

Pivot Chord Modulation - Cheat Sheet

Modulation is what we call moving from one key to another in music. Most of the time this will be accomplished through the use of a pivot chord. It is different from tonicization in that we are going to stay in this new key for a (relatively) long time, rather than just hinting at it and going right back to the original key.

A Pivot Chord is a way to get smoothly between two keys. It exists in both keys at once. It must have the same quality (i.e. Major, minor) in both keys.

To find a Pivot Chord, find the first chord that's not functioning in the original key, step back a chord, and see if that chord can function in both. If not, step back again until you find the pivot.

C: I V₄ I⁶ I IV V I ii⁶ ii ii ii⁶ I₄ V⁷ I

F:vi

V

Step 1: We see we're moving to F - there is a definitive cadence, so it's not just a tonicization.

Step 2: We look for the chord the can't be in C any more. We see it here:

Step 3: We step one chord back. That d minor chord exists as ii in C Major and vi in F Major, so it is a good place to modulate. The pivot bracket shows the chord in the key we were in in the top and the key we're going to in the bottom. If that chord hadn't worked, we would have kept stepping back.