

k. bad l. acceptable m. good n. not good o. not good p. good

- k. Voice crossing in tenor and alto. Also, why is the dominant triad incomplete (missing a fifth)?
- l. The voice crossing has been corrected by exchanging the inner voices, but there still isn't any obvious reason why the dominant is incomplete.
- m. This solution is preferable to the two before it because it uses complete chords.
- n. The bass overlaps the tenor (i.e., the bass goes above the tenor's previous note). This is a relatively minor mistake, but should be avoided if possible.
- o. The overlap from the previous example is corrected, but the tonic is incomplete for no apparent reason. (Refer back to example *m* to see a better solution.)
- p. In this case, the tonic is also incomplete, but there is a good reason (resolving the tenor's leading tone).

q. bad r. good s. good t. bad u. good

- q. Objectionable direct octave (also known as “hidden” octave) in outer voices.
- r. The outer voices move in similar motion into a perfect fifth, but because the soprano moves by step (thus not attracting much attention), the perfect interval is not objectionable. The tenor leaps into a perfect octave with the bass, but because inner voices don’t attract much attention, the perfect interval is not objectionable. We rarely worry about direct fifths/octaves unless something makes them stand out.
- s. The direct octave between the outer voices is not objectionable because the chord remains the same.
- t. Tenor and alto are too far apart on the second chord.
- u. The spacing from the previous example has been corrected. Notice that the bass and alto do not have parallel octaves because they are not moving at all.