

Figured Bass

Figured bass symbols show intervals above the bass. This is often very easy to interpret. However, there are some notation conventions that can make things trickier.

- A bass note without figures represents a root-position triad.
- A single accidental applies to the third of the chord.
- A slash through a number means the note that forms that interval above the bass is raised by a half step.
- 4+ means that the note a fourth above the bass is raised by a half step.
- An accidental beside a number means the note that intervals above the bass should receive that accidental.
- Sometimes there are not enough figures to write a complete chord, so you will have to infer a note. Remember that figures typically provide the third of the chord and the seventh. You usually have to infer the fifth of the chord.

When analyzing a figured bass:

1. Determine which notes are represented by the figures, including any accidentals.
2. Provide a roman numeral analysis. You may need to infer notes to complete this step. Remember that progressions may modulate.
3. Provide a contextual analysis to check your work. If you are seeing T/PD/D labels that don't make sense you have a mistake.

Sample figured bass with realization:

g: i VI V²/₄/iv iv⁶ V⁷/V V i VI
 c: III VI iv V⁵/₆/V V i

For more information on this topic see *Musician's Guide* pp. 265–267.