

Composition Project, Step 8: Write the b Section

The b section is usually less melodic than the other phrases; it often involves sequential or quasi-sequential treatment of some motivic idea, often (but not necessarily) from the main phrase.

It is possible to start either from harmony or from melody in writing this phrase; the one clear requirement is that it end with an HC in the home key. Following are a few sample recipes; the examples below and the sample pieces linked on the website illustrate other possibilities, of which there are many.

If the contrasting key is V or v:

Start by turning the tonic chord from the preceding PAC into a V chord in the tonic; do this by adding a seventh (melodically) and by raising the third if in minor.

You can then expand tonic harmony in a variety of ways; this can be as simple as rocking back and forth between V and I in various inversions.

Then lead to a strong V chord in the final measure.

Or, use the following progression, one chord per measure: V7 – I – V7/V – V

If the contrasting key is III:

Stay in the new tonic, and expand tonic harmony for a while (again, back and forth with tonic and dominant is fine). End this expansion with either scale-degree one or scale-degree three in the soprano, probably harmonized by i, i6, or VI. This chord becomes the pivot chord, and the note in the soprano will be either scale-degree three or scale-degree five back in the original tonic. Follow this by a Phrygian HC, moving from iv6 to V, probably with scale-degrees 4 and 5 in the soprano (unless this would set up parallel octaves in the next phrase).

Examples:

The image shows a musical score with two staves (treble and bass clef) and a chord progression below. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The bass line consists of quarter notes G3, A3, B3, and C4. The chord progression is as follows:

D: I6	5/3	I6	(V)	I	V/V	V	6/5
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C: V6 5/3 I vii6 I6 ii6 a: iv6 V

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