



Controlling Consonance and Dissonance: Introduction to Two-Voice Counterpoint

The study of harmony concerns how chords connect to one another and move through time. But chords and their connections are dependent on how individual members, or **voices** (or **parts**), move from one chord tone to the next and how they combine with one another. Listen to the excerpts in Example 4.1, all of which sound very different from one another, but each of which shares many common features, including:

1. At least four simultaneously sounding voices. These voices are labeled "Soprano," "Alto," "Tenor," and "Bass" in Example 4.1A and in their abbreviated forms in Example 4.1B–D ("SATB").
2. Individual voices that are melodic, moving from one pitch to another, usually by steps or small leaps.
3. Voices that combine vertically with one another, forming, for the most part, consonances with the other voices (octaves, fifths, thirds, and sixths).
4. The highest- and lowest-sounding pitches as aurally the most prominent. That our ears are drawn to these **outer voices** is very important. Outer voices provide the structural skeleton in tonal music, and we will learn that harmony is most easily viewed as the filling in of the musical space between these two melodic voices—the soprano and the bass—with usually two additional voices (alto and tenor).
5. Voices that often move in opposite directions to one another, especially the outer voices; when one voice ascends, the other descends, and vice versa. When voices move in the same direction, it is usually by imperfect consonances (i.e., thirds and sixths).