Bach Chorales: A Guide.

- Bach Chorales are meant to be sung by four part harmony - SATB, originally for Lutheran churches in Germany.
- Melodies should be something easy to sing with a recognisable tune.
- These melodies are broken up into phrases, which are identified by pause marks – this is where you put your cadences.

Possible Keys

- Begin by looking at your key signature and any accidentals and working out what key you are in - either the Major or relative minor.
- Then work out the 5 other possible keys that you can modulate (change keys) to. This would be to the following:

  Dominant
  Subdominant
  Relative Minor
  Relative minor of the dominant
  Relative minor of the subdominant

E.g in the key of C major

| Key 1 | C Major | Tonic / home key |
| Key 2 | G Major | Dominant Key |
| Key 3 | F major | Subdominant Key |
| Key 4 | A minor | Relative minor |
| Key 5 | E minor | Relative minor of dominant |
| Key 6 | D minor | Relative minor of sub-dominant |

This works exactly the same if the chorale is in a minor key.....

| Key 1 | A minor | Tonic / home key |
| Key 2 | E minor | Dominant Key |
| Key 3 | D minor | Subdominant Key |
| Key 4 | C major | Relative major |
| Key 5 | G major | Relative major of dominant |
| Key 6 | F major | Relative major of sub-dominant |

Never modulate to any other keys than these.
7 Chords

Write out the 7 possible chords available to you in your key e.g in C Major:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This will help you quickly work out what possible chords you can use for the melody notes in the soprano part.

Harmonise Your Cadences

- Always harmonise your cadences first.
- A Cadence consists of three chords i.e. Ic - V - I.
- About 78% of Bach’s cadences are perfect (V-I) and about 20% are imperfect (ending on V, usually I-V or even better Ib-V)
- Do not use plagal or imperfect cadences (very rare)
- Begin by labelling your soprano notes with their number in the scale:

For example, in F Major

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{I2} \\
\text{3 2 1} \\
\text{1} \\
\text{b} \\
\end{array}
\]

- This will usually indicate to you if the cadence is Perfect or Imperfect (as you will get VERY used to the different cadence progressions!)
- You can also quickly look at the chart you made at the beginning of the 7 different chords available and work out which chords fit with these three different notes.

Perfect Cadences

- The most common perfect cadences (think Bach harmonic language) are the following:
  
  - ii\(^7\)b - V - I (39% of all Bach cadences)
  - Ic - V - I / Ic - V\(^7\) - I (also known as cadential 6/4)
  - Ib - V - I
  - IV - V - I
Always put your bass notes in first, then add the other two inner parts.
• In a Minor key use a *tierce de picarde* - this is where the final chord I is changed to the Major chord I.

**Dominant 7th**
When writing a perfect cadence, chord V can be made stronger by adding the 7th - V7. When you do this you need to resolve the chord correctly:
• The bass part MUST move V - I
• The 3rd of Chord V MUST RISE to the tonic
• The 7th of the chord V MUST FALL to the 3rd of chord I

**Imperfect Cadences**
• Imperfect cadences often feature:
  V7b - I - V
  Viib - I - V
  Vii7 - I - V
  I - ivb - V (use rarely)
  Ib - iiib - V (use rarely)
General Bach Chorale Techniques

Vocal Range
- Make sure you keep the four parts within their ranges and remember that the Bach Chorale is meant to be sung not played on the Piano.
- It is easier to play the top three parts (SAT) with the right hand and the bass parts with the left hand - so keep the tenor part high.

Part Writing
- The soprano and alto parts should not be more than an octave apart.
- The alto and tenor parts should not be more than an octave apart.
- Generally keep the alto and tenor parts quite static - repeat notes or move by steps, if you do jump it should be very small jumps.
- The only large gap should be between the tenor and bass.
• The bass parts can leap more usually by 4ths or 5ths.
• Do not overlap parts i.e.
• Voices should not cross keep them in the order SATB.

