AUGMENTED SIXTH CHORDS

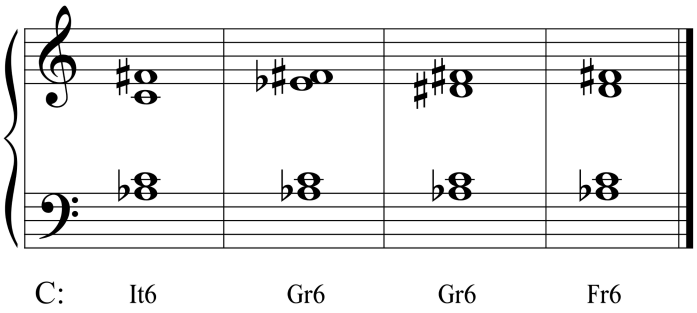
Definition:

A chord that contains the interval of an augmented sixth.

Description:

There are 3 such chords: the German 6th (Gr^6), the French 6th (Fr^6) and the Italian 6th (It^6). The chords consist of the following intervals:

Italian 6:	M3, A6
German 6:	M3, P5 (or DA4), A6
French 6:	M3, A4, A6



The Gr^6 in major may be spelled with a doubly augmented fourth instead of a perfect fifth to show the resolution of the pitches in the direction of the inflection (see part-writing below).

A6 chords are most often built on the note a half step above the dominant (^{b}6) of the scale in both major and minor keys (as the above examples in the key of C).

A6 chords may also be built on the note a half step above the tonic (^{b}2) (see below for examples).

Sound:

It^6 sounds like an <u>incomplete</u> V7 chord (i.e., with the fifth omitted).

Gr^6 sounds like a <u>complete</u> V7 chord.

Fr^6 has its own unique sound.

Function:

A6 chords are used for color and tension.

They can also be used in chromatic modulations.

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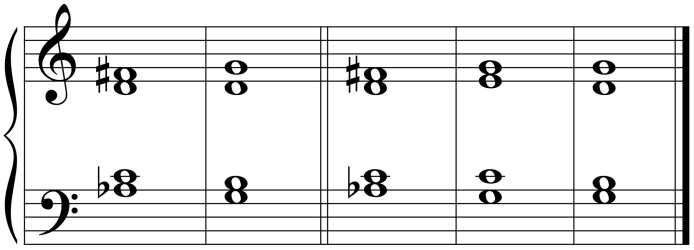
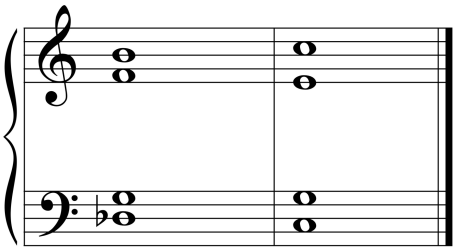
Resolution:

When built on the $^{\flat}6$, A6 chords usually resolve to V or a V$\binom{6\ -\ \ 5}{4\ -\ \ 3}$ progression.



C: Fr6 V Fr6 V$\binom{6\ -\ \ 5}{4\ -\ \ 3}$

When built on the $^{\flat}2$, A6 chords will resolve to I.



C: Fr6 I

Part-Writing:

ITALIAN 6:

In the Italian sicth chord, double the note that is a third above the bass; double the unaltered/non-tendency tone.

Resolve the interval of the A6 to the octave; resolve the altered notes in the direction of their inflection/tendency.

Take other notes to the nearest chord tone following part-writing rules.

