Part-Writing: Using Inversions

When common practice composers used inverted chords in four-voice writing, they followed some general patterns regarding which note of the chord should be doubled.

### Root Position

- **In root position triads,** composers usually doubled the root, which is in the **bass** of the chord.

### First Inversion

- **In major first inversion triads,** composers doubled the root.
- **In minor first inversion triads,** composers doubled the **soprano** or **bass** of the chord.
- **In diminished first inversion triads,** they doubled the **bass** of the chord.

### Second Inversion

- **In second inversion triads,** composers usually doubled the fifth, which is in the **bass** of the chord.

Here's another way to think of it: The **only time you can't double the bass** is in first inversion major triads, where you should double the **soprano** instead.

Okay, we know how to use inversions in four-part writing... but **when can we use them?**

The only "rule" regarding root position triads and first inversion triads is that diminished triads are always placed in first inversion.

**The cadential Ⅵ chord** is a tonic triad in second inversion followed by a root-position dominant chord at a cadence.

**The passing Ⅵ chord** is a chord placed in second inversion where the bass is treated like a passing note: the middle note of a stepwise line moving up or down.

The pedal Ⅵ chord is a second inversion chord where the bass is treated like a pedal note: a note preceded and followed by the same note.

If you write a second inversion triad and it's not one of these three situations, then you are not writing in the common practice period style! The composers of the style just didn't use these chords willy-nilly.