

# The Plagal Half Cadence: A Compendium of Theoretical Sources

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*In Chronological Order (v.4)*

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## 1. Hauptmann, Moritz (1853/1888)

- **Source:** *The Nature of Harmony and Metre*, trans. W.E. Heathcote (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1888), 184.
- **Perspective:** Endorsement of the plagal variant as a legitimate category.
- **Defining Quote:** "Besides this, the condition whereby the perfect close could only be led from either the dominant or the subdominant triad, here lapses, and the dominant or subdominant triad may issue from any succession that meets the case of a close. In the perfect close only the two cadences V---I, IV---I; G...C, F...C, could be realised. But for the half-close upon the dominant and subdominant, besides the two cadences opposite to the two former, I---V, I---IV; C...G, C...F, these stand also at disposal:

II°...V, IV...V, VI...V;	D/F-a ... b-D-G,
F-a-C ... D-G-b,	a-C-e ... b-D-G, and
VII...IV, V...IV, III...IV;	b-D/F ... a-C-F,
G-b-D ... a-C-F,	c-G-b ... C-F-a.

Similarly this close may have its derivation from the triads that unite the limits of the key-system in extension ; into the upper Fifth  $f\sharp/a-C \dots D-G-b$ , into the under Fifth  $e-G/B\flat \dots C-F-a$ .

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## 2. Tiersch, Otto (1874)

- **Source:** *Elementarbuch der musikalischen Harmonie- und Modulationslehre* (Berlin: Robert Oppenheim), 102.
  - **Perspective:** Systematic classification of cadences into four distinct quadrants (Perfect/Half x Authentic/Plagal).
  - **Defining Quote:** "The harmonic progressions applicable at the conclusion of musical pieces or rhythmic phrases are termed harmonic cadences... Each of these categories is further subdivided into authentic and plagal types, depending on whether the dominant or the tonic functions as the mediating chord. Perfect Cadences: a) Authentic, b) Plagal; Half Cadences: a) Authentic, b) Plagal."
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## 3. Riemann, Hugo (1882)

- **Source:** *Musik-Lexikon*, 1st ed. (Leipzig: Verlag von Bibliographisches Institut), English translation by J.S. Shedlock, 151.
- **Perspective:** Skeptical/Formalist; views the motion as a structural "disturbance."

- **Defining Quote:** "The under-dominant [subdominant] at a moment of such rhythmical cadential power produces quite a different effect; as a real conflicting chord it presses forward to a near termination, and disturbs the symmetry... It entirely takes away the effect of a close, and always produce a double relationship (double phrasing)."
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#### 4. Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolai (1886)

- **Source:** *Prakticheskii uchebnik garmonii* [Practical Manual of Harmony], 1st ed. (St. Petersburg: A. Büttner), 21.
  - **Perspective:** Practical pedagogical acceptance of the cadence.
  - **Defining Quote:** "An interruption on the fundamental triad of the V or IV degree is called semi-cadence; authentic semi-cadence (a) if the dominant chord is used; plagal semi-cadence (b) if it is the subdominant. \* In this case the triad of the IV degree may be preceded by the dominant. "
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#### 5. Foote, Arthur and Walter R. Spalding (1905)

- **Source:** *Modern Harmony in Its Theory and Practice* (Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt), 68.
- **Perspective:** Transitional/Progressive; acknowledges the shift from the "old custom" (V only) to a "more recent opinion" that admits the subdominant.
- **Defining Quote:** "Some theorists enlarge the possibilities of this cadence by admitting that its final chord may have other degrees of the scale (I, II, IV, vi) for its root. In many cases such successions do have the especial effect of the half cadence, but the old custom was to restrict that name to such cadences as end[ing] with a dominant triad. According to more recent opinion, however, all the passages in the following examples marked by a x [including endings on IV] would be considered to be half cadences."