- Tenor part on beat 2 is lower than part above it - Bass on beat 1
- Alto part on beat 3 is higher than the part above it - Soprano on beat 2

• The 7th of a chord MUST ALWAYS FALL.
• The leading note MUST ALWAYS RISE to the tonic (except in a few cases of cadences)
• Nb - the leading note is the 7th note in your key i.e. in the key of C the 7th note is B - this is the leading note. The 7th of a chord is the 7th note in your chord so (in the key of C) the 7th note of a G chord is an F and should rise.
• Avoid leaps in any parts that are of an augmented interval - remember the chorales are meant to be sung!
Parallel 5ths/8ves

- Between 2 parts i.e. alto and tenor avoid having 5ths/8ves from one beat to another e.g:

  Beat 1
  Tenor = C
  Bass = F
  A 5th

  Beat 2
  Tenor = B
  Bass = E
  A 5th
  = Parallel 5th between alto and bass beats 1-2

  Beat 3
  Alto = G
  Bass = G
  An octave

  Beat 4
  Alto = F
  Bass = F
  An octave
  = Parallel 8ve between alto and bass parts beat 3-4

- To double check look at the following parts in order between every two beats looking at 5ths an 8ves:
  1. S+A
  2. S+T
  3. S+B
  4. A+T
  5. A+B
  6. T+B

Exposed 5th and 8ves

- This is when the soprano lines leaps and the bass moves in the same direction (whether by step or leap) and the parts arrive on a perfect 5th or 8ve.

  A jump in the Soprano part.
  The Bass part is also moving in the same direction - both part are ascending

  An Octave between Soprano and Bass parts
Chords

- The majority of your chords should be chords I/ IV and V.
- Aim for 50% root position chords and 50% first inversion chords.
- Bach could harmonise a chorale perfectly using only chords I/IV and V in the root and first inversion - he makes it interesting through his part writing.
- Do not use 2nd inversion chords unless it is in the cadential progression Ic-V-I or passing 6/4 which has specific rules which we discuss later.
- Diminished chords and Augmented 6ths can be used (although rarely) but there are specific rules for these which are discussed later.

Anacrusis

- An anacrusis is where a phrase starts on the last beat of a bar.
- It is common to move from the following chords in this instance:
- This is the only instance where you can repeat the same chord in the same position i.e. I-I.
- Usually this involves a leap of an octave in the bass with the other parts being altered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat 4</th>
<th>Beat 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>I (but with altered part writing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The phrase starts on the up-beat or anacrusis.

The chord moves I-I but the bass line jumps up an octave

Doubling

- You have 4 parts SATB but only three notes in a chord - the tonic, third and fifth. One of these will be doubled.
- There are specific rules for doubling notes in Bach Chorales.
- The most important rule is this: always include the tonic and 3rd i.e. in a C Major chord always include the C and E, this is because the C is the tonic and therefore the most important note and the E indicates we are in the Major key (the 3rd would be an
Eb in the Minor key) so if we omit the 3rd we don’t know if we are in the Major or Minor key.

- As a general rule always aim to double the tonic, have one 3rd and one 5th.
- Exceptions - you can double the 5th instead of the tonic as a second choice.
- Do not double the 3rd in a major chord.
- Never double the leading note in a key (i.e. in C Major the leading is B (7th of the scale) never double this note)
- **ALWAYS double the 5th in Ic** (i.e. the bass note of the chord so in chord C double the G)
- There are certain chords that in a Minor key should always double the third.

**Secondary Chords:***

**Chord II**
- Use mostly in the first inversion
- In a **Major** key chord II is minor and you can therefore double the 3rd
- In a **Minor** key chord II is diminished and the 3rd MUST be doubled.

**Chord III**
- **Only use chord III/IIIb in a Major Key - NEVER in a Minor key.**
- Chord II is often used in association with the melodic movement 8-7-6-5 using progressions:
  - VI – III – IV – I or I – III – IV – V

**Chord VI**
- Always write in the root position.
- **In Minor keys always double the 3rd** - this will be the tonic of the key.
- Use VI – V and V – VI
- I – VI is strong and often harmonises a repeated tonic note weak to strong i.e. beat 2-3 or 4-1 at the beginning of a chorale.
- I – VI – IV – I and VI – II are good progressions.
- **In Major keys only** – V – III/IIIb – VI is a good progression.

**Chord VII**
- **Chord VII is only used in the 1st inversion. You MUST ALWAYS double the 3rd** (because you never double the leading note in a key i.e. in C Major the root of Chord VII is B which is the leading note so you don’t double the tonic)

**Bachian Stylistic Writing**
- Always aim for contrary motion with the Soprano line.
- Try to always have quaver movement in at least one part.
- Bach often has harmonies of 3rds and 6ths between parts.
- Runny bass line - the bass line moves a lot (in step) often ascending or descending towards the cadence.
- The easiest way to spot where to put quavers is if you have 2 crotchets a third apart - why not join them up with passing note i.e. passing between the two main notes.
- Different types of melodic decorations are as follows:
Passing Notes:
- This is the most common and basically is what it sounds like a note that passes between two harmony notes - usually used to fill gaps of a third. Can also include semiquaver movement to fill a gap of a fourth.

