Guide to Playing Dominant Seventh Arpeggios

for ABRSM Grade 8 Piano - © Fergus Black 2011

Start with diminished sevenths! I have prepared a separate guide for diminished sevenths, and you should start with that.

As with all scales and arpeggios, play legato - for the pianist that means joining the bottoms of the notes together. Aim for an even legato.

𝅗𝅥 = 66 in the recommended minimum speed for ABRSM Grade 8. I have shown two octaves in the examples, but four octaves are required for the exam.

Remember that the Dominant does not start on the key note, so “The Dominant Seventh Arpeggio of C” starts on G, and has the notes G-B-D-F. The Dominant Seventh of C major and C minor are the same, so it is just “... of C”.

As you go through, make sure the note names are known for each arpeggio: I play a game with my students called "Guess the Notes", which is tongue-in-cheek, because it shouldn't be guessing at all: with the piano lid **shut**, they should be able to tell me the names of the notes in the arpeggio they are going to play (down, as well as up).

I tackle them in three groups:

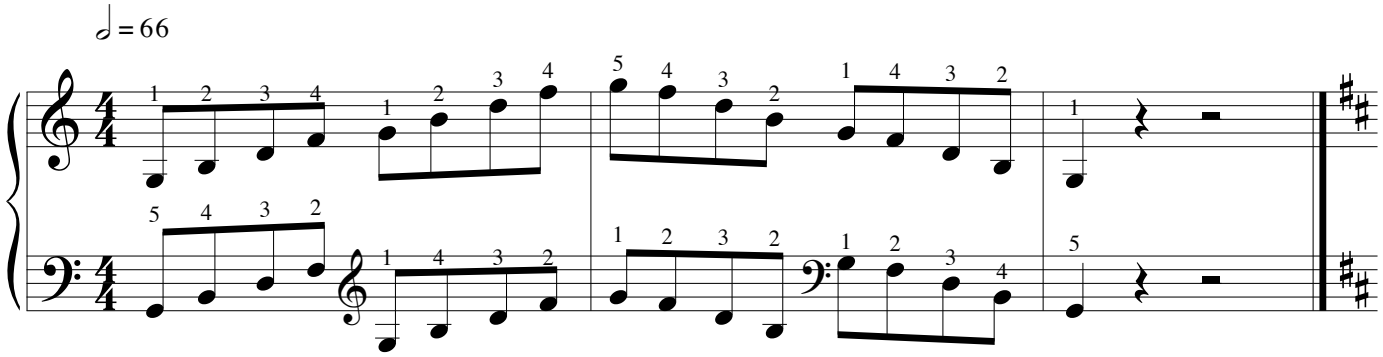
Group 1

The Dominant Sevenths of C, D and F are just like the Hanon Diminished Sevenths – they start on a white note. You start on the fifth finger of the left hand, and the thumb in the right. You put both thumbs on the first quaver of each group of four.

The Dominant Seventh of C:

Starts on G

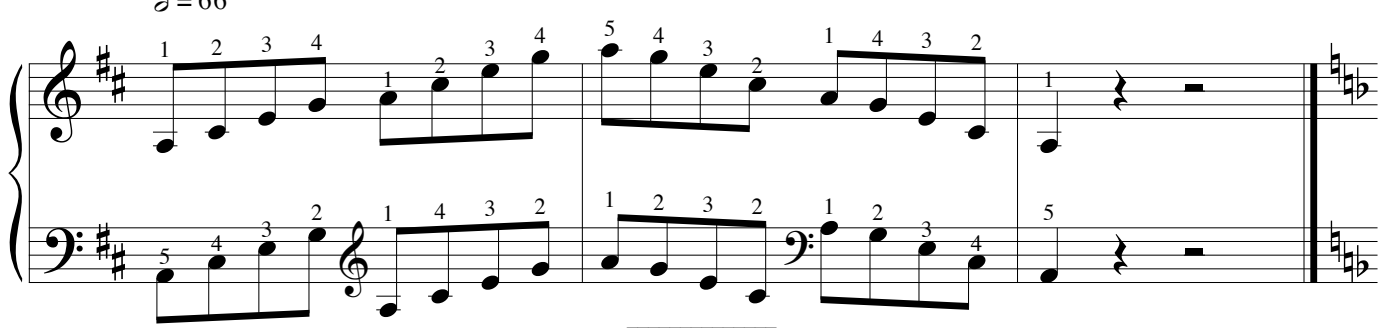
Put both thumbs on G (not the first one!)



