Chord symbols

Every chord symbol you will meet on a lead sheet, built on **C**. Read a symbol from left to right: the **root letter** first, then the **suffix** that changes it (Handout 229). All of them are stacks of 3rds — except the sus chords, which swap the 3rd out.

TRIADS — AND THE CHORDS THAT BEND THEM

C
also CM, Cmaj



C–E–G
major 3rd + minor 3rd

Handouts 01, 229

Cm
also Cmin, C-



C–E♭–G
minor 3rd + major 3rd

Handouts 23, 229

C°
also Cdim



C–E♭–G♭
minor 3rd + minor 3rd

Handout 209

C+
also Caug



C–E–G♯
major 3rd + major 3rd

Handout 225

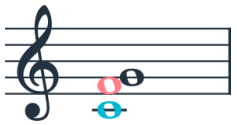
Csus2
2nd replaces the 3rd



C–D–G
no 3rd: root, 2nd, 5th

Handout 226

Csus4
also Csus



C–F–G
no 3rd: root, 4th, 5th

Handout 226

C6
major triad + 6th



C–E–G–A
adds the 6th above the root

SEVENTH CHORDS — AND SLASH CHORDS

C7
the dominant 7th



C–E–G–B♭
major triad + minor 7th

Handout 212

Cmaj7
also CM7, CΔ7



C–E–G–B
major triad + major 7th

Handout 223

Cm7
also Cmin7, C-7



C–E♭–G–B♭
minor triad + minor 7th

Handout 224

Cø7
also Cm7♭5



C–E♭–G♭–B♭
diminished triad + minor 7th

Handout 211

C°7
also Cdim7



C–E♭–G♭–B𝄫
diminished triad + diminished 7th

Handout 210

C/E
C chord, E in the bass



E–G–C
the letter after the slash is the lowest note

Handout 229

C/G
C chord, G in the bass



G–C–E
the letter after the slash is the lowest note

Handout 229

Just a letter = major
C means C–E–G. Every other symbol is measured against this plain major triad.

"7" alone = a minor 7th
C7 adds B♭. Only "maj7" adds the B a half step under the octave.

The "m" belongs to the triad
In Cm7 the m makes the 3rd minor; the 7 is the usual minor 7th.

Spell in 3rds
Letters climb C, E, G, B — so C°7 has B 𝄫, never A.

cyan = the root **coral** = the note the suffix changes or adds, compared with plain C major (on a slash chord: the bass)

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Chord symbols in all 12 keys

The five chords you will see most on lead sheets, on every root. Find the root in the left column, then read across. Cyan marks the root.

ROOT	MAJOR C		MINOR Cm		DOMINANT 7TH C7		MAJOR 7TH Cmaj7		MINOR 7TH Cm7	
C	**C**	C-E-G	**Cm**	C-E♭-G	**C7**	C-E-G-B♭	**Cmaj7**	C-E-G-B	**Cm7**	C-E♭-G-B♭
D♭ / C♯	**D♭**	D♭-F-A♭	**C♯m**	C♯-E-G♯	**D♭7**	D♭-F-A♭-C♭	**D♭maj7**	D♭-F-A♭-C	**C♯m7**	C♯-E-G♯-B
D	**D**	D-F♯-A	**Dm**	D-F-A	**D7**	D-F♯-A-C	**Dmaj7**	D-F♯-A-C♯	**Dm7**	D-F-A-C
E♭	**E♭**	E♭-G-B♭	**E♭m**	E♭-G♭-B♭	**E♭7**	E♭-G-B♭-D♭	**E♭maj7**	E♭-G-B♭-D	**E♭m7**	E♭-G♭-B♭-D♭
E	**E**	E-G♯-B	**Em**	E-G-B	**E7**	E-G♯-B-D	**Emaj7**	E-G♯-B-D♯	**Em7**	E-G-B-D
F	**F**	F-A-C	**Fm**	F-A♭-C	**F7**	F-A-C-E♭	**Fmaj7**	F-A-C-E	**Fm7**	F-A♭-C-E♭
G♭ / F♯	**G♭**	G♭-B♭-D♭	**F♯m**	F♯-A-C♯	**G♭7**	G♭-B♭-D♭-F♭	**G♭maj7**	G♭-B♭-D♭-F	**F♯m7**	F♯-A-C♯-E
G	**G**	G-B-D	**Gm**	G-B♭-D	**G7**	G-B-D-F	**Gmaj7**	G-B-D-F♯	**Gm7**	G-B♭-D-F
A♭ / G♯	**A♭**	A♭-C-E♭	**G♯m**	G♯-B-D♯	**A♭7**	A♭-C-E♭-G♭	**A♭maj7**	A♭-C-E♭-G	**G♯m7**	G♯-B-D♯-F♯
A	**A**	A-C♯-E	**Am**	A-C-E	**A7**	A-C♯-E-G	**Amaj7**	A-C♯-E-G♯	**Am7**	A-C-E-G
B♭	**B♭**	B♭-D-F	**B♭m**	B♭-D♭-F	**B♭7**	B♭-D-F-A♭	**B♭maj7**	B♭-D-F-A	**B♭m7**	B♭-D♭-F-A♭
B	**B**	B-D♯-F♯	**Bm**	B-D-F♯	**B7**	B-D♯-F♯-A	**Bmaj7**	B-D♯-F♯-A♯	**Bm7**	B-D-F♯-A

BUILD ANY OF THEM FROM THE ROOT

major	root + 4 half steps + 3
minor	root + 3 half steps + 4
7	major triad + 3 half steps on top
maj7	major triad + 4 half steps on top
m7	minor triad + 3 half steps on top

TWO NAMES FOR ONE KEY

Three rows have two root names. The major chords use **D♭, G♭, A♭** and the minor chords use **C♯, F♯, G♯** — the usual spellings, and the same ones our key-by-key handouts use. D♭ and C♯ are the same piano key.

KEEP THE LETTERS IN 3RDS

Every chord here skips one letter between notes: C-E-G-B, D-F-A-C. That is why G♭7 ends on **F♭**, not E, and B major has **D♯**, not E♭. Same keys, but the right names make the chord look like what it is.

Learn more: lead sheets 229 · 7ths 212, 223, 224 · other qualities 209, 210, 211, 225, 226. **Practice:** Exercise 34 (name the 7th chord).

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