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Choosing chords for a melody

To harmonize a melody, you choose the chords to play under it. Three questions do the work: **which chords own the important notes**, **how often to change**, and **where each phrase ends**.

WHO OWNS THIS NOTE?

Every note of the key belongs to three of its seven chords (Handout 357). The notes on the **strong beats**, 1 and 3 in 4/4, choose the chord: it must contain them.

Notes in between may be **visitors** that step in and out (Handout 234). In bar 2 below, F and A both fit **IV** and **ii**; the G just steps through.

C	D	E	F	G	A	B
I C	ii Dm	I C	ii Dm	I C	ii Dm	iii Em
IV F	V G	iii Em	IV F	iii Em	IV F	V G
vi Am	vii° B°	vi Am	vii° B°	V G	vi Am	vii° B°

Each note of C major and the three chords that contain it. **Dashed chips** (iii, vii°) are rarely used to harmonize. G7 also owns F.

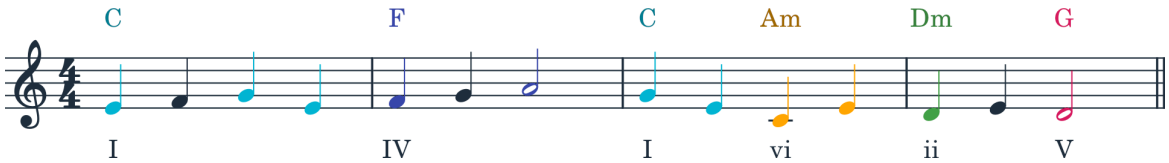
HOW OFTEN? HARMONIC RHYTHM

Harmonic rhythm is how often the chords change. Both lines carry the same tune. A colored note belongs to the chord above it; an ink note is a visitor. Line B changes on beat 3 where the strong-beat notes allow a new chord, and speeds up toward the end of the phrase.

Line A
one chord a bar: calm



Line B
two chords a bar in bars 3–4: it pushes toward the cadence



PLAN THE ENDING FIRST

Both lines stop on **V**: a half cadence, a comma (Handout 232). The answer phrase, bars 5–8, must close with **V7 → I**, a full stop. Plan the cadences first, fill the middle with I, IV and V, then add color: vi can stand in for I and ii for IV, because each shares two notes with it, and ii can lead into V (bar 4).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Ends first				V			V7	I
2 Fill the middle	I	IV	I	V	I	IV	V7	I
3 Add color	I	IV	I vi	ii V	I vi	ii	V7	I

Bars 5–8
the answer phrase, after pass 3



Try it Harmonize all 12 bars of **Twinkle, Twinkle**, as in Exercise 46, with this plan: bars 4 and 12 close V → I, bars 6 and 8 stop on V. Its strong beats ask for a new chord every two beats in most bars. Then compare with the chords there, and try ii or vi where IV or I fits.

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