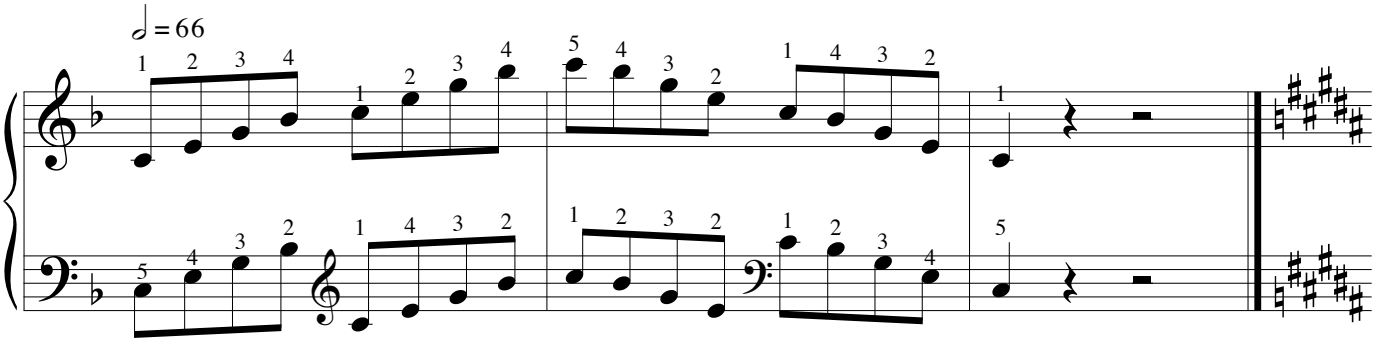
Dominant Seventh of D

Starts on A

Put both thumbs on A (not the first one!)



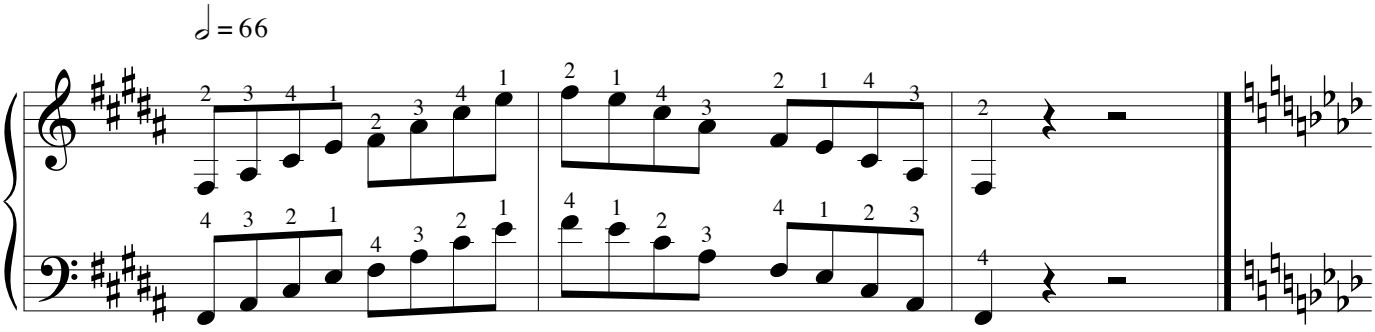
Dominant Seventh of F
Starts on C
Put both thumbs on C (not the first one!)



