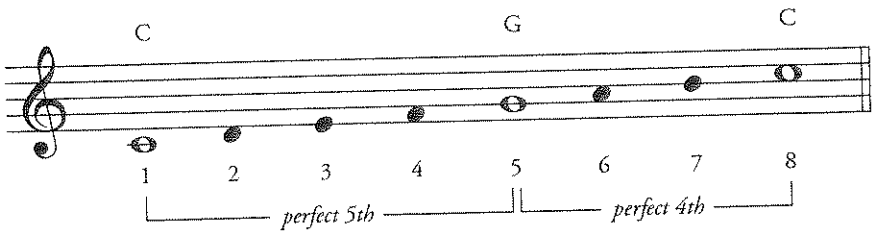
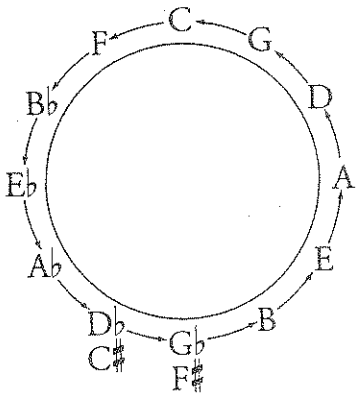
HARMONIC MOVEMENT • THE CYCLE • PROGRESSION • KEY CENTERS

One of the basic principles governing the movement of chords is the fact that there is a strong tendency for a note to move down a perfect fifth (or up a perfect fourth). Notice below, in the C scale, the note G wants to move to the note C; whether down a perfect fifth or up a perfect fourth. Play G followed by the C on your instrument and you will hear this strong pull.



In the same way that G wants to go to C, C wants to go to F, F wants to go to B♭, B♭ wants to go to E♭. This principle of notes wanting to move down a perfect fifth has come to be known as moving through the *cycle* (or *circle*) *of fifths* and is often illustrated as shown.



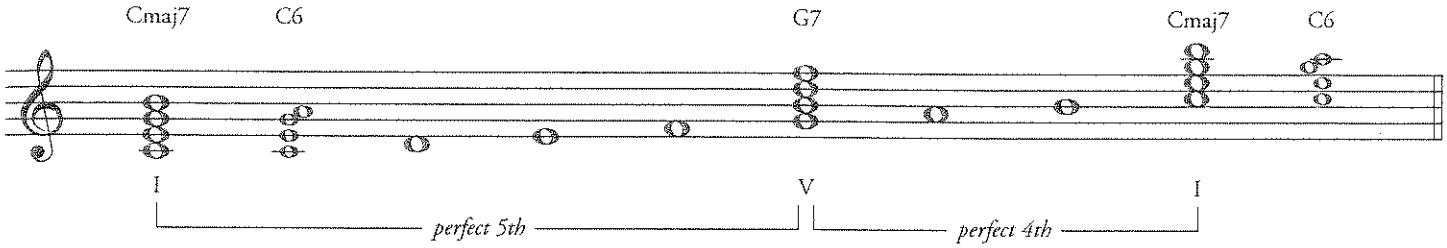
Each letter in the circle represents the root or letter name of a chord. The chords move in the direction shown by the arrows, so that a C chord moves to an F chord, an F chord moves to a B♭ chord, a B♭ chord to an E♭ chord, E♭ to A♭, and so on.

The chords represented by the letter names on the circle may all be of the same quality or of mixed qualities. However, great care must be taken so that chords remain within the framework of the diatonic scale. For example, if you want to use the circle to create a progression in the key of C, you must choose chords that have as their roots any of the letters on the circle that go from B to F. If you go beyond the F to the B♭ you are out of the key of C. Generally speaking, no more than four chords on the circle are used in any particular key. In the key of C that would be an A chord to a D chord to a G chord to a C chord.

Progressions

A *progression* is the movement of one chord to another chord. The smallest possible progression is that of the V chord going to the I chord—the dominant chord to the tonic.

Let's see how progressions are formed within the structure of the major scale. We will use the C scale for our example. The C chord is the tonic. Looking at our circle we see that the root or letter name of the chord that goes to C is G. Below is the C scale with the two chords that form our first progression.



Notice that the G7 chord progresses to the C chord (either C triad, Cmaj7, or C6), thus satisfying the natural urge of the root of the G chord to move a perfect fifth down (or a perfect fourth up) to the root of the C chord. This has come to be referred to as *circular* or *cyclical movement.*

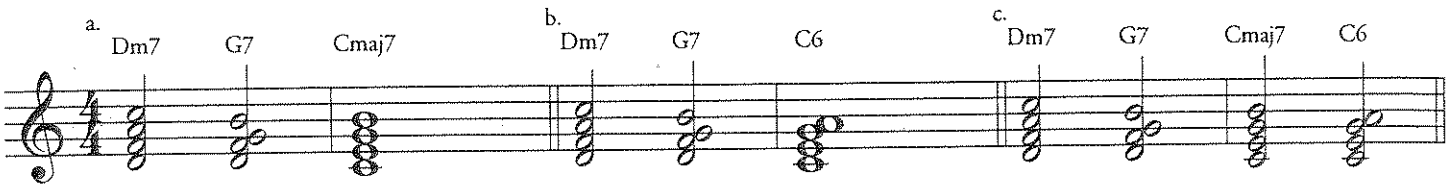
Tension and Release

In addition to the principle of circular movement, another reason for the tendency of the V chord to move to the I chord is the principle of *tension and release.* Certain tones in the V chord set up aural tensions that demand resolution to certain rest tones in the I chord. Besides the pull of the root of the V chord to the root of the I chord, the third of the V chord, which is the seventh of the key, also has a strong pull toward the root of the I chord. The fifth of the V chord, which is the second of the key, also wants to move to the root of the I chord. The seventh of the V chord, which is the fourth of the key, wants to move to the third of the I chord. Below is a second inversion G7 (V) chord resolving to the C triad (I). Notice how the arrows show the resolution of the tension tones of the G7 to the rest tones of the C triad.

