The Neapolitan Sixth Chord

The neapolitan sixth chord is a major triad in 1st inversion with the lowered supertonic scale degree as its root. The half-step relation of the lowered supertonic to the tonic gives the N6 a unique, dark quality. N6 most frequently is found in minor keys in 1st inversion. However, it may also occasionally appear in root position. N6 is a predominant functioning chord.

Part-writing the N6:

1. In a four-part texture, double the bass. Scale degrees b6 and b2 are tendency tones.
2. Scale degree b2 should progress to either the leading-tone (if V follows) or to the tonic (if i₇ follows).
3. The cross relation that appears when N6 progresses to V should involve an inner voice. The cross relation should not appear within the same voice.

Compare the following two progressions:

Consult the following chart when using the N6 in a progression:

*Only in minor keys. Very rare in major.

Watch out for parallel fifths when N6 progresses to i₃. The root of the N6 must be above the 5th.

Exceptions to the conventional use of the N6:

2. May appear between two instances of a tonic chord.
3. May also be used as a pivot chord in a modulation.