

How To Reharmonize a Hymn

1) Where to reharmonize?

Though you can reharmonize at pretty much any given point in a hymn, you should begin at the cadential points as these areas lend themselves more readily to adjustment.



Organ

5

Org.

10

Org.

V-I: Perfect Cadence

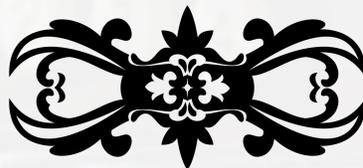
V/V-V: Imperfect Cadence

I-IV: Imperfect Cadence

V-I: Perfect Cadence

For this exercise we will use the tune *Richmond* and begin to alter the 2nd cadential point, currently an imperfect cadence in G major.

Note that altering the harmonies on the final cadence of a hymn would not be a good idea unless you are planning to segue into a coda or an interlude.



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2) What chord to use?

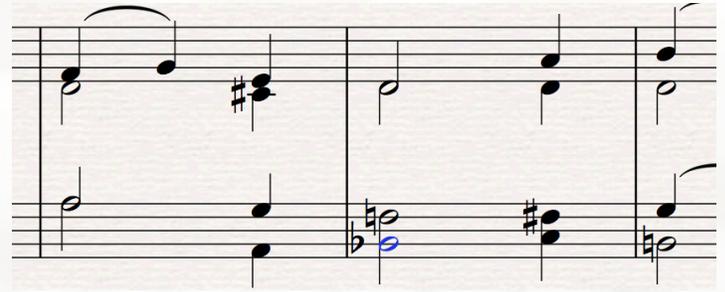
Each melody note there has various choices for reharmonization but only a couple would actually sound great in context.

Using **TRIAD** chords only, here are some examples of available choices (note: most of these would **NOT** sound great in context).

D minor - the melody note is the root of the triad. The original choice of D major works here as well.

Musical notation showing a melody line and a bass line. The melody consists of four notes: D4, E4, F#4, and G4. The bass line shows chords: D4 (root), D4 (root), D4 (root), and D4 (root). The original D major chord is shown in blue.

B flat major - the melody note of D is now the 3rd of the triad.

Musical notation showing a melody line and a bass line. The melody consists of four notes: D4, E4, F#4, and G4. The bass line shows chords: Bb4 (3rd), Bb4 (3rd), Bb4 (3rd), and Bb4 (3rd). The original B flat major chord is shown in blue.

B minor - just as with B flat major, the melody note of D is the 3rd of the triad.

Musical notation showing a melody line and a bass line. The melody consists of four notes: D4, E4, F#4, and G4. The bass line shows chords: B4 (3rd), B4 (3rd), B4 (3rd), and B4 (3rd). The original B minor chord is shown in blue.

G major - the melody note is now the 5th of the triad.

Musical notation showing a melody line and a bass line. The melody consists of four notes: D4, E4, F#4, and G4. The bass line shows chords: G4 (5th), G4 (5th), G4 (5th), and G4 (5th). The original G major chord is shown in blue.

G minor - as with G major, the melody note "D" is the 5th of the triad.

Musical notation showing a melody line and a bass line. The melody consists of four notes: D4, E4, F#4, and G4. The bass line shows chords: G4 (5th), G4 (5th), G4 (5th), and G4 (5th). The original G minor chord is shown in blue.

This should give you an idea of how many choices you have for any one given note, as we have not yet begun to explore 7th chords.

For this example, I have chosen to **use the B minor alternative**. Note that it is possible to make others fit in context, such as the B flat major but I chose B minor for the purposes of this exercise.





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3) How to make the changes work in context?

Once you have chosen an alternative chord, you now have the challenge of ensuring that it fits in with the surrounding harmonies.

Though B minor is a good alternative, the progression is now weakened if we do not alter the surrounding harmonies.



One of the reasons that this cadential point now sounds a bit weaker than the original is that it is missing the V-I feel.

To remedy this, find a way to create a V-I progression towards the newly altered chord.

Since the newly altered chord is B minor, chord 5 in B minor is F# major.

The only way to harmonize the melody note "E" with an F# major chord, is to use an F# major 7th chord.

Now we have a V-I feel towards our newly altered chord. Though it could remain as is, there is more we can do to make it fit well.



One of the reasons that this cadential point now sounds a bit weaker than the original is that it is missing the V-I feel.

To remedy this, find a way to create a V-I progression towards the newly altered chord.

Since the newly altered chord is B minor, chord 5 in B minor is F# major.

The only way to harmonize the melody note "E" with an F# major chord, is to use an F# major 7th chord.

Using a chromatically moving bass line is another method that facilitates a smooth progression. In this case below, the F# 7th chord was inverted to allow for an A# in the bass line, thus connecting A to B chromatically.



On the following pages are two hymns which have a similar structure.

Using the same steps that I have taken, reharmonize the 2nd cadence of those hymns.



How To Reharmonize a Hymn

Exercise 1 - Reharmonize this hymn using the 3 steps.

Once you have chosen an alternative chord, you now have the challenge of ensuring that it fits in with the surrounding harmonies.

The Hymnal 1982 - #662 Abide with me: fast falls the eventide

1 A - bide with me: fast falls the e - ven - tide;
 2 I need thy pres - ence ev - ery pass - ing hour;
 3 I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
 4 Hold thou thy cross be - fore my clos - ing eyes;

the dark - ness deep - ens; Lord, with me a - bide:
 what but thy grace can foil the tempt - er's power?
 ills have no weight, and tears no bit - ter - ness.
 shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;

when o - ther help - ers fail and com - forts flee,
 Who, like thy - self, my guide and stay can be?
 Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy vic - to - ry?
 heaven's morn - ing breaks, and earth's vain sha - dows flee;

help of the help - less, O a - bide with me.
 Through cloud and sun - shine, Lord, a - bide with me.
 I tri - umph still, if thou a - bide with me.
 in life, in death, O Lord, a - bide with me.

Words: Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847) Music: *Eventide*, William Henry Monk (1823-1889)