

Tutorial 4G: Variations on ii-V-I's



Welcome! In this tutorial you'll learn how to:

1. Use tri-tone substitutions
2. Go from the V to a New I
3. Build ii-V-I Chains
4. Build ii-V and V-I Chains

Enjoy the learning, and see you at the arch ...

Other Tutorials

- 4A: Soundscapes
- 4B: Double-Time & Half-Time
- 4D: More Development
- 4F: Chord Substitutions
- 4J: Group Interaction

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- ▶ There are many variations of ii-V-I progressions in standard tunes. Finding them, using them, and creating your own can give you fresh insights into making your own statements in improvisation.

Part 1 – Using Tritone Substitutions

A) What are tri-tone substitutions?

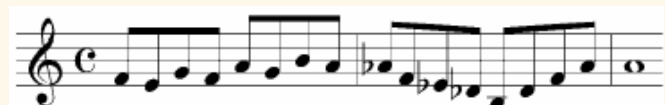
*Just as you can simplify ii-V-I's, you can also spice them up with tritone (augmented 4th) substitutions.

*A tritone substitution occurs when you use a bII chord instead of a V, creating a ii-bII-I progression. For example, in the key of C the ii-bII-I progression would be Dm to Db7 to CMa7. These chords move down by half-steps – a strong chord movement.

*Because the substitute bII is a tritone away from the V, using the bII is called a tritone substitution. You can substitute a ii-bII-I wherever you see a written II-V-I.

*Tritone substitution favors dominant alterations (b5, +5, b9, +9). For example:

Dm7 G7 (play a Db7 chord) CMa7



b9 +5 b5

*You can also use “opposite” tritone substitution: when the actual chords are ii-bII-I, you can use II-V-I instead.

Dm7 Db7 (play a G7 chord) CMa7



Opposite tritone subst: ii-V-I (Dm7-G7- CMa7) over ii-bII-I

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Write the ii-bII-I progression for each key in the circle of 4ths. Then write a chromatic progression down from C (C, B, Bb, A, etc.). Think of every other chord as a bII; do an “opposite” tritone substitution for each bII.

Part 2 – Going from the V to a New I

*A dominant chord (V) usually resolves up a 4th to the root chord (I or i), such as G7 to CMa7, or G7 to Cm. This resolves the built-in energy of the dominant chord. But a dominant chord can also resolve to certain other chords besides the root chord.

A) What are some new dominant resolutions?

A dominant chord can also resolve to a I chord that is:

- Down a 1/2 step (such as G7 to F#Ma)
- Up or down an augmented 4th (G7 to C#Ma)

(Part 2 – Going from the V to a New I)

*By using a different dominant resolution, it sounds like you modulate to a new key; the new I chord is unexpected but sounds good. Below are chord progressions for each of these dominant resolutions.

Em7 A7 | AbMa7 (V resolves down 1/2 step)

ii V new I, key of Ab

Cm7 F7 | BMa7 (V resolves up an augmented fourth)

ii V new I, key of B

- **TRY IT** – Basic: Resolve each dominant chord around the circle of 4ths to two major chords (not up a 4th). Medium: think of each chord in the circle of 4ths as a dominant chord. Name the two related minor chords that each dominant chord could resolve to.

B) What about dominant resolutions to minor chords?

*A dominant chord can also resolve to a related minor chord (minor chord in the key of the major I):

- Up a whole step, going to the minor vi (such as G7 to Am in C Major)
- Down a minor third, going to the minor iii (such as G7 to Em in C Major)

*Resolving to the minor vi or iii chord makes the progression sound like it's switching to minor. A tug between major and minor can give welcome variety to the progression.

- **TRY IT** – Around the circle of 4ths, create ii-v's that resolve to the minor vi chord. Then resolve to minor iii.

Part 3 – Building ii-V-I Chains

A) What are ii-V-I chains?

*Some tunes “chain” consecutive ii-V-I progressions together to modulate to a I chord in a distant key –

one with several more (or fewer) sharps or flats. Any ii-V-I's can be used in a chain; they sound good because of the strong chord movements (up a 4th).

*The example below chains ii-V-I's together. It begins with a ii-V-I in the key of C Major then adds ii-V-I's in E Major, F Major, and B Major.

