

Notes on Music Theory and Chord Symbols

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To form a major scale (to be in a "Major Key"):

Start on a note (the name of the key, the "tonic" or 1 of the key), and go whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, whole step, half step. The degrees of the scale are numbered 1-8. Do =1 re=2 mi=3 etc. Note the half steps are between the 3rd and 4th, and 7th and 8th scale degrees.

The diatonic triads are the chords made from every other note of the scale, (no non-scale tones). Thus the "one chord" is 1, 3, and 5 of the scale, the "two chord" is 2, 4, and 6 of the scale, etc.

The diatonic seventh chords are the same concept with a 4 note chord: the one chord is 1, 3, 5, and 7 of the scale; the two chord is 2, 4, 6, and 8 of the scale; etc.

There are five kinds of triads and five kinds of seventh chords. The following chord recipes are based on comparison to the major scale of each chord root. For instance, to form an G minor seventh chord, form a G *Major* scale (g=1,a=2,b=3,c=4,d=5,e=6,f#=7,g=8) then follow the recipe by selecting the root(g), flat 3rd (B_b), 5th (d), and flat 7th (f natural, as opposed to the f#). All the examples are in the key of C for easy visual assimilation.

Major triad: chord symbol is just the letter name of the note, usually a capital; root, 3rd, and fifth. C=C,E,G

Minor triad: symbol is note name followed by – or min;
Root, flat (minor) 3rd (3 half steps), fifth C-, Cm, or Cmin= C, E flat, G

Diminished triad: symbol is letter name followed by a small circle (like a degree symbol) or dim; root, Flat 3rd, flat 5th. C dim or C^o = C, E flat, G flat

Augmented triad: symbol is letter name followed by a plus sign or aug; root, 3rd, raised fifth; C+ or C^{aug} = C,E,G#

Suspended triad: symbol is letter name followed by sus;
Root, raised 3rd (same as 4 of scale), 5th;
Csus= C,F,G

Major Seventh Chord: Symbol is letter name followed by a triangle or Maj7; root, 3rd, 5th and 7th of scale;

Cmaj7 or CΔ = C,E,G,B

7th chord (also called a dominant chord); symbol is letter name followed by 7; root, 3rd, 5th, flat 7th; C7= C,E,G,B flat

Minor seventh chord; symbol is letter name followed by -7, m7, or min7; root, flat 3rd, 5th, flat 7th;

Cm7 or C-7, or Cmin7 = C,E flat, G, B flat

Minor seven flat five (also called Half Diminished): symbol is letter name followed by -7flat5 m7flat5 or min7flat5 or a small circle with a line through it like an international "No" sign; root, flat 3rd, flat 5th, flat 7th

Cmflat5, or C-flat5, or Cmin flat5, or CØ = C, E flat, G flat, and B flat

Diminished Seventh chord: symbol is letter name followed by dim7, or a small circle7; root, flat 3rd, flat 5th, double flatted 7th; Cdim7 or C°7 = C, E flat, G flat, B double flat (same as A)

In any and all major keys, the one, four, and five triads will be major; the two, three, and six triads will be minor; and the seven will be diminished.

In any and all major keys the diatonic seventh chords,(four notes, every other one of the scale: 1,3,5,7, = one chord; 2,4,6,8 = two chord; 3,5,7,2 = three chord; etc.) will form as follows: the one and four chords will be major seventh chords, the two, three, and six chords will be minor seventh chords; the five chord will be a 7th (dominant) chord; and the seven chord will be half diminished (min7 flat5)

There are no diatonic augmented triads, or diminished seventh chords.

These are 120 basic chords: ten chord types on each of the twelve roots.

Additional Chords

Sixth Chords C6 = root, 3rd, 5th, and 6th C, E, G, A

An "Add 9" chord, and 6/9 chord do not have sevenths.

Cadd9 = root 3rd, 5th, and 9th. C, E, G, and D

C6/9= root, 3rd, 5th, 6th, and 9th. C, E, G, A and D

Extended chords are 7th chords with added notes; typically one or more 9th, 11th or 13th.

All Extended Chords as in 9th, 13th raised 11th or any combination thereof, are built on top of a 7th chord (root, 3rd, 5th, FLAT 7th), NOT ON A MAJOR 7th, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY NOTATED Maj 7th). For instance C9 = C, E, G, B flat, D.

Ninth Chords: 9 as in C9 = root, 3rd, 5th, flat 7th, 9th. 9=2 C, E, G, B flat, D.

Flat 9 as in C7_b9 or C flat 9

(the case of the flat symbol is small and raised, so as not to be confused with a 9th chord on the note C flat)

Root, 3rd, 5th, flat 7th, flat 9th
C, E, G, B flat, D flat

Raised 9 as in C7[#]9 Root, 3rd, 5th, flat 7th, #9
C, E, G, B flat, D#

Thirteenth Chords= Root, 3rd, 5th flat 7th and 13th
(13=6th up an octave, so a 13th chord is just like a sixth chord, but the Flat 7th)

Slash chords = a chord over a different bass note. For instance:

C/D= root, 3rd, 5th, of the C chord over a D bass note

C9/F = root, 3rd, 5th, flat 7th, and 9th of a C Chord over an F bass note.

C-7/G = C minor seventh with the G in the bass

With the info on these 3 pages you can now form 216 of the basic chord types and identify all the normal chord symbols used in popular music.