Harmony

I: Major and Minor Triads
Major and Minor Triads

Triads are one of the most fundamental building blocks of Western music. Virtually any piece composed between 1600 to the present day (excepting 12 tone serial music) will display a strong preponderance and reliance on triads. Having a solid understanding and fluency of triads is the equivalent of understanding how grammar and vocabulary function in language. The better your knowledge and fluency, the better you become at reading, writing, speaking and understanding the language.

**Triad = Three**
- A triad is simply when three different notes are stacked in thirds:
  - C-E-G for example is a C Major triad.

**Interval Structure**
- The interval structure tells us what kind of triad it is. The only difference between a major and minor triad is the interval produced from the tonic to the third (i.e. the first two notes of the triad in root position).
  - Major third = major triad C-E-G or 1-3-5 (C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C)
  - Minor third = minor triad C-Eb-G or 1-b3-5 (C-D-Eb-F-G-Ab-B-C)
Doubling
- You can double (or triple, or quadruple, etc.) any of those three notes and that wouldn't change the chord's label (C-E-G-C is still C Major)

Inversions and Figured Bass
- By changing the order of those notes, you get inversions of the triad
  a) C-E-G = root position
  b) E-G-C = first inversion
  c) G-E-C = second inversion

Figured bass: numbers that represent the intervals above the bass note.
  a) 5/3 = root position
  b) 6/3 (or just ‘6’) = first inversion
  c) 6/4 = second inversion
Spacing
- Triads can be stacked (i.e. notes can be distributed) in a variety of ways, but two are commonly seen in music: closed and open.

Other types of triads
In addition to major and minor triads, there are also diminished and augmented ones. The quality of the third above the root note determines if the triad is major or minor. But with augmented and diminished triads, the quality of the fifth above the root is the main factor.

Diminished triad = 1 b3 b5 (C - Eb - Gb): or minor triad with diminished 5th
Augmented triad = 1 3 #5 (C - E - G#): or major triad with augmented 5th
Task 1

Practice these major and minor triads. Say the inversion as you play each one.
innocence, simplicity, naïvety and "Completely pure. Its character is earnestness, deepest religious

C Major

A Minor

Harmonized Scale (Rule of the Octave)
G Major

E Minor
A Major

E Minor
A Major

F# Minor

Chords and Rotations
**E Major**

Serious and sad. Noble feeling, full of conversations with God, the friend and the...

**C# Minor**

Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of...
bitterness and melancholy."

expresses effectively a light, passing

Full of peace and joy, but also

F Major

D Minor
Task 2

Practice these moveable major and minor triad shapes.
Moveable triad shapes

There are some fundamental triad shapes that can be moved both horizontally and vertically on the fretboard. This means that you can learn hundreds of triads in a relatively short amount of time.

- **Major**
  - The “4-3” shape: $5/3$ triad (root position)
  - The “3-0” shape: $6/3$ triad (first inversion)
  - The “2-3” shape: $6/4$ triad (second inversion)
Minor

The “4-2” shape: 5/3 triad (root position)

The “2-0” shape: 6/3 triad (first inversion)

The “3-4” shape: 6/4 triad (second inversion)
Task 3

Identify the major and minor triads in the following examples. Write the triads out as block chords.
Andante.

1.

\[\text{Music notation}\]