Diatonic Common Chord Modulation

Modulation is the process of changing to a different key within a piece of music.

There are several different ways to modulate; perhaps the simplest is the unprepared modulation, where the music pauses and suddenly changes key, often up a half-step.

Common practice period composers, however, preferred a particular type of modulation that required a little more planning: the diatonic common chord modulation. As the name suggests, this uses a chord which is diatonic in both the outgoing key and the new key.

Let's say we're starting off in C major... here is a list of all the keys which have chords in common with C major (the specific chords are highlighted):

- G: I ii iii IV V vi vii°
- F: I ii iii IV V vi vii°
- D: I ii iii IV V vi vii°
- B: I ii iii IV V vi vii°
- A: i ii° III iv V VI vii°
- E: i ii° III iv V VI vii°
- C: I ii iii IV V vi vii°
- B♭: i ii° III iv V VI vii°
- D♭: i ii° III iv V VI vii°
- A♭: i ii° III iv V VI vii°
- G♭: i ii° III iv V VI vii°
- F♭: i ii° III iv V VI vii°

Notice how these keys are all close to one another on the circle of fifths.

To use this type of modulation, a composer would pivot the harmony around the chord that fit into both keys. As theorists, we show this pivot chord by analyzing the chord in both keys.

Note that the pivot chord is always the last chord that can be analyzed in the old key... the first accidentals will always occur in the chord immediately following the pivot chord.