

Figured Bass Symbols

	Triads			Seventh Chords			
	Root Pos.	1 st Inv.	2 nd Inv.	Root Pos.	1 st Inv.	2 nd Inv.	3 rd Inv.
Realization Bass							
Figured Bass	5 3	6 3	6 4	7 5 3	6 5 3	6 4 3	6 4 2
Abbreviation		6	6 4	7	6 5	4 3	4 2

The quality (M, m, P, +, °) of the interval above the bass depends on the key signature. For example, if the figured bass was a “6” under a G, and there were two or more flats in the key signature, the player would play an E-flat, not an E-natural. When the composer wished to add accidentals, they were designated with a variety of symbols, and there was no set standard as to how it might be done. The table below summarizes these alterations to the basic figured bass symbols.

Figured Bass Alterations

Symbol	Description	Alteration
3 [♯] , 4 [♯] , or [♯] 3, [♯] 4, etc.	A sharp, or plus to the left or right of a numeral, or a slash through a numeral	Do whatever is necessary to raise that interval above the bass one half step.*
3 ⁺ , 4 ⁺ , or +3, +4, etc.		
3, 4, etc		
3 [♭] , 4 [♭] , or [♭] 3, [♭] 4, etc.	A flat to the left or right of a numeral	Do whatever is necessary to lower that interval above the bass one half step.*
3 [♮] , 4 [♮] , or [♮] 3, [♮] 4, etc.	A natural to the left or right of a numeral	Cancels any accidental for that interval †
♯, ♭, ♮	Accidentals with no numeral to the left or right	<i>Always</i> alters to the <i>third</i> above the bass
—	A dash following a numeral	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Sustains the note represented by the preceding number, even if the bass changes Signifies movement within a single voice (e.g., 7-6, a single voice, such as the alto moves from a 7th above the bass to a 6th. The bass usually stays the same)

*A sharp or flat symbol does not necessarily mean to make the note sharp or flat. It means to raise or lower the note by a half step. For example, if a third above a G is a B-flat in the key signature, and the figured bass has a sharp next to the three, it means to make the B a natural, not a B-sharp.

† The natural symbol is used also as a means to cancel a sharp or flat that is part of the key signature.