

“Four Way Close” Voicing

“Four Way Close” voicing is a technique that can be used to give your group a jazzy sound, something akin to a big-band horn section. In terms of a vocal group, think “Four Freshmen.”

It is very parallel sounding and not desirable for use in a BHS or SAI contest, but is a very cool way to change up the harmonies of your group into a more showy “shout section” when you want to kick up the volume/energy for a bit.

Here are the simple steps:

1. Use a lead sheet or piano score with chord changes. Do the analysis yourself if need be.
2. Melody on top.
 - This requires a strong Tenor section
3. Is melody note a chord tone (CT)?
 - If yes, place the CT down in the Lead voice.
 - If not, skip a CT and use the next one for the Lead voice.
4. Continue voicing the Baritone and Bass voices with successive chord tones.

You’re done! EASY!

A couple of general tips:

- In triads, use the major 6th or major 7th to round out the 4th CT.
 - These CT’s won’t corrupt the feel of the chord the way a minor 7th might.
 - Use your ears to pick the most appropriate CT
- Drop 2 voicing: This is a technique where the second CT from the top is dropped an octave. Very common in jazz rhythm sections (guitars and pianos). Be aware of the technique and use it if it feels better. It works very well for a stretch of phrase.
- Drop 3, drop 4, drop 3&4 voicing: There are many techniques. You can probably figure them out just by their names, but most of these do not work very well with an a cappella quartet.