

2.5 SATB Part-writing 1: Voicing Triads

Part-writing = the composition of short, primarily homorhythmic (same rhythm all parts) musical excerpts in the style of Bach. Part-writing exercises are typically 3 or 4 parts. This text focuses on 4 parts, but the principles for 3-part writing are very similar. The 4 parts, from top to bottom, are *soprano*, *alto*, *tenor*, and *bass*.

Why do part-writing like Bach? Many principles of this style carry directly over into most music from 1600-1900.

1. Stem direction and clefs

Soprano (S) note stem goes up, alto (A) stem down, tenor (T) stem goes up, bass (B) stem down. S and A always in treble clef, T and B always in bass clef.

Yes NO! NO! NO!

bass stem incorrect tenor and soprano stems incorrect alto stem incorrect

2. Vertical order of voices

Voices should be in this order, top to bottom: S-A-T-B. Also, align each beat vertically top to bottom.

Voice crossing is having voices out of order top to bottom.

Yes NO! NO! NO!

unstylish crossed voices: tenor above alto unstylish crossed voices: bass above tenor unstylish crossed voices: alto above soprano

3. Spacing

There should be an *octave or less* between *S & A* and an *octave or less* between *A & T*. The bass and tenor may be a much larger interval apart.

Yes Yes Yes NO! NO!

= 8ve, ok >8ve! >8ve!

= 8ve is o.k. incorrect: S & A > 8ve incorrect: A & T > 8ve

4. Ranges

These are the lowest and highest notes for each voice (in this style):

Soprano Alto Tenor Bass

"Candy Good, Eat Candy"

5. Chord members

All members of the triad (root, third, fifth) should be present, *except* the final tonic (I/i) chord may omit the 5th and have three roots.

Doubling = more than one part has the same note (possibly in different octaves). **Root position** and **second inversion** triads double the *bass*. **First inversion** chords double *anything except the leading tone*.