

## ELIDED RESOLUTIONS

To “elide” something refers to leaving it out or suppressing it. We frequently do this when we speak. Someone referring to “that tuba,” for instance, tends to skip the “t” at the end of “that,” merging it into the initial “t” of “tuba.” Even slightly different sounds can be blurred together, as in “this xylophone.”

Elision in music is strikingly similar. In an elided resolution (also known as harmonic elision), a progression seems to skip an expected chord. In most cases, the expected chord has obvious similarities with the chord that replaces it, such as common tones (often including the root) and harmonic function. When the similarities are very strong, we may not even notice that a chord is missing because it is so strongly implied. The expected chord would almost certainly have progressed nicely to the chord that replaces it. Because the overall idea is so clear and the voice leading is so smooth, we don’t mind the exceptional resolution.

The most common and easily recognizable type of harmonic elision involves primary or secondary dominant or leading-tone chords (e.g., V, V<sup>7</sup>, V<sup>7</sup>/IV, vii<sup>o7</sup>, vii<sup>o7</sup>/V, etc.). Instead of resolving to the triad expected, the chord resolves to a seventh chord with the same root. The surprising chord is usually a major-minor seventh chord (either a dominant or a secondary dominant). Some common examples are provided below.

<u>Starting chord</u>	<u>Implies</u>	<u>Root</u>	<u>Mm<sup>7</sup> chord with same root</u>
V	I	$\hat{1}$	V <sup>7</sup> /IV
V/ii	ii	$\hat{2}$	V <sup>7</sup> /V
V <sup>7</sup> /V	V	$\hat{5}$	V <sup>7</sup>
vii <sup>o7</sup> /vi	vi	$\hat{6}$	V <sup>7</sup> /ii

The preferred voice leading in these situations is mostly familiar: resolve all dissonance as expected, and maintain common tones when appropriate. The single exception is both visually and aurally obvious: the leading-tone (or secondary leading-tone) moves *down* a half-step rather than resolving *up* a half-step as expected. As you can see from the following examples, both root-position and inverted chords are common. Notice that parallel tritones will occur; this is not a problem.

a) B $\flat$ : I — 6 V<sup>5</sup><sub>6</sub>/V V<sup>4</sup><sub>2</sub> I<sup>6</sup>

b) B $\flat$ : I V<sup>7</sup>/ii V<sup>7</sup>/V V I

c)  $\text{bb: } i \quad V^6 \quad V^4_2/iv \quad iv^6 \quad V$

d)  $\text{Bb: } I \quad vii^{\circ 7}/vi \quad V^4_2/ii \quad ii^6 \quad V$

Rather than eliding into a dominant seventh chord, it is also possible to elide into an equivalent diminished (or half-diminished) seventh chord — that is, using  $vii^{\circ 7}$  instead of  $V^6_5$ ,  $vii^{\circ 6}_5$  instead of  $V^4_3$ , or  $vii^{\circ 4}_3$  instead of  $V^4_2$ . The effect is similar. (Notice that example f contains *three* secondary chords, but only *one* elision.)

e)  $\text{bb: } i \quad V^6 \quad vii^{\circ 4}_3/iv \quad iv^6 \quad V$

f)  $\text{Bb: } I \quad V^4_3/vi \quad vi \quad V^4_2/ii \quad vii^{\circ 7}/V \quad V \quad I$

Sometimes an elided resolution is the result of unanticipated rising chromatic motion. In these cases, one expects to hear a major chord (either a major triad or a dominant seventh), but a diminished chord is heard in its place. The root of the diminished chord will lie a half step above the root of the elided chord. Pay particular attention to example g, which is an extremely common formula. Notice that the upper voices resolve exactly as expected, creating the aural impression that the cadential  $V^6_4$  resolves to  $V^7$ , even though this chord never literally appears. We might even hear the bass as a chromatic passing tone, which is why this kind of elision tends to sound less conspicuous.

g)  $\text{Bb: } I \quad IV \quad V^6_4 \quad vii^{\circ 7}/vi \quad vi$

h)  $\text{Bb: } I \quad vii^{\circ 6} \quad vii^{\circ 6}/ii \quad ii \quad V^7 \quad I$

In order to avoid confusion with the passing  $V^6_4$  chord, you might want to represent your analysis in example g a little differently, with the Roman numerals appearing below the figures so that voice leading and harmonic implication are not confused. (Just cover this paragraph to see the proper alignment.)

$\begin{array}{r} 8 \text{ --- } 7 \\ 6 \text{ --- } 5 \\ 4 \text{ --- } 3 \end{array}$   
 $I \quad IV \quad V \quad vii^{\circ}/vi \quad vi$

It is important to keep in mind that two secondary chords in a row do not necessarily involve an elision. Sometimes secondary chords simply substitute for equivalent diatonic chords (e.g., V/V rather than ii). Using  $V_2^4/ii$  leads us to expect  $ii^6$ , but  $V_2^4/ii$  can just as easily resolve to  $V^6/V$ . Remember that the dominant is exactly the same in major and minor keys, and the voice leading is also exactly the same when we change the triad quality of the resolution from minor to major. There is *no* elision in the example below; all tendency tones resolve. (Compare to example *f*, which *does* contain elision.)

i) B $\flat$ : I  $V_3^4/vi$  vi  $V_2^4/ii$   $V^6/V$  V I

“Elision” should not be used as a synonym for surprise. A deceptive cadence is surprising, but it has nothing to do with elision. Remember that elision specifically refers to leaving something out — usually the resolution of a leading-tone or secondary leading-tone. In the above example,  $V^6/V$  is a little surprising, but nothing has truly been omitted.