

How to Harmonize a Melody with Triads

To harmonize a melody with triads, you broadly need just two steps:

1. Identify the note name.
2. Find a triad that contains this note and check if it sounds right.

However, it's not quite that simple—there's more to understand. To make this process easier and help you progress more quickly, here are five additional steps to simplify the entire approach:

Step 1: Identify the Key

Start by determining the key of the melody:

- Write down the melody's notes.
- Look for accidentals as hints to the correct key.
- Be prepared for exceptions because some melodies change key. Tonality is not static and may shift briefly. For instance, in *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, you find a G minor cadence and a C major cadence that cannot be harmonized solely with the chords from F major. (Check out the analysis!)

Knowing the key narrows down which triads are available for harmonization.

Step 2: Prioritize the I, IV, and V Chords

The I, IV, and V chords often form the backbone of harmonization, especially in simpler melodies. These three chords can often harmonize entire songs.

- In minor keys, the V chord is usually major, while the i and iv chords remain minor.

Step 3: Consider Other Chords as Well

Use other chords in the key to add variation and interest:

- Experiment with the ii, iii, vi, and vii chords.
- Switch between these triads to discover different harmonization possibilities.

Step 4: Recognize Chord Relationships

When you explore other chords, keep their relationships in mind. Chords within a key are related via thirds:

- Two triads that share two notes forming a third differ by just one note.
For example:
 - The I chord is related to the vi chord.
 - The ii chord is related to the IV chord.
 - The iii chord is related to the V chord.
 - The V chord is related to the vii chord.

Understanding these relationships can make harmonization a bit easier.

Step 5: Start Practicing and Apply the Seven Ground Rules

With the foundational knowledge from the previous steps, just start harmonizing.

If you need additional help, try to apply these ground rules.

- 1. Songs usually start on the one chord.**
- 2. Songs often end on the one chord.**
- 3. The five chord resolves to the one chord.**
- 4. The third of the five chord leads to the one chord root.**
- 5. The five chord is major in minor keys.**
- 6. Melodic climaxes (The highest note) often land on the four chord.**
- 7. Harmonies change at the start or middle of a bar.**

To see how and when the rules apply, refer to the analysis of melodies where. Be patient. This is a rather advanced topic...

Analysis

F Gm Am Bb C Dm E°
I ii iii IV V vi vii

Rule No.1

Rule No.3

Chords: F C F C C F Bb F C F

T	1	6	6	5	6	10	10	8	13	13	13	11	10	8	10
A	2	5	5	5	5	10	10	9	14	14	14	10	10	9	10
B	3	7	7	5	7	10	10	10	15	15	15	12	10	10	10

Rule No.4

Chords: F C F C F C C-Major Cadence-> G C

T	1	6	6	5	6	10	10	8	13	8	8	5	5	3	1
A	2	5	5	5	5	10	10	9	14	9	9	5	5	4	0
B	3	7	7	5	7	10	10	10	15	10	10	5	5	5	2

Half Cadence!!!

Section B: Chords F Bb F C F F Bb F C

T	13	13	13	6	11	10	10	8	13	13	13	6	11	10	10	8
A	14	14	14	5	10	10	10	9	14	14	14	5	10	10	10	9
B	15	15	15	7	12	10	10	10	15	15	15	7	12	10	10	10

Rule No.6

Rule No.5

Chords: Bb Gm D Gm C F Bb F F C F

G-Minor Cadence->

T	15	15	15	13	11	10	11	8	10	11	13	6	6	8	10
A	15	15	15	14	12	11	12	9	10	10	14	5	5	9	10
B	15	15	15	15	12	12	12	10	10	12	15	7	7	10	10

Rule No.5 Although The Melody is In F-Major, This Passage has this short G-Minor Cadence. The D-Major Is The V and the Gm is the (i) one chord in minor.

Rule No. 7: Take a bird's-eye perspective of the page and notice that the first half is mostly F major. However, in the B section, the harmony changes almost every bar and sometimes even in the middle of a bar.

B \flat **F** **Gm D Gm** **C** **F B \flat F** **C** **F**

T	15	15-15	13	11-10	11	8	10-11-13	6	6	8	6
A	15	15-15	14	12-11	12	9	10-10-14	5	5	9	5
B	15	15-15	15	12-12	12	10	10-12-15	7	7	10	7

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing Triad Exercise

F C F C F B \flat F C F

T	1	6	6	5	6	10	10	8	13	13	13	11	10	8	10
A	2	5	5	5	5	10	10	9	14	14	14	10	10	9	10
B	3	7	7	5	7	10	10	10	15	15	15	12	10	10	10

F C F C F C G C

T	1	6	6	5	6	10	10	8	13	8	8	5	5	3	1
A	2	5	5	5	5	10	10	9	14	9	9	5	5	4	0
B	3	7	7	5	7	10	10	10	15	10	10	5	5	5	2

B
F B \flat F C F F B \flat F C

T	13	13	13	6	11	10	10	8	13	13	13	6	11	10	10	8
A	14	14	14	5	10	10	10	9	14	14	14	5	10	10	10	9
B	15	15	15	7	12	10	10	10	15	15	15	7	12	10	10	10

C
B \flat F G \flat D G \flat C F B \flat F F C F

T	15	15	15	13	11	10	11	8	10	11	13	6	6	8	10
A	15	15	15	14	12	11	12	9	10	10	14	5	5	9	10
B	15	15	15	15	12	12	12	10	10	12	15	7	7	10	10

B \flat **F** **Gm D Gm** **C** **F B \flat F** **C** **F**

T	15	15	15	13	11	10	11	8	10	11	13	6	6	8	6
A	15	15	15	14	12	11	12	9	10	10	14	5	5	9	5
B	15	15	15	15	12	12	12	10	10	12	15	7	7	10	7