

## 6.1 First Species, Part 1

Begin by placing the cantus firmus in the lowest voice of your exercises.

**Task 6.1.1—Prepare staves for three-voice exercises with the Set Eight cantus firmi placed in the lowest voice. Write the alto-clef cantus firmi an Octave lower, in the bass clef.**

Cadence formation follows the general principle of adding a third voice to the regular two-voice cadence | 6 | 8 ||:

6	8
3	5

As in two-voice cadences, the Sixth must be major, so it sometimes needs an accidental.

Note that, when the cantus firmus is in the lowest voice, exercises in 'F' require exceptional treatment. As in third-species counterpoint for two voices, you must avoid 'B' in the second last bar—now, though, your only way of doing that is to use 'B $\flat$ ' instead.

**Task 6.1.2—Write your cadences. Ensure that all accidentals are present and correct.**

In between the opening chord (which you should write last of all) and the cadence, your object is to use as many triads (5/3 chords) as you can, arranging them so that the parts move only by permitted melodic intervals. The possible arrangements (in descending order of preference) are:

5	10	12	12	17	17
3	5	10	3	12	5

Each of these chords contains a perfect Fifth or Twelfth which should ideally be approached in oblique or contrary motion. (This rule is **not**, however, as strictly binding as in two-voice counterpoint; its exceptions will be discussed below.)

**Task 6.1.3—Under the heading 'Triads', write an example of each of the above arrangements for bass, tenor and alto on three staves. Do not use 'B' as a bass note.**

It is often impossible, and occasionally undesirable, to use a triad. Sometimes, an alternative is provided by the Sixth-chord (6/3). Its possible arrangements (in descending order of preference) are:

6	10	13	13
3	6	3	10

Of these chords, only the 10/6 contains a perfect consonance; the others do not and they are thus very easy to approach. But Sixth-chords in general are unstable, and should be deployed only in particular circumstances:

whenever the lowest note is 'B' (c'+e'+g'→b+d'+g'→a+e'+c")  
when the lowest note is 'E' and it is followed by 'F' (d'+f'+a'→e'+g'+c"→f'+a'+c")  
to approach a cadence when the cantus firmus is in the lowest voice  
(e'+g'+b'→c'+e'+a'→b+d'+g'#→a+e'+a')  
in a descending chain (a+c'+e'→g+b+e'→f+a+d'→e+g+c'→d+a+f')

**Task 6.1.4—Under the heading 'Sixth-chords and when to use them', write out and annotate the foregoing examples for tenor, alto and soprano on three staves.**

You can use the descending 6/3 chain whenever the cantus firmus has a descending scale of four or more notes. But do not begin or end that scale with a 6/3 chord unless circumstances oblige it. (Note that the chain is unworkable with 10/6 chords because they contain perfect Fifths between the middle and highest voices.)

The descending 6/3 chain is effective because each chord resolves the previous one's unstable Sixth by taking it a step **lower**, just as in the resolution of dissonances. For that reason, you should avoid following one Sixth-chord with another a step **higher**.

**Task 6.1.5—Write a number 6 below every note of your exercises that should (or could) take a Sixth-chord rather than a triad.**

At least once during most exercises, you will find that the absolute necessity of avoiding consecutive perfect consonances precludes a triad, yet circumstances are not right for a Sixth-chord.

In this situation, you must resort to a **dyad** consisting of a Third plus a Unison ( $c'+c'+e'$ ,  $c'+e'+e'$ ) or some Octave-equivalent arrangement of those intervals ( $a+c'+a'$ ,  $a+c'+c''$ ,  $a+a'+c''$ ). Dyads are inferior to triads and Sixth-chords because they comprise only two pitch-classes rather than three. Their possible arrangements (none of which is necessarily preferable to any of the others) are:

3	3	8	10	10	15	15	17	17
1	3	3	3	8	3	10	8	15

Each of these dyads contains a Unison or an Octave that must be approached in oblique or contrary motion. Use them whenever a Sixth-chord would be out of place and a triad proves unfeasible.

Triads, Sixth-chords and the dyads just described have one thing in common: they all contain at least one imperfect consonance. In fact, an imperfect consonance is obligatory for every chord in an exercise except the first and the last.

Ideally, the first chord should consist of perfect consonances ( $8/5$ ,  $12/8$ ,  $8/8$  etc.), but it may also be a triad or a dyad. You may thus begin your exercises with any consonant combination other than a Sixth-chord.

**Task 6.1.6—Complete your Set Eight exercises. Working outwards from the highest note of the cantus firmus is recommended.**

Full-length exercises require more flexible approaches to cadence construction and to the handling of perfect consonances than short exercises do.

The principle of adding a third voice to a two-voice cadence can take various forms. Compare the following two:

(a)	6   8	(b)	10   10
	3   5		6   8

Thus far you have used only form (a), in which the added voice is the middle one. This form is optimal for two reasons: it keeps the voices close together, and it ends with perfect consonances. Keeping the voices close together is easier said than done, however, and you may sometimes need to fall back on form (b), in which the added voice is the highest one.

With form (b) the concluding Tenth must be **major**, so it might need an accidental. (This breaks the rule about ending on perfect consonances, of course, but you can't observe all of the rules all of the time.)

Occasionally, the movement of the parts will oblige you to arrange the cadence in yet other ways (which are less preferable because they are more widely spaced):

(c)	13   15	(d)	13   15
	10   12		3   5

At least once in most exercises, you will find that you cannot avoid approaching a perfect Fifth or Twelfth in similar motion. This is least objectionable if:

- it involves the middle voice
- it is approached by descent rather than ascent
- it is approached by step by one of the voices
- it is accompanied by contrary or oblique motion in the third voice

A progression such as  $a+c'+e' \rightarrow e'+b+g'$  meets all these special conditions, and is therefore perfectly tolerable, whereas a progression such as  $c'+g+e' \rightarrow f+a+c''$  meets none of them, and is therefore perfectly intolerable. **Any perfect consonance approached in similar motion should meet at least three out of the four conditions.**

Task 6.1.7—Write out and annotate these progressions for tenor, alto and soprano. Mark the perfect consonances that are approached in similar motion.

Task 6.1.8—Complete a set of three-voice exercises with the Set One [cantus firmi](#) in the lowest voice.

Sample Workings

1	5	6	3	6	3	4	4	4	4
8	10	10	5	10	5	6	6	6	8
8	6	5	3	5	3	3	3	3	5

3	3	3	6	8	3	4	6	3	6	5	3
10	12	10	10	10	5	6	10	5	10	10	10
8	10	8	5	3	3	3	5	3	5	6	8

5	6	8	6	3	4	3	6	5	3
12	10	10	8	5	6	5	10	10	10
8	10	3	3	3	3	3	5	6	8