

Secondary Dominants - Cheat Sheet

A Secondary Dominant is a dominant function chord that we borrow from the key of one of the diatonic chords. Its purpose is to tonicize (give extra emphasis to) that chord.

If you see a lone accidental, it's likely to be a secondary dominant. Check the chord to make sure it's a dominant 7th or major triad, then check to see what it's V of.

A short-cut is to look at the next chord and work backwards. A secondary dominant almost always resolves the way it should (so a V7/V will resolve to a V, a V7/IV will resolve to IV)

You can also use pop chord notation to help figure out what a chord is.

D⁷

C: I V₄⁶ I⁶ V⁷/V V I

D⁷ is V⁷ in G Major. G is V in C Major. This chord is therefore V⁷ of V (V⁷/V)

Writing Secondary Dominants

A: V⁷/IV IV

Cm: V₅⁶/VI VI

Be careful with accidentals!

First, work out what IV is (D). Then work out what the V chord is in that key (A). Then simply write and resolve that chord as if it were in D Major (3rd is the leading tone, 7th steps down)

Work out what VI is in C Minor (A_b), then figure out what the V chord is (E_b). Write (using the correct inversion), and resolve!