Bass Lines

Basslines show most principles of voice leading that are still held today. A bass player generally thinks in terms of how to connect most smoothly from chord to chord. This means a good bass player is always thinking ahead. This also *usually* means avoiding "jagged" lines and unexpected resolutions in favor of smooth voice leading, relying on natural resolution and pull tendencies, a concept that can be adapted to all areas of music.

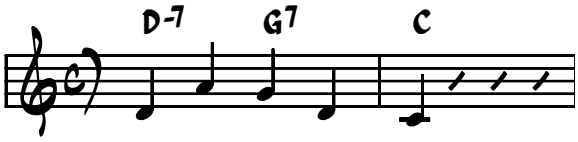
Foreward: For the most part, chords in jazz move at the rate of one per bar or two per bar. As a general rule, a bass player will **always** play the root when the chord changes. In otherwords, each time a new chord symbol is displayed, the bass note must be the root. For ease of study, basslines have been placed in treble clef for this discussion.

Chord progressions at the rate of two per bar (new chord every two beats)

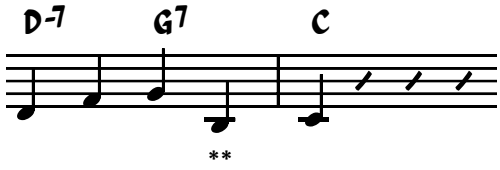
There are basically four ways of moving smoothly from one root to the next in walking basslines. Those four ways are: A.) upper diatonic neighbor, B.) lower diatonic neighbor, C.) upper chromatic neighbor, and D.) lower chromatic neighbor

Examples using the ii-V7-I progression

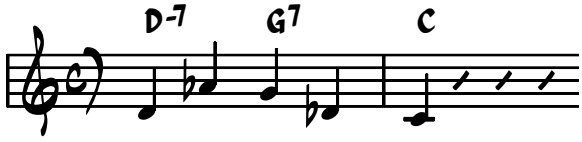
A.) upper diatonic neighbor



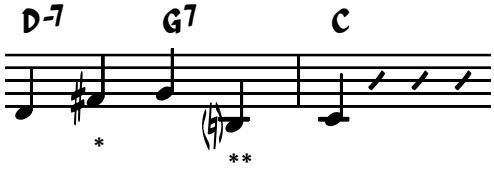
B.) lower diatonic neighbor



C.) upper chromatic neighbor

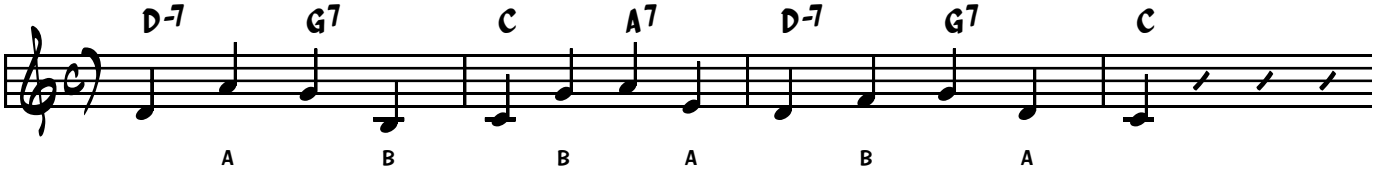


D.) lower chromatic neighbor

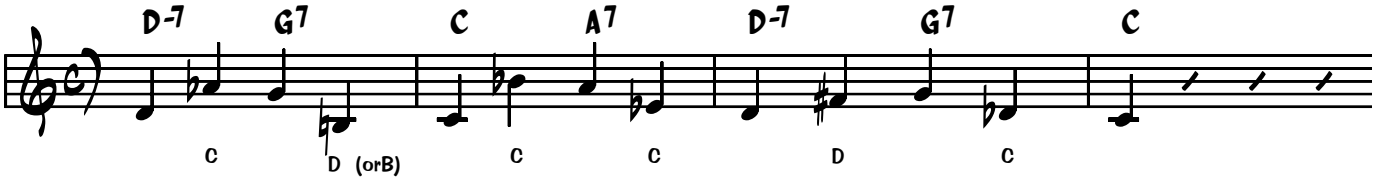


Examples using the ii-V-I-vi pattern from "rhythm" changes (letters correspond to box above)

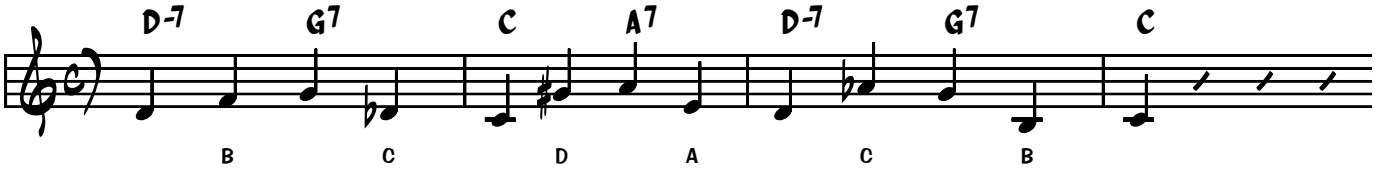
Diatonic bassline



Chromatic bassline



Bassline using both diatonic and chromatic neighbors. (This is a more common type of bassline)



