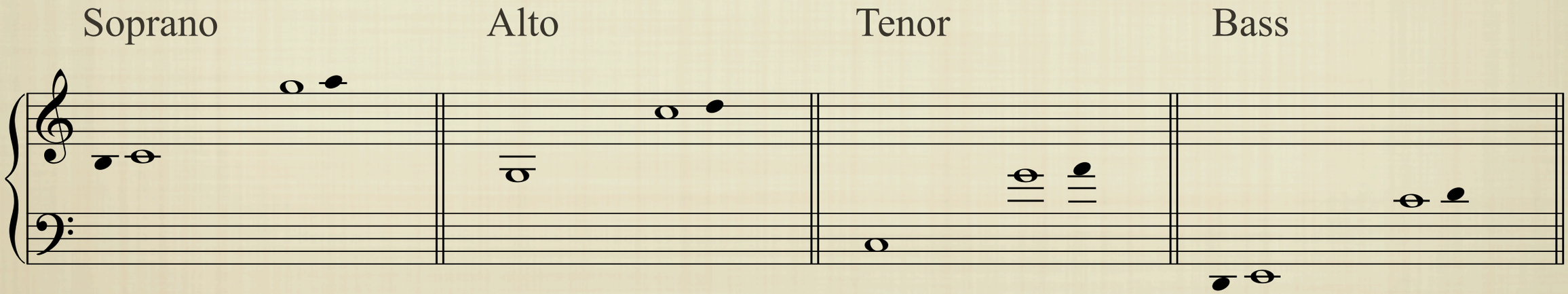
Procedures of Four-Part Writing

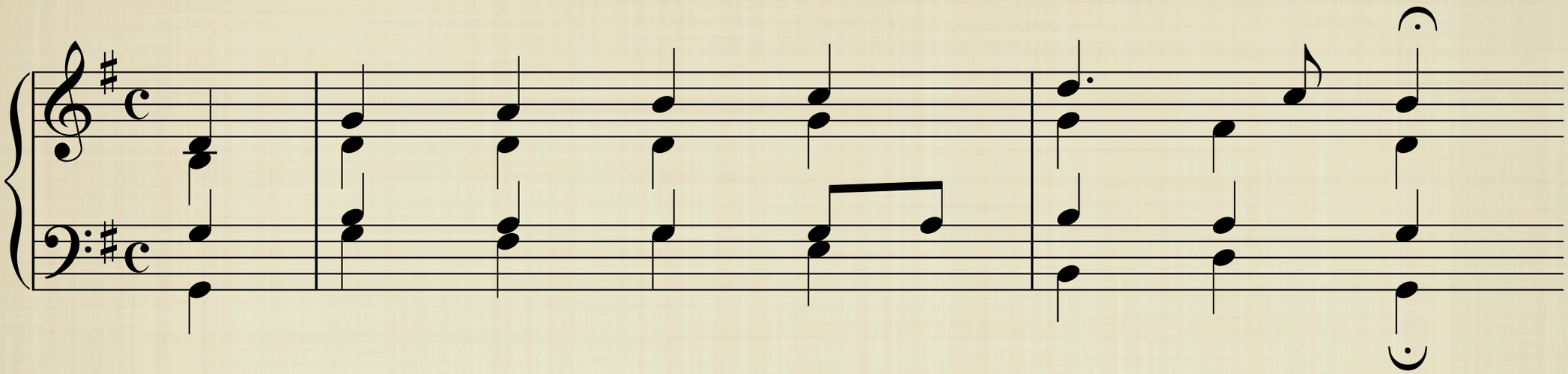
Chord Construction and Voice-Leading

Four Voices

- Soprano
- Alto
- Tenor
- Bass



Notation Style



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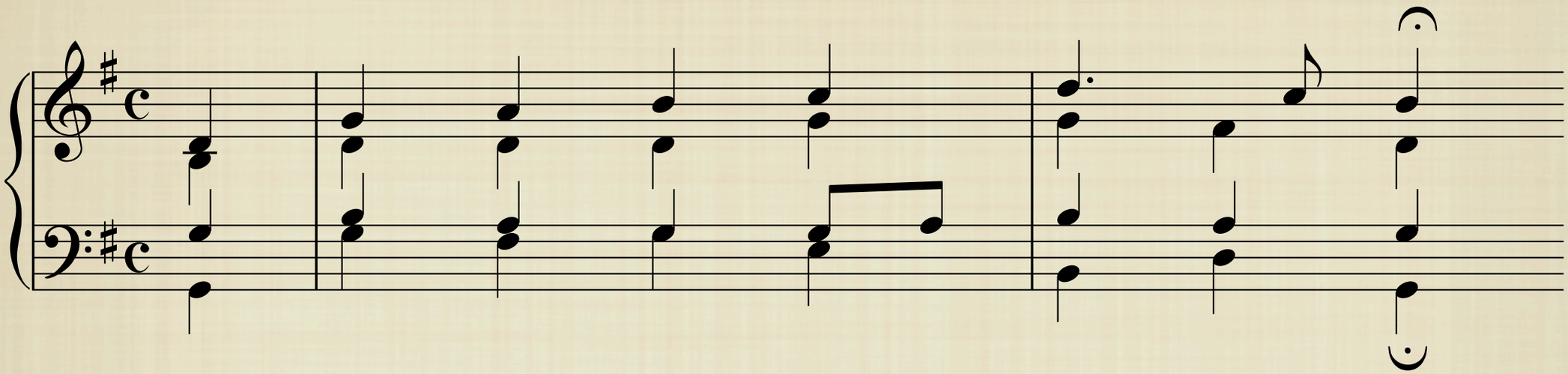

- Soprano and alto in the treble clef

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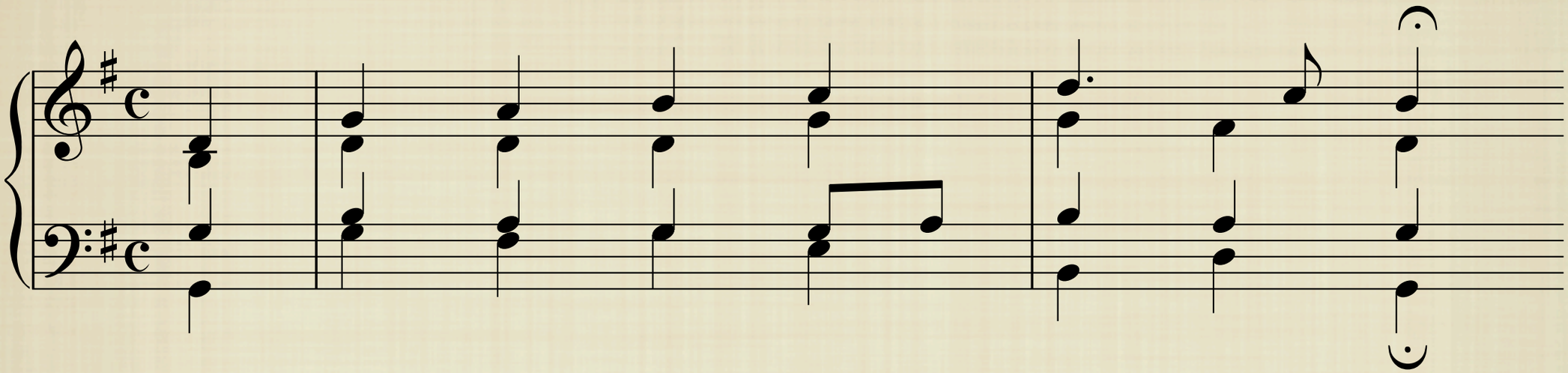

- Soprano and alto in the treble clef
- Bass and tenor in the bass clef

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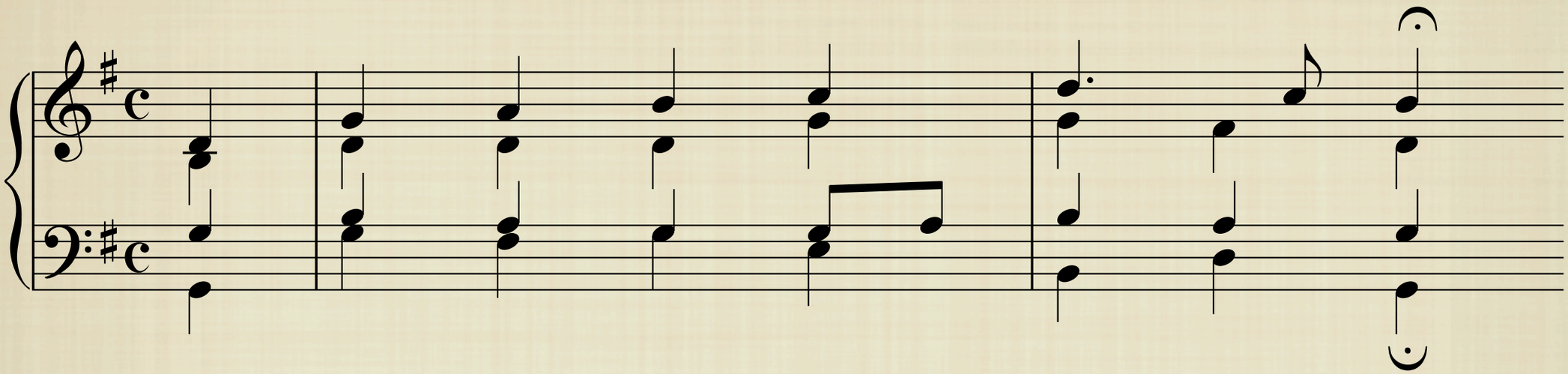

- Soprano and alto in the treble clef
- Bass and tenor in the bass clef
- Stems distinguish one voice from another

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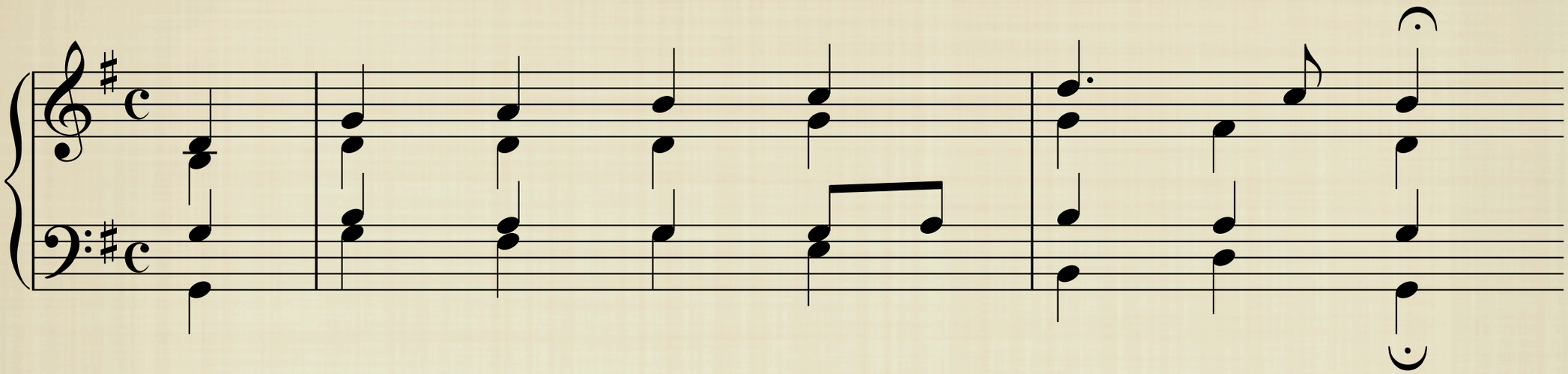


- Soprano and alto in the treble clef
- Bass and tenor in the bass clef
- Stems distinguish one voice from another
- Note the unison on the third beat

Doubling

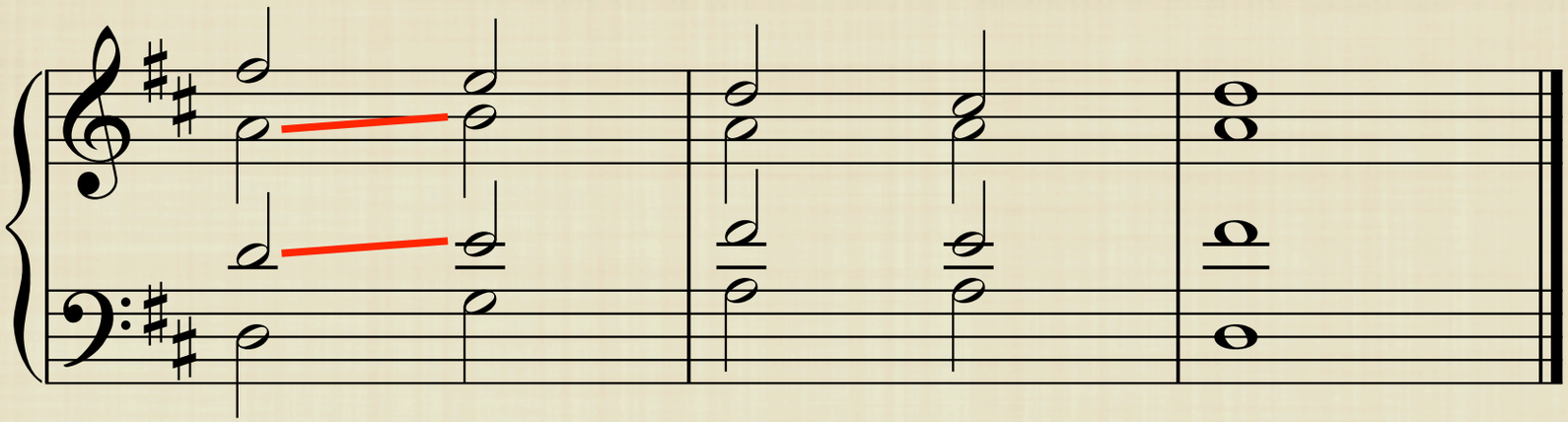
- All else being equal, it's best to double the root
- However, any note of a chord may be doubled *unless* it is a note which requires a specific resolution, such as:
  - The 7th of a seventh chord
  - The leading tone

Doubling

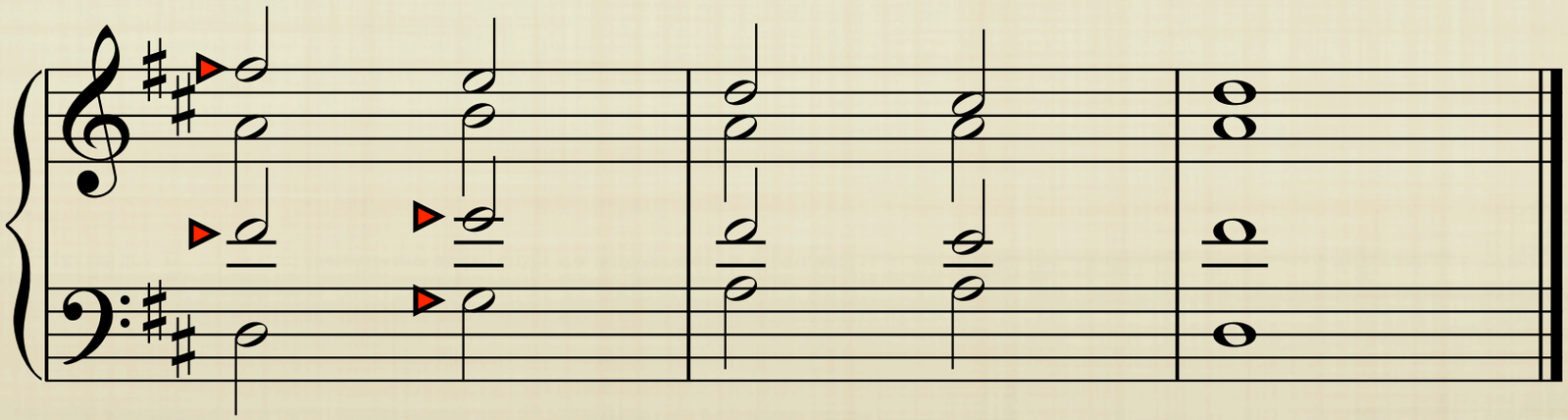
- Do not think of “double the root” as a hard-and-fast rule.
- A progression can be vastly improved sometimes by doubling notes other than the root.