Group 2

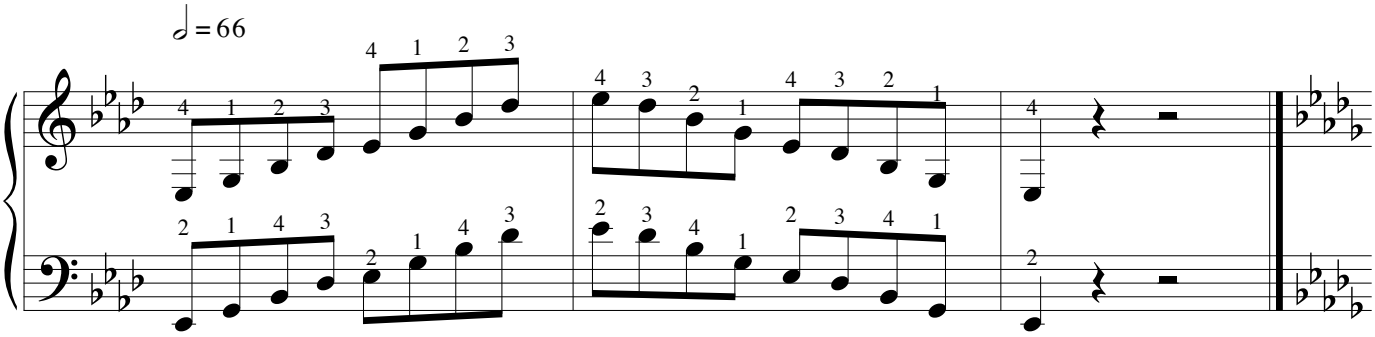
The Dominant Sevenths of B, A♭ and D♭ These three arpeggios have only one white note, so that is where the thumbs go in both hands:

The Dominant Seventh of B
Starts on F♯.
Put both thumbs on E.

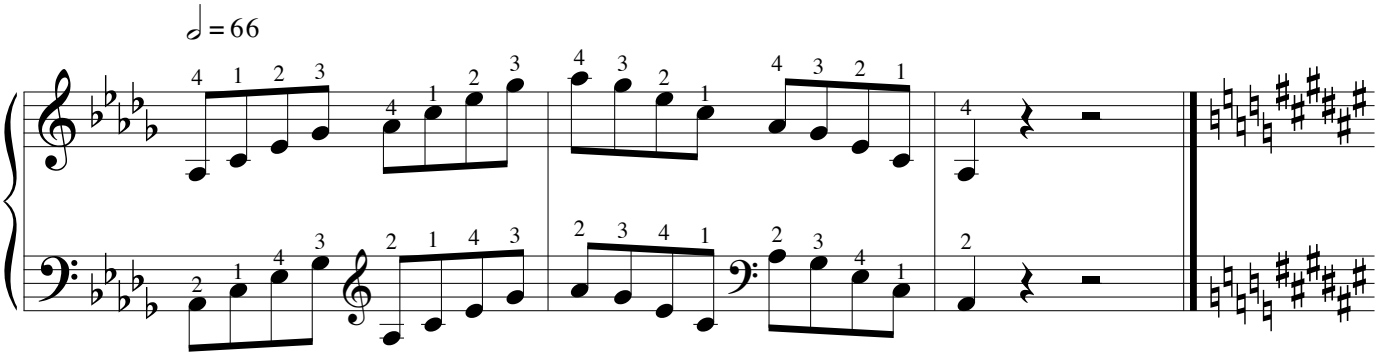


The Dominant Seventh of A♭
Starts on E♭
Put both thumbs on G

N.B. I have shown the fingering pattern for multiple octaves. You can substitute a more convenient finger for the opening black note of the right hand, using the 2nd finger instead of the 4th for the first RH e♭, for example.



