**Section 5.3**

**Harmonic Progression**

A *harmonic progression* is a goal-directed succession of chords. Composers from the 1600s through the 1800s favored certain strong harmonic progressions. The strongest of all progressions involves the root of the chord moving down a fifth (or up a fourth), especially *dominant (V)* to tonic (I or i).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{C major: } & V \quad \text{...root down a fifth... } \quad I
\end{align*}
\]

**Circle-of-Fifths**

Composers often led into the V-I progression with a series of downward fifth (or upward fourth) root motions. This pattern is called a *circle-of-fifths sequence* (see 2.2 The Circle of Fifths). A *sequence* is a progression based on a repeating pattern, such as downward fifths.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{C major: } & \text{iii vi ii V I}
\end{align*}
\]

**Downward thirds**

Inserting the IV chord and leading tone chord into the circle-of-fifths sequence creates a descending third pattern. The leading tone chord is usually in first inversion (third on the bottom) to avoid placing too much emphasis on the unstable leading tone pitch.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{C major: } & \text{iii vi IV ii vii\textsuperscript{*} V I}
\end{align*}
\]
Subdominant progressions

Since the subdominant chord (IV or iv) is a fifth below the tonic, it is the third strongest harmony after tonic and dominant. Subdominant can move down a third to ii (shown above), or to leading tone, dominant, or tonic. IV to I (or iv to i) is called the plagal progression. All of these progressions work in both major and minor keys.

The plagal progression

C major: IV vii° IV V iii IV V IV I

Also common:

The deceptive progression

The deceptive progression is V to vi (or, in minor keys, VI) instead of the expected V—I (or V—i). Sometimes vi (or VI) will move immediately back to the dominant: V—vi—V.

Seventh chords and inversions

Seventh chords and inversions have the same harmonic function as the corresponding root position triad, except second inversion triads, which embellish or decorate nearby chords (see 5.7 Second Inversion Triads).

Harmonic progression diagram (major keys)

This table summarizes the progressions in major keys:

Harmonic progression diagram (minor keys)

The only addition in minor keys is major subtonic (VII), which goes to III.