Doubling

In this first example, doubling the root of the first two chords results in a parallel fifth (an illegal motion) being written between the two inner voices.



In this revision, the third of each chord is doubled (between tenor and soprano in the first chord, and between bass and tenor in the second chord) and solves the problem.



Complete and Incomplete Chords

- Chords are *complete* when they contain at least one instance of each chord element (root, 3rd, 5th, etc.)
- Chords are *incomplete* when one of those elements is missing.

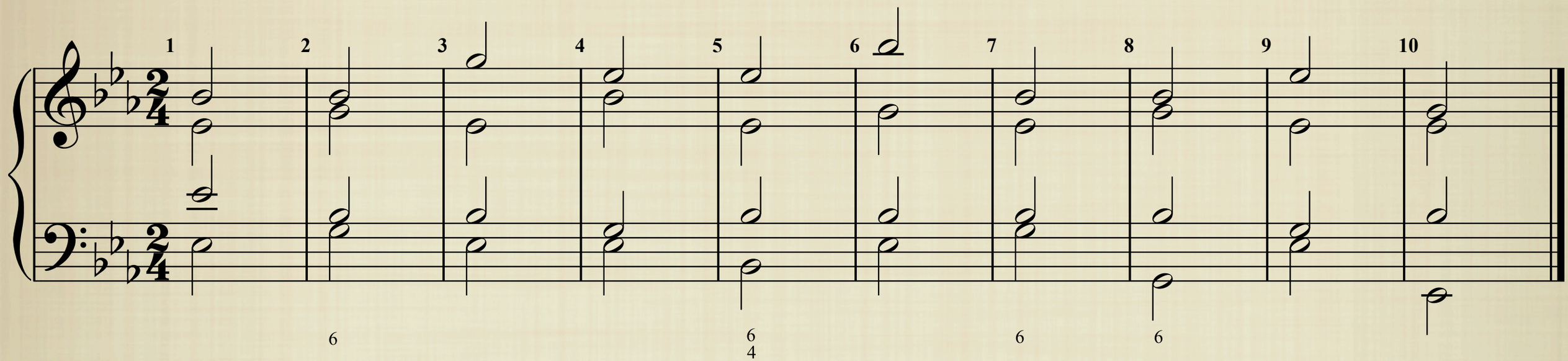
Incomplete Chords

- It is sometimes necessary to write incomplete chords to avoid problems with voice-leading.
  - Do not write incomplete chords in inversions
  - Generally speaking double (or triple) the root and omit the fifth of the chord
  - *Never* omit the 3rd of a chord!

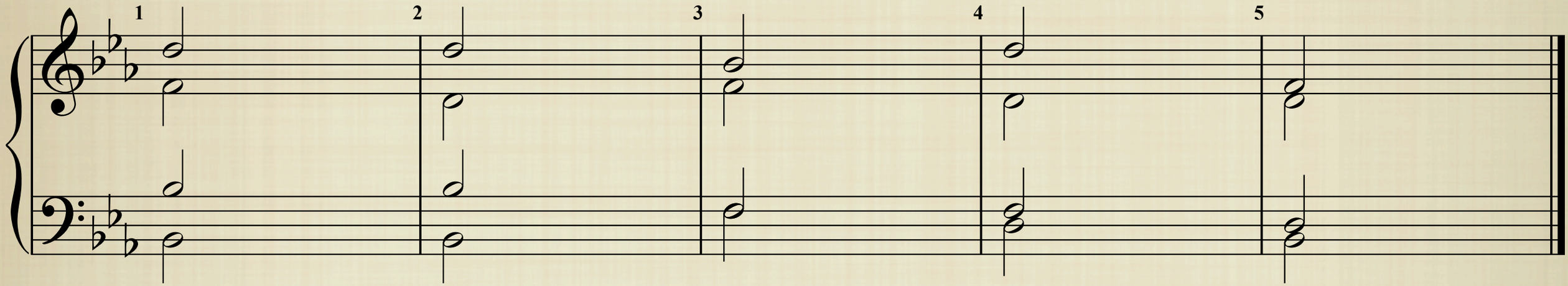
Spacing

- Do not allow more than one octave between two *adjacent* voices
- Between bass and tenor the distance may be as much as two octaves

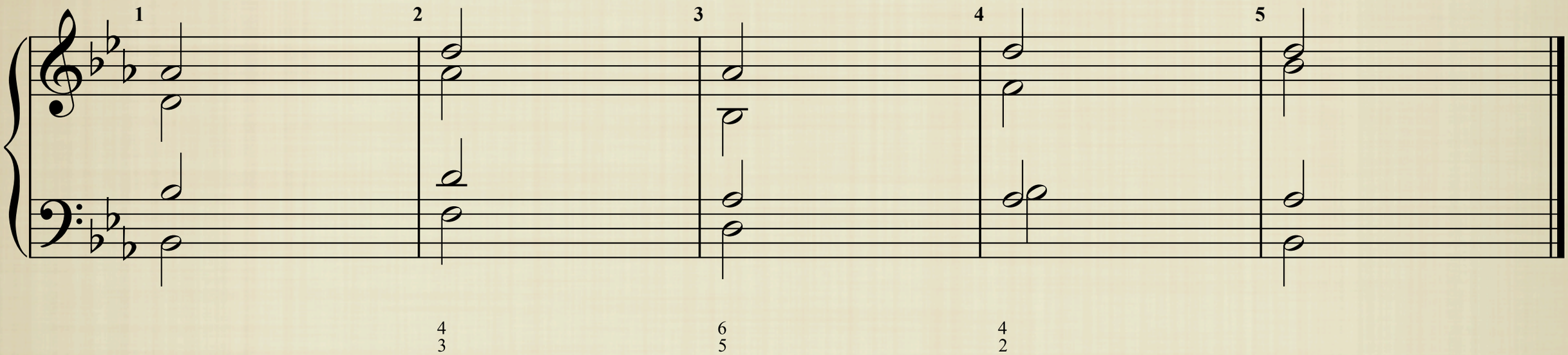
Exercises: Tonic Triad



Exercises: Dominant Triad



Exercises: Dominant 7th Chord



Open and Close Position

- Open: a chord element could be placed between any two of the upper three voices
- Close: no chord elements could be placed between any of the upper three voices

Identifying Close and Open

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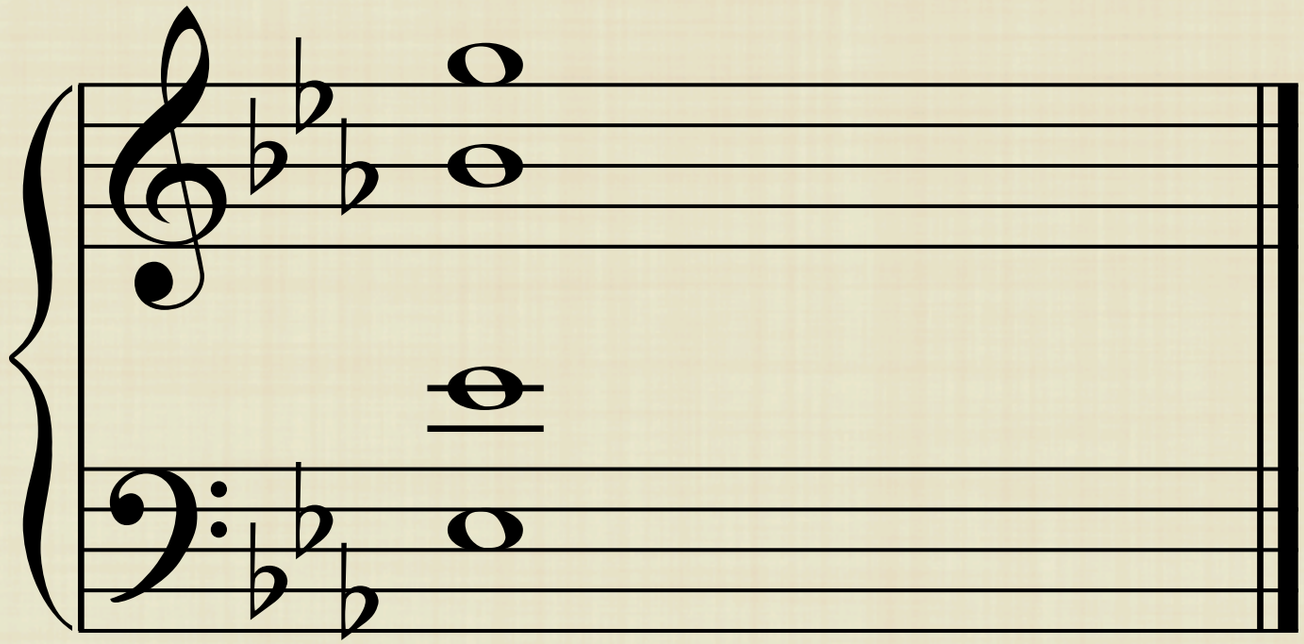

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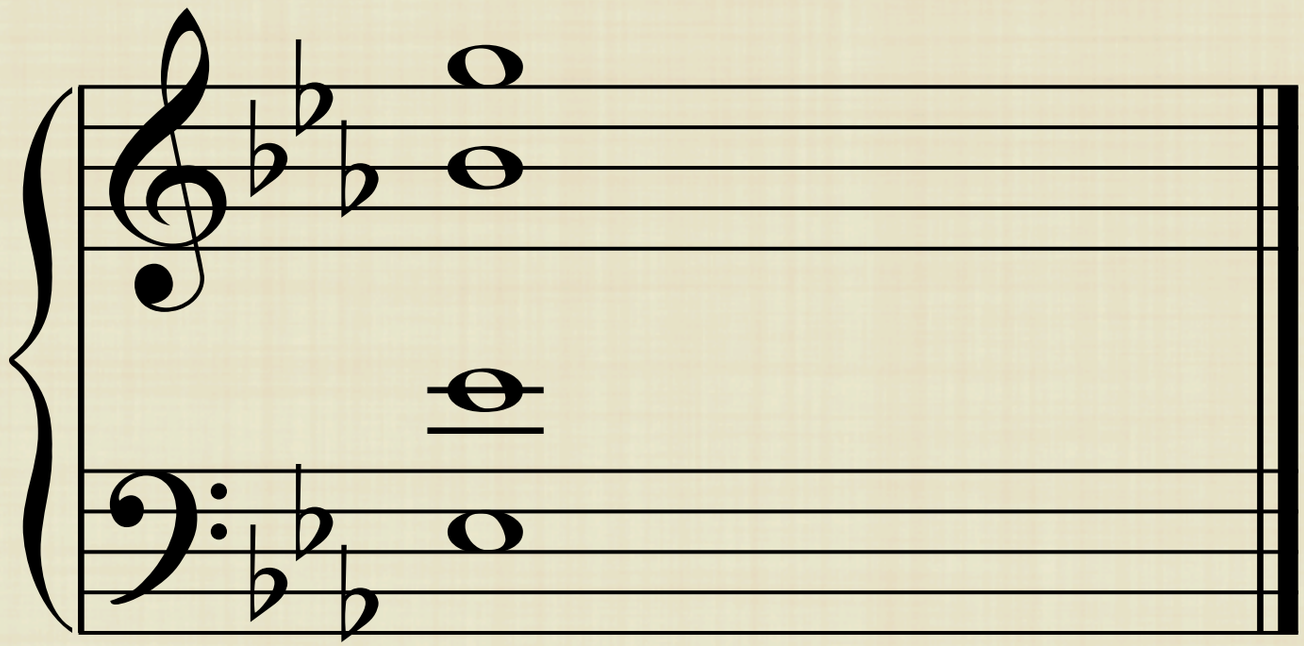

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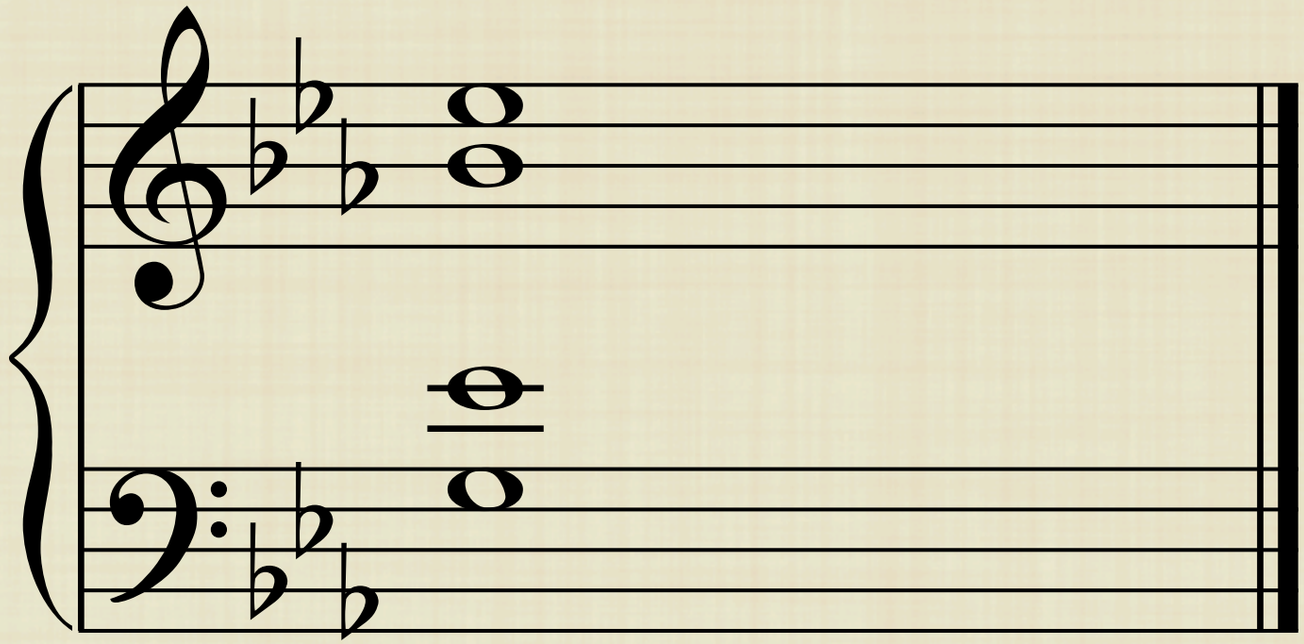

