

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION ABOUT $\frac{6}{4}$ CHORDS

Because of their inherent instability, $\frac{6}{4}$ chords are used only in very limited circumstances. You will find that they fall into four categories: cadential, passing, auxiliary (also commonly described as neighboring), and bass arpeggiation.

The cadential $\frac{6}{4}$

This is the most common and also the most important variety of $\frac{6}{4}$ chord. The cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ functions as an elaboration of the dominant because it is really a root-position dominant chord with two non-harmonic tones (suspensions and/or passing tones). When these two non-harmonic tones resolve, we can clearly see the expected V chord. To convey the chord's dominant function as well as its voice leading, the preferred label for the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ and its resolution is $V_4^6 - \frac{5}{3}$. As its name suggests, this chord is especially common at cadences, but it can also be used in the middle of a phrase.

Other important things to remember:

- This chord almost invariably appears on a metrically strong beat, such as beat 1 or beat 3 in a quadruple meter. When it appears on a relatively weak beat, its resolution falls also falls on a weak beat. For instance, if the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ falls on beat 2 in a triple meter, then the resolution will almost surely fall on beat 3.
- As the figures clearly suggest, the two notes that are non-harmonic to V want to resolve down to their respective harmonic tones ($\hat{1}$ wants to resolve down to $\hat{7}$, and $\hat{3}$ wants to resolve down to $\hat{2}$). Because $\hat{1}$ is dissonant (lying a perfect fourth above the bass), it is a tendency tone and must resolve as expected. Because $\hat{3}$ is consonant (lying either a major or minor sixth above the bass), irregular resolutions are less unusual.
- Although the bass may leap, expect to approach the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ with smooth voice-leading in the upper parts. It is particularly important not to leap into $\hat{1}$ (the fourth above the bass) because, as a general rule, we don't like to leap into dissonances.
- The best note to double is the bass, since this is the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$'s only stable note. (Keep in mind that this is the true root of the chord!) Doubling $\hat{1}$ (the fourth above the bass) is a serious mistake because this note is dissonant. Poor doubling is likely to lead to other mistakes such as parallel octaves. Doubling $\hat{3}$ is quite unusual, although not impossible.

Below are some typical examples of cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ chords.

The image shows two musical examples of cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ chords. The first example is in B-flat major (Bb:), 4/4 time, showing a sequence of chords: I, IV, $V_4^6 - \frac{5}{3}$, I, I, ii^6 , $V_4^6 - \frac{5}{3}$, I. The second example is in B-flat minor (bb:), 3/4 time, showing a sequence: i, i^6 , iv, $V_4^6 - \frac{5}{3}$, i. The notation includes treble and bass staves with notes and stems, and the chord symbols are written below the bass staff.

Bb: I IV $V_4^6 - \frac{5}{3}$ I I ii^6 $V_4^6 - \frac{5}{3}$ I bb: i i^6 iv $V_4^6 - \frac{5}{3}$ i