

Composition Project, Step 3: Complete a Real Bass Line

The amount of work required in this step will vary considerably from piece to piece. Here you listen to your piece so far and decide if it sounds like real music, or if the skeletal bass line is clearly that – just the most significant notes from a real bass line.

Looking at the examples below and provided on the web site, you will see that in some cases the skeleton serves well as a real bass line, or else requires minimal embellishment, while in others the real bass line is considerably more elaborate than the skeleton. You will have to listen to your piece and decide what kind of bass line would serve it best.

Add whatever level of embellishment you feel is called for, taking care with the voice leading with the melody. Listen carefully for the level of rhythmic activity, and the ways in which your rhythms want to be continued. Some bass lines work well with uneven note values, but others create such consistent rhythmic patterns that they become features of the piece, and it would sound strange if the pattern were broken in the middle of the phrase. (An example is the staccato 8th motion in the minor example below.)

Examples:



A musical score in G major, 4/4 time, consisting of two staves. The upper staff contains a melody of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The lower staff contains a skeletal bass line of quarter notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4. Below the staves are Roman numeral chord symbols: I, V4/3, I6, 5/3, IV, I, V, V6/5, I, V4/2, I6, V.

I V4/3 I6 5/3 IV I V V6/5 I V4/2 I6 V



A musical score in G minor, 4/4 time, consisting of two staves. The upper staff contains a melody of quarter notes: G3, A3, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2. The lower staff contains a skeletal bass line of quarter notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4. Below the staves are Roman numeral chord symbols: i, V6, i, V6/5, i, V6/4, i6, V.

i V6 i V6/5 i V6/4 i6 V