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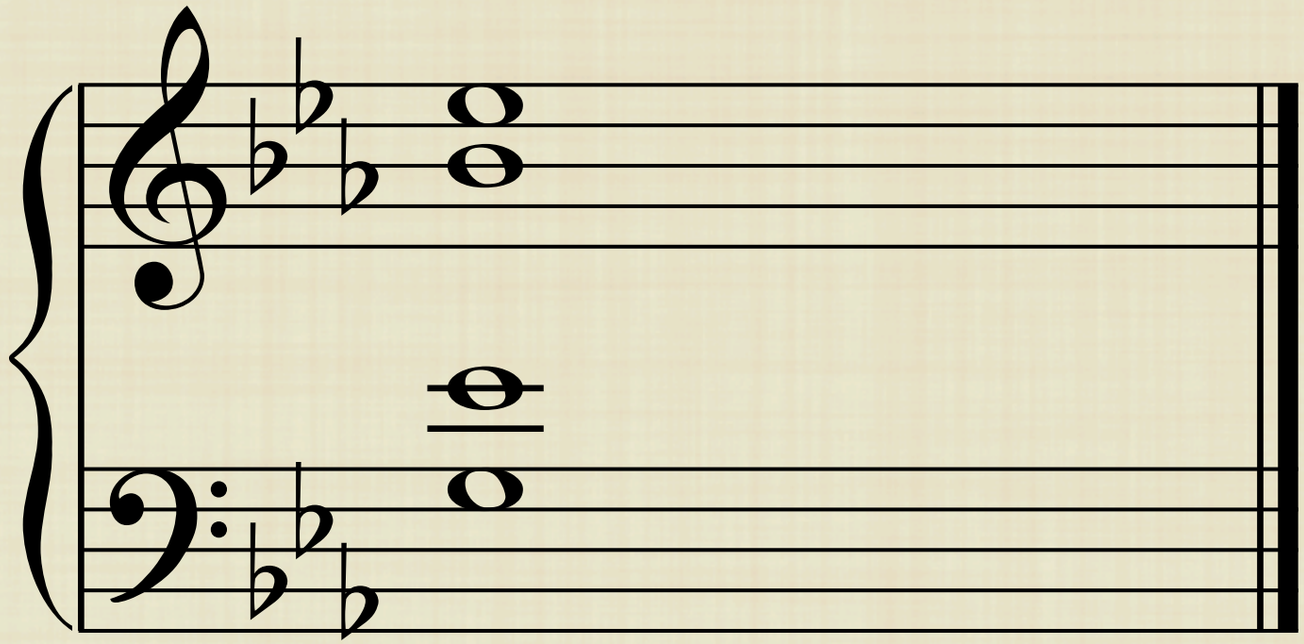

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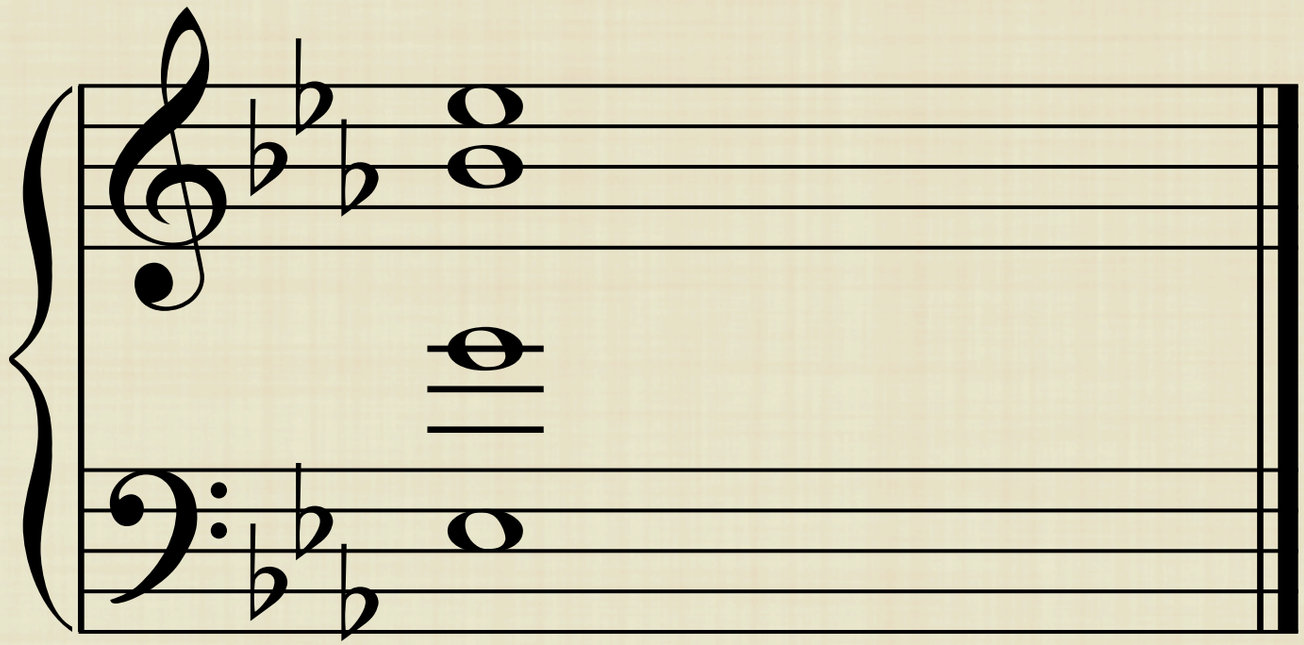

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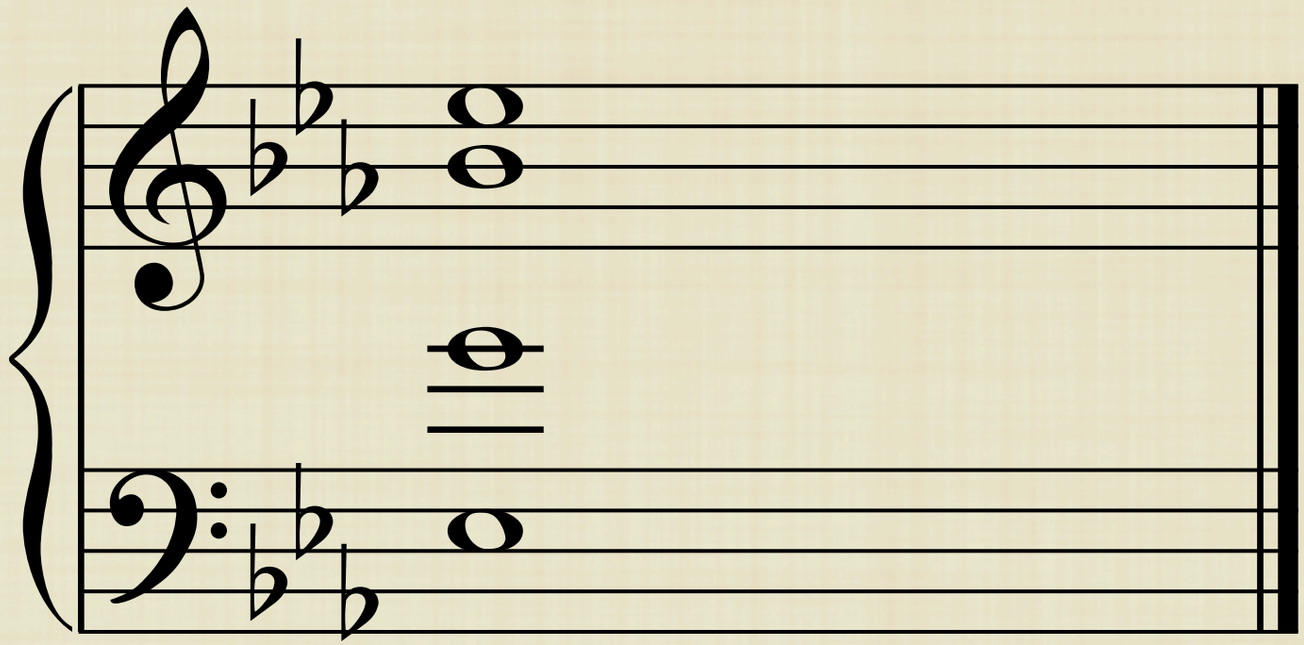

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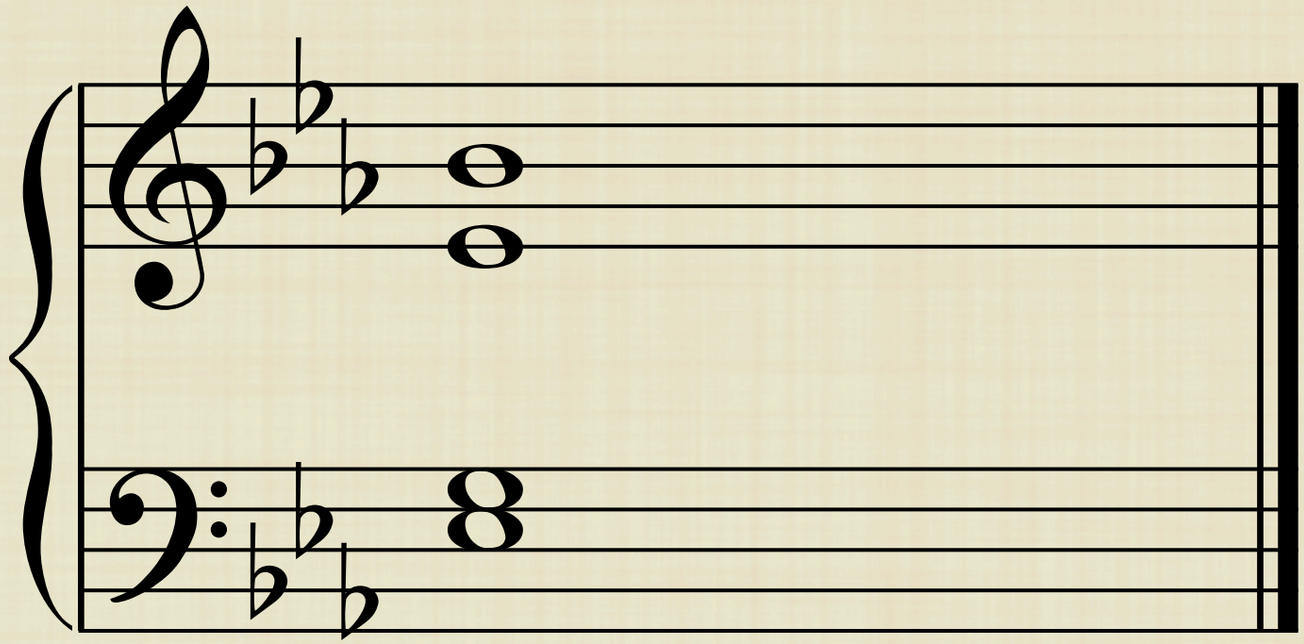

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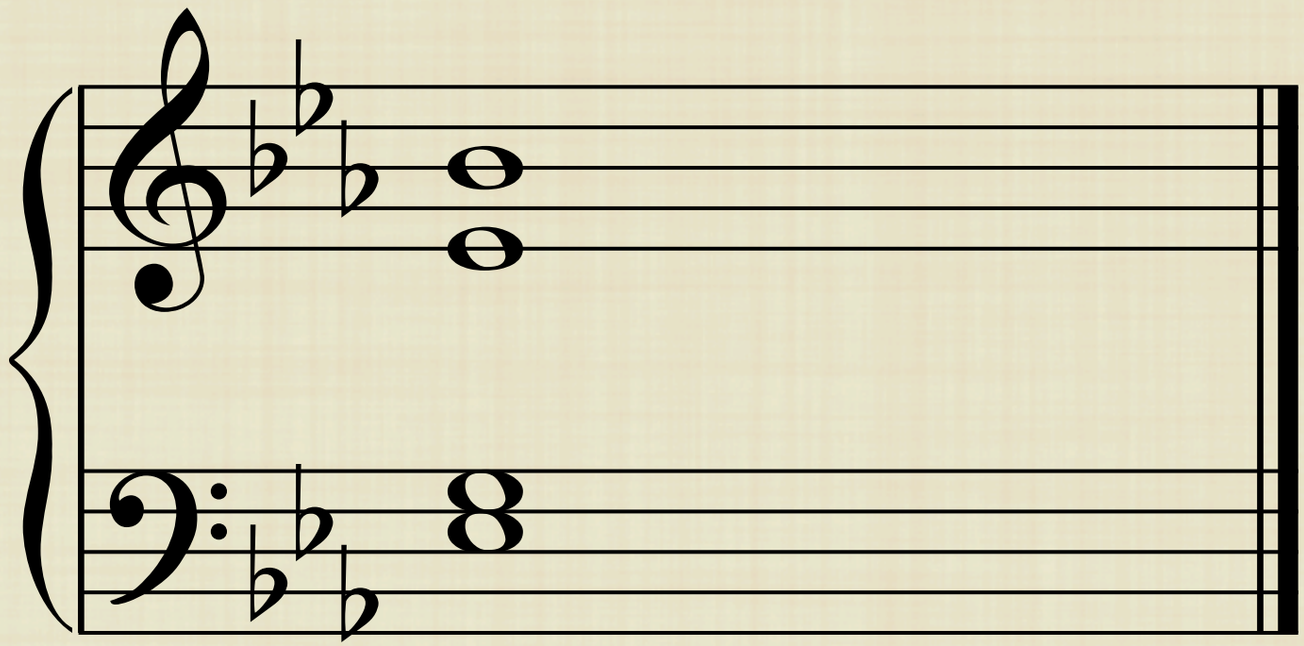

