Composition Project, Step 2: Identify Main Melodic Tones and Write a Skeletal Harmonization

First, approach your melody as you would a contrapuntal analysis; try and figure out which melodic tones sound like they would end up in a reduction, and listen for where you think the chord changes should be. Circle the main melodic tones and draw vertical lines to indicate chords.

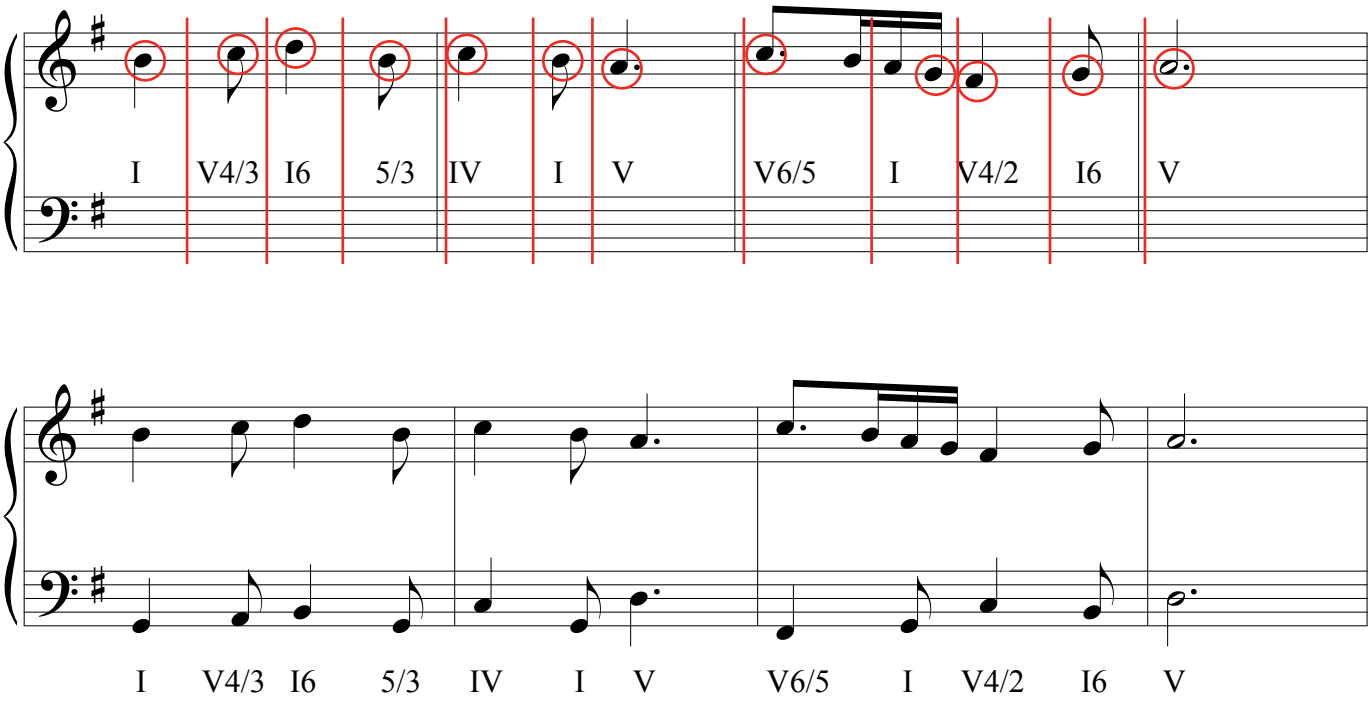
Second, choose chords that fit the main melodic tones and that create idiomatic harmonic progressions. Depending on the details of your melody and chosen harmonization, you may want to specify inversions at this stage or you may want to leave that until the next stage.

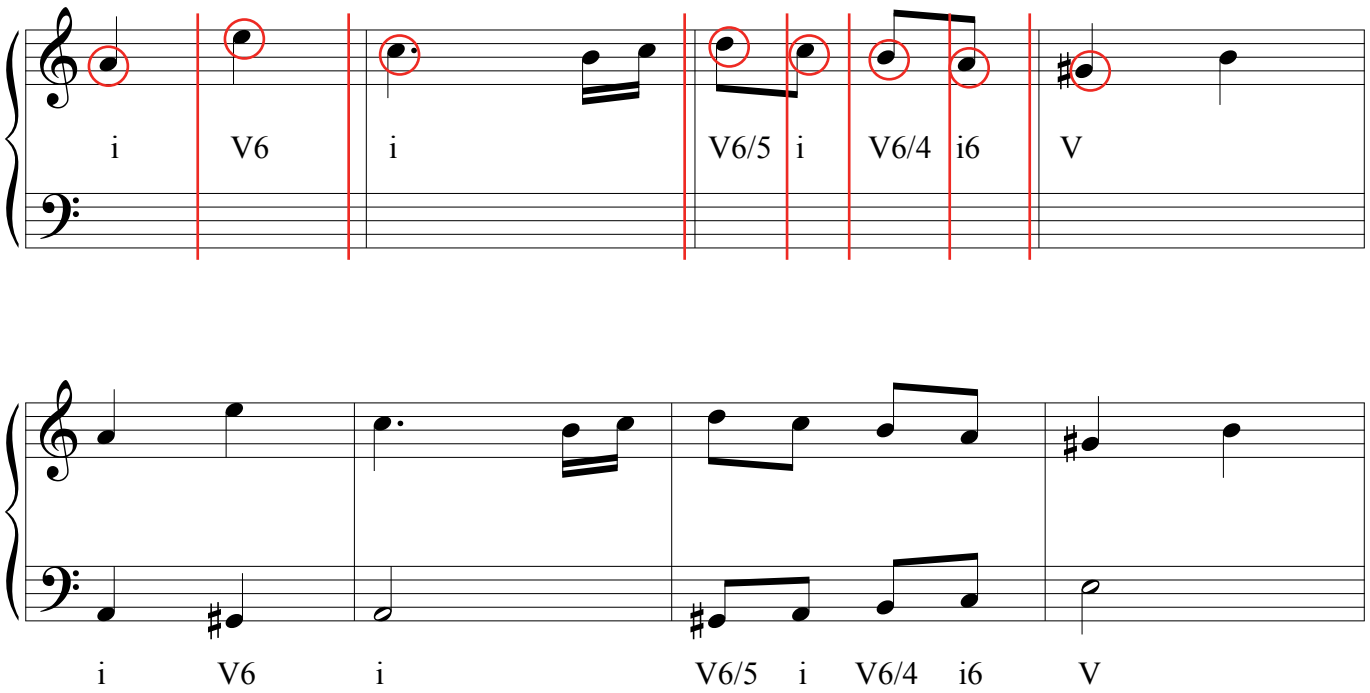
Finally, write a skeletal bass line that fits your harmonization and that makes good counterpoint with the main tones of your melody, probably one bass note per chord, a bass line that resembles the bass in a reduction, but with note values that fit the actual music.

Bear in mind that this will be first phrase of a parallel period, and so the end of the phrase should lead back to the beginning without voice-leading errors.

Remember that this is a more flexible assignment than the melody harmonizations from freshman harmony; if you run into difficulty, adjusting the melody is one of your options.

Here again are some examples; though the steps were done in order, the results of the first and second steps are shown together on the first example for each piece in progress.

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