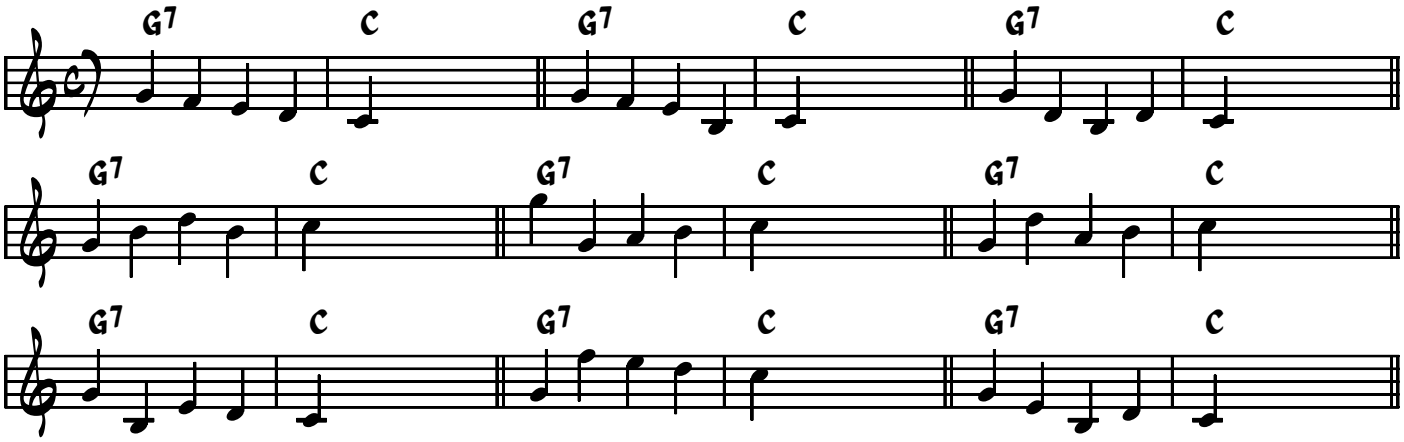
* N.B. Major 3rd (F#) doesn't disrupt ii-7 feel

** Diatonic and chromatic neighbors are often the same pitch

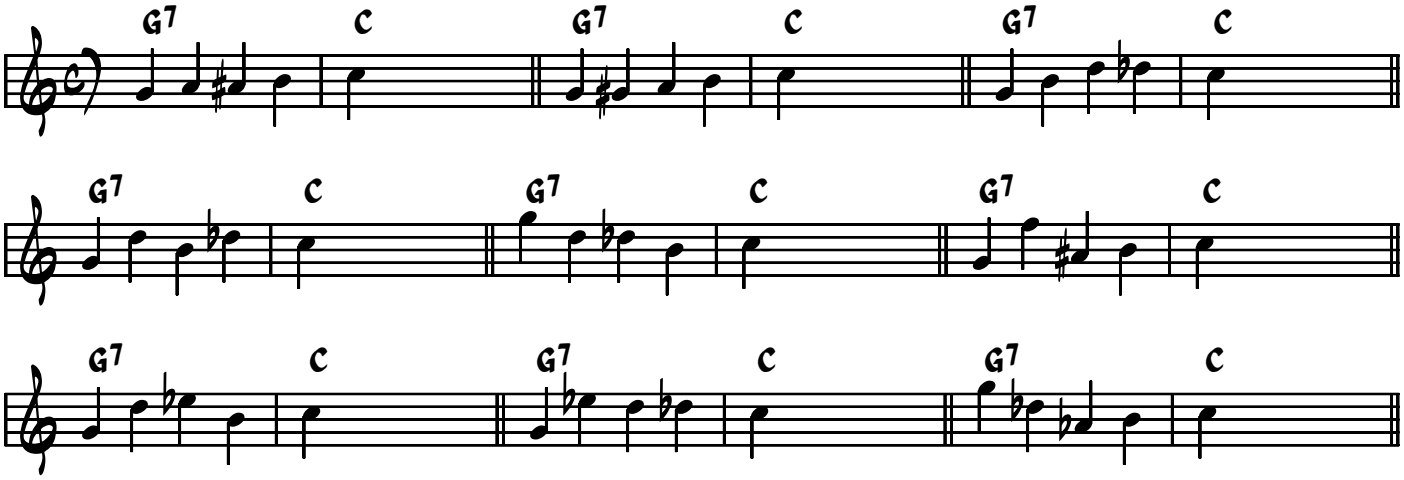
Chord progressions at the rate of one per bar (new chord every four beats)

Listed below is just a handful of ways to connect two chords. A creative bass player could extend this list almost infinitely.

Examples using the V-I progression(diatonic pitches)



Examples using the V-I progression (chromatic pitches)



By combining the possibilty of both chromatic and diatonic resolutions, the choices increase exponentially...

Bb Blues

write in basslines in quarter notes for the following three choruses...aim for smooth voice leading