

MU 009 (Feurzeig)
Fill-In-The-Blanks Primer: Triads

A triad in its fundamental form is a stack of two thirds. (a snowman!)

A triad has a root, a third, and a fifth.

Qualities

A triad is either major, minor, diminished, or augmented. Learn the labels and abbreviations for each quality.

Music theory fact: major and minor triads are the only collections of three different pitches (i.e. three pitches with no unison or octave duplication) that are all-ways consonant (every pair of notes is consonant).

Inversions

root position	1 st inversion	2 nd inversion
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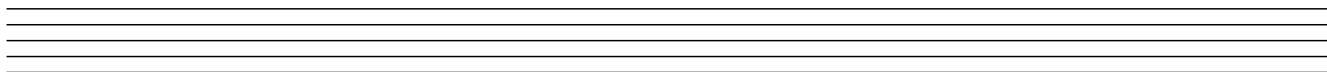
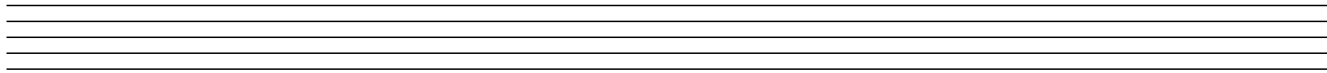
$\frac{5}{3}$	$\frac{6}{3}$	$\frac{6}{4}$
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in practice: $\frac{5}{3}$ (root position) may be assumed, if no other information is given;
 $\frac{6}{3}$ may be abbreviated to 6;
 $\frac{6}{4}$ is always written out fully.

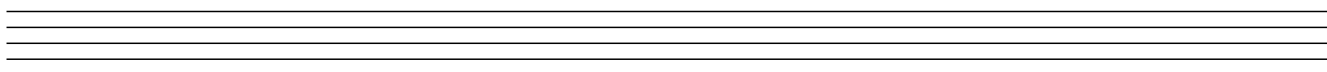
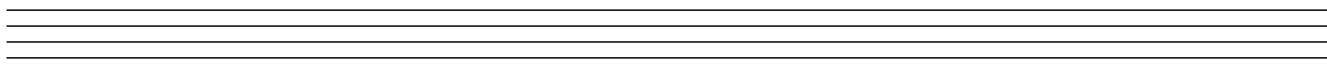
When a triad is inverted, each element (root, third, fifth) retains its label. So, for example, in first inversion, the third of the triad is the lowest note, but it's still "the third".

Spacing and doublings

The notes of a triad may be doubled, and can be spaced in almost endless ways. We still refer to these collections of notes as triads.



Inversion is determined by the **single lowest sounding** note, called the **bass** note.

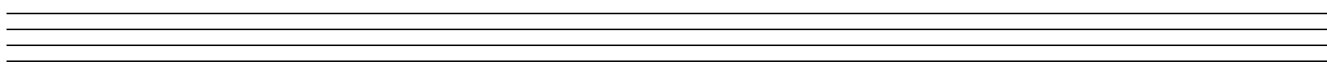
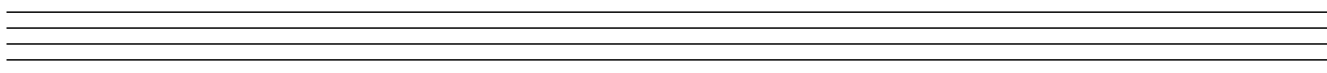


Don't confuse the **bass** note with the triad **root!** They are often the same pitch, but not necessarily so.

Lead-sheet symbols



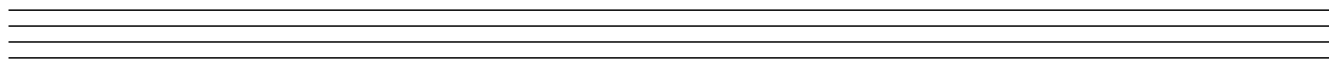
How to indicate inversion using lead-sheet notation:



Roman numeral notation



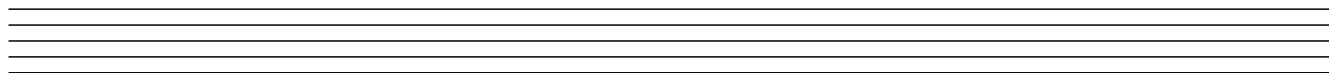
Unlike lead-sheet notation, roman numerals are **relative to a key (tonic)**. This can be a specific key, as in “The **ii** chord in the key of F major is G minor.” Or RN’s may describe patterns that apply generically to any key, for example: “In the 12-bar blues, the second phrase moves to the **IV** chord.”



