MODULE C · SHEET 3A

CHORD TONE VS NON-CHORD TONE

The second dimension of the Emotional Map — whether the melody note belongs to the chord underneath it

CHORD TONE

IN THE CHORD

A note that **belongs to the currently playing chord** — specifically the root, 3rd, 5th, or 7th. The harmony catches and supports this note. It feels grounded within the chord, regardless of its key stability.

NON-CHORD TONE

OUTSIDE THE CHORD

A note that **does NOT belong to the currently playing chord**. The harmony doesn't catch it — it floats above the triad. Depending on its key stability, this creates color, tension, or dissonance.

C MAJOR CHORD (DO · MI · SO) — WHICH NOTES ARE CHORD TONES?

NOTE	SOLMIZATION	IN C MAJOR CHORD?	ROLE IN CHORD	ZONE OVER C	FEELS LIKE
DO (C)	Home · Rank 1	✓ Chord Tone	Root (1st)	Zone 1 Sweet	Fully resolved, grounded
MI (E)	Sweet · Rank 3	✓ Chord Tone	Major 3rd	Zone 1 Sweet	Warm, melodically bright
SO (G)	Strong · Rank 2	✓ Chord Tone	Perfect 5th	Zone 1 Sweet	Confident, stable open
RE (D)	Open · Rank 5	✗ Non-Chord Tone	—	Zone 4 Bitter	Searching, unresolved
FA (F)	Tension · Rank 7	✗ Non-Chord Tone	—	Zone 4 Bitter	Maximum ache, needs resolution
LA (A)	Warm · Rank 4	✗ Non-Chord Tone	—	Zone 3 Float	Airy, added color (6th extension)
TI (B)	Leading · Rank 6	✗ Non-Chord Tone	—	Zone 4 Bitter	Major 7th color — edgy and active

HOW RE CHANGES ZONE DEPENDING ON THE CHORD

MELODY NOTE	CHORD PLAYING	CHORD TONES	RE IS...	ZONE	FEELS LIKE
RE	C major	DO · MI · SO	Non-chord tone	Zone 4 Bitter	Searching, unresolved tension
	G7 (SO-TI-RE-FA)	SO · TI · RE · FA	Chord tone (5th)	Zone 2 Tense	Supported but still pulling forward
	Dm (RE-FA-LA)	RE · FA · LA	Chord tone (root!)	Zone 2 Tense	Grounded in *that* chord — the anchor
	Am (LA-DO-MI)	LA · DO · MI	Non-chord tone	Zone 4 Bitter	Adds dark color above the minor chord

QUICK ZONE FINDER — TWO QUESTIONS, ONE ZONE

STABLE KEY DEGREE + CHORD TONE
ZONE 1
Sweet / Grounded — fully resolved

UNSTABLE KEY DEGREE + CHORD TONE
ZONE 2
Tense / Supported — forward motion

STABLE KEY DEGREE + NON-CHORD TONE
ZONE 3
Floating / Modern — airy color

UNSTABLE KEY DEGREE + NON-CHORD TONE
ZONE 4
Bitter / Edgy — maximum tension

The rule: Is it in the chord? Is it a stable scale degree? Answer both questions → find your zone. The same note can live in any zone depending on what chord is playing.

MODULE C · SHEET 3B

NON-CHORD TONE SURVIVAL GUIDE

Four types of non-chord tones — how each moves, how each sounds, and when to use each one

1 PASSING TONE

Moves by step between chord tones

DO → RE → MI ← NCT

A non-chord tone that **steps between two chord tones** in a single direction. Brief, smooth, and melodic. The ear barely notices it as tension — it feels like motion, not conflict.

EXAMPLE

DO – RE – MI over a C chord: RE is a passing tone. *Very common in singable pop melodies.*

Use it when: *you need stepwise motion that feels smooth and natural. Short duration only — passing tones on long beats become suspensions.*

2 NEIGHBOR TONE

Steps away from chord tone and returns

MI → FA → MI ← NCT

A non-chord tone that **steps one degree away from a chord tone** and immediately returns. Creates a shimmer or ornament effect — like a note briefly questioning its home before returning.

EXAMPLE

MI – FA – MI over C chord: FA is an upper neighbor tone. *Creates a subtle moment of ache that resolves immediately.*

Use it when: *you want melodic ornamentation without harmonic disruption. Works well on beats 2 and 4 for rhythmic interest.*

3 ANTICIPATION

Arrives before the chord that owns it

Chord: C → SO | Chord: G ← ANTICIPATES G

A note that **arrives early** — before the chord change that would make it a chord tone. Over the current chord it's a non-chord tone, but it sets up the next harmony perfectly, creating rhythmic momentum.

EXAMPLE

Melody hits SO on the last 8th note of a C chord measure, while G major doesn't arrive until beat 1 of the next bar. SO anticipates the G chord. *Creates forward pull.*

Use it when: *you want rhythmic energy at chord changes. Very common in R&B and funk — the melody "pushes" the chord. Keep it short (one 8th or quarter note max).*

4 SUSPENSION

Held over from previous chord, resolves down

Prev. chord | RE → DO HELD → RESOLVES ↓

A note **held over from the previous chord** into the new chord where it becomes a non-chord tone. Creates a "lean and fall" — the suspended note hangs in mid-air, then resolves downward by step. The most emotionally powerful NCT type.

EXAMPLE

RE held through a chord change to C major. RE is not in C, so it hangs as a 9th. Then it falls to DO. *The classic "ache and release" of gospel and soul.*

Use it when: *you need emotional weight at a chord change. The longer the suspension, the stronger the resolution payoff.* **Always resolve downward by step** *— unresolved suspensions feel like errors, not intentions.*

RESOLUTION RULES — HOW EACH TYPE MUST RESOLVE

PASSING + NEIGHBOR TONES

Short duration is the key. **Keep them on weak beats or subdivision.** They resolve by stepwise continuation (passing) or immediate return (neighbor). Duration creates the distinction between these and suspensions.

ANTICIPATIONS

Resolution happens **by chord arrival**, not note movement. The next chord makes the anticipation "correct" retroactively. Keep anticipations to 1–2 subdivisions ahead of the beat — earlier feels like a wrong note, not a push.

SUSPENSIONS

Always resolve down by step. The downward resolution is the moment of release. Common patterns: 4–3 (FA→MI), 7–6 (TI→LA), 9–8 (RE→DO). Suspensions that don't resolve become dissonances that sound unintentional.

DURATION GUIDE

Passing/Neighbor = **8th note or less**
Anticipation = **1–2 subdivisions**
Suspension = **quarter note or longer**
Longer = more emotional weight on resolution