

5. CHORD SYMBOLS

A) FOUR-NOTE BASIC CHORDS

Our starting point is the triad, the three-note combination that is central to Western music:

- major triad
- minor triad
- augmented triad
- diminished triad

However:

The basic chord in jazz has four notes, and not just three.

In other words i.e. the basic chord of C major will now be a combination of 1(C), 3(E), 5(G) and **one more note**.

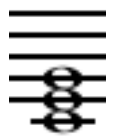

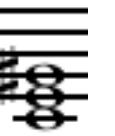
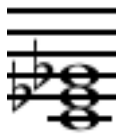
That additional note is traditionally a 6, b7, or major 7.

These additional notes are called **tension notes** because they inherently have a resolving function, thus they create a “tense” or unsettled feeling. Furthermore, in addition to the above three intervals of 6, b7, and major 7, the upper partials are also tension notes.


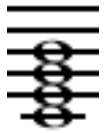
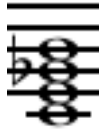
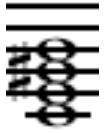
B) JAZZ CHORDS AND THEIR SYMBOLS

Jazz chords are described symbolically, subject to conventions that have evolved over the years.


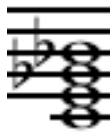
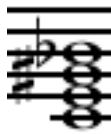
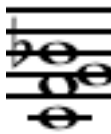
1) Triads

Basic Chord Type	Major	Minor	Augmented	Diminished
Written Example in C				
Symbol in C	C	C-	Caug, C+	Cdim, Co

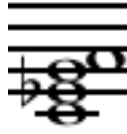

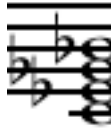
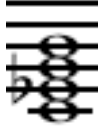
2) Major triads plus sixth/major seventh and alteration to the fifth

Basic Chord Type	Major sixth	Major seventh	Major seventh flat five	Major seventh sharp five (major seventh augmented)
Written Example in C				
Symbol in C	C6	Cmaj7, CΔ7	Cmaj7b5, CΔ7b5	Cmaj7#5, CΔ7#5

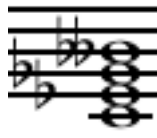


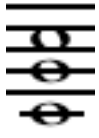
3) Major triads plus flat seventh and alteration to the fifth/third

Basic Chord Type	Dominant seventh	Dominant seventh flat five	Dominant seventh sharp five (dominant seventh augmented)	Dominant seventh suspended fourth
Written Example in C				
Symbol in C	C7	C7b5	C7#5, Caug7, C+7	C7sus4

4) Minor triads plus sixth/flat seventh/major seventh and alteration to the fifth

Basic Chord Type	Minor sixth	Minor seventh	Minor seventh flat five (half-diminished)	Minor major seventh
Written Example in C				
Symbol in C	C-6	C-7	C-7b5, Cø7	C-maj7, C-Δ7

5) Other basic chords and triads

Basic Chord Type	Diminished	Minor seventh sharp five	Two-no third	Power
Written Example in C				
Symbol in C	Cdim7, Co7	C-7+5	C2(no3)	C power

6) Notating complex chords

If a chord has more than four different notes or pitch classes, they are described as the basic jazz chord plus the upper partials:



D7(#9)

Often, there will be multiple upper partials. Writing these out symbolically, keep the following in mind as a rule:

Always describe the basic chord first, and then add the tension notes either on top, or in brackets:



C7(9,#11,13) F7sus4(b9, #9, 13)

C) CLOSED AND OPEN VOICINGS

Voicings with roots as the lowest notes are called **closed** voicings. When the lowest note is not the root, it is called an **open** voicing.


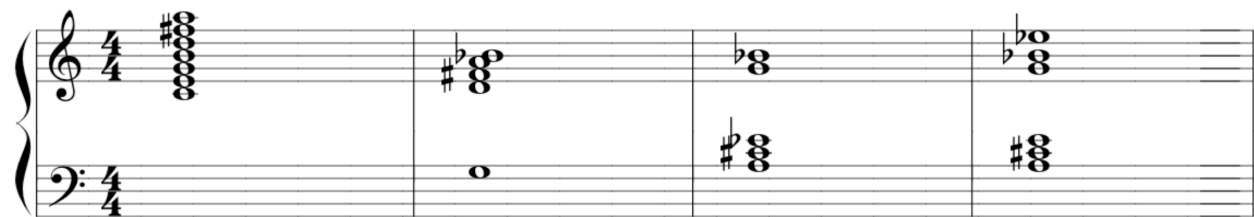
For the time being, we will deal only with closed voicings. The correct deciphering of open voicings will await other elements yet to be introduced.

D) DECIPHERING CHORDS PROPERLY

Notes comprising a chord may be dispersed in a way so that the basic chord is not always immediately apparent. There's no problem when the notes are stacked as thirds from the root up. However, sometimes the basic chord itself may be spread out over more than an octave, so that some basic-chord notes may be voiced higher than some upper partials. Furthermore, inversions of the basic chords can complicate the issue. Nevertheless:

Always isolate the basic chord first.

If you can find a dispersion of notes that fit a basic-chord interval pattern, then it's a fair bet that you've found the basic chord. Some examples of note dispersal in jazz chords:



You are encouraged to find the correct ways of symbolizing these chords.

E) CHORDS AND UPPER TENSIONS

When is a note a #9 and not a b3? This can be a confusing issue. To anticipate later discussion, upper partials are predominantly a **polytonal concept** where more than one tonality can be simultaneously discerned. In its linear application, it will often lead to a two-octave scale.

Within a chord, however, the situation is a little easier. Try **counting up from the root of the chord**. Otherwise, in general, the following maxims hold true:

- **b2 or 2 are rarely used; they are usually b9 or 9.**
- **A note is a #9 if there is a 3 somewhere in the chord within which the #9 is embedded.**
- **A note is an 11 only if there is a b3 somewhere in the chord and no 3.**

- A note is a #11 if there is a 5 somewhere in the chord.
- A note is a 13 if there is a maj7 or b7 somewhere in chord.
- A note is a b13 if there is a b7 somewhere in the chord.
- A note is a #5 if there is a maj7 somewhere in the chord.
- Different tension numbers signifying the same note are never used together in the same chord. For example, a Cmaj7 with an F# in the chord is either a Cmaj7b5 or Cmaj7#11, but not Cmaj7b5#11.