

MU 1310 (Feurzeig) Fill-In-The-Blanks Triads Primer

A triad in its fundamental form is a stack of two thirds. (like a traffic light—or snowman, as we used to say)

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. with no unison or octave duplication) that are all-ways consonant (i.e. every note pair forms a consonant interval).

Inversions

root position

1st inversion

2nd inversion

$\frac{5}{3}$

$\frac{6}{3}$

$\frac{6}{4}$

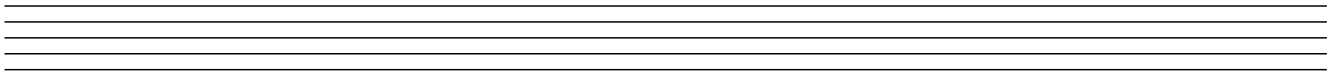
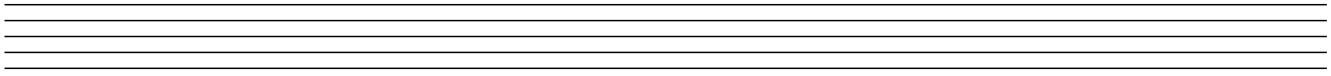
- in practice:
- a triad is assumed to be in root position (i.e. $\frac{5}{3}$) is assumed, if no other indication is given
 - $\frac{6}{3}$ may be abbreviated to $\frac{6}{}$
 - $\frac{6}{4}$ is always written out fully (there is no abbreviation)

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 called the third. The next higher note (which lies a third above the now-bottom note) is still called the fifth, and the note now on top is still the root.

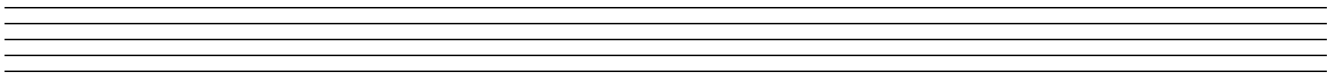
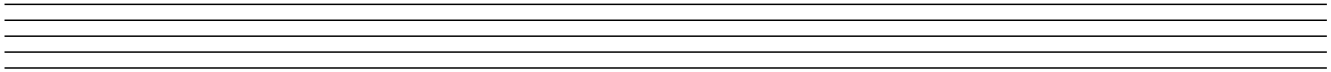
Spacing and doublings

The notes of a triad may be doubled in different octaves, and can be spaced in almost endless ways.

Regardless of the number of doublings or how the chord is spaced (voiced), any chord which contains only the pitches in one of the 3-note collections described above is still called a triadic harmony.

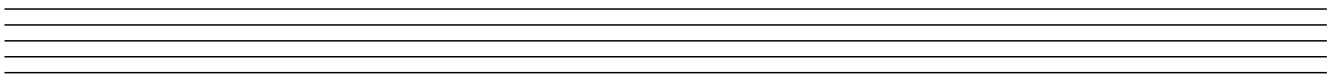


Inversion is determined by the **single lowest sounding** note, called the **bass** note. The spacing and ordering of the higher notes do not affect the inversion.

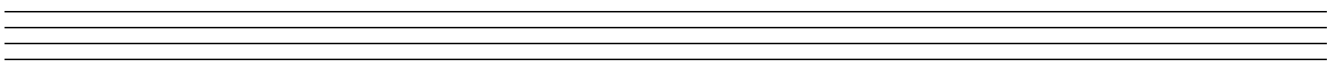
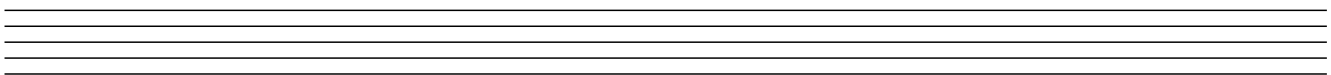


Don't confuse the **bass** note with the triad **root**! They are often the same pitch, but not necessarily so.*

Lead-sheet symbols (aka pop symbols or simply chord symbols)



How to indicate inversion using lead-sheet notation:



*But everyone occasionally confuses them when talking. Guaranteed I will do this once or twice in class.

Roman numerals

Unlike lead-sheet symbols, 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 upper-case 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?

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

