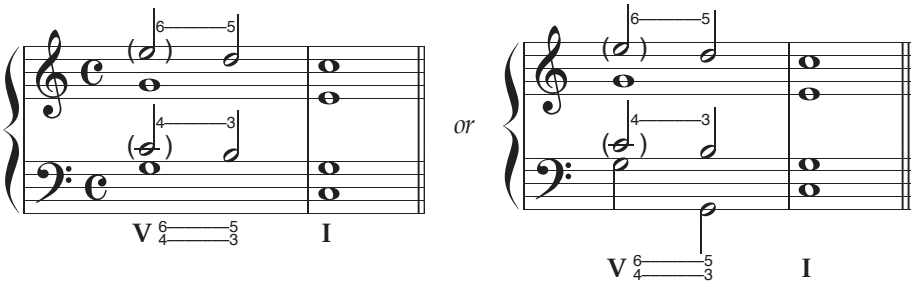
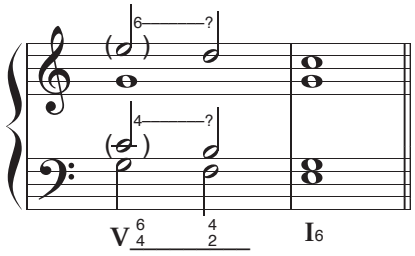
The Cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ Chord

I. DESCRIPTION, CONSTRUCTION, AND RESOLUTION

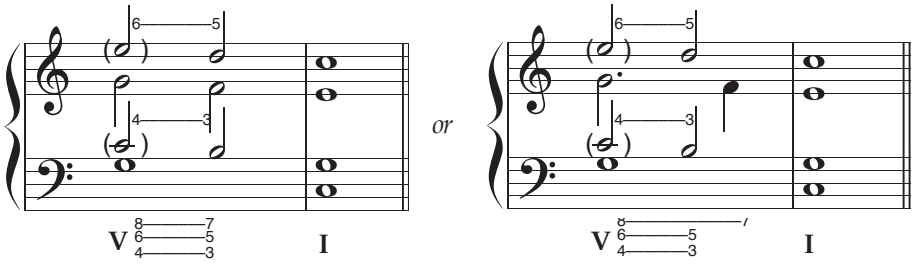
The **CADENTIAL $\frac{6}{4}$ CHORD is a voice-leading embellishment of the Dominant chord**. It involves **two** NCTs resolving (almost always) down by step above the bass, which is usually stationary, *or* may contain an octave displacement.



Sometimes the bass moves to a V4/2 position simultaneously with the resolution of the upper voices:

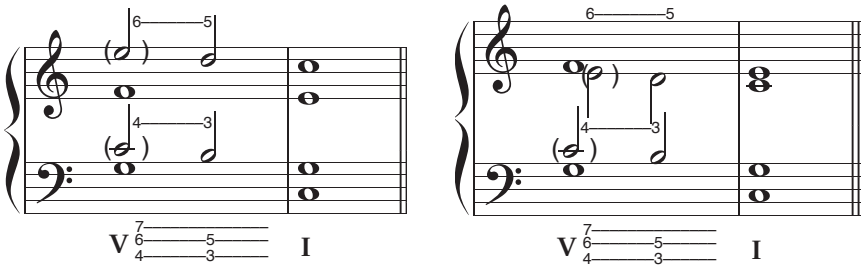


More commonly, the chord seventh is introduced in one of the upper voices, resolving simultaneously with them, *or* it may be staggered to occur later:



It is possible, but less common, to have the chord seventh sounding *simultaneously* with the $\frac{6}{4}$, although this is more typical of the music of the later nineteenth century or tonal music of the twentieth century than it is of Bach, Haydn, Mozart, etc. If you choose this, make sure the chord seventh is **below** the "6" of 6-5. Play both examples below to find out why:

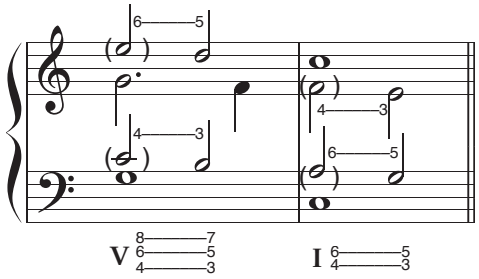
POSSIBLE **YIKES!**



II. PURPOSE, OTHER USES

As has already been stated, the purpose of the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ - $\frac{5}{3}$ is to **embellish** the **V** chord; it also **prolongs V**. Remember that this is one of *several* possible decorations of the dominant; other common embellishments include adding a seventh (V7 instead of V), or a suspension (4-3 is most common).

Any of these embelishments (including the $\frac{6}{4}$ - $\frac{5}{3}$) may also be used to embellish harmonies *other* than dominant as well. **V** is by far the most frequently decorated chord in this way, but it is often used to decorate the tonic chord as well. The following example embellishes both **V** *and* **I**:



III. DERIVATION; *IF IT LOOKS LIKE A* **I** $\frac{6}{4}$, *WHY DO WE CALL IT A* **V** $\frac{6}{4}$?

•A common way to decorate a **V** (or any other) chord is to add a 4-3 suspension. The cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ just takes this one step further by simultaneously adding a *second* accented dissonance, the 6-5. (You could even add a 9-8 decoration to the mix if you wish, but this is less common.)

•The $\frac{6}{4}$ - $\frac{5}{3}$ refers to the **voice leading above the bass**, *not* to the inversion; it is a way of identifying the type of decoration to the V chord. It may *look* like a **I** $\frac{6}{4}$ when taken out of context, but when the **function** (i.e. dominant) and **decorative nature** are taken into account, it must be labelled as a **V** $\frac{6}{4}$ - $\frac{5}{3}$.

IV. VOICE-LEADING , DOUBLING, METRIC PLACEMENT, ETC.

•While the **6** and **4** above the bass may *look* like chord tones, they are actually *functioning* as NCTs, and so they need to be approached and resolved properly.

•Approaching a NCT *properly* means:

(i) by common tone,
(ii) by step, or
(iii) by small ascending skip (less frequent). **Avoid approaching the 4 by ascending skip**.

•The TYPICAL resolution of these NCTs (6-5 and 4-3) is shown in all the above examples; both the **6** and **4** fall by step (to the **5** and **3**, accordingly). Note, however, that:

Another possible, but significantly less-common resolution is 6-7 instead of 6-5.

•The **6** and **4** (above the bass), since they are NCTs, should *not* be doubled; **double the bass**. (A relatively rare exception is to double the **6**, in order to have resolutions of 6-7 and 6-5 at the same time.)

•**The cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ is normally ACCENTED relative to its resolution** (the $\frac{5}{3}$). The only fairly-common exception to this occurs in 3/4 time, where *sometimes* the $\frac{6}{4}$ occurs on beat 2, while the $\frac{5}{3}$ occurs on beat 3.

•The **cadential $\frac{6}{4}$** is not as commonly-used in Bach chorales as other dominant embellishments; he seemed to prefer the 4-3 suspension, with often combining it with a chord seventh. However, it is extremely common in music of the classical era.

☞ Why do you think the **cadential $\frac{6}{4}$** is usually accented relative to its resolution?

☞ Make up 5 examples for SATB in different keys showing different approaches and resolutions of the **cadential $\frac{6}{4}$**, then play them.