

# HARMONIC FUNCTIONS In Major Keys

## Progressions

When chords are organized in a traditional harmonic progression, they “progress” towards the tonic (the roman numeral I chord). To put it another way, the I chord is the ultimate goal of a progression, which will most-often conclude in a V to I combination.

Some progressions move rather directly to the tonic:

I----ii-----V----I

Other progressions will move less directly:

I----iii----IV----I----vi----ii----V----vi----IV----vii<sup>o</sup>----V----I

## Function

While there are seven different chords that can harmonize a key, they can be grouped together into fewer categories according to their function. By “function”, we mean tendency; like “V tends to move to I”. There are three main functions:

<b>Tonic:</b>	a goal; a stable harmonic area
<b>Dominant:</b>	an unstable harmonic area that needs to continue towards the stable tonic
<b>Pre-dominant:</b>	a somewhat unstable harmonic area that usually wants to continue to a dominant chord

Some chords’ functions are very predictable while others can be flexible (those in parentheses).

<b>Pre-dominant</b>	<b>Dominant</b>	<b>Tonic</b>
ii, IV (vi)	V, vii <sup>o</sup>	I (vi, iii)

The above functions are tendencies, not absolutes. This is what they often do, but there are exceptions for sure.

## Exceptions

- Sometimes IV goes to I (instead of V going to I); this represents a “softer” arrival at the tonic chord.
- The vi chord can be a tonic substitute and come after the V chord, but it can also precede a V chord, or even precede a ii or IV chord.