WAGNER: "Tannhäuser" Overture

## 5. Schoenberg, Arnold (1911/1922)

- **Source:** *Harmonielehre* [Theory of Harmony], 3rd ed., trans. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 137.
- **Perspective:** Functional/Psychological; categorizes the V–IV progression as a "deceptive cadence" rather than a "half-close."
- **Defining Quote:** "The progression from V to I has the name "authentic cadence", the one from IV to I, "plagal cadence". These are only names, technical expressions, which tell us nothing that would be harmonically significant. We have just examined the authentic cadence. As for the plagal cadence, on the other hand, we have no reason for discussing it, because it has no special harmonic significance. It can\* [\*If it is not used merely to sound antique, to give a flavor of the church modes.] hardly appear at any time except after the requirements of key definition have already been fulfilled through the familiar means; thus, it does not enrich our cadence as far as the chief purposes of the latter is concerned. More significant for the harmonic structure are the so-called deceptive cadences. This term is understood to mean the substitution for the expected progression, V-I, of the progressions V-VI or V-IV. This is the original form: I is expected after V, but it does not come; VI or IV come instead. But I is expected after V only at close, rather only a deceptive cadence. A possibility of closing is set up, but not used. The effect is naturally quite strong; for the deceptive cadence creates the possibility of preparing the actual close again, and, through the repetition, of ending with increased power."

## 6. Palma, Athos (1941)

- **Source:** *Tratado Completo de Armonía*, Vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Ricordi Americana), 87.
- **Perspective:** Structural/Pedagogical; grants equal cadential status to IV and V while equating "broken" cadences with the function of half cadences.
- **Defining Quote:** "Half cadences are constructed upon the IV or V chords of the key, in either root position or inversion. Broken cadences carry the same significance as half cadences; they momentarily interrupt the chord progression and separate one phrase from another within the same musical idea."

## 7. McHose, Allen Irvine (1947)

- **Source:** *The Contrapuntal Harmonic Technique of the 18th Century* (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co.), 299.
- **Perspective:** Analytical/Statistical; identifies specific melodic patterns that trigger a subdominant half cadence.
- **Defining Quote:** "The half cadence on the subdominant is infrequent, compared with the half cadence on the dominant. The scale steps 5 to 6 or 3 to 1 in the soprano line of the cadence formula are usually harmonized as a half cadence on the subdominant."
- **Note:** McHose is one of the few mid-century theorists to provide a specific "formula" for identifying this cadence based on the soprano melody, adding a layer of empirical evidence to the proponent camp.

### HALF CADENCE ON THE SUBDOMINANT

The half cadence on the subdominant is infrequent, compared with the half cadence on the dominant. The scale steps 5 to 6 or 3 to 1 in the soprano line of the cadence formula are usually harmonized as a half cadence on the subdominant.

Ex. 561. Scale tones

The image shows two musical systems, (a) and (b), in G major. System (a) has a soprano line with notes G5 and A6, and a bass line with notes G1 and D4. System (b) has a soprano line with notes B3 and G1, and a bass line with notes G1 and D4. Roman numerals I and IV are placed below the bass line notes in both systems.

(a) is more frequent than (b). A variation of (b) which is more frequent contains an altered passing tone f-natural in the alto. This will be discussed in Part II, Chapter 31.

The half cadence on the subdominant is practically limited to a major key. This is due to the nature of the minor chorale melody, which rarely has the melodic line 5-6 or 3-1 in the cadence.

## 8. Sessions, Roger (1951)

- **Source:** *Harmonic Practice* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), 86-87

- **Perspective:** Dual-Functional; grants the subdominant status as both a cadential goal (Half Cadence) and a substitute resolution (Deceptive Cadence).
  - **Defining Quote:** "A cadence ending in IV or V is known as a "half" cadence, and is, of course, less conclusive than either of the forms of the "perfect" cadence; in this cadence, IV or V is frequently preceded by I..."
  - The "deceptive" cadence substitutes some other chord, generally VI or IV, for the final tonic in the authentic cadence formula...
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#### 9. Reed, H. Owen (1954)

- **Source:** *Basic Music: A Basic Theory Text* (New York: Mills Music, Inc.), 29-30.
  - **Perspective:** Identifies the dominant-led cadence as the standard, while labeling the subdominant version as uncommon and "less satisfactory."
  - **Defining Quote:** "The half cadence is analogous to a colon, which is a mark of anticipation. The cadence is classified as a half cadence when the final chord in the phrase is dominant or subdominant harmony. By far the most common type of the half cadence occurs when the dominant triad is preceded by tonic harmony (Example 24a). A strong half cadence also occurs in the progression subdominant to dominant (Example 24b), or supertonic to dominant (Example 24c). The half cadence ending on the subdominant is far less satisfactory than the one ending on the dominant."
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#### 10. Tischler, Hans (1964)

