

Interlude: Dissonance on the Strong Beat--Suspensions

Strong Beat Dissonances

In the second interlude we introduced embellishments on certain weak beats: beats 2 and 4 in 4/4 time. Now we will discuss the suspension, which is one of the primary sources of dissonance on the strong beat. The strong beats here occur on beats 1 and 3 in 4/4.

1. **Definition:** For now, we will define a suspension as a non-chord tone that delays a descending stepwise motion from one chord tone to the next by suspending (holding over) the note from the first chord into the time span of the second chord. For example, we might begin a two-voice counterpoint as in Example D-1a. The stepwise descent in the top voice could be delayed as in Example D-1b, forming a suspension (in parentheses). The suspension may be tied to the previous note or not tied; it is a suspension in either case.

Example D-1: Adding a Suspension

Example D-1 consists of two parts, a and b, on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). Part a shows a stepwise descent from G4 to F4. Part b shows a suspension where the G4 note from the first chord is held over into the second chord. Chord symbols are provided below the staff: D: I, vii⁰⁶, I, vii⁰⁶.

2. **Metric Restrictions:** For the purposes of this unit, suspensions may occur only on strong beats. This means that we will use suspensions in 4/4 on beats 1 and 3.

Suspensions in the Bass Voice

1. **The 2-3 Suspension:** The only bass suspension we will use is the 2-3 suspension. The "2-3" means that the suspension causes a dissonance of a 2nd (or octave equivalent) between the two voices, which then becomes a 3rd when the bass descends to its resolution, as in Example D-2.

Example D-2 consists of two parts on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab) and a common time signature (C). The bass voice has a suspension on the second beat. Chord symbols are provided below the staff: f: i, V⁶, i, V⁶. The suspension is labeled "2 - 3" above the staff.

Suspensions in the Top Voice

1. **The 7-6 Suspension:** The most successful top-voice suspension in a two-voice texture is one in which a suspended 7th resolves down to a 6th, as in Example D-3.

Example D-3: Adding a 7-6 Suspension

G: I vii^{O6} I vii^{O6}

2. **The 4-3 Suspension:** Also good is the 4-3 suspension, as in Example D-4, although this works somewhat better in fuller textures.

Example D-4: Adding a 4-3 Suspension

Bb: IV⁶ V IV⁶ V

3. **The 9-8 Suspension:** The 9-8 suspension tends to fall flat in two-voice textures (see Example D-5). It works much better when the bass arpeggiates at the same time as the top voice resolves the suspension (to be discussed below). Subtracting an octave from the 9-8 yields a 2-1 suspension, which should be avoided for now.

Example D-5: Adding a 9-8 Suspension

Eb: V I V I

Embellishments in the Other Voice

As the strong-beat suspension resolves down to its resolution on the weak beat, the other voice is free to arpeggiate to another chord tone (passing tones, however, seldom work as well). This changes the technical name of the suspension from 2-3, for example, to something like 2-6, but we aren't really concerned with the labels. If the suspension started out as one of the allowed types (2-3, 7-6, 4-3, 9-8), the arpeggiation will probably

be fine. In fact, the 9-8 suspension must be accompanied by arpeggiation to be effective in a two-voice texture. Several examples appear below.

Example D-6: Suspensions with Arpeggiation in the Other Voice

(2-3)
F: IV I⁶ IV I⁶ IV I⁶

(7-6)
C: V I⁶ V I⁶ V I⁶

(4-3)
b: iv V iv V iv V

(9-8)
Eb: V I V I V I

The Logic Behind Suspensions

You may wonder why only certain suspensions are used. All of the possible suspensions are listed below.

Suspension in the Top Voice	Suspension in the Bottom Voice
9-8 ? (OK)	8-9 diss. res.
8-7 diss. res.	7-8 ?
7-6 good	6-7 diss. res.
6-5 ?	5-6 possible
5-4 diss. res.	4-5 ?
4-3 good	3-4 diss. res.
3-2 diss. res.	2-3 good
2-1 ?	1-2 diss. res.

As the table shows, nearly half of the possible suspensions would "resolve" into a dissonance. This is like sitting down on a thumbtack, as far as tonal music is concerned, because dissonance itself requires resolution. For this reason, the suspensions labeled "diss. res." are not used. Five of the possible suspensions would resolve into perfect

consonances, which tend to have a more stark and hollow sound than do imperfect consonances. These suspensions are shown with question marks. The only one used with any frequency is the 9-8, and, as we have seen, it is usually converted into a 9-6 or a 9-3 by arpeggiation in the bass. The 5-6 suspension in the bass is "possible." It is less successful than the "good" ones largely because the 5-6 does not create a dissonance, as do the 7-6, 4-3, 9-8, and 2-3.

Where to Use Suspensions (see also Chapter 11: "Embellishing a Simple Texture")

To add the suspensions we have been discussing to a 1:1 framework, do the following:

1. Find a step down in the bass from a weak to a strong beat. Is the harmonic interval above the second bass note a 3rd? If so, the 2-3 suspension will work.
2. Find a step down in the top voice from a weak to a strong beat. Is the harmonic interval below the second note a 3rd, 6th, or 8ve? If so, the 4-3, 7-6, or 9-8 suspensions, respectively, will work. Remember that the 9-8 should have an arpeggiation in the bass.
3. Be sure to play the suspension to see if it gives you a good musical effect at that point. The object is not necessarily to add as many suspensions as possible.

