



EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

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In this presentation, you will learn the steps to follow when taking harmonic dictation.



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HARMONIC DICTATION

When taking harmonic dictation, concentrate on various aspects of the progression:

- Quality of the chords
- Function of the chords.
- Bass line
- The chord progression.

You might concentrate on these aspects in a different order than is presented here. That is okay. Use whatever order works for you.

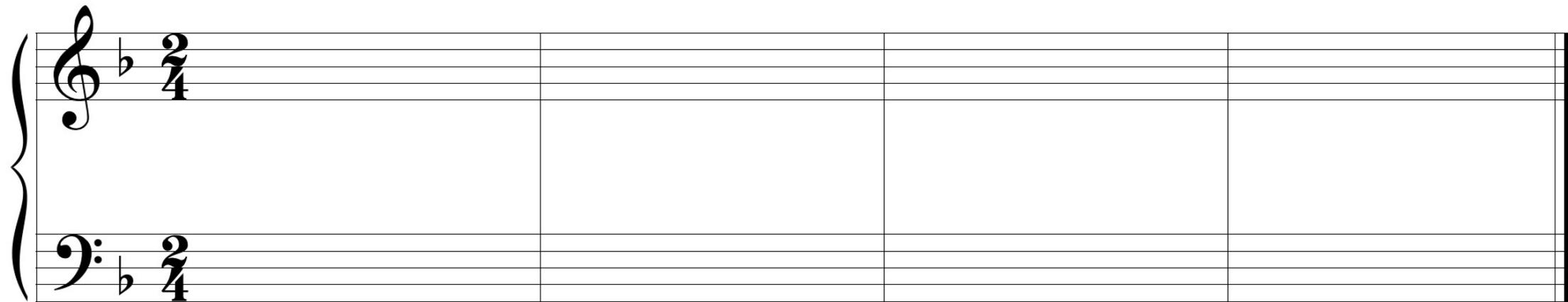
Let's try an example.

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

KEY

First, listen to the progression a few times.
Click on the sound icon anytime to hear the progression.

First, decide the key. This progression is in major.
Since there is one flat in the key signature, the key is F major.

A musical staff with two staves (treble and bass clefs) and a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 2/4 time signature. The staff is empty, intended for the student to write the harmonic dictation.

F major: _____

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

BEGINNING AND ENDING

Next, fill in any chords that you know.

Concentrate on determining the beginning and ending chords and the cadence (if you can).



A musical staff with two staves (treble and bass clefs) and a 2/4 time signature. The key signature is one flat (Bb). The staff is empty for chord dictation.

F major: _____

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

BEGINNING AND ENDING

Next, fill in any chords that you know.

Concentrate on determining the beginning and ending chords and the cadence (if you can).

This progression starts and ends on tonic (I).

The cadence at the end is an authentic cadence so the progression ends the chords V-I.

If you have been listening/practicing short chord progressions, you may already know some of the chords by recognizing the shorter progressions, but we will go through how to determine the chords using the elements we talked about earlier (quality, function, bass line, progression).



F major: I _____ _____ _____ _____ V I

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

CHORD QUALITY

First, concentrate on the **qualities of the triads** – are they major, minor, or diminished?
Once you think you have figured them out, click to see the answers.



M m M m M M M

F major: I _____ _____ _____ _____ V I

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ANALYSIS

If you know the function and the quality of the chords, you can sometimes figure out what the chords are.

For example, in a major key, if you know that a chord is **tonic in function** but **is minor in quality**, it must be a **vi** chord.

Likewise, if a chord is **pre-dominant in function** and **major**, then it is a **IV**, but if it is **minor** it is most likely a **ii**.



M	m	M	m	M	M	M
T	T	PD	PD	D	D	T

F major: I _____ _____ _____ _____ V I

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

ANALYSIS

Therefore, if we know the qualities and function of the chords below, we can sometimes guess the Roman numeral for the chords.

Try determining the chords below given the quality and function of the chords.
Click when you have your answers.



	M	m	M	m	M	M	M
	T	T	PD	PD	D	D	T

F major: **I** **vi** **IV** **ii** **V** **V** **I**

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

BASS LINE

Now listen to the bass line.

Knowing the bass line notes will help you to determine if any of the chords are in inversion or if they are not the chords you have guessed.

Play the progression again concentrating on the bass line. Click to see the correct bass line.



	M	m	M	m	M	M	M
	T	T	PD	PD	D	D	T

F major:

I vi IV ii V V I

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

BASS LINE

Now listen to the bass line.