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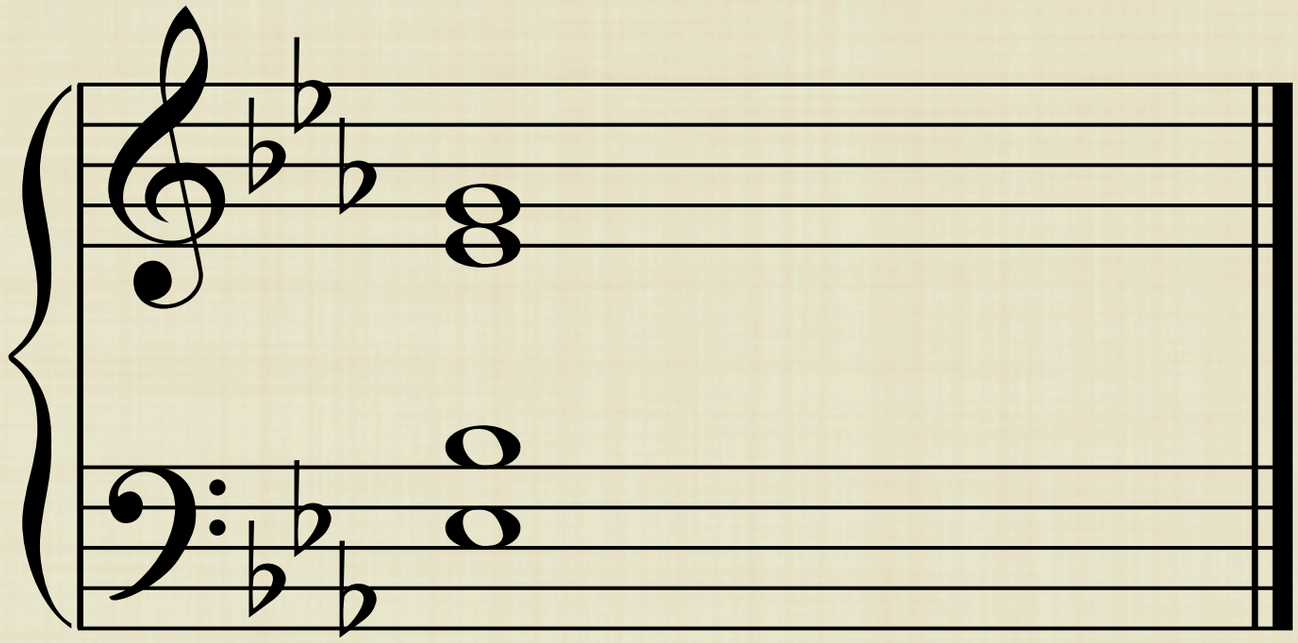

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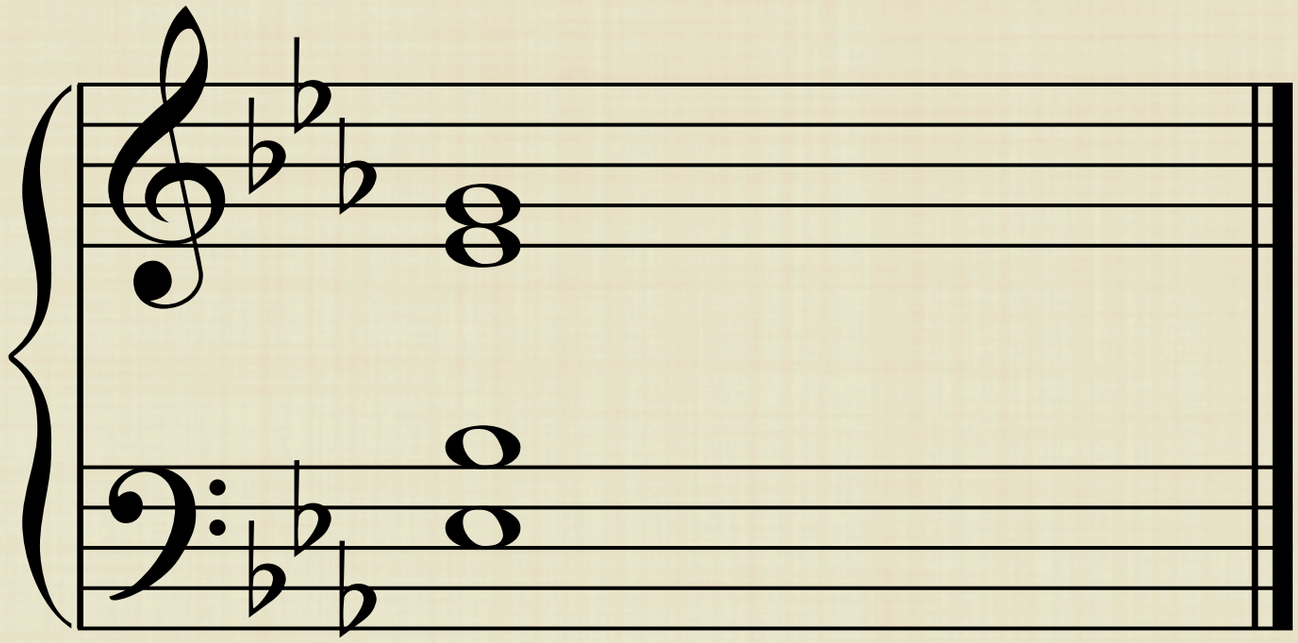
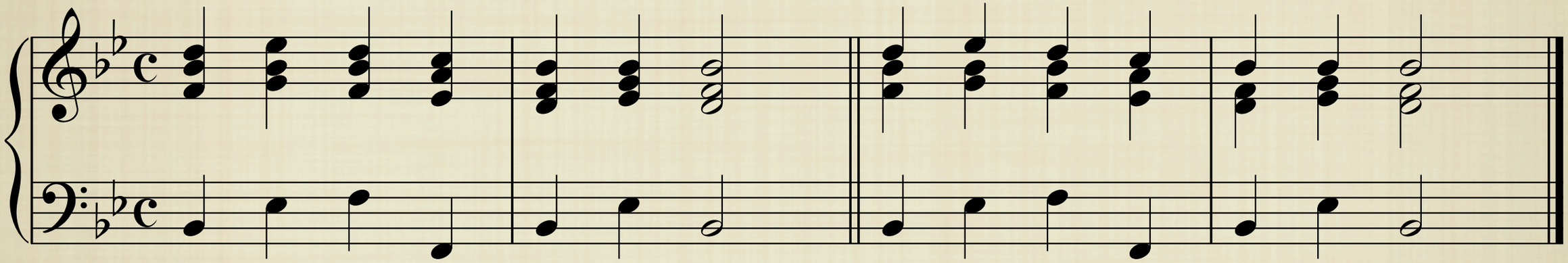


Close

Keyboard Style

- Comes from the old system of "realizing" a figured bass line
- The right hand is used to play the upper three voices, while the left hand plays the bass
- The upper three voices are written in the treble clef, while the bass line is written in the bass
- The soprano line may or may not be stemmed separately from the alto and tenor

Keyboard Style



Melodic Motion

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- Conjunct Motion

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- Disjunct Motion

Leaps

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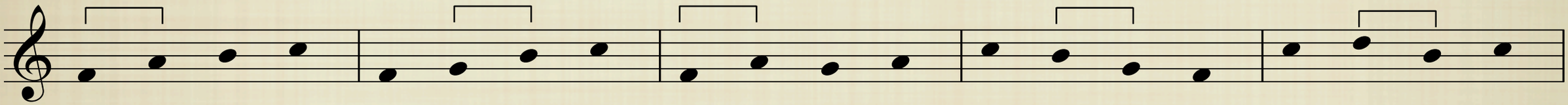
  - Generally after a larger leap, return stepwise in the opposite direction whenever possible
- Do not allow a leap of an augmented second

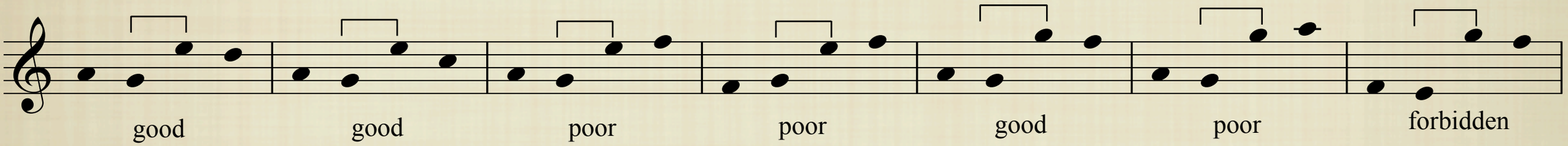
Leaps

These are all good



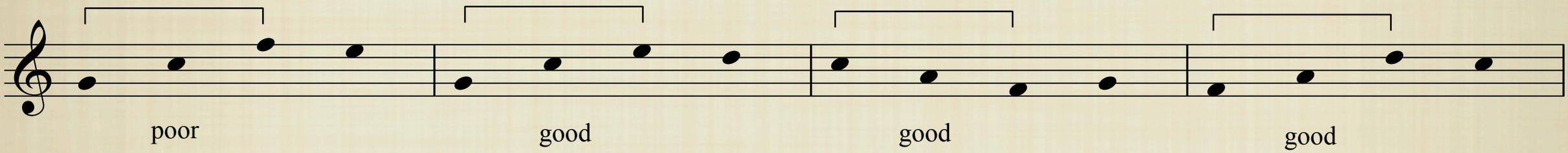
Leaps

These are leaps involving sixths and above



Leaps

Multiple leaps, some good, some not



Simultaneous Motion

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- **Parallel** Motion
  - Both voices move in the same direction and retain the same interval between them

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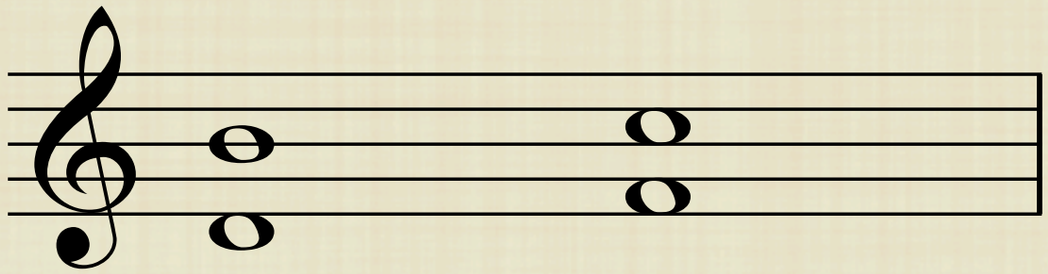
- **Oblique** Motion
  - Only one voice moves while the other remains stationary

Simultaneous Motion

- **Parallel** Motion
  - Both voices move in the same direction and retain the same interval between them
- **Similar** Motion
  - Both voices move in the same direction, but the interval between them changes
- **Oblique** Motion
  - Only one voice moves while the other remains stationary
- **Contrary** Motion
  - The voices move in opposite directions

Simultaneous Motion

Simultaneous Motion



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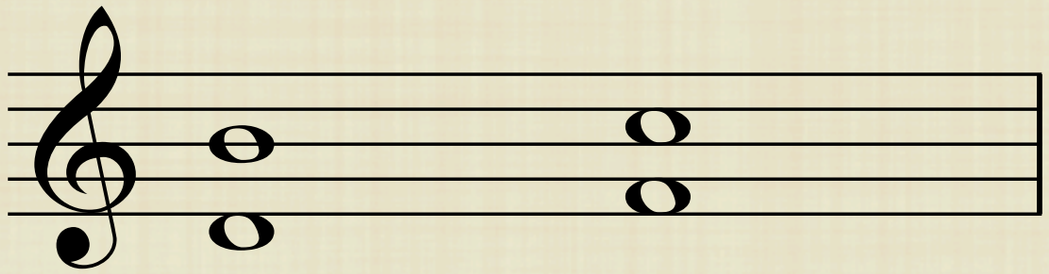
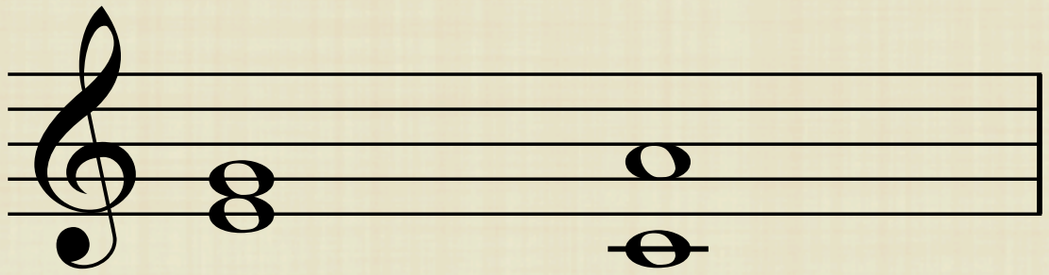


Similar

Simultaneous Motion

Simultaneous Motion



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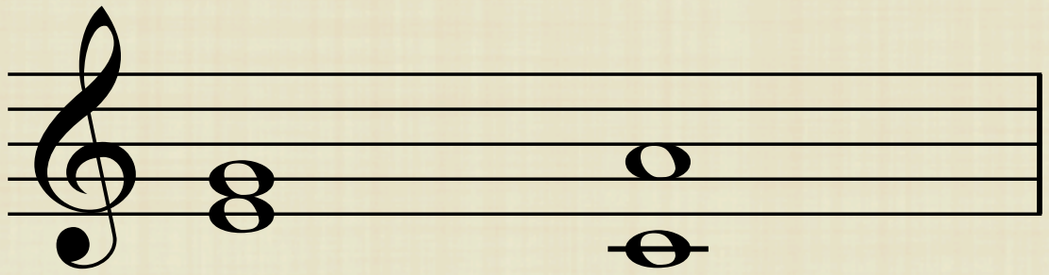

Contrary

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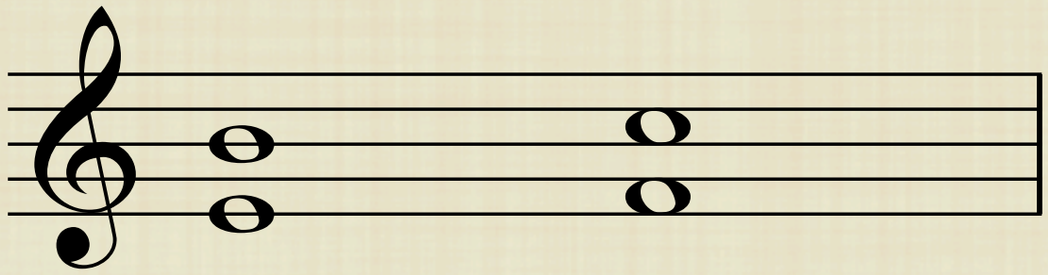