- **Source:** *Practical Harmony: An Integrated Course...* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.), 95.
  - **Perspective:** Integrated / Practical; uses a direct linguistic analogy to define the structural "rest" of the subdominant.
  - **Defining Quote:** "When the dominant or subdominant triad is heard at the end of a passage, this produces a **half-cadence** — authentic when stopping on V, and **plagal when stopping, more rarely, on IV**. The cadence and the half-cadence are the musical counterparts to the period and the comma (or colon) in language."
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#### 11. Delamont, Gordon (1965)

- **Source:** *Modern Harmonic Technique, Vol. 1: The Elements of Harmony* (New York: Kendor Music, Inc., 1965), 89-90.
- **Perspective:** Pragmatic / Arranger's; classifies the V-IV motion as a "Deceptive Cadence" rather than a half-rest, emphasizing its role in modern (North) American arranging.
- **Defining Quote:** "The movement of "V", at a cadential position, to a chord other than "I". Prolongation! The deceptive cadence avoids the conclusion, and keeps the music moving. It is usually followed by material leading back to a regular cadence. In diatonic tonality, the

available deceptive cadences are: V-ii, V-iii, V-IV, V-vi." In traditional harmony, the most common and most adaptable of these is V-vi.

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#### 12. Green, Douglass M. (1965)

- **Source:** *Form in Tonal Music: An Introduction to Analysis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.), 14.
  - **Perspective:** Broadened definition of the "semicadence."
  - **Defining Quote:** "The semicadence is one which can close a phrase within a composition but is not conclusive. Other types of semicadence occasionally appear, however, such as that which ends with IV or I in first inversion."
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#### 13. Harder, Paul O. and Greg A. Steinke (1968/2010)

- **Source:** *Harmonic Materials in Tonal Music: A Programmed Course, Part 1*, 10th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall), 224.
  - **Perspective:** Aesthetic/Pedagogical; acknowledges the subdominant half cadence as a rare but viable stylistic choice for creating specific "interest."
  - **Defining Quote:** "The half cadence that ends on the dominant triad is by far the most common type. **Half cadences to the subdominant, although rare, provide an interesting effect.**"
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#### 13. McClanahan, Richard (1970)

- **Source:** *The Cadence: Key to Musical Clarity* (Privately published), 47–49.
  - **Perspective:** Applied phrasing approach; connects the theory to specific folk repertoire.
  - **Defining Quote:** "Just as we may have a half cadence on the dominant, so may we have one on the subdominant. Here is another illustration, this time from a well-known Scotch folksong, Auld Lang Syne."
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#### 14. DeLone, Richard P. (1971)

- **Source:** *Music: Patterns and Style* (Addison-Wesley), 100.
  - **Perspective:** Inclusionary; views any non-tonic closure as a progressive cadence.
  - **Defining Quote:** "The implication that more music is to follow. This is accomplished by closure on a nontonic degree (or chord) such as V, VI, VII, II, III, or IV, producing a progressive or half cadence."
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#### 15. Siegmeister, Elie (1967/1977)

- **Source:** *Harmony and Melody, Volume I: The Diatonic Style* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1977), 114.
- **Perspective:** Practical/Pedagogical; acknowledges the IV as an occasional but valid alternative to the V for a phrase rest.
- **Defining Quote:** "Although the V remains the most common choice for the half cadence, occasionally a IV chord may be used. Ex. 21 shows a half cadence resting on the subdominant. [Ex. 21: *Auld Lang Syne*]"

## 16. Toutant, William (1985)

- **Source:** *Functional Harmony, Vol. 1* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company), 185, 187.
- **Perspective:** Logical-Functional; argues for the naming of the cadence based on the "rest" effect, while distinguishing it from the deceptive use of the subdominant.
- **Defining Quote:** "On rare occasions, a half cadence comes to rest on subdominant harmony. The effect is similar, though not identical, to that of a half cadence coming to rest on dominant harmony. It is logical to call cadences ending on subdominant harmony half cadences, although they are used infrequently. [Regarding deceptive cadences]: Occasionally the subdominant chord, usually in first inversion, is substituted for the tonic."
- **Note:** Toutant provides a clear distinction between the **root-position** "rest" (Half Cadence) and the **first-inversion** "substitution" (Deceptive Cadence).

