

10 Ways Introductory Harmony Will Make Basic Harmony Easier

By Frank Horvat

For many students, once they have completed Advanced Rudiments, it is standard to proceed directly to Basic Harmony (formally Grade 3 Harmony). But before starting Harmony, many do not realize that the transition from Rudiments to Harmony can be quite demanding. The amount of material, combined with having to think “quick on your feet” can make the Basic Harmony exam very challenging for many students. When correcting Basic Harmony exams, I often see many errors being committed that could have been avoided with the solidification of certain skill sets earlier on. That is why I wholeheartedly recommend the initial study of Harmony at the introductory level. Here are ten reasons why:

- 1. Strengthens knowledge of names of notes of chords within a key.** The absolute most important aspect to starting a study in Harmony - getting the notes correct within a chord. The curriculum for Basic Harmony can launch a student right into a multitude of concepts all at once. Intro Harmony allows time for this basic skill to sink in.
- 2. Emphasizes the very important and common concept of Dominant 7th voice leading early on.** If I had a dollar for every time I have uttered the phrase, “leading note rises, 7th falls” when teaching harmony, I think I would be a millionaire! This most fundamental aspect of voice leading is introduced within the Intro Harmony curriculum. The earlier a student can begin putting this resolution into practice, the earlier it will become second nature to them, thus allowing an opportunity to focus on other elements.
- 3. Makes students sensitive to the types of motions within SATB.** Whether it's *parallel*, *similar*, or *contrary*, having students being able to instantly recognize the contour relationships between the different voices is of paramount importance. Know how common parallel 5th and octave errors can be? This can be curtailed with a study of the various types of motions.
- 4. Solidifies the recognition of Roman Numerals.** All too often I see students labeling a VI as a IV or confusing V^4_3 with V^4_2 . Drilling the symbolism of harmony at the introductory level can ensure students will be more consistently accurate later.
- 5. Solidifies the recognition of the quality of chords.** Unless studying Keyboard Harmony, students often cannot tell whether a chord they're mapping out is major, minor or diminished. The Introductory Harmony curriculum encourages a lower case vs. upper case approach so it's clear through analysis what the chord sounds like. This is of paramount importance if one feels it's important in bringing harmony to life through sound.

6. Work in two-part texture makes students sensitive to the important relationship between soprano and bass, also excellent introduction to counterpoint. Often students starting studies in Counterpoint express frustration by the lack of a 4-voice presence in establishing what the perceived harmony should be. With the introduction of two-part structures at the Introductory Harmony level, a student becomes well versed in interpreting the implications of fewer voices, not to mention isolating important notes in chordal resolutions.

7. Introduces students to the specific characteristics of various Baroque dance types. Some of the common exercises students at the Basic Harmony level must complete are melody writing and structural analysis. Both require a sharp eye at recognizing phrasing configurations. The study of these dance types will make that recognition much easier. Also one cannot overlook the valuable insight that will be given to practical studies of dances such as the allemands, courante, and sarabande.

8. Sensitizes the student to the balance between chord and non-chord notes. When completing the SATB of Bach Chorales, I often observe students attempting to include a plethora of non-chord notes that are stylistically inappropriate. Introductory Harmony offers detailed study into commonly used non-chord notes such as passing notes, appoggiaturas, and neighbouring tones. This fundamental contrast between consonant and dissonant sonorities is essential to be grasped by any new student to harmony.

9. Reviews important concepts from Rudiments, including various scale types and intervals. Many might take for granted that all students studying at the Basic Harmony level would have no problem identifying the key of a piece...think again. It saddens me when I see a student put so much work into a harmony exercise all for nothing since they were not able to use important clues within the given material to identify the key correctly. If you are working with a student who did not score well on questions that depend on identifying keys on their Advanced Rudiments exam, you would be well advised to use the Introductory Harmony curriculum as a means to strengthen those skills before leaping into Basic Harmony.

10. Practice makes perfect! Just as repetition through practice allows a student to progress in their practical studies, so does repetition in harmony exercises. With a foundation from Introductory Harmony, students in Basic Harmony will complete very similar exercises as they had at the Intro Harmony level, but with more ease because of experience and familiarity.

To assist your students in better grasping the material at the Basic Harmony level and raise the odds of a better result on exam day, why not first explore the Introductory Harmony curriculum and exam - your students will benefit greatly!