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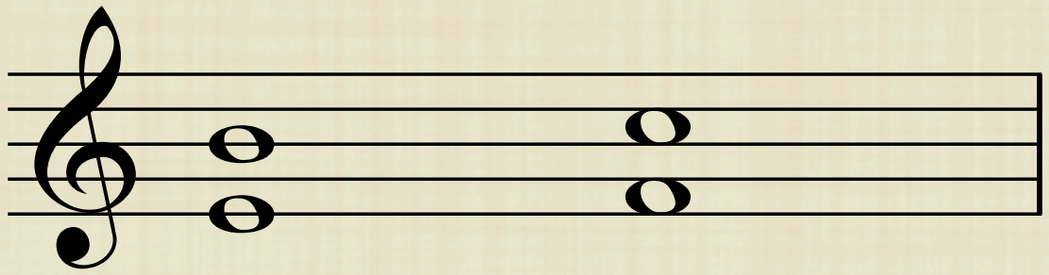

Parallel

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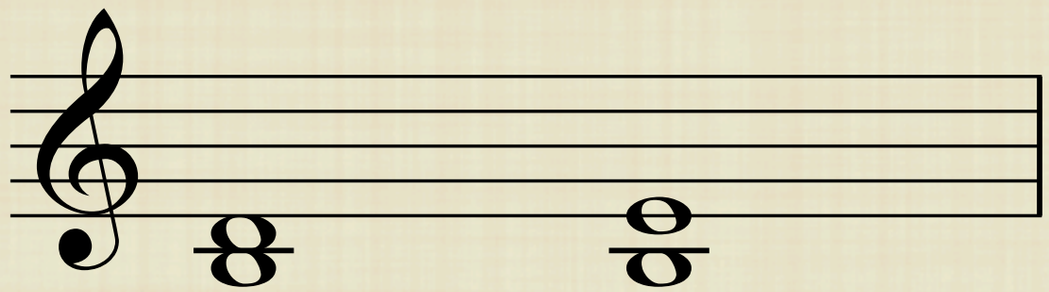

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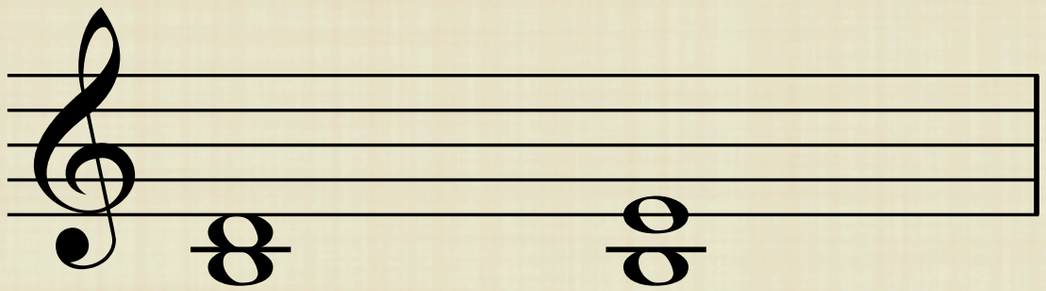

Oblique

Simultaneous Motion

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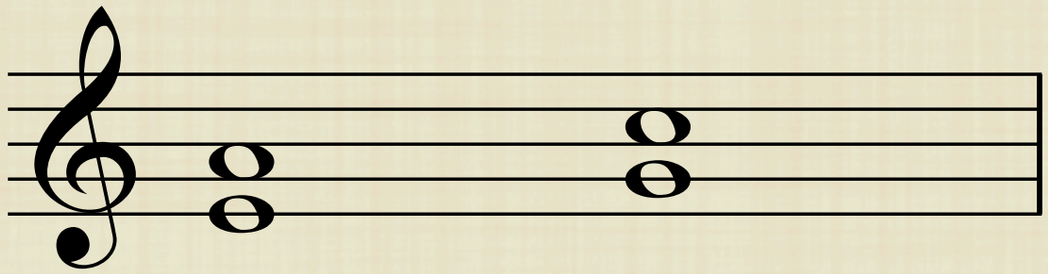

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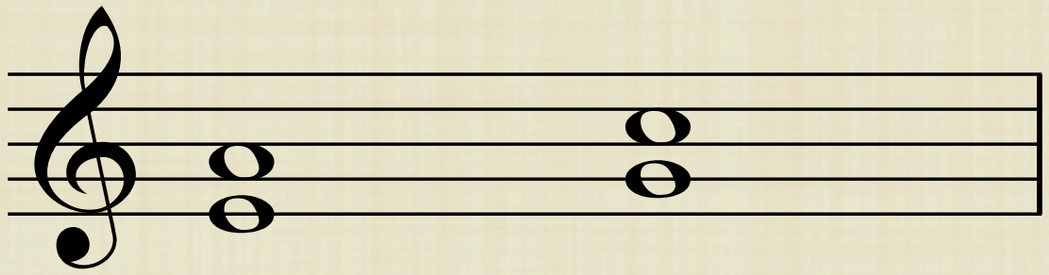

Parallel

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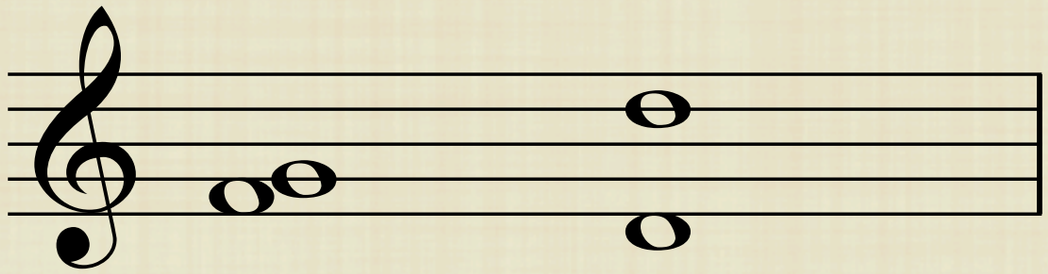

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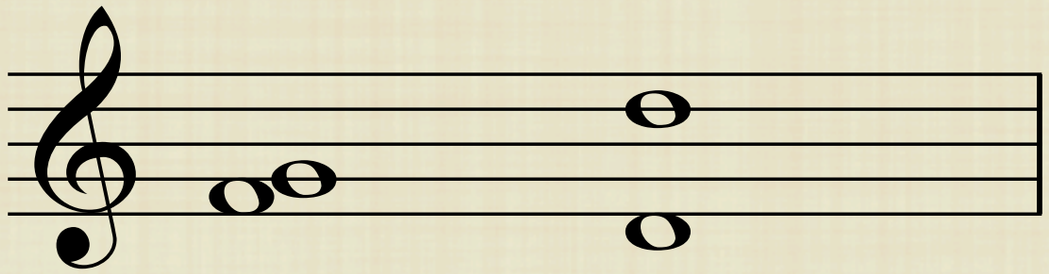

Contrary

Simultaneous Motion

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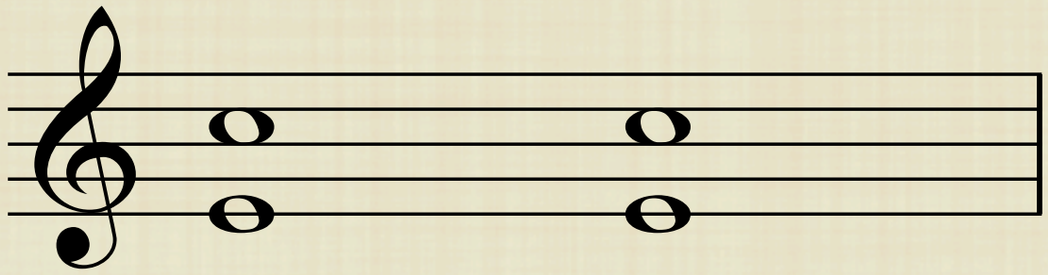

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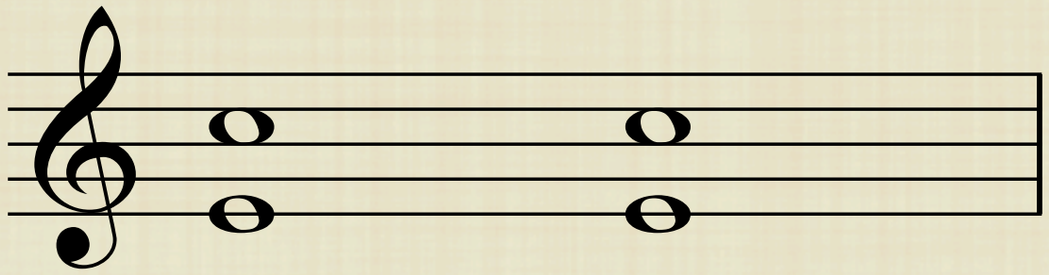
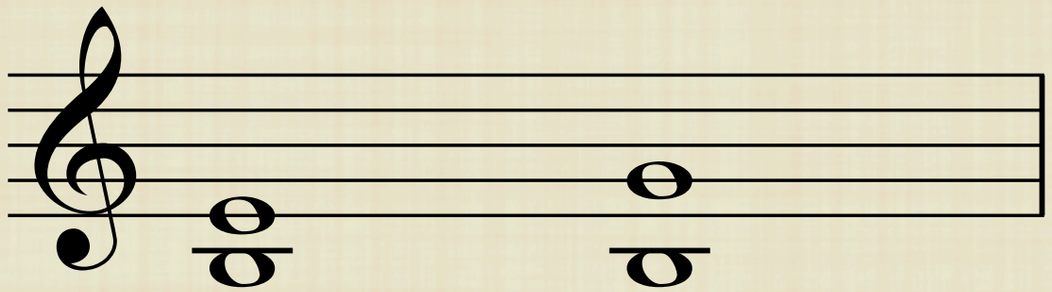


Trick Question! No motion at all

Simultaneous Motion

Simultaneous Motion



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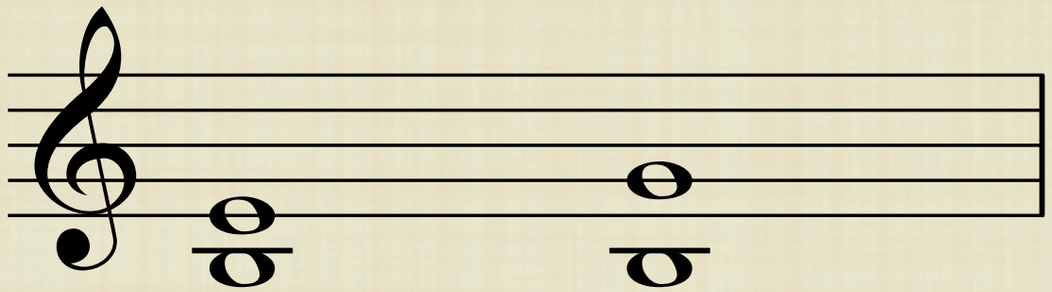

Oblique

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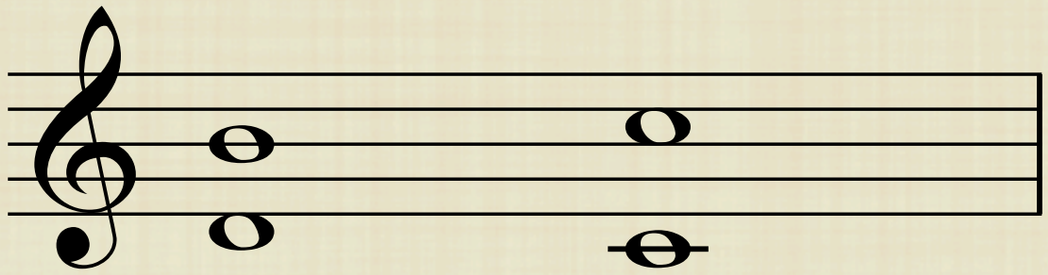

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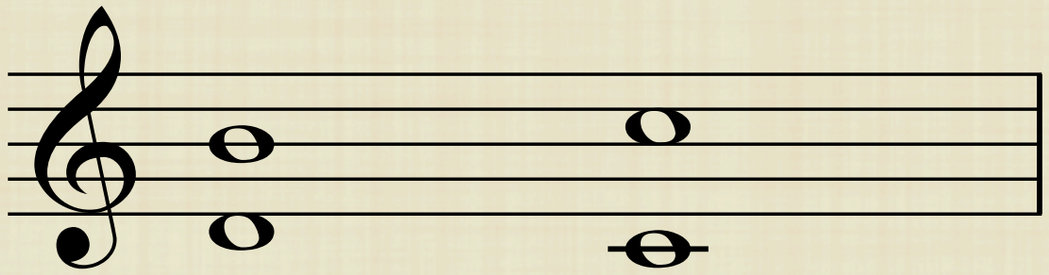

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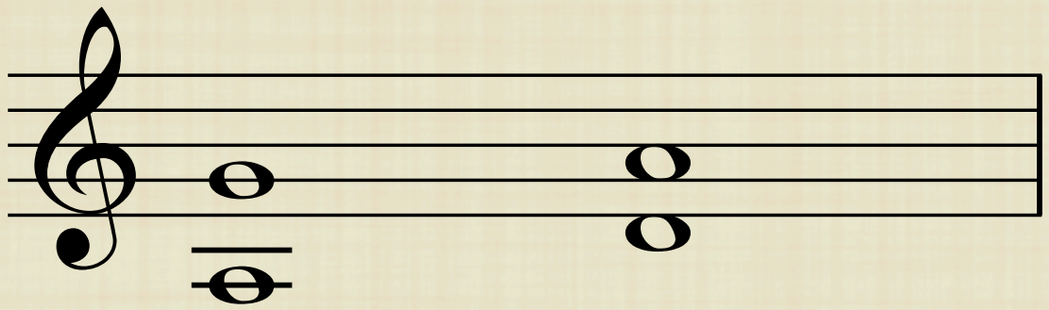