(Part 3 – Building ii-V-I Chains)

Dm7 G7 | CMa7 | F#m7 B7 | EMa7

(ii-V-I in C -----) (ii-V-I in E -----)

Gm7 C7 | FMa7 | C#m7 F#7 | BMa7

(ii-V-I in F -----) (ii-V-I in B -----)

Eight-measure progression using arbitrary ii-V-I chains

- ▶ **TRY IT – Basic:** Write a four-bar ii-V-I chain that includes these chords somewhere in the progression: A7, Ebm7, and GMa7. **Medium:** Pre-select any three chords to include.

B) What are parallel ii-V-I's?

*Although any ii-V-I's can be chained together, usually the ii of each ii-V-I moves up or down by a constant interval.

*This makes the ii-V-I's sound like they are related to each other in a parallel way.

Chain Intvl. First ii-V-I Second ii-V-I

1/2-step up Dm7-G7-CMa7 | Ebm7-Ab7-DbMa7

1/2-step down Dm7-G7-CMa7 | C#m7-F#7-BMa7

1-step up Dm7-G7-CMa7 | Em7-A7-DMa7

1-step down Dm7-G7-CMa7 | Cm7-F7-BbMa7

Fourth up Dm7-G7-CMa7 | Gm7-C7-FMa7

*Using parallel ii-V-I's, a tune can modulate to any key. You can use this technique to add your own chords when the original progression stays on a single chord for a while.

Example: Bridge of "Cherry Key"

*The bridge (B) section of "Cherry Key" in 300 Standards uses a chain of ii-V-I's. Starting in B Major, each ii-V-I moves down a whole-step. Instead of F Major for the last two bars, the tune uses a ii-V (Cm to F7) to get back to the original key of Bb Major:

C#m | F#7 | BMa6 | •/• |

(ii-V-I in B -----)

Bm | E7 | AMa6 | •/• |

(ii-V-I in A -----)

Am | D7 | GMa6 | •/• |

(ii-V-I in G -----)

Gm | C7 | Cm | F7 |

(ii-V in F -----) (ii-V in Bb -----)

Bridge to "Cherry Key"

4

(Part 3 – Building ii-V-I Chains)

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Basic: Write a parallel ii-V-I chain that starts with a Cm7 and ends up in E Major. Medium: Pre-select your own starting and ending chords.

Part 4 – Building ii-V and V-I Chains

A) How do I use ii-V chains?

Some tunes chain ii-V's and then resolve to a I chord.

Any ii-V's can be used; they work well because of the strong movement (up a 4th) of each ii-V. The next example chains several ii-V's. It begins with a ii-V in C Major, adds a ii-V in Db Major, then ends with a ii-V-I in E Major.

Dm7 G7 | Ebm7 Ab7 | F#m7 B7 | EMa7

(ii-V in C -----) (ii-V in Db --) (ii-V-I in E -----)

You can also simplify a ii-V by playing only the I or ii scale across both chords.

B) How do I use V-I chains?

Like ii-V-I chains, ii-V's often move up or down by a constant interval, creating a parallel movement.

Chain Interval

1/2-step up

1/2-step down

Whole-step up

Whole-step down

Fourth up

Example

Dm7-G7, Ebm7-Ab7

Dm7-G7, C#m7-F#7 (the V and ii are an augmented 4th apart)

Dm7-G7, Em7-A7

Dm7-G7, Cm7-F7 (circle of fourths)

Dm7-G7, Gm7-C7 (the V and ii are on the same pitch)

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Basic: Write a ii-V chain of seven total chords that starts with Am7 and ends up in Bb Major. Hint: You may want to work backwards from the final ii-V-I. Medium: Pre-select your own starting and ending chords.

C) What are arbitrary V-I's?

*It's one where the V chord is outside the key, leading directly to a modulation. In this case, the V chord just seems arbitrarily chosen.

*The arbitrary V chords are based mostly on the non-harmonic tones (bII, III, #4, bVI, and bVII in major, for example). Examples in C Major are shown below. In the left-hand examples the V resolves up a fourth; in the right-hand examples the V goes down a half-step.

