

Music Theory II

Harmonic Function

1. In tonal music, there are three *harmonic functions*:

Tonic (T)

Dominant (D)

Pre-dominant (PD)

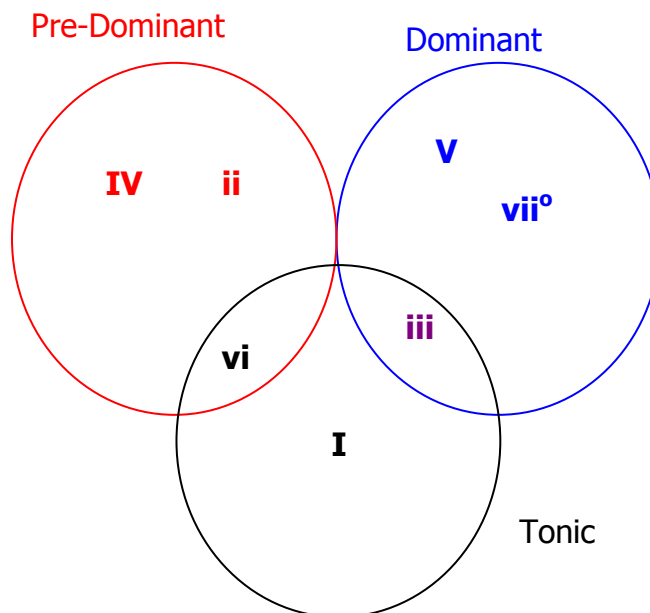
2. These harmonic functions group together to form *phrases*. (A phrase is a musical idea that ends with a cadence). There are two *phrase models*:

T-PD-D (a phrase ending with a half-cadence)

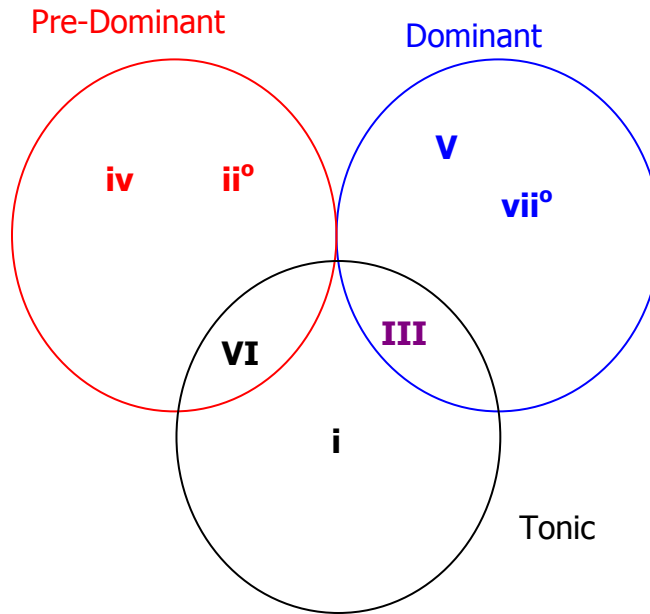
T-PD-D-T (a phrase ending with an authentic cadence)

3. In either of these phrase models, PD can be omitted, but only at the risk of being boring if you omit it too frequently.

4. The chords of the major mode are divided between the three functions like this:



And the chords of the minor mode are divided like this:



Consider this progression:

I—vi—IV—V⁷

If I were labeling the harmonic function of these chords, I would write the following:

T—Ts—PD—D

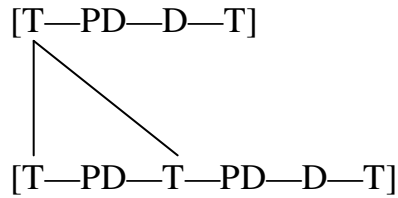
(Ts stands for *tonic substitute*, which is what vi is doing – it's moving us smoothly between I and IV.)

8. Composers do three things with the phrase models.

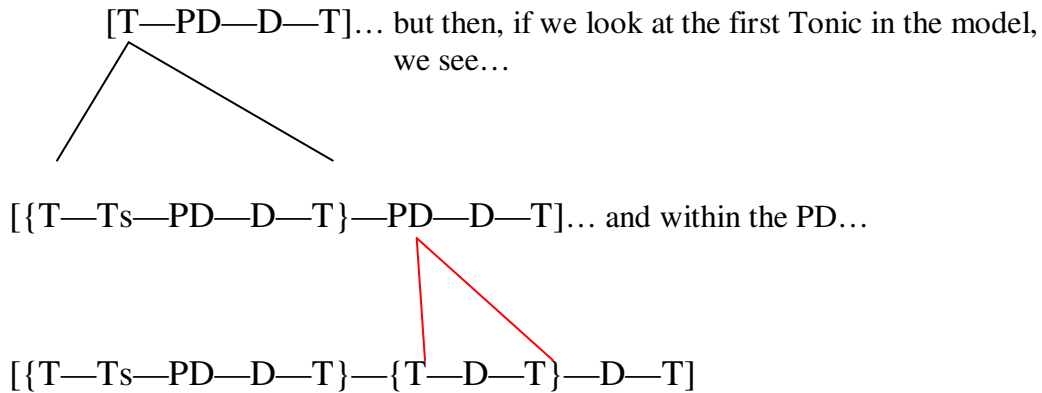
First, they make chains of them:

[T—PD—D]—[T—PD—D—T]

Second, you can use chords from other functions as neighbor chords:



Third, and this is really cool, they nest them:



We could write the next-to-last progression above in the following way:

I—vi—IV—V⁷—I—ii—V⁷—I ...or it could be...

I—vi—ii—V⁷—I—IV—V⁷—I ...or even...

I—vi—IV—ii—V⁷—I—ii—vii⁰—V⁷—I (using more than one chord for some functions)

9. From harmonic function, we can learn about *root motions*.

Between two chords, the three most common root motions are:

Falling Fifth (or Rising Fourth) – For example, V-I or I-IV.

Falling Third (or Rising Sixth) – For example, I-vi or IV-ii.

Rising Second (or Falling Seventh) – For example, IV-V or V-vi.

These three root motions cover many, many situations, including half- and authentic-cadences, the deceptive cadence, and the basic moves of the two phrase models. Use these as much as possible.