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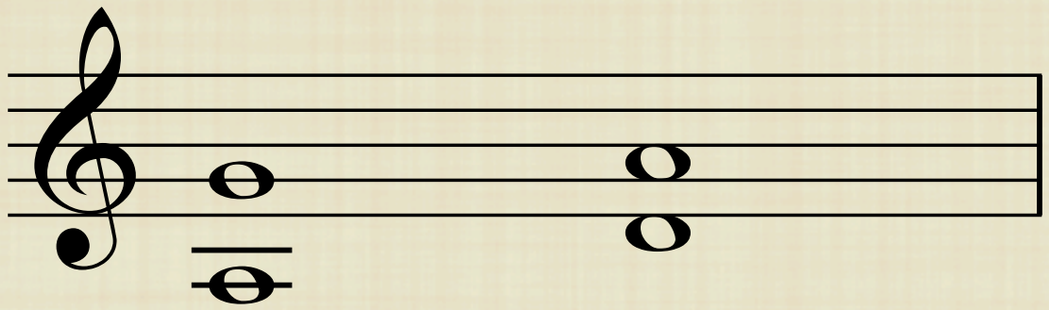

Similar

Forbidden Parallel Motions

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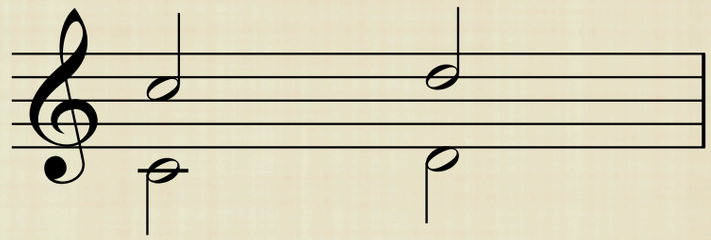
- Motion by octaves



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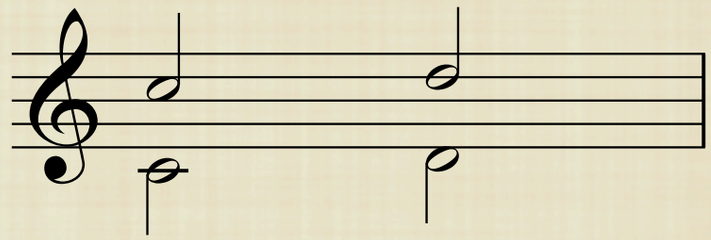
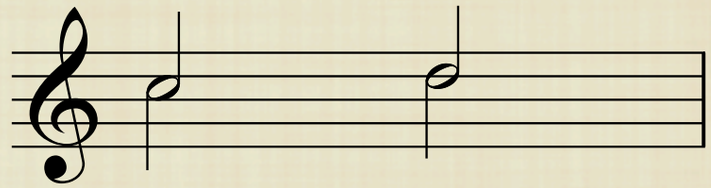


- Motion by unisons



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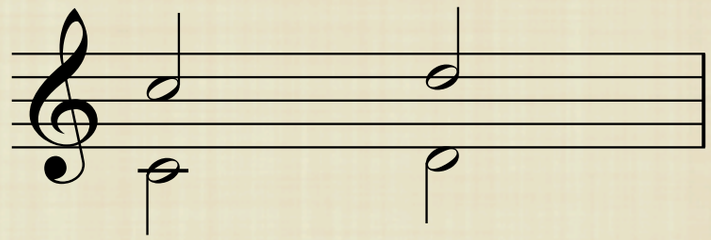

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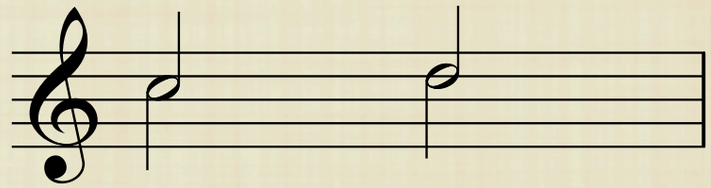
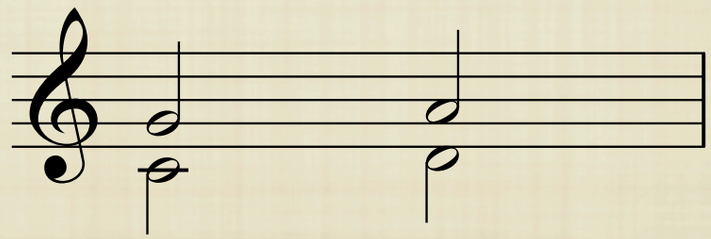


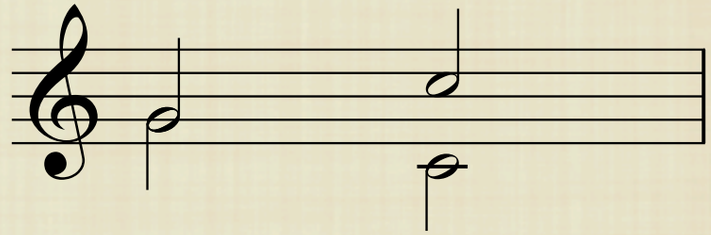
- Motion by fifths



Forbidden Contrary Motions

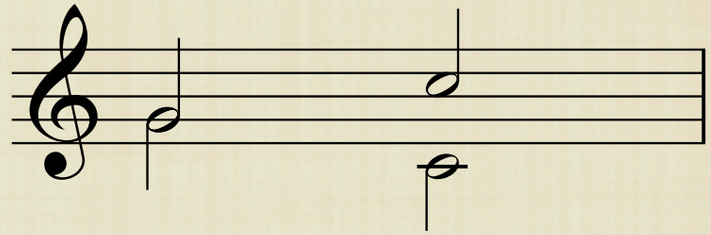
Forbidden Contrary Motions

- Octaves

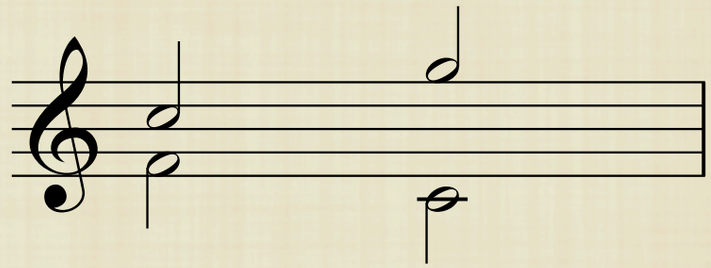


Forbidden Contrary Motions

- Octaves



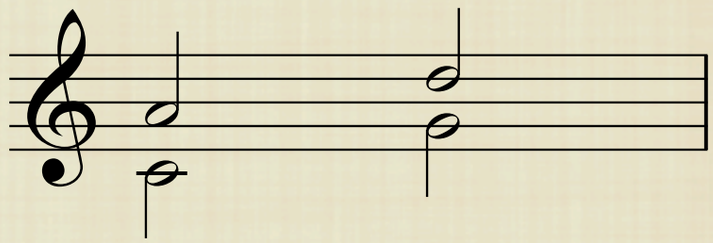
- Fifths



Hidden (Direct) Motions

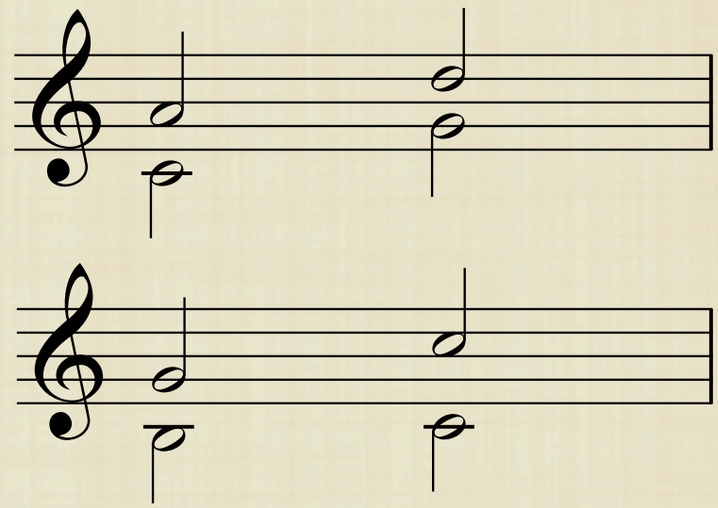
Hidden (Direct) Motions

- Fifths



Hidden (Direct) Motions

- Fifths
- Octaves



Hidden (Direct) Motions

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- Hidden, or direct, motion is a problem only if:

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- Hidden, or direct, motion is a problem only if:
  1. It occurs between the outer voices AND

Hidden (Direct) Motions

- Hidden, or direct, motion is a problem only if:
  1. It occurs between the outer voices AND
  2. The soprano is moving by leap

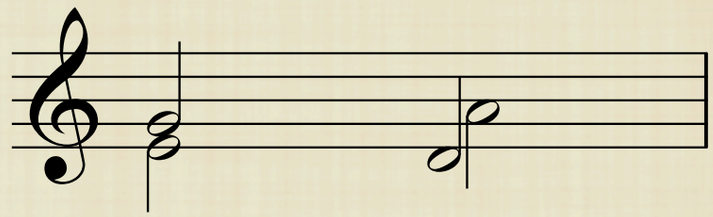
Hidden (Direct) Motions

- Hidden, or direct, motion is a problem only if:
  1. It occurs between the outer voices AND
  2. The soprano is moving by leap
- Otherwise, don't worry about it

Voice Crossing

Voice Crossing

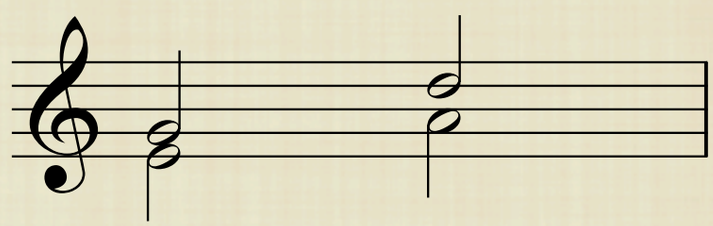
- Forbidden for now



Overlapping

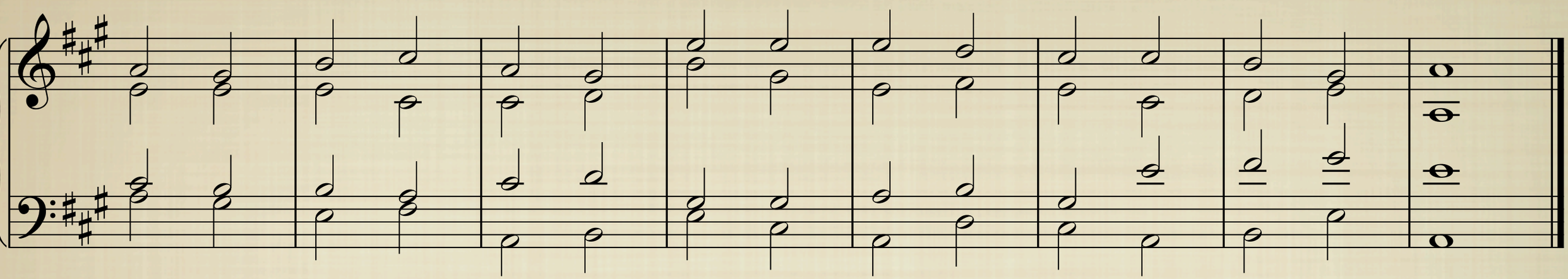
Overlapping

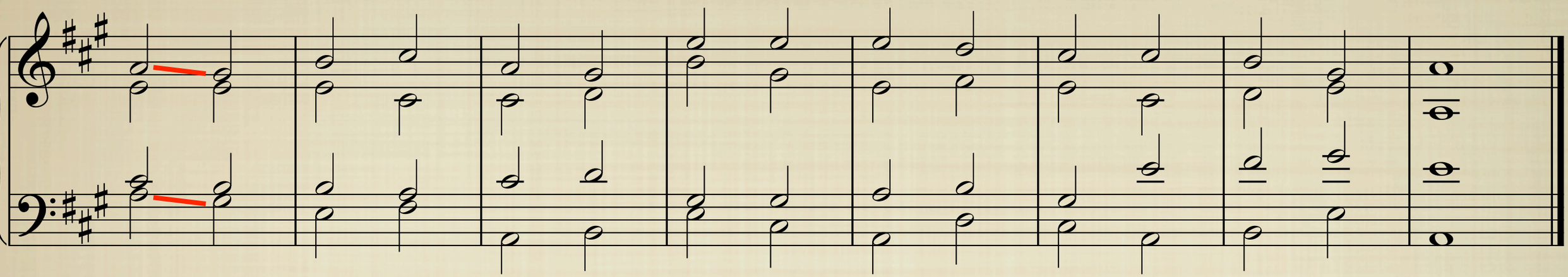
- Forbidden for now



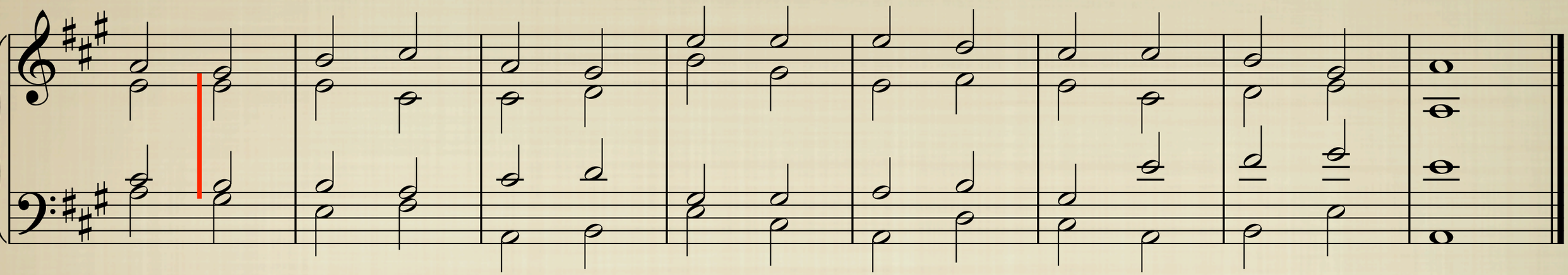
Practice

- The following progression contains many mistakes of chord construction and voice-leading. Find as many as you can.
- Hint: there are *at least* 23 errors!

