

Harmony at a Glance

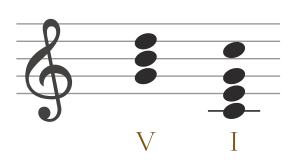
A roman numeral does not name a chord — it names a chord's *job* in a key. Learn the seven of a major key and their pull on one another, and the same knowledge works in every key you will ever write in.

THE SEVEN CHORDS OF A MAJOR KEY — SHOWN IN C



I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
Tonic	Supertonic	Mediant	Subdominant	Dominant	Submediant	Leading note
C MAJOR	D MINOR	E MINOR	F MAJOR	G MAJOR	A MINOR	B DIM.

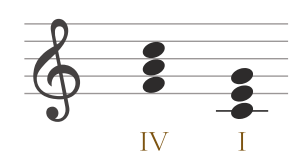
THE FOUR CADENCES — HOW A PHRASE ENDS



Perfect

V - I · A FULL STOP

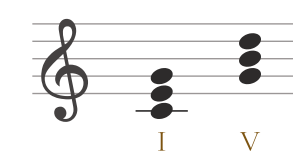
The only ending that sounds finished. Both chords in root position, tonic in the top voice, and the phrase is closed.



Plagal

IV - I · THE AMEN

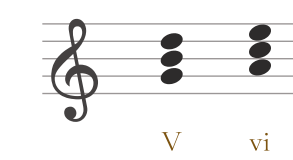
Softer and rounder than the perfect. Sung to *amen* at the end of a hymn, which is where its nickname comes from.



Imperfect

... - V · A COMMA

Any chord to V. It leaves the phrase open and expecting an answer, so it ends the first half of a question-and-answer pair.



Interrupted

V - VI · THE SWERVE

The ear is promised the tonic and given the relative minor instead. Deceptive, and best used once.

INVERSIONS AND FIGURED BASS

5/3 · or nothing	Root position. The root of the chord is in the bass.
6/3 · written 6	First inversion. The third is in the bass — lighter, good for moving lines.
6/4	Second inversion. The fifth is in the bass. Unstable; use it passing or cadentially.
7	A root-position seventh chord, nearly always V ⁷ .
6/5 · 4/3 · 4/2	The first, second and third inversions of a seventh chord.
Ic - V - I	The cadential six-four: the tonic in second inversion delays the dominant, then resolves onto it.

THE THREE FAMILIES

Tonic	I, vi, iii — home. Rest, arrival, no pull.
Subdominant	IV, ii — away from home. Movement without tension.
Dominant	V, vii° — tension. It wants the tonic and will not settle for less.

Harmony moves **tonic** → **subdominant** → **dominant** → **tonic**. You may skip forwards in that order freely; going backwards — dominant to subdominant — is the move that sounds weak.

PROGRESSIONS THAT WORK

I - IV - V - I	The plain loop. Hymns, folk songs, and most of the first pieces you will write.
I - V - vi - IV	Four chords behind a thousand pop songs. Endlessly repeatable because it never quite closes.
ii - V - I	The strongest approach to a tonic there is, and the backbone of jazz.
I - vi - IV - V	The fifties turnaround. Slow it down and it becomes a ballad.
i - VI - III - VII	The minor-key loop — the same shape, borrowed for darker music.

Writing the numerals

Capitals for major chords, **lower case** for minor, a small circle for diminished and a plus for augmented.

Name the key first and put a colon after it: C: *I* - *IV* - *V* - *I*. Without the key the numerals mean nothing.

A numeral is not a chord symbol. *V* in C major and *G* are the same three notes, but only the numeral tells you what the chord is *doing*.

In a minor key

The harmonic minor gives *i* · *ii*° · *III* · *iv* · *V* · *VI* · *vii*° — the seventh is raised so that *V* stays major and can pull home.

Leave the seventh unraised and you get *v* and *VII* instead: modal, older, and much less urgent.

A minor-key piece may end on a major tonic chord — the *tierce de Picardie*. Common in Bach, and still startling.

Harmonising a melody

Start at the end. Choose the final cadence first, then work backwards to the beginning.

Change chord on the strong beats. One chord a bar is plenty at first; two is usually the most a slow phrase wants.

Every melody note should belong to the chord under it — or be a passing note, a suspension or an appoggiatura on its way to one that does.