A related problem is how to compose a progression to which suspensions could be added. Here are some suggestions (by no means exhaustive):

2-3: Use in a $I-V^6$ progression, or in any progression involving a root movement down a 4th, with only the second chord inverted.

7-6: Use in a $I^{(6)}-vii^{o6}$ progression, or in any progression with root movement down a 5th and the second chord inverted.

4-3: Use in any progression with root movement a 4th down or 2nd up, the second chord in root position in either case.

9-8: Generally best in ii-V and V-I progressions.

A two-voice 1:1 counterpoint is shown in Example D-7 with possible locations for suspensions indicated by an "X". Below that is an embellished version of the 1:1 framework, containing suspensions, passing tones, and arpeggiations.

Example D-7: An Embellished Framework

Bb: I V⁶ I V vi IV V I⁶ V vi I ii⁶ V I

Bb: I V⁶ I V vi IV V I⁶ V vi I ii⁶ V I

Self-Test

Self-Test D-1

A. After reviewing this interlude, especially the section titled, "Where to Use Suspensions," decide what one suspension would be best in each excerpt below. Then, using the blank staff, re-rotate the excerpt with the suspension and at least one additional embellishment. Remember to put parentheses around non-chord tones (but not around arpeggiations).

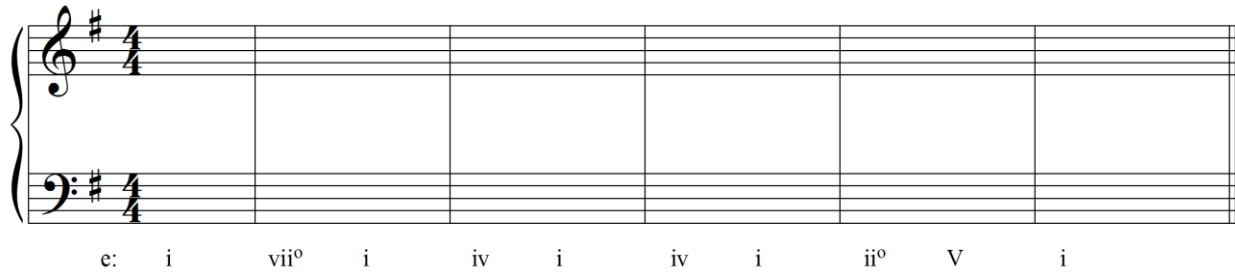
F: I⁶ V vi IV f#: i IV⁶ V⁶ i Bb: I⁶ IV V I d: i V⁶ V i

F: I⁶ V vi IV f#: i IV⁶ V⁶ i Bb: I⁶ IV V I d: i V⁶ V i

Self-Test D-2

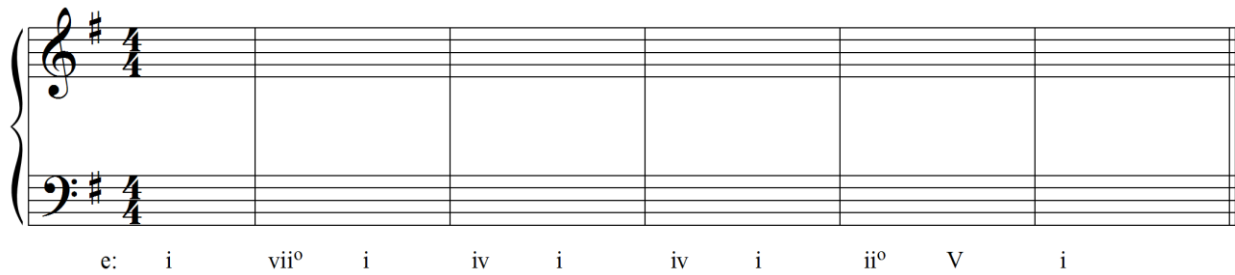
A. Using the following progression, compose 1:1 frameworks on the first staff, *changing chord inversions as appropriate*. Then, using the second staff, add embellishments—including at least one good suspension—to your 1:1 framework.

1:1 version



The image shows a musical score for a 1:1 exercise. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff, both in 4/4 time and the key of D major (one sharp). The score is divided into six measures. Below the staves, the chord progression is written as: e: i vii° i iv i iv i ii° V i

Embellished version



The image shows a musical score for an embellished version of the exercise. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff, both in 4/4 time and the key of D major (one sharp). The score is divided into six measures. Below the staves, the chord progression is written as: e: i vii° i iv i iv i ii° V i

Self-Test D-3

A. Compose a period in D Minor, ending the first phrase with an imperfect authentic cadence and the second phrase with a perfect authentic cadence. Then compose 1:1 and embellished versions by following the instructions from Self-Test D-2. Each phrase should be six measures in length, begin on the downbeat, and end with a whole note.

1:1 version

A musical staff for piano in D minor, 4/4 time, consisting of six measures. The treble clef has a flat sign, and the bass clef has a flat sign. The staff is currently empty.

d: _ _ _ _ _

A musical staff for piano in D minor, 4/4 time, consisting of six measures. The treble clef has a flat sign, and the bass clef has a flat sign. The staff is currently empty.

d: _ _ _ _ _

Embellished version

A musical staff for piano in D minor, 4/4 time, consisting of six measures. The treble clef has a flat sign, and the bass clef has a flat sign. The staff is currently empty.

d: _ _ _ _ _

A musical staff for piano in D minor, 4/4 time, consisting of six measures. The treble clef has a flat sign, and the bass clef has a flat sign. The staff is currently empty.

d: _ _ _ _ _