

More advanced chords

Most of the chords you will play are variations on the basic triad we looked at first. Sometimes a note will be added, sometimes one will be taken away and sometimes a note will be changed. Here is a run down of most types of chords to help you to get to know them:

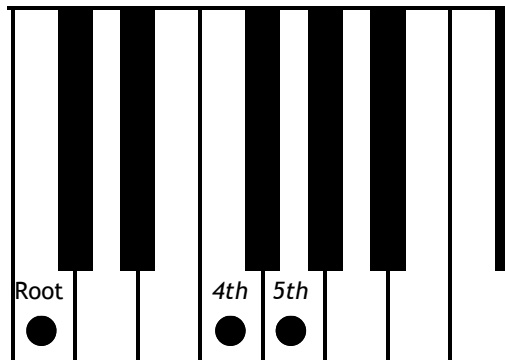
Slash chords

Slash chords are the most common variation of a triad. These are when the bass note is different to the root note of a chord. For example C/E means that you would play a C major chord with an E in the bass rather than a C. It can be helpful to think of these chords like fractions—C/E would be C ‘over’ E—this way you’re more likely to get the chord and bass notes the correct way round.

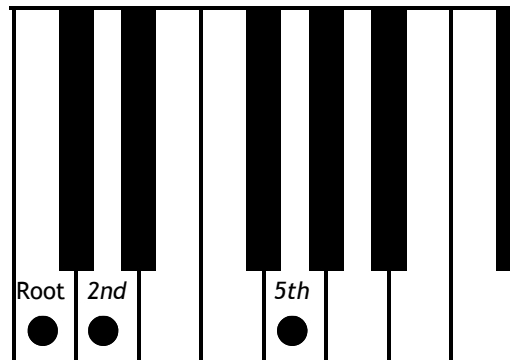
“sus” chords

This simply means “suspension”. When Bach wrote music there were times when he would hold one note over into the next chord (or suspend it) creating a brief clash which would then be resolved. A “sus” chord will involve you swapping the third of the chord with either the note above or below:

Csus⁴



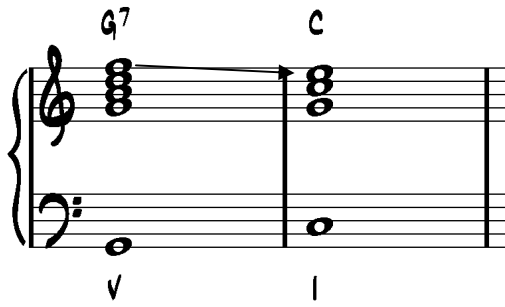
Csus²



The “sus⁴” is the most common suspended chord and it would usually resolve (go to) a normal major chord i.e. if you play Csus⁴ you will often play a chord of C immediately afterwards. We are not as careful about resolving chords now as composers used to be so you may not need to do this but it is useful to know where a chord might go.

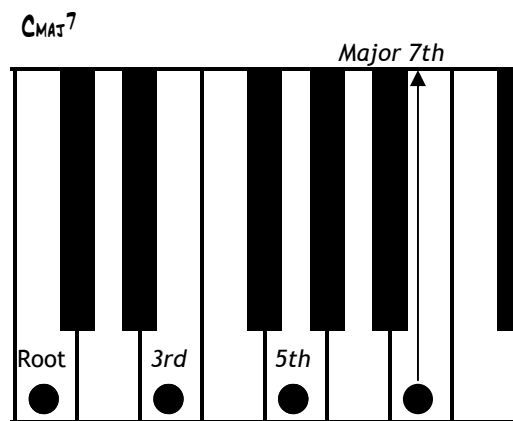
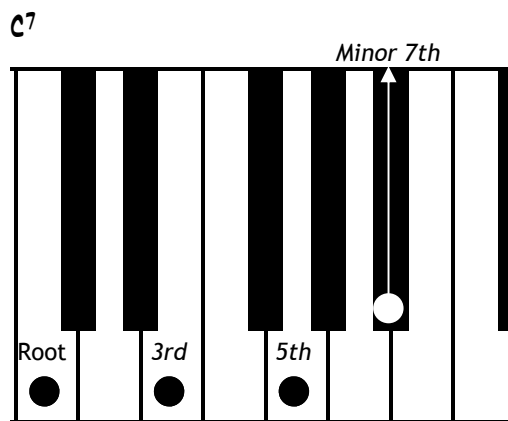
7th chords

7ths are very common in music and you will often find a chord symbol with 7 after it (e.g. D7). A seventh is a note which is added to the basic triad. As with all chords we count from the first note in the chord (the root note). This is how we find the third and fifth of a chord. The most common 7th chord is the chord on the dominant (or 5th). This means that the most common 7th chord in C major would be G7. Because a 7th is always dissonant (i.e. the 7th clashes with the root note of the chord) it usually resolves in a certain way—the 7th of the dominant chord falls to the third in the tonic chord (chord 1) creating a perfect cadence:



Notice how the seventh note falls a semitone to the third in the tonic chord. A lot of seventh chords should be treated like this.

You might notice that the 'F' in the example above is an F natural. This is partly because it is in the key of 'C' (which has no sharps and flats). It is also because of the type of seventh chord written above. Any chord written with **just** the number 7 next to it has a **minor 7th** added to it. This has nothing to do with the chord being major or minor—it is just about the interval. You can have an interval of a major or minor seventh in the same way as you can have an interval of a major or minor third. The minor seventh is on the 11th semitone above the root whilst the major seventh would be on the 12th semitone:



As you can see above, the chord with a minor 7th just says '7' after it whereas the chord with a major 7th says 'maj7' afterwards. This will always be the case so you can tell if a chord has a major or minor 7th.

Added note chords

Added note chords are much simpler to understand—if the symbol says C6 you just play a C chord and add the 6th note of a scale of C. Add 9 chords are also very common and it is possible to add a 9th (or 2nd) to many major chords even though it may not be indicated in the music:

