

chapter

31

Augmented Sixth Chords

Augmented sixth chords lead to root-position V and contain tendency tones that are a minor second above and below $\hat{5}$.

Function and Tendency Tones

Types of Augmented Sixth Chords: Italian, French, and German

Spelling the German augmented sixth

Harmonic Progressions

German augmented sixth

Italian and French augmented sixth

Harmonies that precede augmented sixth chords

Augmented sixth chords embellishing V

Moving between augmented sixth chords

FUNCTION AND TENDENCY TONES

Augmented sixth chords are a group of harmonies that share the same tendency tones and the same powerful drive toward V. In eighteenth-century music, augmented sixth chords frequently precede the dominant harmonies of climactic cadences. In later music, augmented sixth chords are used more freely, appearing before a dominant chord at almost any point within a composition.

Unlike most other chords, augmented sixth chords are built not from thirds stacked above a root, but rather by intervals above the *bass*. The bass of an augmented sixth chord is the minor form of $\hat{6}$, a tendency tone that leads *down* to $\hat{5}$. Augmented sixth chords include raised $\hat{4}$, a tendency tone that leads *up* to $\hat{5}$. These two tendency tones—separated by an augmented sixth—resolve to $\hat{5}$ in opposite directions.

31.1



Raised $\hat{4}$ (C^\sharp) appears in an upper voice.

Minor $\hat{6}$ (E^\flat) appears in the bass.

key of G:

The interval between E^\flat and C^\sharp is an augmented sixth.

E^\flat and C^\sharp are tendency tones that lead to $\hat{5}$ (D) by a melodic minor second.

Raised $\hat{4}$ requires an accidental in both major and minor keys. The minor form of $\hat{6}$ requires an accidental in major keys, but not in minor keys. In each case, these tendency tones must be spelled as minor seconds above and below $\hat{5}$ —*not* as chromatic semitones.

31.2



Raised $\hat{4}$ needs an accidental in both major and minor keys.



Poor The tendency tones should each be a minor 2nd—not a chromatic semitone—above and below $\hat{5}$!

G min.:

G:

The minor form of $\hat{6}$ is diatonic in G minorbut needs an accidental in G major.

31.3



Depending on the key signature, raised $\hat{4}$ might need a \sharp , \natural , or \times .

A:

C \sharp :

A \flat :

D \flat :

Depending on the key signature, the minor form of $\hat{6}$ in major keys might need a \flat , \natural , or $\flat\flat$.

TYPES OF AUGMENTED SIXTH CHORDS: ITALIAN, FRENCH, AND GERMAN

The three most common augmented sixth chords are known as the **Italian augmented sixth** (abbreviated as It^{+6}), **French augmented sixth** (Fr^{+6}), and **German augmented sixth** (Ger^{+6}). In addition to raised $\hat{4}$ and minor $\hat{6}$, these chords all include $\hat{1}$. The Italian augmented sixth includes only these three notes; the French augmented sixth also includes $\hat{2}$; and the German augmented sixth includes the minor form of $\hat{3}$.

31.4



All three augmented sixth chords use minor $\hat{6}$ in the bass, along with $\hat{1}$ and raised $\hat{4}$ in any of the upper voices.

key of C: notes found in all three augmented sixth chords

intervals above bass:
M3, A6

C: It^{+6} M3 above bass is doubled

Fr^{+6} also uses A4 above bass

Ger^{+6} also uses P5 above bass

An Italian augmented sixth (It^{+6}) uses only these three notes, with $\hat{1}$ doubled.

A French augmented sixth (Fr^{+6}) adds $\hat{2}$ (no notes doubled).

A German augmented sixth (Ger^{+6}) adds minor $\hat{3}$ (no notes doubled).

SPELLING THE GERMAN AUGMENTED SIXTH

The minor $\hat{3}$ in the German augmented sixth is diatonic in minor keys, but requires an accidental in major keys—either a flat or a natural, depending upon the key signature.

31.5



In minor keys, minor $\hat{3}$ in the Ger^{+6} does *not* need an accidental.

G minor: Ger^{+6} G major: Ger^{+6} B minor: Ger^{+6} B major: Ger^{+6}

In both G major and G minor, minor $\hat{3}$ = B \flat

In both B major and B minor, minor $\hat{3}$ = D \sharp

In major keys, minor $\hat{3}$ in the Ger^{+6} needs an accidental (either a flat or a natural).

In major keys (but *not* in minor keys), the Ger^{+6} may occasionally be spelled with raised $\hat{2}$ instead of minor $\hat{3}$.

31.6



In major keys, the Ger^{+6} is written with either minor $\hat{3}$ ($\text{B}\flat$), a perfect 5th above the bass, or raised $\hat{2}$ ($\text{A}\sharp$), a *doubly augmented 4th* above the bass.

G major: Ger^{+6} Ger^{+6}

($\text{E}\flat$ -G- $\text{B}\flat$ - $\text{C}\sharp$) ($\text{E}\flat$ -G- $\text{A}\sharp$ - $\text{C}\sharp$)

(intervals above bass: major third,
doubly augmented fourth, augmented sixth)

Raised $\hat{2}$ ($\text{A}\sharp$) is enharmonic with the minor form of $\hat{3}$ ($\text{B}\flat$).



Poor In minor keys, the Ger^{+6} may *not* be written with raised $\hat{2}$.

G minor: Ger^{+6} (!?)

In G minor, use $\text{B}\flat$ (which is in the key signature), *not* $\text{A}\sharp$.

31.7



Depending on the key signature, raised $\hat{2}$ may require a \sharp , \natural , or \times .

C: Ger^{+6}

(raised $\hat{2}$ in C = $\text{D}\sharp$)

$\text{A}\flat$: Ger^{+6}

(raised $\hat{2}$ in $\text{A}\flat$ = $\text{B}\natural$)

B: Ger^{+6}

(raised $\hat{2}$ in B = $\text{C}\times$)

HARMONIC PROGRESSIONS

GERMAN AUGMENTED SIXTH

A German augmented sixth chord most often leads to V through a cadential $\hat{4}$.

31.8



A Ger^{+6} normally moves to a cadential $\hat{4}$ -V (i.e., $\text{V}_4^6 - \hat{5}$), with stepwise motion or repeated notes in all voices.

G: $\text{Ger}^{+6} \text{ V}_4^6 - \hat{5}$ G min.: $\text{Ger}^{+6} \text{ V}_4^6 - \hat{5}$ G: $\text{Ger}^{+6} \text{ V}_4^6 - \hat{5}$ G: $\text{Ger}^{+6} \text{ V}$



Good Voices move smoothly when Ger^{+6} goes to a cadential $\hat{4}$.



Good Good Raised $\hat{2}$ ($\text{A}\sharp$) moves up to $\hat{3}$ (B).



Poor Moving directly from Ger^{+6} to V creates parallel 5ths.

31.9 Chopin, Mazurka in A Minor, B. 134 ➡



A min.: i^6

$\text{Ger}^{+6} \text{ V}_4^8 - \hat{7} - \hat{5} - \hat{3}$

i

Ger^{+6} with minor $\hat{3}$ ($\text{F-A-C-D}\sharp$) moves to a cadential $\hat{4}$.

Raised $\hat{4}$ ($\text{D}\sharp$) is in the tenor (raised $\hat{4}$ does *not* need to appear in the soprano).

31.10 Mendelssohn, *Songs without Words*, op. 102, no. 6 ➡



C: I vii°₆/V **Ger⁺6** **V_{6/4}⁸** **$\frac{7}{5}$ ₃** I

Ger⁺6 with minor $\hat{3}$
(A \flat -C-E \flat -F \sharp) moves
to cadential $\frac{6}{4}$.

31.11 R. Schumann, "Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen" (On a Bright Summer Morning) ➡



Bb: I **Ger⁺6** **V_{6/4}⁸** **$\frac{7}{5}$ ₃** I

Ger⁺6 with raised $\hat{2}$
(G \flat -B \flat -C \sharp -E \natural) moves
to a cadential $\frac{6}{4}$.

ITALIAN AND FRENCH AUGMENTED SIXTH

The Italian and French augmented sixth chords may move to a root-position V either directly or through a cadential $\frac{6}{4}$.

31.12



G: It⁺6 V G: Fr⁺6 V

Italian and French augmented sixth
chords often move directly to V.

Every voice either repeats or
moves by step when a It⁺6 or
Fr⁺6 moves to V.

31.13 L. Reichardt, "Vaters Klage" (The Father's Lament) ➡



Es ste-hen drei Stern' am Him - mel, die bli - cken trau-rig her - ab;

G min.: i V i **It⁺6** V

Translation: Three stars shone in the sky, looking sadly down.

31.14 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in C Minor, op. 13 ("Pathétique"), I ➡

Eb: V₂ I⁶ IV⁶ **Fr⁺6** V

31.15



Italian and French augmented sixth chords can also move through a cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ to V, with smooth motion in all voices.

G: It⁺6 V₄ $\frac{6}{4} = \frac{5}{3}$ Fr⁺6 V₄ $\frac{6}{4} = \frac{5}{3}$

31.16 Mozart, Piano Sonata in D, K. 284, III ➡



Italian and French augmented sixth chords can also move through a cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ to V, with smooth motion in all voices.

D min.: i V $\frac{4}{2}$ /IV IV⁶ It⁺6 V $\frac{6}{4}$ - $\frac{5}{3}$

31.17 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in E \flat , op. 7, II ➡



C: I IV passing I $\frac{6}{4}$ vii $^{\circ}$ 6/V Fr⁺6 V $\frac{8}{6}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ - $\frac{7}{5}$ $\frac{3}{3}$ I

HARMONIES THAT PRECEDE AUGMENTED SIXTH CHORDS

Any harmony that may precede V—such as I, IV⁶, or vi—may precede an augmented sixth chord.

31.18 Beethoven, Symphony no. 5, I ➡



C min.: i V⁶ i V⁶ i It⁺6 V

An augmented sixth chord may be preceded by a tonic chord.

31.19 Schubert, *Moments Musicaux*, op. 94, no. 6 ➡



Ab: $\flat VI$ It^{+6} V

31.20 Sor, Leçons progressives for Guitar, op. 31, no. 20 ➡



A min.: i V_2^4/IV IV^6 It^{+6} V V_2^4 i^6 V_3^4 i

It is particularly common for VI or IV^6 to precede an augmented sixth chord.

AUGMENTED SIXTH CHORDS EMBELLISHING V

An augmented sixth chord may also be sandwiched between two root-position V chords, so as to embellish V with neighbor motion in the bass.

31.21 Bortniansky, Cherubic Hymn, no. 3

C min.: i^6 $ii^{\circ 6}_5$ V V It^{+6} V

It^{+6} embellishes V with a G-A \flat -G neighbor motion in the bass.

31.22 Bellini, "Torna, vezzosa Fillide" (Return, charming Phillida) ➡



A min.: i Fr^{+6} V V Fr^{+6} V Fr^{+6} V

Fr^{+6} embellishes V with E-F-E neighbor motion in the bass.

Translation: Where, Phillida, where?

MOVING BETWEEN AUGMENTED SIXTH CHORDS

Before progressing to V, augmented sixth chords may interchange with one another, as a result of skips or passing motion between chord tones.

31.23



A min.: Aug. 6 V
 Ger⁺6 Fr⁺6 It⁺6

A passing tone (B) leads from C to A in the top voice . . .

31.24 Beethoven, Bagatelle, op. 33, no. 4 ➡



A min.: i Aug. 6 V
 Ger⁺6 Fr⁺6 It⁺6

. . . forming a Ger⁺6 moving through a Fr⁺6 to an It⁺6.