Knowing the bass line notes will help you to determine if any of the chords are in inversion or if they are not the chords you have guessed.

Play the progression again concentrating on the bass line. Click to see the correct bass line.



M m M m M M M

T T PD PD D D T

F major: I vi IV ii V V I

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

BASS LINE

In most cases, the bass notes and the chords played match. For example, the second chord is a vi (minor tonic chord) and the sixth scale degree (D) is in the bass. Therefore, the analysis is a vi (root position).

However, there are two chords we need to take another look at -- the fourth and fifth chords (the ii and the first V).



M M M M M M M
T T PD PD D D T
F major: I vi IV ii V V I

The image shows a musical score for F major in 2/4 time. It consists of three systems of two staves each. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 2/4 time signature. The bottom staff is a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. Above the treble staff, chord symbols are written: M, m, M, m, M, M, M. Above the bass staff, the notes are written: F, D, Bb, D, F, Bb, F. The notes D, Bb, and F are highlighted with purple rectangular boxes. Below the bass staff, Roman numeral chord analysis is provided: I, vi, IV, ii, V, V, I. The Roman numerals vi, ii, and V are aligned with the purple boxes.

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

BASS LINE

We identified the fourth chord as a minor chord with a Pre-dominant function so it should be a minor ii.

However, there is a Bb in the bass - which is the third of a ii chord. Therefore, the chord must be in first inversion and should be identified as a **ii6**.



M m M m M M M

T T PD PD D D T

F major: I vi IV **ii6** V V I

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BASS LINE

Finally, let's look at chord 5. Listen to the progression again paying specific attention to this chord and the V after it.

Did you hear that these two chords were not the same? (Listen again if you did not hear the difference.)

Since chord 5 is not a V chord but has a dominant function and is major in quality, it must be a cadential 6/4 chord.



M m M m M M M

T T PD PD D D T

F major: I vi IV ii6 $V_{6/4}$ V I

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

THEORY KNOWLEDGE

Finally, listen again to be sure it matches the progression played and that the progression makes sense according to your theory knowledge.

From our theory knowledge, we know that tonic chords go to pe-dominant to dominant back to tonic. That is what we have in this progression.



M m M m M M M

T T PD PD D D T

F major: I vi IV ii6 I⁶₄ V I

The musical score is written in F major (one flat) and 2/4 time. It consists of three systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The first system contains two measures: the first measure has a tonic chord (I) and the second has a subdominant minor chord (vi). The second system contains two measures: the first has a predominant chord (PD) and the second has a predominant chord (PD). The third system contains three measures: the first has a tonic chord with a first inversion (I⁶₄), the second has a dominant chord (V), and the third has a tonic chord (I). The quality labels (M, m, PD, D, T) are placed above the treble staff, and the Roman numerals are placed below the bass staff.

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

THEORY KNOWLEDGE

We also know that within the function categories, primary chords (I, IV and V) usually come before secondary chords (vi, ii, and viio). That is also what happens in this progression.

And, finally, the cadential 6⁴ chord comes before the V at the cadence – which also happens here.



The musical score is for F major in 2/4 time. It consists of three systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The chords and their functional labels are as follows:

System	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4	Measure 5	Measure 6	Measure 7
Function Labels	M	m	M	m	M	M	M
Chord Labels	T	T	PD	PD	D	D	T
Chord Symbols	I	vi	IV	ii ⁶	I ⁶ ₄	V	I

EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

THEORY KNOWLEDGE

Since this progression looks right theoretically and matches the chords we hear, we can be sure that this progression is correct.

Listen once more to be sure.



M m M m M M M

T T PD PD D D T

F major: I vi IV ii6 I⁶₄ V I

The musical score is written in F major (one flat) and 2/4 time. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains chord symbols: M, m, M, m, M, M, M. The bass staff contains chord symbols: T, T, PD, PD, D, D, T. The bass staff also contains a sequence of notes: F, C, F, C, F, C, F. The notes are: F (quarter), C (quarter), F (quarter), C (quarter), F (quarter), C (quarter), F (half).



EAR TRAINING – HARMONIC DICTATION

HARMONIC DICTATION

In summary:

When taking harmonic dictation, remember to concentrate on various aspects of the progression:

- Quality of the chords.
- Function of the chords.
- Bass line.
- The chord progression.

You can do these steps in any order you want as long as it works for you.

The main thing to remember is to use your theory knowledge along with what you hear to determine the chords played.

Now try some of the melodic dictation exercises available on [MusicTheoryMaterials.utk.edu](https://www.musictheorymaterials.utk.edu)



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