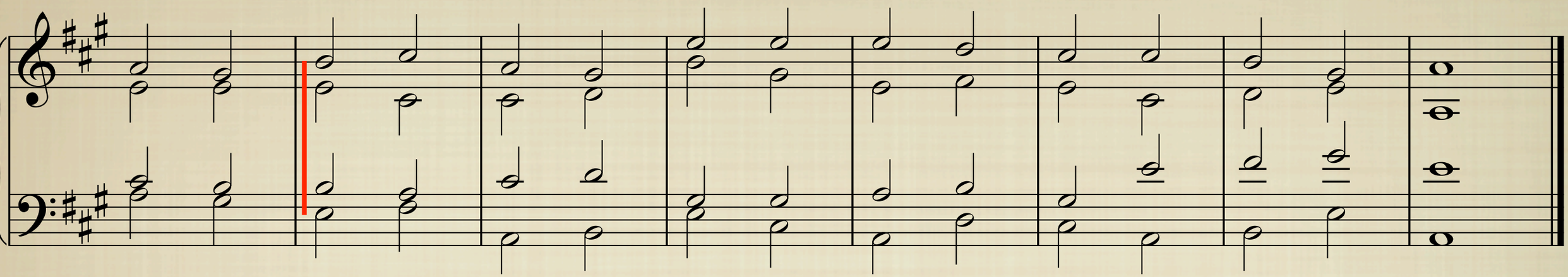




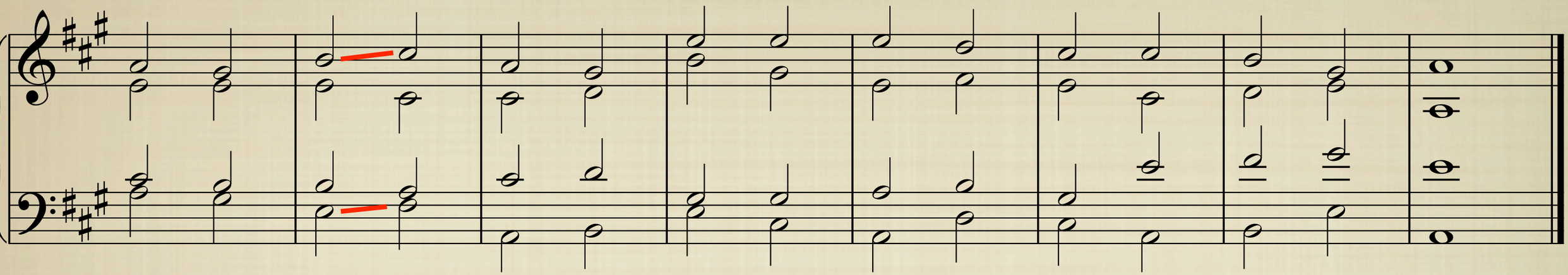
Parallel octaves between soprano and bass



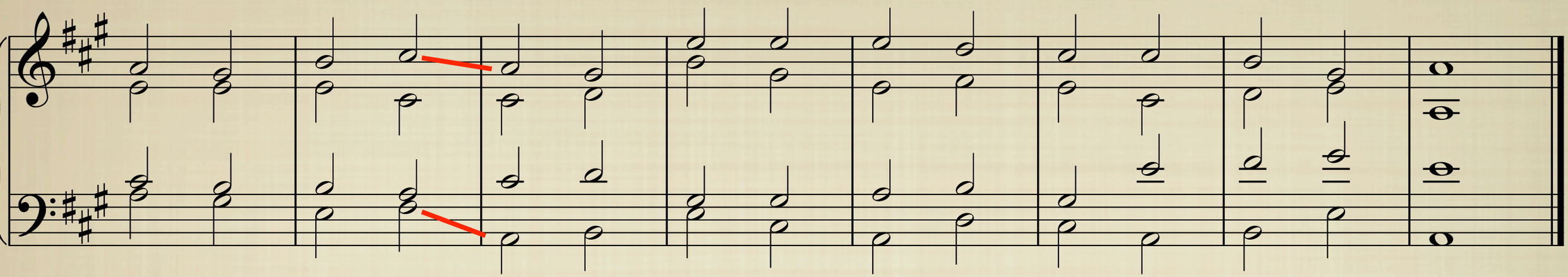
Doubled leading tone between bass and soprano



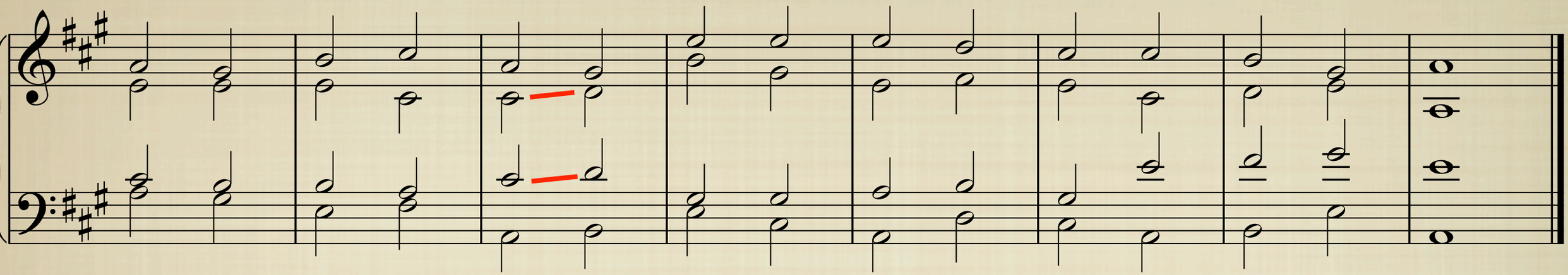
Incomplete chord: no 3rd



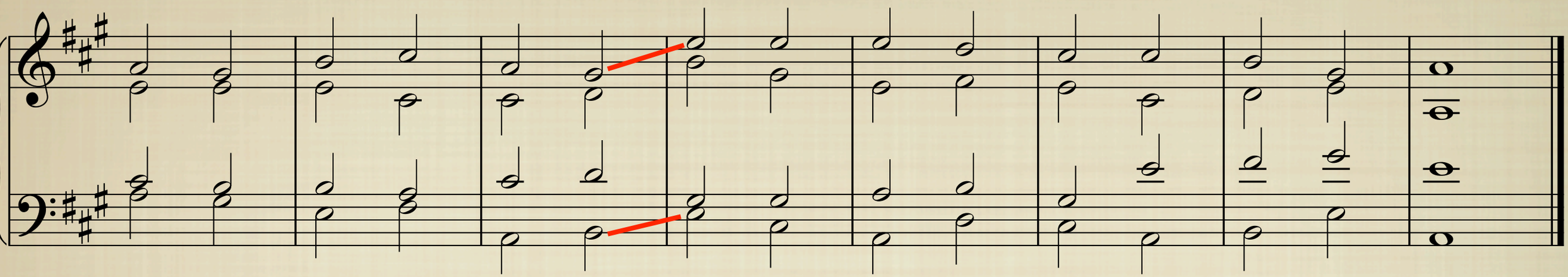
Parallel fifths between soprano and bass