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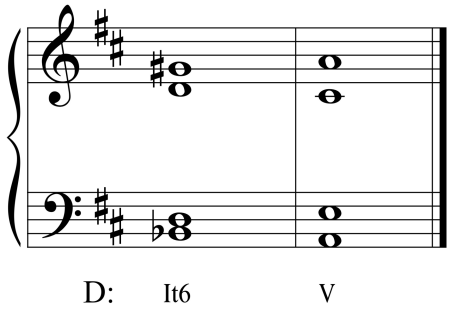
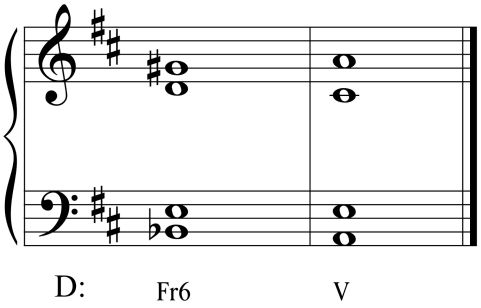


FRENCH 6:

The French 6 has four notes, so put one note in each voice. Do not leave any notes out.
Resolve the interval of the A6 to an octave; resolve the notes in the direction of their inflection/tendency.
Keep the common tone.
Take the other note to the nearest chord tone.



GERMAN 6:

The German has four notes; put one not in each voice. Do not leave out notes. Resolve the interval of the A6 to an octave.
Resolve the interval of the A6 to an octave; resolve the notes in the direction of their inflection/tendency.
Take the notes to the nearest chord tone.

Problem – Parallel Fifths:

Resolving a Gr^{6} (on $^{\flat}$6) directly to V or Gr^{6} (on $^{\flat}$2) directly to I will result in parallel perfect fifths (see below).

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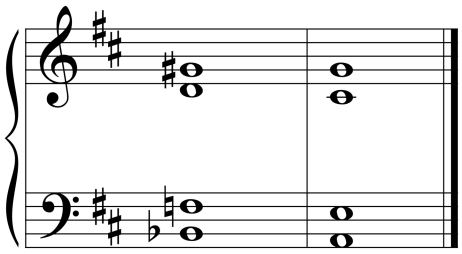
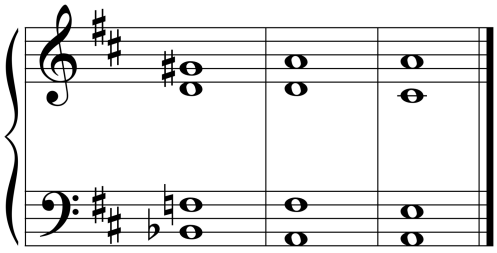
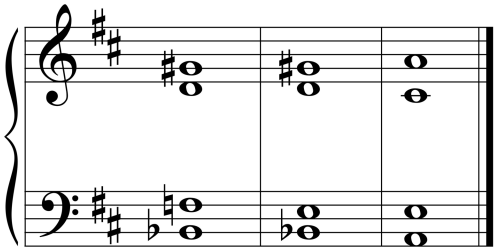


D: Gr6 V

In order to avoid the P5s, resolve the German to another chord (e.g., a cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ or a Fr^6 or It^6) before resolving to the V (see second and third examples below).



D: Gr6 $V\binom{6-}{4-}\binom{5}{3}$



D: Gr6 Fr6 V

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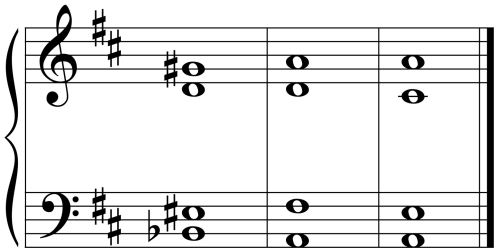
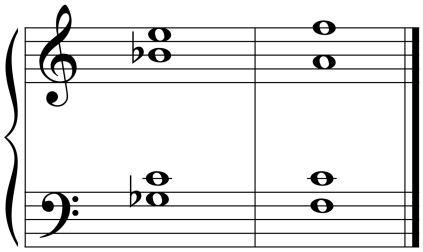
Problem: In a major key, spell the Gr^6 with the DA4 spelling to show the resolution of that tone to the third of the $V\binom{6-}{4-}\binom{5}{3}$.



D: Gr6 $V\binom{6-}{4-}\binom{5}{3}$

Other:

Augmented 6th chords can be created by scale degrees other than $^{b}6$ and $^{b}2$. They may be built on the note a half-step above the note of resolution creating a secondary function. See the example below.



C: Fr6/IV IV

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