

Harmonization Guidelines

The purpose of implementing these guidelines is to develop an awareness of chord voicing and voice leading in the context of jazz harmony. These would include the movement of tones linearly to reveal common guide tone lines, and the chord components that create a good voicing. The guidelines will also give you a method to create basic solo piano arrangements, and provide insight into basic arranging principles and composition.

1. Use the root of the chord for the bass note (no chord inversions), unless the chord symbol shows a note other than the root for the bass (e. g., a "slash" chord).

2. Use a total of five notes in the harmonization (including the melody and bass note), and keep the number of voices the same throughout the entire harmonization. Later on, the number of voices may change within the harmonization. For example, if the melody moves higher, a six note texture may be appropriate; as the melody moves lower, a five note texture may be most appropriate. Think of each voice as the equivalent of a vocal part, or a monophonic instrument in a quintet or sextet, such as a woodwind or brass quintet.

3. Do not double any chord tones. The melody tone, however, may be doubled by one of the voices below it. This includes a *unison* doubling, where the voice below the melody and the melody sound the same pitch.

4. The melody may temporarily drop below the voice underneath it.

5. The melody is the *most important* aspect of the harmonization, so always make sure that the chord and voicing choice supports the melody. Most intervals between the melody and the voice below it are preferable, typically thirds, fourths, fifths, and sixths. In general, however, avoid seconds (major and minor) between the melody and the voice below it. Major seconds between the melody and the voice below it are occasionally usable, but minor seconds rarely work well, as they create a dissonant relationship with the melody. With regard to major seconds, different voicing scenarios (the particular voicing, register, etc,) will determine whether the major second sounds acceptable or not.

6. Typically, the *third* and the *seventh* must be included in the chord. *Perfect fifths* may be omitted, but can also be included in the chord. Altered (sharped or flatted) fifths, as in the chords Cmi7b5 or C7#5, must be included in the chord. You may include the ninth, eleventh, or thirteenth as the fifth or sixth note in a chord, but make sure that the third and seventh are also present. The melody may be considered as one of the required tones. For example, if the melody is the third of the chord, it is not necessary to also include it in a voice below it, although it may be doubled by another voice.

7. Avoid combining altered and unaltered chord components in the same chord, such as an altered ninth and an unaltered ninth, or an altered fifth and an unaltered fifth. Watch minor ninths within the chord, except for minor ninths in dominant seventh chord qualities (e.g.,

Bb7b9). However, avoid using a tritone substitution in place of a dominant when the melody forms a minor ninth with the root of the chord of the tritone substitution.

8. Spacing: generally, keep the large intervals on the bottom, and the smaller intervals in the middle of the chord voicing. The largest interval will tend to be between the bass and tenor voices. The preferred intervals between the bass and the tenor voices are sevenths, tenths, and occasionally thirds. Fifths and sixths are also appropriate.

9. The intervals between the bass and tenor voice should follow certain guidelines depending on the register (this rule will not always be strictly adhered to and depends on the particular voicing, and the harmonic and rhythmic context):

- a. Avoid using minor and major thirds lower than Bb2 to D3.
- b. Avoid using minor and major sevenths lower than Eb2 to Db3
- c. Avoid using minor and major tenths lower than Ab 1 to C2.

10. Regarding the movement of the individual voices, use the best voice leading possible. In most cases, the voices will move by *step* (half step or whole step), or the tone will repeat. The following will usually occur in descending fifth progressions (these form *guide tone* oriented lines):

- a. Voices will often repeat the note they are sounding
- b. Thirds will often become sevenths (and vice versa).
- c. Fifths will become ninths (and vice versa).
- d. Fifths may also often move to the thirteenth (and vice versa).
- e. Ninths may move to thirteenths (and vice versa).

11. Generally speaking, you will have to balance and trade off voice leading (the horizontal connections) with chord voicing (the vertical structure). If you have to skip to an inner voice to make a vertical chord sound good, this is perfectly ok. Overall, the vertical chord sonority (the chord voicing) is more important than the voice leading to and from the chord. If one of the inner voices moves by skip while the other two or three move by step, this is generally acceptable. However, if two or more voices skip, particularly if they skip in the same direction, this is best avoided. It is also worth noting the bass with respect to the movement of an inner voice or voices. Avoid moving one or more of the inner voices in the same direction and interval the bass.

12. Keep the rules of traditional tonal harmony and counterpoint in mind when harmonizing a melody in the jazz style. They don't have to be followed closely, but avoid obvious problems such as doubled leading tones (or other chromatically active chord tones), and parallel fifths and octaves.

13. When working out your harmonizations, sometimes it is useful and valuable to work *backwards* from a particular point in the score. For example, if there is a particular voicing that

you feel is desirable or appropriate after you have voiced the chords previous to it, but the chords previous to it do not voice-lead well or sound good, you can try working back from this point. This may reveal other possibilities and alternatives that you have not have thought or when working in the forward direction.

14. Work out your harmonizations at a piano or keyboard instrument, listening very carefully to each chord and voice. It's not a bad idea to sing each individual part after you've finished, to see if each part is interesting, musical, and perhaps even melodic. You can also play through the chord voicings *without the melody*; this will give you a better idea of what the voicings and voice leading sound like.

15. If you reach an impasse, you may simply want to and throw out what you've done and start all over.

16. While you will want to be able to play the harmonizations, if there are sections that are very difficult to play, that is okay. The main goal of these types of harmonizations is instructional as well as developing your ear and your knowledge of theory and harmony. Also note that notes that are written in the left hand that form large intervals with the bass note can often be played with the right hand.