Tarantino's Tools for Chords

You want to Identify A Chord?

1) Put all the pitches in the same octave
2) Stack them in thirds (in successive spaces or lines)
3) Your root is on the bottom

You want to do a Roman Numeral Analysis?

1) Identify your key.
2) Identify the chords that are easy to identify.
3) Then work to fill in the rest

You want to assign a Roman Numeral to a chord?

1) Determine your key
2) Are there three pitches in your chord?
    a. If yes, go to number 3
    b. If no, go to number 4
3) Are all your pitches in your key?
    a. If yes, determine what scale degree your chord begins on and determine inversion. You are finished.
    b. If no, go to 7.
4) You have some kind of seventh chord. Is it a dominant seventh chord? [M3-m3-m3, such as: G-B-D-F]
    a. If yes, it can only be part of one key and its parallel minor. For example G7 can only be part of C major and C minor.
    b. Are all the pitches in your key?
        i. If yes, you have a V7 chord. Use standard inversions.
        ii. If no, you have a secondary dominant, notate it as a V/x with x equaling the Roman Numeral of whatever key it is the dominant of. Use standard inversions.
    c. If no, go to 5.
5) Is it a fully diminished seventh chord? [m3-m3-m3, such as: B-D-F-Ab]
    a. If yes, it can only be a vii˚ of the minor key a half step up from its root. Notate it accordingly (vii˚7/x). Use standard inversions.
        i. The actual pitches and bass note are particularly important here as depending on the way the notes are spelled a vii˚7 chord can be a part of four different keys.
    b. If no, go to 6.
6) Is it a half diminished seventh chord? [m3-m3-M3, such as D-F-Ab-C]
    a. If yes, it is likely a ii˚7 of the minor key a whole step below its root. Notate it accordingly (ii˚7/x). Use standard inversions.
    b. If no, go to 9.
7) Is it an augmented chord?
    a. If yes, it is likely a III+ of the scale a minor third below the root. Notate it accordingly (III+/x). Use standard inversions.
    b. If no, go to 8.

8) Is it a major triad built on the flat second degree of the key?
    a. If yes, you have a Neapolitan. Use N and the inversion.
    b. If no, go to 9.
9) You have a complicated chord. Does the chord contain the interval of the augmented sixth?
    a. If yes, see "So you've got an augmented sixth chord" below.
    b. If no, go to 10.
10) Determine what key(s) has the pitches in question. Keep in mind where the chord eventually resolves to.
11) Determine the scale degree in the other key.
12) Put the Roman Numeral for the other key under a slash and the scale degree above. Treat inversions normally. For example: IV/IV.

So you've got an augmented sixth chord?

1) Does it have three pitches or four pitches?
    a. If three, you have an Italian. Use "It." with standard inversions.
    b. If four, go to 2.
2) Respell the augmented sixth interval as a minor seventh. Is it now a dominant seventh chord?
    a. If yes, you have a German. Use "Ger." with standard inversions.
    b. If no, you have a French. Use "Fr." with standard inversions.

So you want to realize a Roman Numeral Progression?

1) Identify your key
2) Identify your chords
3) Write in the bass
4) Add dissonances
5) Add "tendency" tones – tones that must resolve one way or another.
6) Tie common tones
7) Fill in the rest – avoid partwriting errors.

So you want to harmonize a melody/chorale?

1) Determine key
2) Determine cadences
3) If you wish, identify possible modulations
4) Add Roman Numerals at cadences.
5) Choose a pivot chord
6) Determine Roman numerals for the remainder of the melody.
7) Realize the Roman Numeral Progression.