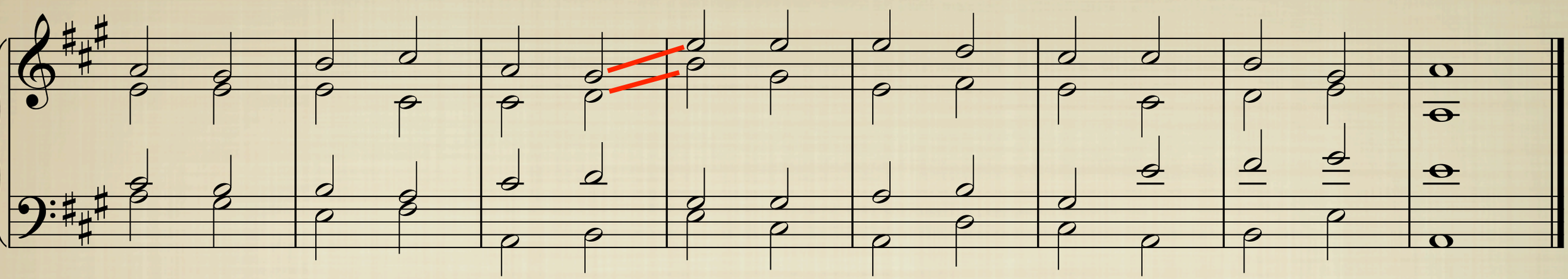
Hidden octave between soprano and bass



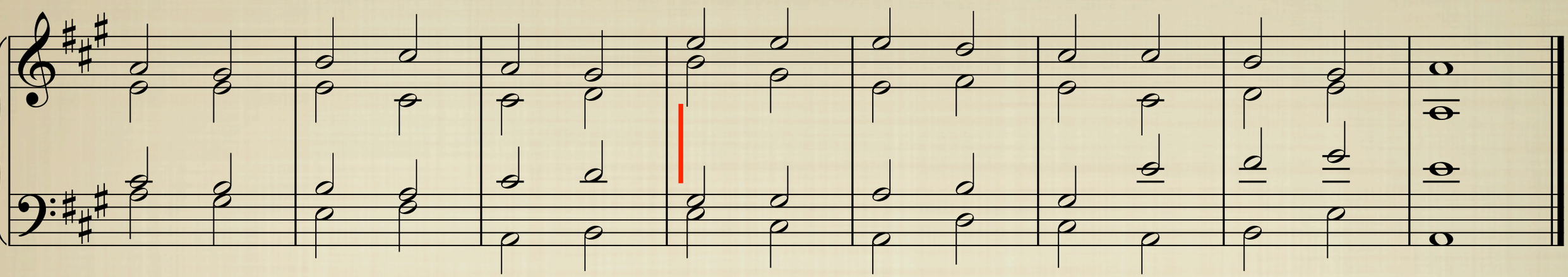
Parallel unison between tenor and alto



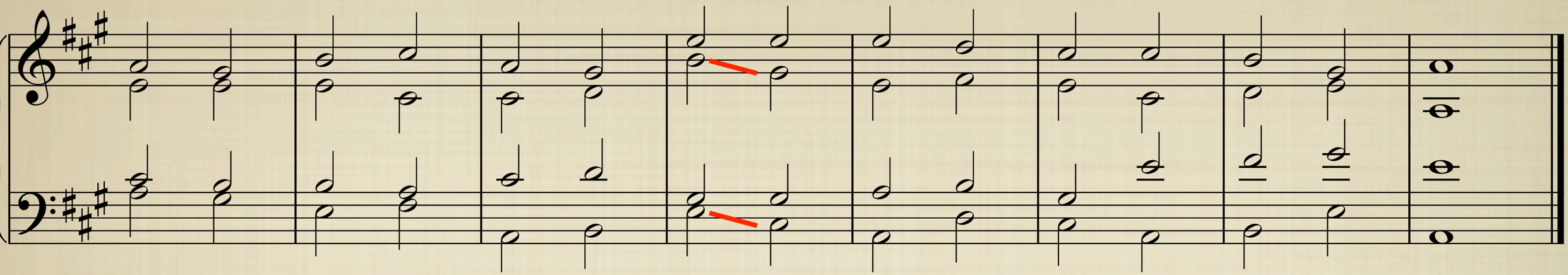
Hidden octave between bass and soprano



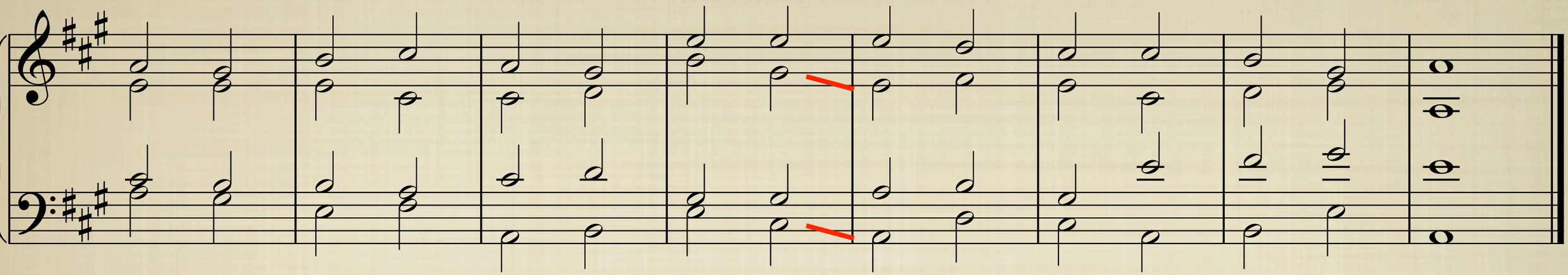
Overlap between alto and soprano



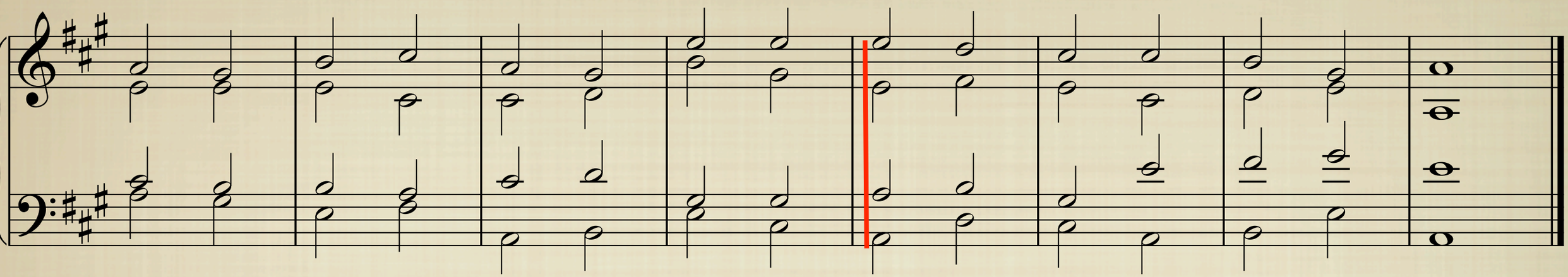
Spacing error between tenor and alto



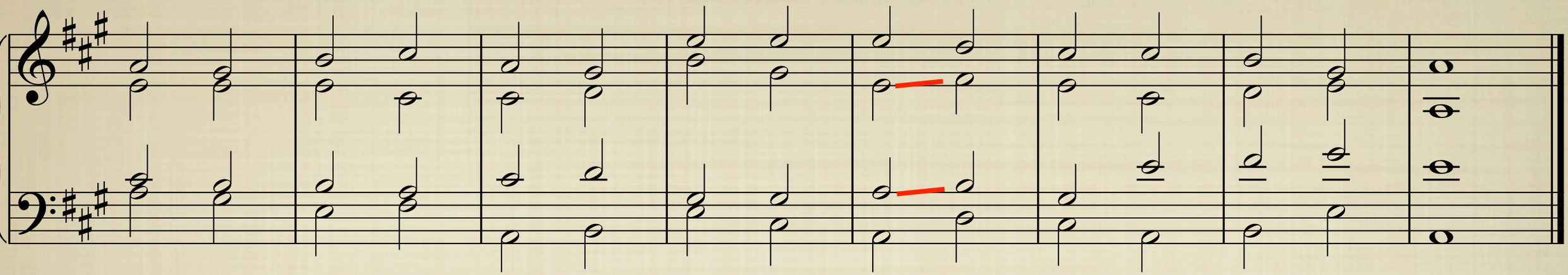
Parallel fifth between bass and alto



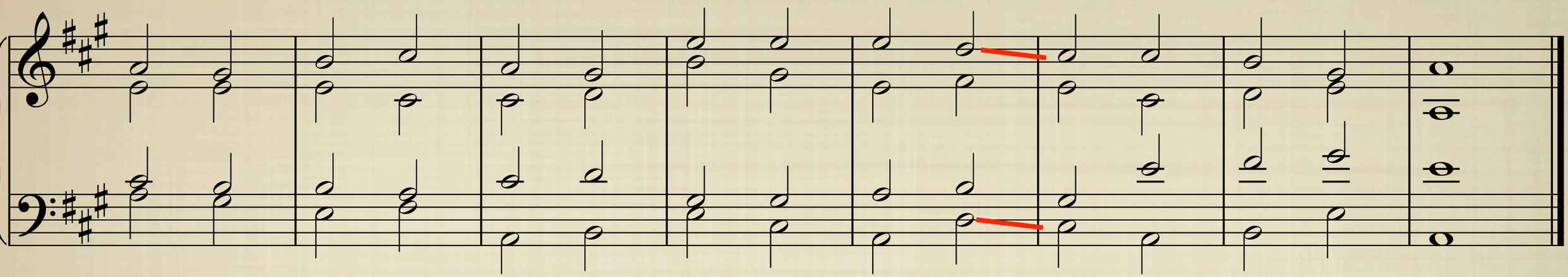
Parallel fifth between bass and alto



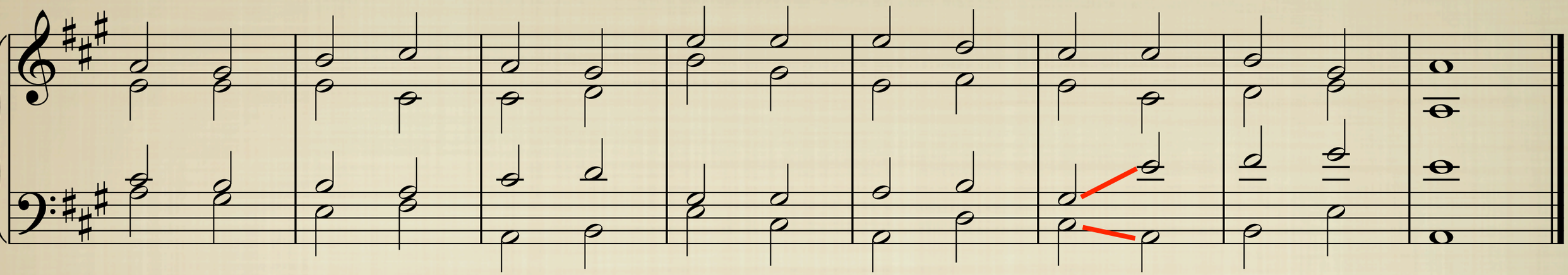
Improperly incomplete chord: no 3rd



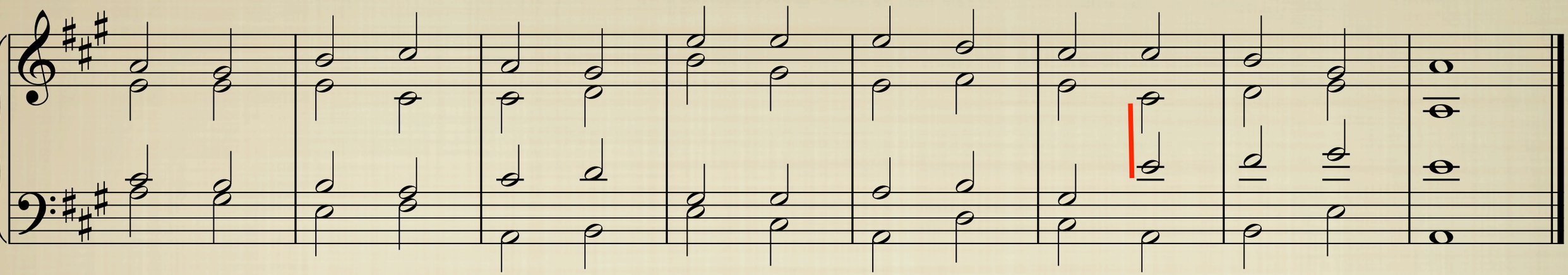
Parallel fifths between tenor and alto



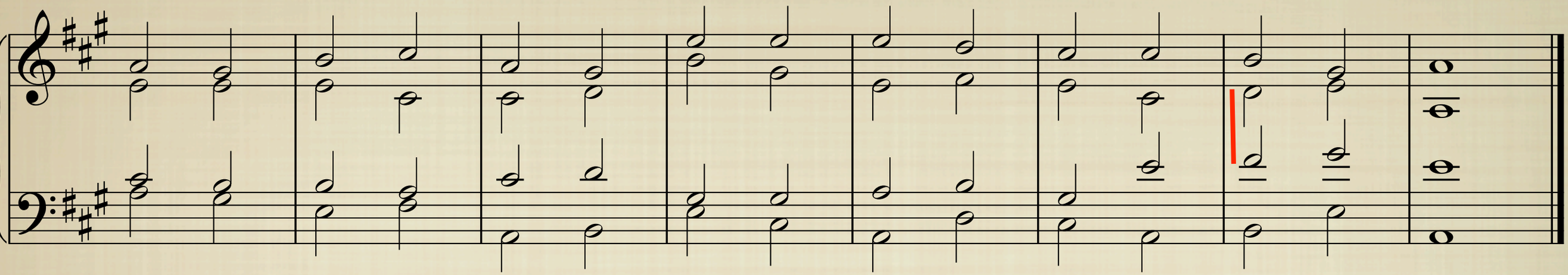
Parallel octaves between bass and soprano



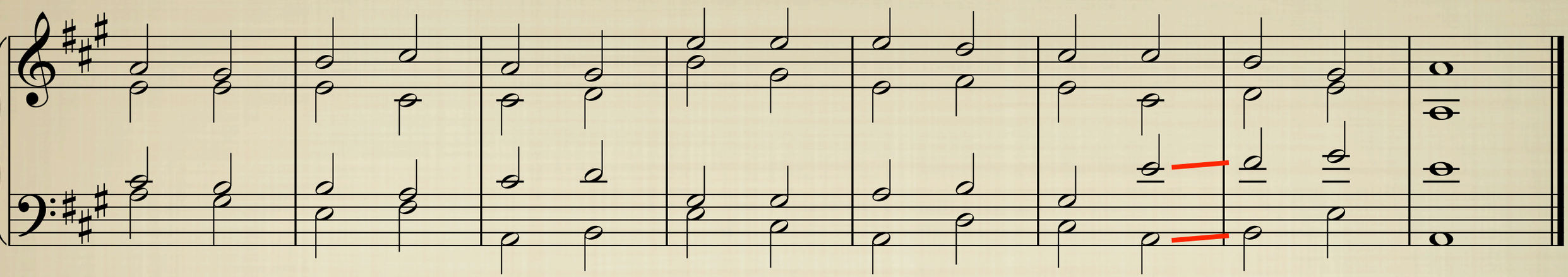
Fifths by contrary motion between bass and tenor



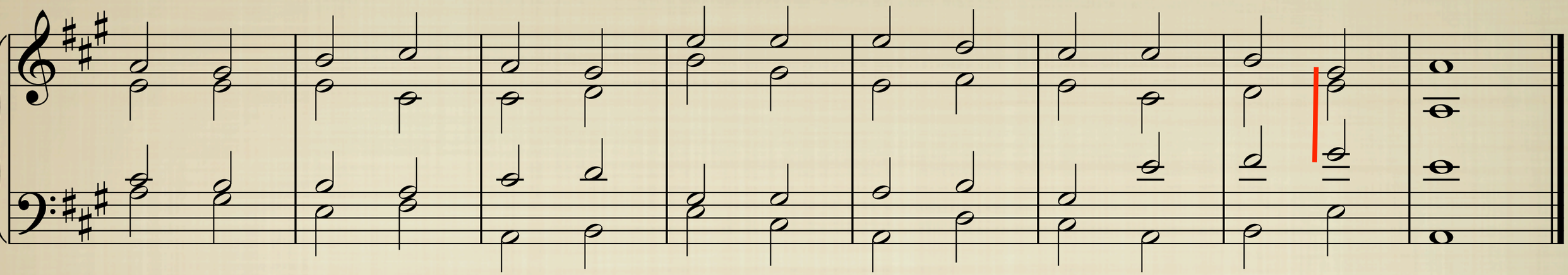
Voice crossing between tenor and alto



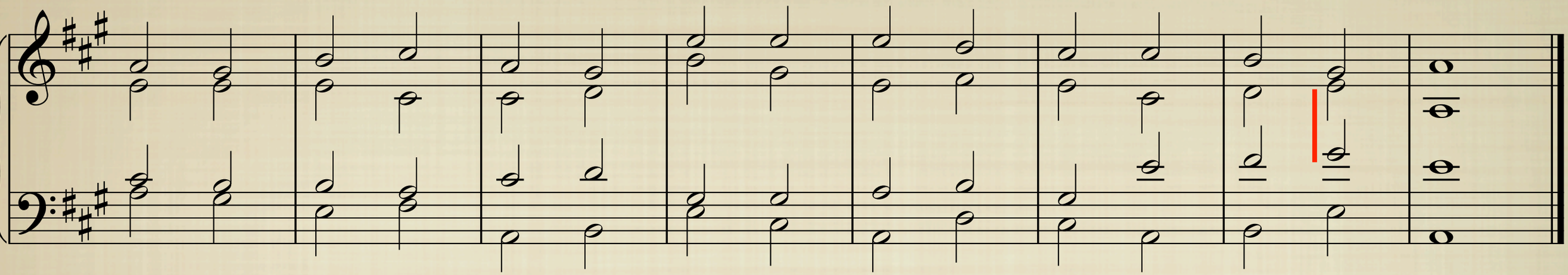
Voice crossing between tenor and alto



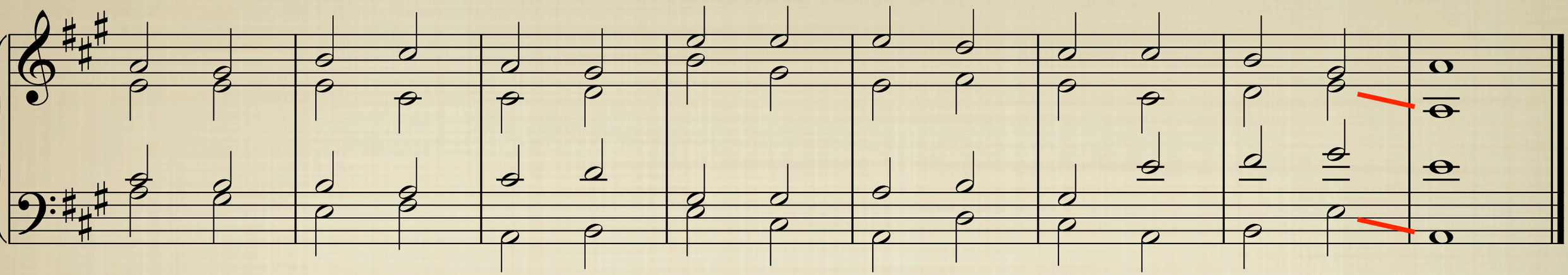
Parallel fifths between bass and tenor



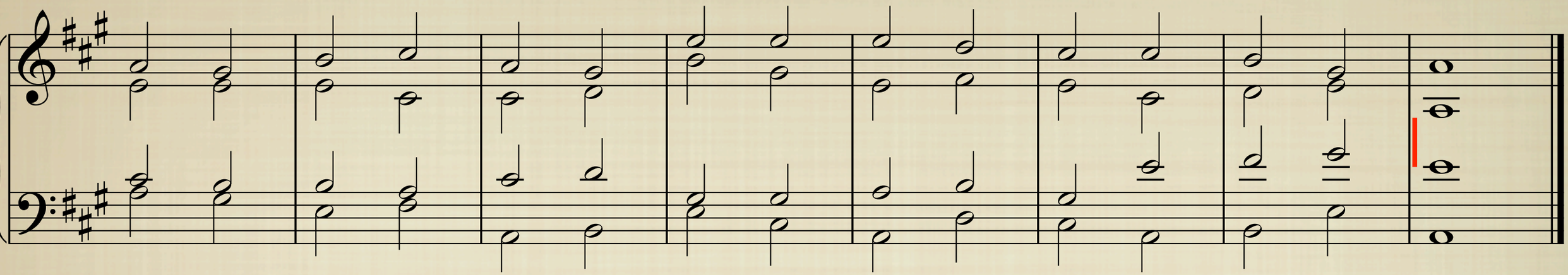
Doubled leading tone in tenor and soprano



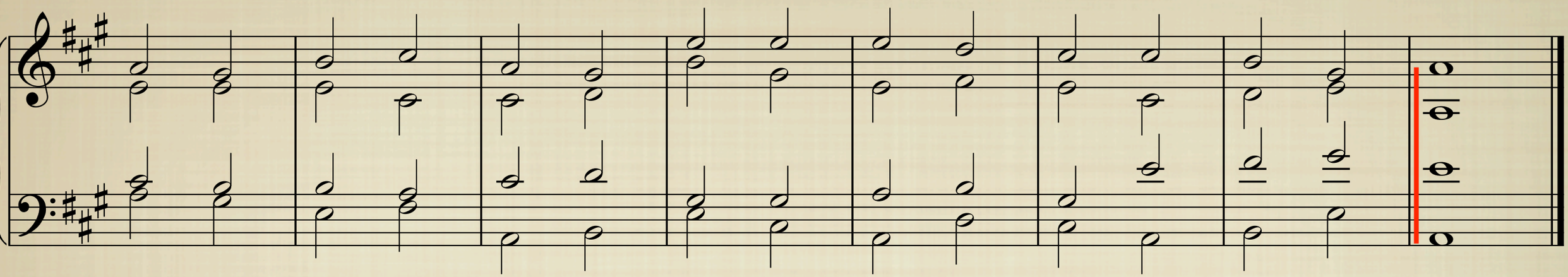
Voice crossing between tenor and alto



Parallel octaves between alto and bass



Voice crossing between tenor and alto



Incomplete chord: no 3rd