The II V I Progression

One of the most effective ways of creating harmonic interest in a composition is to delay resolution to the I chord. This may be achieved by placing a II chord in front of the V chord. The II chord has certain inherent characteristics that demand movement to the V chord, which in turn demands resolution to the I chord. Delaying resolution is a way of heightening tension, so that when the I chord is finally reached there is a greater sense of release. The II V I progression is one of the most commonly used progressions in popular and jazz music.

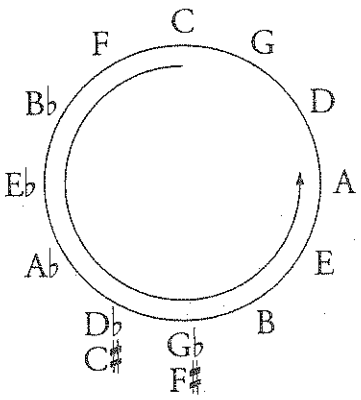
Below are several examples of II V I progressions in the key of C. Notice the use of inverted chords which creates a smoother flow from chord to chord.



Here are some general rules to follow when moving from chord to chord:

- Keep common tones. In example *a* we see how the root and third of the II chord become the fifth and seventh of the V chord. Also, the root and third of the V chord become the fifth and seventh of the I chord.
- Always move to the next nearest chord tone. In example *a* the fifth and seventh of the V chord move down to the root and third of the I chord.
- Try to connect chord tones in a melodic line. In example *b* the seventh of the II chord (C) moves down to the third of the V chord (B) which in turn moves down to the sixth of the I chord (A). This movement creates a descending melodic line in the top notes of the chords.

The II V I progression is another example of circular movement. The circle of fifths may be used to find the II V I chords in any key. Any letter on the circle may represent the root of a I chord, the letter in front of the I chord; becomes the root of the V chord and the letter in front of that becomes the root of the II. Just remember that the letters around the circle represent the roots of chords of any quality or of mixed quality. For example, let's find the II V I chords in the key of E♭. Here is the circle written out again for convenience.

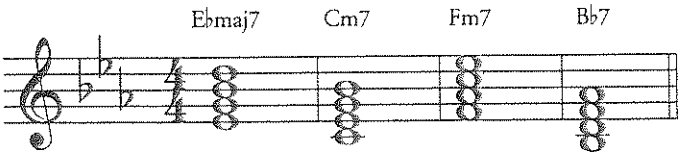


Locating the E♭ on the circle it becomes the root of the I chord, the E♭maj7. The letter in front, B♭, becomes the root of the V chord, the B♭7. The letter in front of the B♭, F, becomes the root of the II chord, the Fm7. So the II V I progression in the key of E♭ is Fm7 B♭7 E♭maj7.

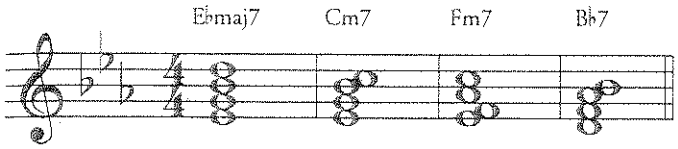
The I VI II V Progression

So far we've seen how the I chord is used to end a progression. Since the I chord is a chord of rest, a chord that establishes the key feeling, it is also often used to start a progression. The progression flows out from the I chord until it finally resolves back to the I after taking many side trips, possibly through a number of other keys. The most commonly found progression beginning with the I chord is the I VI II V progression. Here is the I VI II V progression in the key of E♭.

Chords in root position



Chords in inverted form



Notice that the VI chord is another link in the circle of fifths. Looking at the circle above, we find the letter C coming before the F. The C represents the root of the Cm7 chord, which is the VI chord in the key of E♭.

Another way of figuring the I VI II V progression in any key is to know the scale of each key and simply count the numbers up on the scale. Remember that the I chord is a major seventh (or sixth), the VI chord is a minor seventh, the II chord is a minor seventh, and the V chord is a dominant seventh chord.

Worksheet

1. Write out the II V I progression in the following keys.

KEY	II Chord	V Chord	I Chord
C			
F			
B♭			
E♭			
A♭			
D♭/C♯			
G♭/F♯			
B			
E			
A			
D			
G			

2. Complete in the following sentences.

Dm7 is the VI chord in the key of _____.
B°7 is the VII chord in the key of _____.
C♯m7 is the II chord in the key of _____.
F♯7 is the V chord in the key of _____.
Dm7 is the III chord in the key of _____.
Cmaj7 is the IV chord in the key of _____.
Bm7 is the III chord in the key of _____.
A♭m7 is the II chord in the key of _____.
The VI chord in the key of A is _____.
The III chord in the key of E♭ is _____.
The IV chord in the key of A♭ is _____.
The IV chord in the key of B♭ is _____.
The VII chord in the key of A is _____.
The VI chord in the key of B♭ is _____.
The III chord in the key of B is _____.