

Here is an elementary introduction to figured bass--the art of adding soprano, alto, and tenor lines to a bass line. In addition to proper spacing, doubling, beautiful melodic writing and tendency tone resolution here are the nuts and bolts of what the numbers mean.

Remember: you add these notes above the bass note in the key signature; if you need to alter the note in any way, you do that conceptually AFTER finding the generic interval. For example, look at the final sharp under B-natural. You find a third above the bass note in the key signature (which is d-natural); then you raise it. So the pitch class you'll write in tenor, alto, or soprano voice will be a D-sharp.

The image shows a musical staff in D major (one sharp) with a bass line. The notes are D, E, F#, G, A, and B. Below the staff are figured bass numbers: 6, 6, 7, 8 - 7, and 6 - 5. Lines connect these numbers to text boxes explaining how to derive the upper voices (soprano, alto, tenor) from the bass note in the key signature.

**6**  
Add a third and a sixth above the bass note in the key signature.

**6**  
Add a third and a sixth above the bass note in the key signature.

**7**  
Add a third, a fifth, and a seventh above the bass note in the key signature

**8 - 7**  
Add an octave above the bass note in the key signature; have that note move melodically to a seventh above the bass note in the key signature.

**6 - 5**  
Add a sixth above the bass note in the key signature; have that note move melodically to a fifth above the bass note in the key signature.

**4 - #3**  
Add a fourth above the bass note in the key signature; have that note move melodically to a third above the bass note in the key signature and then RAISE that note

**#** Add a third above the bass note in the key signature and RAISE it.

Add a third + a fifth above the bass note in the key signature.