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**

- **Bass** of the chord.

**First Inversion**

- The doubling of first inversion triads depends on the type of the chord being written.

**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 6 Chord** is a tonic triad in second inversion followed by a root-position dominant chord at a cadence.

**The Passing 6 Chord** is a chord placed in second inversion where the bass is treated like a passing tone: the middle note of a stepwise line moving up or down.

**The Pedal 6 Chord** is a second inversion chord where the bass is treated like a pedal tone: 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.

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