## 16. Benward, Bruce and Marilyn Saker (1977/2015)

- **Source:** *Music in Theory and Practice, Vol. 1*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2021), 99.
- **Perspective:** Standard Pedagogical/Functional; categorizes the V–IV<sup>6</sup> progression as a species of deceptive cadence.
- **Define Quote:** Deceptive Cadence: If the first chord is V and the second is not I, the cadence is *deceptive*. Although there are a large number of possibilities, composers most often select vi (VI in minor). Figure 5.5

Figure 5.5

Deceptive (a)      Deceptive (Rare) (b, c)

Chord progression: Eb: V   vi   c: V<sup>7</sup>   VI   Eb: V   IV<sup>6</sup>

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## 17. Sadai, Yizhak (1980)

- **Source:** *Harmony in Its Systemic and Its Phenomenological Aspects* (Jerusalem: Yanetz, Ltd.), 142.
  - **Perspective:** Phenomenological approach; treats the as a "rare" but distinct phenomenon.
  - **Defining Quote:** "14.2.5 Subdominant Half Cadence. This cadence, which is relatively rare, ends on IV, preceded by I (This concept is proposed by the author)."
  - **Note:** While Sadai labels this as an original proposal, it aligns functionally with the "plagal half cadence" defined a century earlier by Tiersch and Hauptmann.
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## 18. Reynolds, William H. (1985)

- **Source:** *Common-Practice Harmony* (New York: Schirmer Books), 77–78.
- **Perspective:** Functional/Grammatical; uses linguistic analogies to explain harmonic tension and structural "punctuation."
- **Defining Quote:** "A half cadence occurs when a phrase ends on V. In this case a partial stop occurs, much like a comma in speech. Occasionally phrases may also end on IV, and these may be seen to function as half cadences unless they are preceded by V."

Deceptive: V–VI; occasionally V–IV. In this cadence V resolves to a substitute for I in circumstances in which I is strongly expected."

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## 19. US Navy / Joint Military Training (1986/2012)

- **Source:** *Harmony: NAVEDTRA 12012* (Naval Education and Training Professional Development and Technology Center), 21.
- **Perspective:** Institutional/Service-Band Pedagogy; categorizes the IV chord as a valid point of rest within the "Half Cadence" family, recognizing its utility in standard band literature.
- **Defining Quote:** A Half cadence (Semi-cadence) occurs when any chord, regardless of inversion, progresses to the dominant at a cadence point. Generally, the dominant chord will be in root position. A Plagal Half cadence occurs when any chord, regardless of inversion, progresses to the subdominant at a cadence point. Generally, the subdominant chord will be in root position. Half cadences are not used as final cadences.

### Half Cadence

A *Half cadence (Semi-cadence)* occurs when any chord, regardless of inversion, progresses to the dominant at a cadence point. Generally, the dominant chord will be in root position. A *Plagal Half cadence* occurs when any chord, regardless of inversion, progresses to the subdominant at a cadence point. Generally, the subdominant chord will be in root position. Half cadences are not used as final cadences.

The musical score illustrates six examples of half cadences in G major. The chords and their functions are: 1. iv V# (plagal half cadence), 2. I V (authentic half cadence), 3. i<sup>6</sup> V<sup>4</sup> (plagal half cadence), 4. I IV (plagal half cadence), 5. i IV (plagal half cadence), and 6. I<sup>6</sup> IV<sup>5/3</sup> (plagal half cadence).

FIGURE 5.15: Half Cadences

### 20. Harrison, Daniel (1994)

- **Source:** *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 29 (fn. 16).
- **Perspective:** Modern Dualist; traces the historical lineage and theoretical existence of the term.
- **Defining Quote:** "The I-IV succession is not usually regarded as a proper cadence, although it is given theoretical existence by Moritz Hauptmann [...] and indeed called the 'plagal half cadence,' by Otto Tiersch [...]"

