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Resolving V⁷/V to V or V⁷

Dr. Paula J. Telesco

I. Basic Principles:

1. A secondary dominant is a type of *borrowed* chord: it is the dominant chord borrowed from the key of the chord it is tonicizing.
2. Recall that a V⁷/V is an altered ii⁷ chord. Be sure to include all necessary accidentals to create the V⁷/V, a Mm7 chord. That means raising the 3rd of the ii⁷ in a major key, and both the 3rd and 5th of the ii^{o7} in a minor key.
3. Remember that when a root position V⁷ resolves to a root position tonic, if you resolve the tendency tones correctly, the tonic chord is incomplete: it has 3 roots and a third (no 5th). The exception to this is at a cadence, where the 3rd of the V⁷ (*ti*) may resolve down to the 5th of the tonic chord (*sol*) in an inner voice, typically the alto, in order to conclude a phrase with a complete tonic chord (2 roots, a 3rd, and a 5th). However, when the V⁷ is inverted, its root stays as a common tone in the tonic chord of resolution, resulting in a doubled root, a 3rd, and a 5th.

The same will be true when resolving a V⁷/V to V. To resolve, think in terms of the *temporary* key (the key being tonicized) and resolve *tendency tones* with respect to the *tonicized* key:

- *Ti* goes **up** to *Do* (unless at a cadence, as shown in the Exception examples below.)
- *Fa* goes **down** to *Mi*
- *Re* goes **down** to *Do*
- *Sol* goes to *Do* if in root position (root to root in the bass), or stays as a common tone if inverted.

Thus, the third of the V⁷/V (the leading tone of the tonicized key) resolves up by step, while the 5th and 7th of the chord resolve down by step, just as when a primary V⁷ resolves to its tonic.

4. Don't double the Leading Tone in the tonicized V chord: if you resolve the tendency tones correctly, you will not have this problem.
5. Avoid Parallel 5ths and 8vas: again, if you resolve tendency tones correctly, you will not have this problem.
6. Finally, remember that when you are in a minor key, you must add the accidental for the Leading Tone in the tonicized V chord.

Major Key

a. b. c. d. e. Exception

G: V⁷/V V V⁹/V V V^{4/3}/V V V^{4/2}/V V⁶ V⁷/V V

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Minor Key

Five examples (a-e) showing chord resolutions in a minor key. Each example consists of a treble and bass clef staff. Arrows indicate voice leading between notes of the first and second chords. Example 'e' is labeled 'Exception'.

a. $g: V^7/V \quad V$
 b. $V^6/V \quad V$
 c. $V^4_3/V \quad V$
 d. $V^4_2/V \quad V^6$
 e. Exception $V^7/V \quad V$

II. If there is a *chromatic half step*, keep it in a single voice: Since the V⁷/V is an altered ii⁷ chord, it is very often preceded by the diatonic ii or ii⁷ (note, however, that ii^o is rarely used in root position). The ii chord contains $\hat{4}$; the V⁷/V contains $\#\hat{4}$. To maintain smooth voice leading, keep the chromatic half-step ($\hat{4}-\#\hat{4}/fa-fi$) in a single voice :

Major Key

Six examples (a-f) showing chord resolutions in a major key. Each example consists of a treble and bass clef staff. Arrows indicate voice leading between notes of the first and second chords.

a. $ii \quad V^7/V \quad V$
 b. $ii^7 \quad V^7/V \quad V$
 c. $ii^6 \quad V^6_3/V \quad V$
 d. $ii^6_3 \quad V^6_3/V \quad V$
 e. $ii^4_3 \quad V^4_3/V \quad V$
 f. $ii^4_2 \quad V^4_2/V \quad V^6$

Minor Key

Six examples (a-f) showing chord resolutions in a minor key. Each example consists of a treble and bass clef staff. Arrows indicate voice leading between notes of the first and second chords.

a. $ii^o \quad V^7/V \quad V$
 b. $ii^{o7} \quad V^7/V \quad V$
 c. $ii^{o6} \quad V^6_3/V \quad V$
 d. $ii^{o6}_3 \quad V^6_3/V \quad V$
 e. $ii^{o4}_3 \quad V^4_3/V \quad V$
 f. $ii^{o4}_2 \quad V^4_2/V \quad V^6$

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III. Avoid Cross Relations: When the chromatic half step occurs between different voices, this is referred to as a *cross relation*; these should be avoided:

Two musical examples, labeled 'a.' and 'b.', illustrating cross relations. Each example shows a two-staff system (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of one sharp (F#).
 Example 'a.' shows a progression: ii (F#m), V⁷/V (D7), and V (D). A chromatic half step occurs between the 3rd of V⁷/V (F#) and the 7th of V (F#).
 Example 'b.' shows a progression: ii⁷ (F#m7), V⁷/V (D7), and V (D). A chromatic half step occurs between the 3rd of V⁷/V (F#) and the 7th of V (F#).

Exception: a cross relation may be used as part of a chromatic voice exchange, as shown in IV.d., below.

IV. Chromatic Voice Exchange: If the V⁷/V is approached as part of a voice exchange, with the V⁷/V substituting for the ii⁶ or ii⁵, there will be a *chromatic voice exchange*. Recall that you may find a passing I₄ between IV⁶ and IV (example a) within a diatonic voice exchange. A ii⁶ (example b) or ii⁵ (example c) may substitute for the IV chord. Notice that if the V₃⁶/V is used in place of the ii⁵, there is a chromatic voice exchange (which includes, therefore, an acceptable cross relation).

Four musical examples, labeled 'a.', 'b.', 'c.', and 'd.', illustrating chromatic voice exchange. Each example shows a two-staff system with a key signature of one sharp (F#).
 Example 'a.' shows a diatonic voice exchange: I (C), IV⁶ (F), I₄ (C), IV (F), V (C).
 Example 'b.' shows a chromatic voice exchange: I (C), IV⁶ (F), I₄ (C), ii⁶ (D), V (C).
 Example 'c.' shows a chromatic voice exchange: I (C), IV⁶ (F), I₄ (C), ii⁵ (D), V (C).
 Example 'd.' shows a chromatic voice exchange: I (C), IV⁶ (F), I₄ (C), V₃⁶/V (D), V (C).

V. Resolving V⁷/V to V⁷: When resolving a V⁷/V to a V⁷ chord (as opposed to the V triad), think again in terms of the *temporary key* (the key being tonicized) and resolve *tendency tones* with respect to the tonicized key, as above, with one exception: instead of taking the leading tone of the tonicized key up to its tonic, take it down by chromatic half step, to the 7th of the V⁷ chord (i.e., *fi-fa* in the primary key). Thus, 5th and 7th of the chord move down by step, and the 3rd moves down by chromatic half step.

Four musical examples, labeled 'a.', 'b.', 'c.', and 'd.', illustrating the resolution of V⁷/V to V⁷. Each example shows a two-staff system with a key signature of one sharp (F#).
 Example 'a.' shows V⁷/V (D7) resolving to V⁷ (D7).
 Example 'b.' shows V₃⁶/V (D) resolving to V₂ (D).
 Example 'c.' shows V₃⁴/V (D) resolving to V⁷ (D).
 Example 'd.' shows V₃³/V (D) resolving to V₅ (D).