Auxiliary Notes:
- This is when you move a step above or below two harmony notes of the same pitch.

Anticipation:
- This occurs on a weak beat. It anticipates the next harmony note by introducing it before the chord and is often used before chord I in a perfect cadence.
**Accented Passing Notes:**

- This is when you have a passing note on the beat and does create harmonic conflict or dissonance with the chord so should be used carefully.

**Modulations**

- To spot a modulation firstly look out for any accidentals not in your original key.
- Look at the chart you completed at the beginning of your chorale with the 6 possible keys for your chorale - do the accidentals match up with any of these keys.
- Look at the cadence points and think about the standard progression i.e. 2-2-1 does this fit with any of the new keys.
- Finally think leading notes - these ALWAYS have to rise to the tonic. You have modulated if the leading note (i.e. B in the key of C) suddenly stops rising to C in the melodic part.
- The easiest way to modulate from one key to another is to do it at the start of a new phrase this is called an **ABRUPT MODULATION**.
- This is often made by a note rising by a semitone in the bass.
- To modulate within a phrase you need to use a **PIVOT CHORD** - this is a chord that belongs to both the keys you are currently in and the key you are modulating too.
- For example if you were modulating from C Major to the dominant G Major chord vi in C = A (ACE) which is the same as chord ii in G = A (ACE). It uses exactly the same notes.
- Suggested pivot chords to modulate to/from:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Keys</th>
<th>Minor Keys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To the dominant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vi-ii</td>
<td>To the dominant major i=iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the sub-dominant</td>
<td>Ii-vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the relative minor</td>
<td>Ii=iv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suspensions

• These occur when a chord changes and one part hangs onto the note from the old chord creating a clash with the bass of the new chord.

• There are three parts to a suspension:
  1. Preparation: the note that will cause the suspension is heard as a part of a normal chord, usually on a rhythmically weaker beat.
  2. Suspension: the prepared note is held over (or repeated) as the other parts move to a different chord on a stronger beat, creating a dissonance between the bass and suspended note.
  3. Resolution: the suspended note falls by a step to a note of the new chord in order to resolve the dissonance.

• There are three types of suspensions: 9 - 8, 7 - 6 and 4 - 3. This refers to the number up from the bass note.

• How to spot opportunities for suspensions - where there is descending stepwise movement in the Alto or Tenor part.
  7ths can often cause suspensions and should therefore be prepared and resolved correctly.
  Suspensions are often used by Bach at cadence points and sometimes one directly after the other.

• Don't try to put suspensions in as you go until you are very practiced at Chorales instead finish your Chorale and then go back and look for possible places you can put them in.
Extra Mile: complex progressions and chords

Passing viib
- Use infrequently and only in the following instances:
- Between chords I and Ib or Ib and I i.e:
  I - viib - Ib
  or
  Ib - viib - I

- The soprano part must move by step in the same direction whilst the bass also moves by step in the opposite direction to the soprano line i.e. contrary motion.
- Used for melodic number 1-2-3 or 3-2-1 or 3-4-5 or 5-4-3

Passing $6_4$
- Basically a second inversion chord that is used as a passing note between the root and first inversion of a chord.
- Has similar rules as a passing viib - the soprano line must move by step in one direction whilst the bass moves in the opposite way by step creating contrary motion.
• Used in the following situations ONLY:
  - Ib – Vc – I
  - I – Vc – Ib
  - IVb – Ic – IV
  - IV – Ic – IVb

**Diminished 7th Chords**
- Diminished 7th chords are chords where every interval is a minor 3rd apart.
- These are used rarely in Bach Chorales and you need to ensure you follow the rules correctly.
- After you use a diminished chord, you need the outer parts (soprano and bass) to move inwards.

**Circle of 5ths**
- A chord progression that moves by a 5th each time. I.e. A-D-G-
  C - each time moving down a 5th.
- Could be used at a cadence point with the chords VI - IIb7 - V - I