

CHORD SYMBOLS

Different voicings of some chords

Simply put, for our purposes, a chord consists of 3 notes on the piano. Start with the note that is the name of the chord and skip a note (letter name) on the piano until 3 notes have been played. The closer the middle note is to the bottom note (eg. E or Eb for the middle with C on the bottom) makes the difference between minor and major chords. The theory behind it is good to know and follows: All regular chords are made up of intervals of thirds. The name of the chord is the bottom most note. That is also known as the root of the chord. The middle note (called the 3rd - the 3rd degree of the scale) is either a major or minor third higher depending on whether it is a major or minor chord. The top most note, in a regular triad, is either a major or minor third higher and is called the 5th. To this basic triad, additional intervals of 3rds (either major or minor depending on the degree of the chord) can be added. These extra notes (beyond the required 3 already mentioned) are called, in order of their addition: 7th, 9th, 11th and 13th. In a major chord the notes and their intervals are as follows: (m3 = minor 3rd; M3 = major 3rd)

(C) (C7) (C9) (C11) (C13)

C E G B \flat D F A

M3 m3 m3 M3 m3 M3

This interval scheme applies to all major chords in all keys. For a minor chord, the first two intervals swap - the first interval is a minor 3rd (C to Eb), and the 2nd interval is a major third (Eb to G).

To the basic chord above, any degree (letter name) of the scale (using the root of the chord as the 1st note of the scale), can be added to the chord. As shown above, adding a B \flat (the 7th note up from C), makes the above chord a C7 chord. You can keep adding every other note until you get to the '13th' degree before you end up coming back to C. You can also add other intervals above the root (or degrees of the scale) to chords. Jazz frequently has "6th" chords (ie. C6). Simply start counting from C until you have gone up 6 letter names (remember to start over in the alphabet when you reach G) and you will get to A. Add the A key to the basic 3-note C chord to make a C6. What would a C2 chord add?

Slash chords:

Chords followed by a '/' contain the same notes as the regular chord specified on the left side of the slash. The letter name to the right of the slash is made the lowest note played. For example, Am7/D means to play an A minor 7th chord (A,C,E,G) but instead of A as the lowest note played, a D is played as the lowest note. The 'slash' letter is **never** added to the chord anywhere but as the lowest note (unless of course it is already present in the chord, as in a C/G chord). Sometimes slash chords are written as one letter above another with a horizontal line between the two (see example above).