
A Note on Terminology and Chord Symbols

Most working jazz musicians prefer easy-to-read shorthand symbols. Both G7alt and

(b13)
(#11)
(#9)
G7(b9)

mean the same thing. Which would you rather read?

For the beginner, jazz presents a bewildering array of chord symbols. You will soon find out that they are just different ways of writing the same few chords. There is no one single set of standard chord symbols. The lack of a universally agreed-upon set of symbols is not a bad thing at all. Jazz is a living, breathing, growing, constantly evolving art, and its changing terminology reflects this.

A C major 7th chord can be notated as Cmaj7, CM7, C6, C $\frac{9}{6}$, or C Δ , and they all mean pretty much the same thing. Many jazz musicians just write C. In this book I'll write C major 7th as C Δ .

A D minor 7th chord can be notated as D-7, Dm7, or Dmi7. I like to use the minus sign, as in D-7.

The plus (+) symbol (C7+11) and the sharp (#) symbol (C7#11) both mean the same thing: Raise a note (the 11th, in this case) a half-step. I'll use the # symbol in this book.

The flat (b) symbol (C7b9) and the minus (-) sign (C7-9) both mean the same thing: Lower a note (the 9th, in this case) a half-step. I prefer the flat symbol.

The 4th and 11th are the same note in a chord. I like to use 4 on major and sus chords (C Δ #4, Csus4), and 11 on dominant and minor chords (C7#11, C-11).

The 6th and 13th are the same note within a chord. Standard practice is to use 6 on major and minor chords (C6, C-6), and 13 on dominant chords (C7b13).

Many piano and guitar voicings for major 7th chords don't include the major 7th. You'll see an occasional "C Δ " chord in this book with no major 7th in the voicing shown.

I use abbreviated numbers—such as "3rd," "5th," "7th," and so on—when referring to *intervals and notes in a specific chord*, such as "the 5th of the G7 chord." I spell out the number as a word—such as "third," "fifth," "seventh"—when referring to anything else, such as "the fourth mode of C major," "the cycle of fifths," "the seventh note of the scale," and so on.