

Major upgrade of Chorales section 2025

I am pleased to announce that, after a considerable period of study and research, I have completed a major revision of the material in the Chorales section of the AMusTCL Composition module. I have chosen this because most students take the chorale question, yet many do not gain high marks. This is partly because of a limited grasp of the style of Baroque chorales, and particularly those of Bach. In grade 6, students arrange a melody for SATB. It is usually a **Protestant hymn tune**, completed in a **chordal texture with basic chords, for a Church which did not want the music to take attention away from the words**. Yet **Bach chorales** are quite different. They were intended for practised singers in auditioned choirs in city Churches, which expected something close to medieval polyphony – whereas hymns were generally intended for all-comers choirs in all Churches, where complex music was not expected. This impacts the **style of chorales** in a number of ways. For example, Bach could expect his singers to manage wide ranges, large leaps, chromatic chords, and awkward intervals, and he liked full chords at cadences (even if that meant inner parts dropping down from the leading note in chord V to the fifth of chord I). So many of the “rules” students have traditionally been given do not apply. Yet there are other **techniques that Bach does or does not use**, particularly related to voice-leading, chord progressions, and the use of seventh chords.

I want the material to be as approachable as possible. I notice that much of the material about chorales is written with big words in long sentences – which makes it especially hard for younger students, or those whose native language is not English. I have set out to make the wording as **clear and simple** as I can, and to move in **small steps** from the simple to the more complex. There are many **examples** of hymn and chorale scores that students can study – as well as they can listen to. I have also made use of **colour and graphics** such as arrows and circles to make it easy to see at a glance the points that are being made – as in the example below. There are also **reminders** of points made in earlier files, as many students have to fit their study into busy lives, so it is easy to forget what they have learned in earlier sections. At the end of the section are **old examination questions, with examiner’s comments, and model answers**.

01. MINOR KEYS

In a minor key the leading note is usually raised. However in voice-writing the **melodic form of the minor scale** is usually used. It is easier to sing, and makes each voice more tuneful. Sometimes, though, both 6th and 7th degrees **are** raised when going down, or **not** raised when going up, to fit the chord. So the seventh degree (leading note) in V(7) is **usually** raised, while the 6th degree in ii, iv and vi is **seldom** raised.

Avoid cross relations (such as G# in one part straight after G in another part.)

1 Write the accidentals in the first full bar in this chorale. .

HERR JESUS CHRIST, DU HOCHSTES GUT (beginning)

The G# here creates a chromatic dominant 7th

Moving in tenths

Listen to the [sound file](#) The biggest interval is usually between tenors and basses.

During this process, I have expanded old files and added new ones, so there is now a large library of files. As a result, I have divided the course into three sections:

- Revision of simple hymn-writing at grade 6 level
- More complex hymn arrangements
- The style expected in Bach Chorales

There has been a small rise in prices to cover this; however at the moment I am sending the material free of charge to students who are already taking this module.