(Part 4 – Building ii-V and V-I Chains)

Dm7-5 Db7 | Gb

ii V (bII) new I

Dm7-5 Eb7 | Ab or Dm7-5 Eb7 | D

ii V (bIII) new I ii V (bIII) new I

Dm7-5 Ab7 | Db or Dm7-5 Ab7 | G

ii V (bVI) new I ii V (bVI) new I

Dm7-5 F#7 | B or Dm7-5 F#7 | F

ii V (#4) new I ii V (#4) new I

Dm7-5 Bb7 | Eb or Dm7-5 Bb7 | A

ii V (bVII) new I ii V (bVII) new I

Arbitrary V-I's in C Major

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Write out all the arbitrary V-I resolutions in the key of D. Then do the same for at least 3 other keys.

D) How do I use V-I chains?

*An alternative to the II-V chain is the V-I chain. The V-I chain usually begins with a ii-V-I so each V chord will be in the “even-numbered” position (such as the

second chord in a bar, or the only chord in an even-numbered bar). As with II-V's, the V-I's can be arbitrary or parallel. You can also play one scale for each V-I.

*The example below uses consecutive V-I progressions to modulate from C Major to F# Major to Bb Major.

Dm7 G7 | CMa7 C#7 | F#Ma7 F7 | BbMa7

(ii-V-I in C -----) (V-I in F# -----) (V-I in Bb ----)

Example: First Half of “Giant Stops”

*The first half of the tune “Giant Stops” in *300 Standards* uses two chains of V-I progressions (the first one is D7-GMa, Bb7-EbMa). Each chain begins on the V halfway through a bar, after starting the bar on a major chord.

BMa D7 | GMa Bb7 | EbMa | Am D7 |

(V- I in G ----) (V- I in Eb -----) (V to I in G)

GMa Bb7 | EbMa F#7 | BMa |Fm Bb7 ||

(V- I in Eb-----) (V- I in B-----) (V to I in Eb)

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Write a parallel V-I chain of seven total chords that starts with F#m7 and ends up in D Major. Hint: You may want to work backwards from the final ii-V-I. Then pre-select your own starting and ending chords.

(Part 4 – Building ii-V and V-I Chains)

E) How do I use minor ii-V and V-I progressions?

*Minor ii-V progressions can be chained together to modulate. The example below modulates from C minor to Db minor to E minor. The ii chords are m7-5 in quality; this gives the feeling of minor ii-V progressions, even though the minor i chord is not actually played.

Dm7-5 G7-9 | Ebm7-5 Ab7+9 | F#m7-5 B7-9 | Em7
(ii-V in C min) (ii-V in Db minor) (ii-V-i in E minor -----)

*Minor V-i progressions can also be chained together to modulate to other keys. The example below modulates from C minor to F# minor to Bb minor.


Dm7-5 G7-9 | Cm7 C#7+9 | F#m7 F7 | Bbm7
(ii-V-i in C minor -----) (V-i in F# minor ---) (V-i in Bb minor--)

- ▶ **TRY IT** – Create a progression of four bars with a minor ii-V chain. Then use a minor V-i chain; then also use a minor ii-V chain, and go for 8 bars.

That's all for Tutorial 4G!

Next is the Quiz –to get started, go to the next page.

QUIZ – 4G: Variations on ii-V-I's

Click on the letter for the best answer for each question. You'll hear a C Maj6 arpeggio if you're right. If you miss 2 or less, you pass the Tutorial!
Or, click [Back](#)  to review the Tutorial before taking the Quiz.

- 1) The 8th chord in a ii-V chain going up chromatically from C would be
A) Eb B) Ab C) G D) C
- 2) What would be the best choice for starting an arbitrary ii-V after Dm – G7?
A) Dm B) CMa C) Abm D) Am
- 3) What's the missing chord in Ebm – Ab7 ___ A7?
A) Gm B) Dm C) Cm D) Em
- 4) Which is not a typical new resolution for a V chord in a major key?
A) down 1/2 step B) down a major third C) down a tri-tone D) up a tri-tone
- 5) The fastest way to modulate to a new key is
A) a ii-V chain B) a V-I chain C) a single ii-V D) a single V-I
- 6) If a tritone substitution were used on Ebm – Ab7 DbMaj7, the second chord would be
A) G7 B) Ab7 C) D7 D) Db7
- 7) If a tritone substitution were used on Bm – Bb7 AMaj7, the second chord would be
A) G7 B) Ab7 C) D7 D) E7
- 8) A dominant chord can resolve to a minor chord that's
A) down a whole step B) up a whole step C) up a major third D) down a minor third



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