### 21. Jablonsky, Stephen (2005)

- **Source:** *Tonal Facts & Tonal Theories. A Concise, practical guide to music analysis and composition* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing), 5-4 to 5-8.
- **Perspective:** Practical/Structural; emphasizes the cadence's role in creating momentum within paired phrase structures.
- **Defining Quote:** "Occasionally a phrase ends on the **root-position subdominant triad** and is said to contain a **plagal half cadence**. Very often, phrases that end with half or imperfect cadences are paired with phrases that end with full cadences."

Type of Cadence	Abbreviation
Perfect Authentic Cadence	PAC
Perfect Plagal Cadence	PPC
Imperfect Authentic Cadence	IAC
Imperfect Plagal Cadence	IPC
Authentic Half Cadence	AHC
Plagal Half Cadence	PHC
Caesura (Very Imperfect Cadence)	VIC

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## 22. Mulholland, Joe and Tom Hojnacki (2013)

- **Source:** *The Berklee Book of Jazz Harmony* (Boston: Berklee Press), 19.
- **Perspective:** Modern Jazz Theory; introduces the term "incomplete subdominant cadence" to categorize phrase endings on IV or II.
- **Defining Quote:** "A phrase ending on IVMaj7 or II-7 can be termed an **incomplete subdominant cadence**. Phrases that end on a subdominant function chord will become especially important in later chapters, as we explore all the varieties of alternative subdominant function represented by modal interchange and special function dominant chords."

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## 23. Collier, Jacob (2018–Present)

- **Source:** *Jacob Collier Masterclass: Harmony and Rhythm* (imusic-school, 2018) and various public lectures/interviews.
- **Perspective:** Emotional/ Acoustic; views the plagal and perfect cadences as equal but distinct emotional "spectrums," often arguing that the plagal cadence has been unfairly overlooked in Western academic tradition.
- **Summary of View:** Collier rejects the notion that the plagal cadence is merely "supplemental." He often describes harmony as a spectrum between "bright" (V ---> I) and "dark" (IV---> I) and argues that "Plagal cadences are just as important as perfect" ones because they offer a different kind of "harmonic responsibility" and resolution.

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## Compendium Sequence: (Labels created by Gemini AI)

1. 1853: **Hauptmann** — The Initial Defense
2. 1874: **Tiersch** — The Four-Quadrant System
3. 1882: **Riemann** — The Skeptical Critic
4. 1886: **Rimsky-Korsakov** — The Practical Educator
5. 1905: **Foote & Spalding** — The Transitional Progressives
6. 1911: **Schoenberg** — The "Deceptive" Reclassification (V-IV6)
7. 1941: **Palma** — The Structural Equalizer
8. 1947: **McHose** — The Voice-Leading Empiricist
9. 1951: **Sessions** — The Hybrid (Half & Deceptive)
10. 1954: **Reed** — The Folk/Choral Proponent
11. 1964: **Tischler, Hans** — The Linguistic Functionalist
12. 1965: **Delamont** — The Arranger's Codification
13. 1965: **Green** — The Semicadence Expansion
14. 1968: **Harder/Steinke** — The Aesthetic Alternative

15. 1967: **Siegmeister** — The Auld Lang Syne Case
  16. 1970: **McClanahan** — The Phrasing Focus
  17. 1971: **DeLone** — The Progressive Definition
  18. 1977: **Benward & Saker** — The V–IV6 Deceptive view
  19. 1980: **Sadai** — The Phenomenological Proposal
  20. 1985: **Reynolds** — The Grammatical Contextualist
  21. 1985: **Toutant** — The Logical Functionalist
  22. 1986: **US Navy / NAVEDTRA** — The Institutional Validator
  23. 1994: **Harrison** — The Historical Synthesizer
  24. 2005: **Jablonsky** — The Structural Paired-Phrase Proponent
  25. 2013: **Mulholland & Hojnacki** — The Jazz Functionalists
  26. 2026: **Collier** — The Modern Equalizer
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