A Closer Look

AUGMENTED SIXTH CHORDS

SHOW

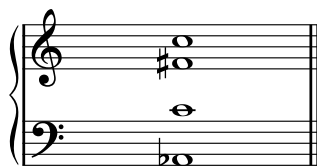
review and interact

POINTS FOR REVIEW

- The three main types of augmented sixth chords each include minor $\hat{6}$ in the bass, along with $\hat{1}$ and raised $\hat{4}$ in the upper voices.
 - An Italian augmented sixth (It^{+6}) uses only these three notes, with $\hat{1}$ doubled.
 - A French augmented sixth (Fr^{+6}) also includes $\hat{2}$, with no notes doubled.
 - A German augmented sixth (Ger^{+6}) also includes minor $\hat{3}$ (or sometimes in major keys raised $\hat{2}$), with no notes doubled.
- When the augmented sixth chord resolves, its tendency tones—minor $\hat{6}$ and raised $\hat{4}$ —resolve to $\hat{5}$ in opposite directions.
- A German augmented sixth usually moves through a cadential $\hat{6}_4$ to V.
- Italian and French augmented sixth chords move either to root-position V or through a cadential $\hat{6}_4$ to V.

Summary of most common types and uses of augmented sixth chords:

key of C: Italian Augmented 6th
 $\flat\hat{6}$ in bass; $\hat{1}$, $\sharp\hat{4}$,
and $\hat{1}$ in other voices



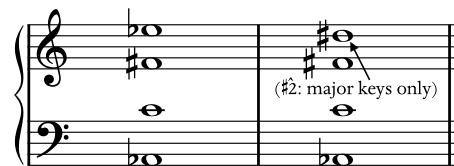
moves to root-position V
(or cad. $\hat{6}_4$ -V)

French Augmented 6th
 $\flat\hat{6}$ in bass; $\hat{1}$, $\sharp\hat{4}$,
and $\hat{2}$ in other voices



moves to root-position V
(or cad. $\hat{6}_4$ -V)

German Augmented 6th
 $\flat\hat{6}$ in bass; $\hat{1}$, $\sharp\hat{4}$,
and either $\flat\hat{3}$ or $\sharp\hat{2}$ in other voices



moves to cadential $\hat{6}_4$ -V

TEST YOURSELF

1. Name raised $\hat{4}$ and minor $\hat{6}$ in the following keys, and identify which of these notes are not in the key (and thus need accidentals):

F major
 F minor
 E major
 E minor
 D \flat major

2. What are the notes in the Italian, French and German augmented sixth chords in these keys?

a F major: It $^{+6}$ = _____ Fr $^{+6}$ = _____ Ger $^{+6}$ = _____

Show answers



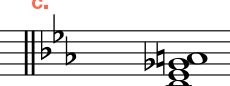

b F minor: It $^{+6}$ = _____ Fr $^{+6}$ = _____ Ger $^{+6}$ = _____

c E major: It $^{+6}$ = _____ Fr $^{+6}$ = _____ Ger $^{+6}$ = _____

d E minor: It $^{+6}$ = _____ Fr $^{+6}$ = _____ Ger $^{+6}$ = _____

e C \sharp minor: It $^{+6}$ = _____ Fr $^{+6}$ = _____ Ger $^{+6}$ = _____

3. Add accidentals to the following harmonies to change them into augmented sixth chords. Identify the augmented sixth chords formed.

a.    

Ab: vii $^{\circ}6/V$ D: V $^{\frac{4}{3}}/V$ Eb: vii $^{\circ}6/V$ F \sharp min.: iv 6

4. The following are augmented sixth chords; label the type of each and identify the keys in which it may appear.

a.     

5. In each example below, which of the two augmented sixth chords is incorrect, is notated incorrectly, or uses incorrect doubling? What is the error?

a. F# min.: It⁺⁶

b. G min.: Ger⁺⁶

c. F: Fr⁺⁶

6. In an augmented sixth chord, must minor $\hat{6}$ appear in a particular voice? If so, which voice? Must raised $\hat{4}$ appear in a particular voice? If so, which voice?

[Show answers](#)

Know It? [Show It!](#)

- Focus by working through the tutorials on:
- [Recognizing augmented sixth chords](#)
 - [Writing Italian augmented sixth \(It⁺⁶\) chords](#)
 - [Writing French augmented sixth \(Fr⁺⁶\) chords](#)
 - [Writing German augmented sixth \(Ger⁺⁶\) chords](#)

- Learn with inQuizitive.

- Apply what you've learned to complete the assignments:
- Spelling Augmented Sixth Chords
 - Realizing Roman Numerals
 - Realizing Figured Bass
 - Harmonizing Melodies
 - Analysis