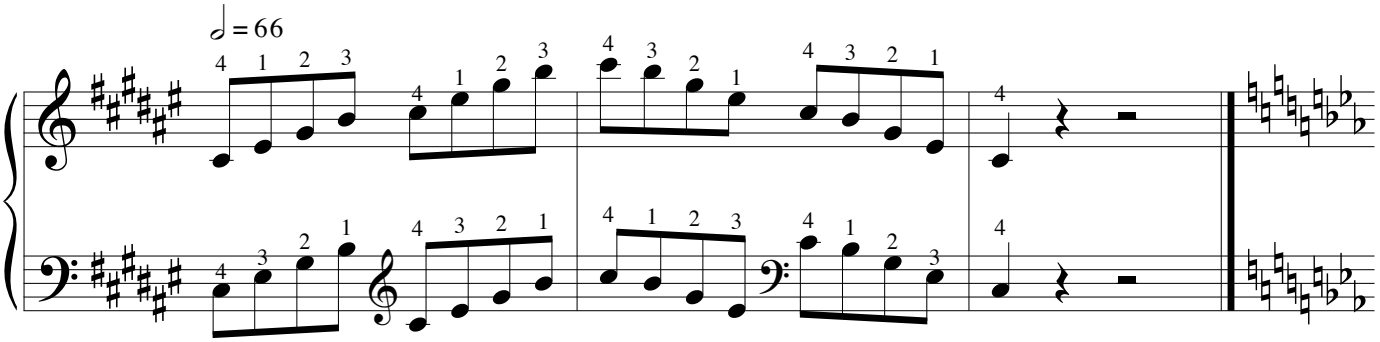
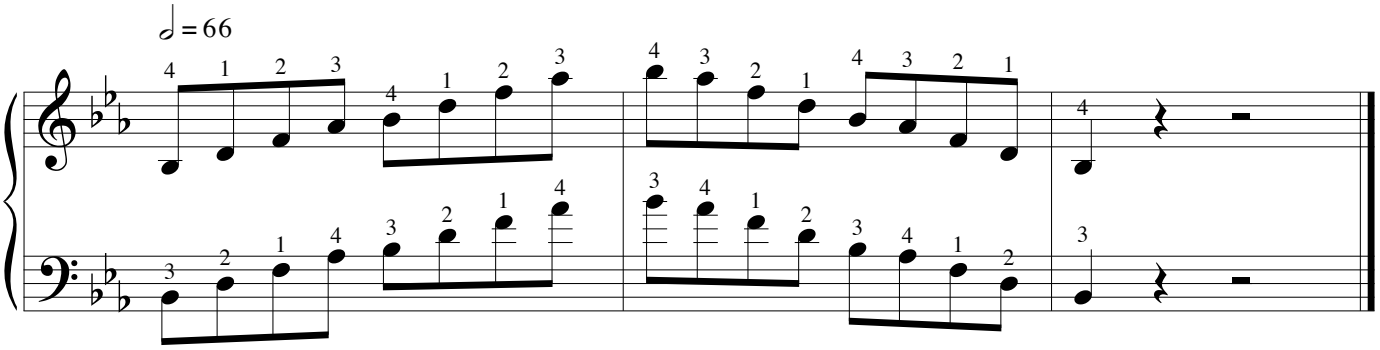
The Dominant 7th of D♭
Starts on A♭.
Put both thumbs on C.



Group 3

Dominant Sevenths of F♯ and E♭ These arpeggios have two white notes, and the thumbs in the two hands are on different notes. It is worth insisting on this - I find that most students will revert to putting both thumbs on the same note, and the result will be choppy and a bit jerky. Since we are aiming for an even legato, this won't do. Practise these hands separately to begin with. Put them slowly together. Half-speed is fine!

The Dominant 7th of F-sharp
starts on C♯.
Put RH thumb on E♯
Put LH thumb on B♯
Both 4th fingers go on C♯



The Dominant 7th of E♭
starts on B♭
Put RH thumb on D
Put LH thumb on F
The 3rd and 4th fingers in both hands go on the A♭ and the B♭