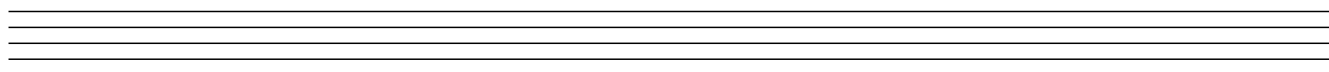
Learn the qualities of the triad on each degree of the major scale.

Don’t confuse **IV** (the subdominant chord) and **vi** (the submediant chord)!

When writing by hand, use horizontal lines above and below all capital RN’s, for clarity.

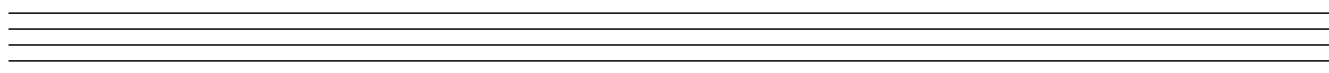


Roman numerals can be combined with inversion numbers, which are also called **figured bass symbols**.



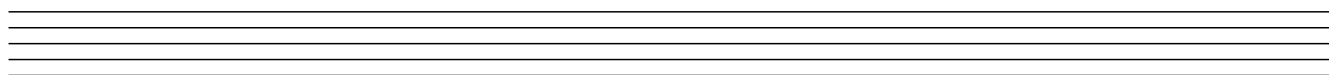
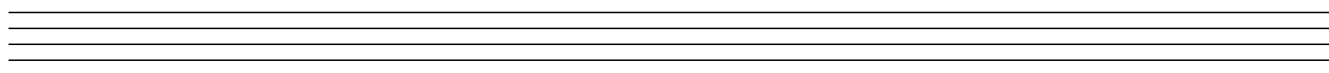
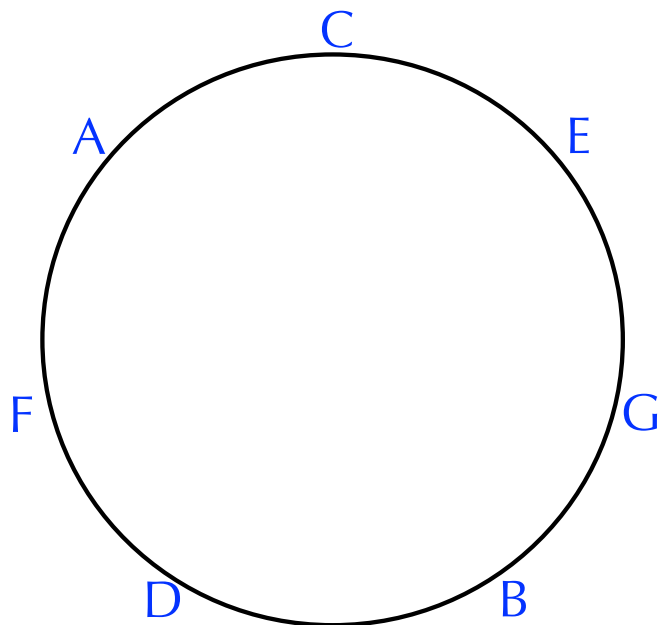
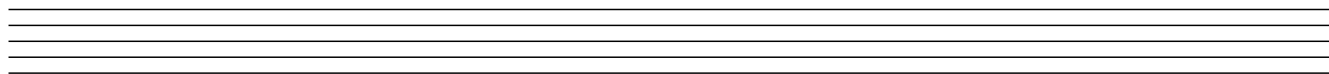
Note these differences between roman numerals and lead-sheet chord symbols:

- Lead-sheet symbols are independent of key signature! RN’s are relative to a key.
- Lead-sheet chord roots are always written with **capital** letters, regardless of quality. RN’s change case according to quality.



Is that a triad?

The **circle of thirds** provides a geometric way to determine if a collection of pitches is a triad, regardless of inversion. You can also “shuffle” the pitches on the staff to see if they can be arranged as a stack of thirds.



The circle of thirds is one example of an **interval cycle**. Because the number of different pitch names in the Western musical system, 7, is a prime number, any interval except the octave and its relatives (unisons, double octaves, etc.) can be used to generate an interval cycle that will generate all seven notes without repetition. A stepwise scale (C-D-E-F-G-A-B) is an interval cycle generated by seconds, for example.