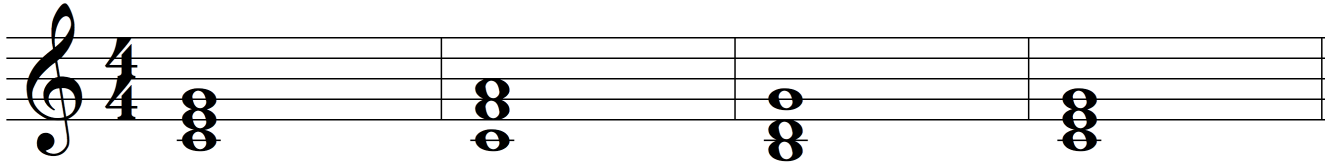
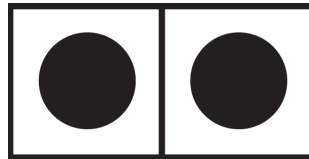


Composing Sequences in Context

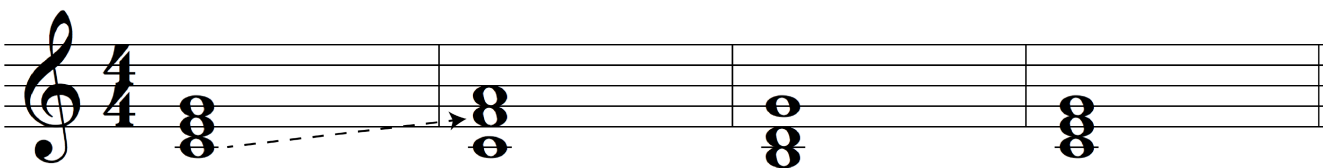
Composing a sequence in the context of a piece is very similar to composing a sequence on its own. The only difference is that we need to consider where the harmonic tones are in the piece. As with any other piece, we start by creating a chord progression. To keep things simple we will use a standard I IV V I progression in the key of C.



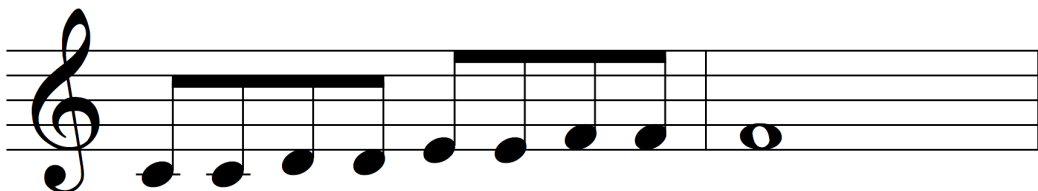
Now we will choose a starting note, direction, and contour. We select middle C as our starting note, up as our direction, and this as our contour:



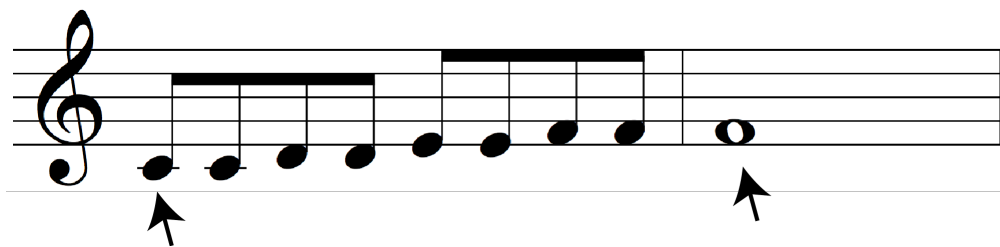
What we would essentially like to do at this point is draw a line from one harmonic tone to another using the notes of our sequence:



When we do this, the result looks like this:



The most important notes of the sequence are the first note and the last note. If these fall on harmonic tones, the other notes will sound fine.



When we start writing a sequence, we don't always know which note it will land on. This is not a problem because at any moment there is always a chord tone within arm's reach. Either we fall on a chord tone naturally, or we will be immediately adjacent to a chord tone. Simply look for the nearest chord tones and resolve to the one that is closest, while also considering the natural direction of the sequence.

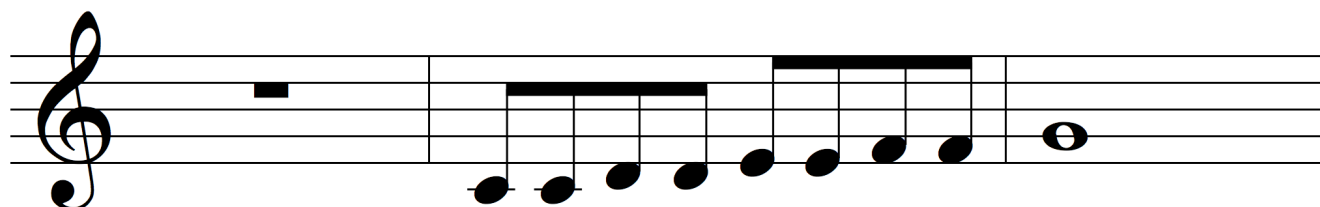
For example, if suppose we started our sequence in bar 2:



We know that the chord in this bar is a G chord, yet our sequence currently is on the note F. Because the G chord contains the notes G B D, we would like to try to end on one of those notes. We could either move up one note to G, or down two notes to D.



Clearly G is the better choice because it is closer and also because it follows the natural direction of the sequence.



Composing Melody First

All of our composing methods thus far have assumed that we compose the harmony first, then the melody. The harmony provides a framework to build upon. However, it is also possible to compose a melody first and then determine the harmony afterwards. This method is more challenging because there is no guarantee we will find a set of chords that match. However, inspiration doesn't always follow a script. For example, if one uses their voice to work out a melody, it is likely that the melody will come first.

Determining the Key

The first challenge is to determine what key the notes are in. One should always have an instrument for reference that is in tune with A440. You don't need the entire song to determine the key. A few notes will do.

Look for half steps in the melody. Half steps are far more informative because there are fewer of them. As they are less common, they give away more information about the key. In a major key, half steps occur between degrees 3/4 and 7/8. Therefore, if you come across a half step in your melody, it is likely you are hovering over one of these pairs of notes.

Listen to the overall feeling of the melody. Typically there is one note in a key which we call the tonic. This note tends to create a feeling of resolution or completion. It can be thought of as the "home" note. If your melody comes to rest on a note which creates a feeling of completion, it is likely that that note is the tonic of the key. If the melody sounds happy, it is likely a major key. If the melody sounds sad it is likely a minor key. For example, if your piece comes to rest on the note D with a sad feeling, it is likely in the key of D minor.

Look at the beginning and ending. Whether you are inspecting just a single phrase or an entire piece, the first and last notes are the most significant for determining the key. In classical music, for example, one can reliably assume the last chord is representative of the key the song is in. (Often composers may make the last chord major, however, even if the piece is in a minor key. This is called a Picardy 3rd).