

Cadence spotting

A cadence is the punctuation at the end of a phrase — the last two chords, and nothing else. Find those two chords, name them as numerals, and the cadence names itself.

THE FOUR TO KNOW

THE LAST TWO CHORDS OF THE PHRASE

CADENCE	CHORDS	WHAT IT DOES	WHERE YOU MEET IT
Perfect	V – I	A full stop. The phrase is finished.	The end of almost every classical piece
Plagal	IV – I	Also finished, but softer and older.	The "Amen" at the end of a hymn
Imperfect	any – V	A comma. More to come.	Halfway through a tune, before it answers itself
Interrupted	V – vi	A surprise. The expected ending is snatched away.	Where the music suddenly turns dark

An imperfect cadence only has to *arrive* on V — the chord before it may be I, ii or IV. That is why it is the one cadence you name by its second chord alone.

FINDING THEM

FOUR STEPS, IN THIS ORDER

- 1 Find the end of the phrase — a rest, a long note, a slur or a comma-shaped lift in the melody. Cadences only happen there.
- 2 Take the last two chords and write out each one's letters in thirds. The root, not the bass note, is what you want.
- 3 Turn both roots into numerals for the key you are in. Check the key signature and any accidental near the cadence — a raised seventh usually means chord V in a minor key.
- 4 Read the pair off the table. If the second chord is V, it is imperfect, whatever came before it.
- 5 Check the bass of both chords before you write "perfect" — an inversion changes the answer.

A perfect cadence needs root position. Both V and I must have their root in the bass. V – I with either chord inverted still sounds like an ending, but a weaker one, and it is named an *inverted* perfect cadence — not a perfect cadence. The same applies to the plagal: IV – I wants both roots in the bass.

In a minor key the numerals change case: V – i is perfect, iv – i plagal, and the interrupted cadence becomes V – VI. Chord V still needs its raised seventh, so look for an accidental that is not in the key signature.

The trap. Perfect and plagal both end on the tonic, so students hear "finished" and write "perfect". The difference is entirely in the *first* chord — V or IV — and in a keyboard texture that is a difference of one bass note. Always name both chords before you name the cadence.

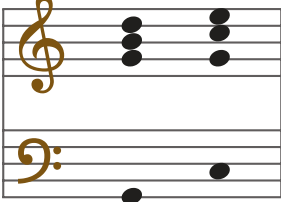
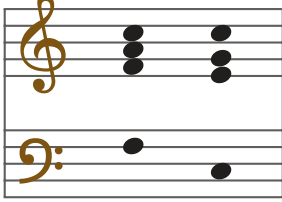
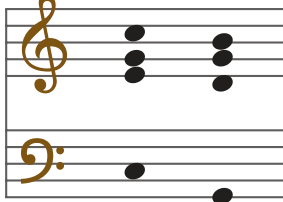
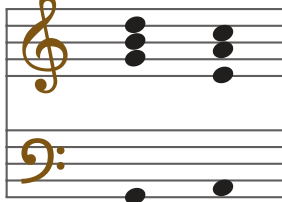
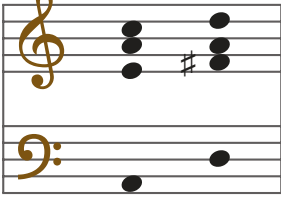
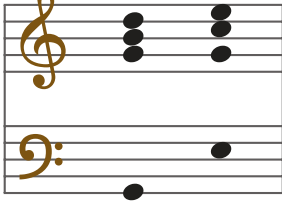
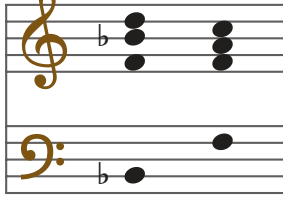
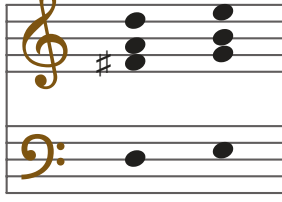
Cadence spotting

Answers overleaf

NAME _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____

A · NAME THE CADENCE

NUMERALS ABOVE · CADENCE BELOW

1 · C major  _____ _____	2 · C major  _____ _____	3 · C major  _____ _____	4 · C major  _____ _____
5 · G major  _____ _____	6 · C major  _____ _____	7 · F major  _____ _____	8 · G major  _____ _____

B · NAME THE CADENCE FROM THE NUMERALS

MAJOR KEY

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>9 V – I _____</p> <p>10 IV – I _____</p> <p>11 ii – V _____</p> | <p>12 V – vi _____</p> <p>13 I – V _____</p> <p>14 IV – V _____</p> |
|--|---|

C · IN A SENTENCE

FOUR SHORT ANSWERS

- 15 Which two cadences end on the tonic chord, and what tells them apart?

- 16 What must be true of both chords before you may call a cadence perfect?

- 17 A phrase ends on chord V. Is the music finished, and what is the cadence called?

- 18 Why does an interrupted cadence sound like a surprise?

Answer key

A · THE PRINTED CADENCES

- 1 G B D → C E G. **V – I, perfect.** Both chords in root position, so the name stands.
- 2 F A C → C E G. **IV – I, plagal.** The ending is the same as 1; only the first chord differs.
- 3 C E G → G B D. **I – V, imperfect.** Arriving on V is what makes it imperfect.
- 4 G B D → A C E. **V – vi, interrupted.** The tonic is expected and a minor chord comes instead.
- 5 A C E → D F# A, in G major. **ii – V, imperfect.**
- 6 G B D → C E G with **E in the bass.** The progression is V – I, but the tonic is in first inversion, so this is an **inverted perfect cadence** – write V – Ib. Full marks need the word "inverted".
- 7 Bb D F → F A C, in F major. **IV – I, plagal.**
- 8 D F# A → E G B, in G major. **V – vi, interrupted.**

NUMERALS AT A GLANCE

Two points each in section A, one elsewhere · twenty-six in all

B · FROM THE NUMERALS

- 9 perfect · 10 plagal · 11 imperfect · 12 interrupted · 13 imperfect · 14 imperfect.
- 11, 13 and 14 are all imperfect. The chord before V does not change the name.*

C · IN A SENTENCE

- 15 Perfect and plagal. Both land on I; the first chord tells them apart – V for perfect, IV for plagal.
- 16 Both V and I must be in root position, with their roots in the bass. Otherwise it is an inverted perfect cadence.
- 17 Not finished – it is an imperfect cadence, and it asks for an answering phrase.
- 18 The ear has learned that V goes to I. The interrupted cadence goes to vi instead, which shares two notes with I but is minor, so the expected ending is recognisably withheld.

CUT THIS OUT AND KEEP IT BY THE DESK

CADENCE	IN MAJOR	IN MINOR	THE TEST
Perfect	V – I	V – i	Both chords in root position
Plagal	IV – I	iv – i	Ends on the tonic, arrives from IV
Imperfect	any – V	any – V	Arrives on V, whatever came first
Interrupted	V – vi	V – VI	Leaves V for the sixth, not the tonic

MARKING GUIDE

WHERE THE MARKS ARE LOST

SCORE OUT OF 26	WHAT TO DO NEXT
23 – 26	Secure. Now mark every phrase ending in a hymn or a minuet.
17 – 22	Redo section A, writing each chord's letters in thirds first.
10 – 16	Learn the table on page one, then redo section B alone.
Under 10	Play all four in C major until you can hear which is which.

Listen before you write. Every cadence here can be played in five seconds, and the ear learns them faster than the eye. Play V – I, then IV – I, then V – vi one after another, and the differences stop being definitions and become sounds.