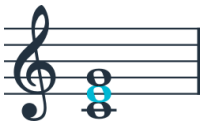Suspended chords: sus2 and sus4

The **3rd** is the note that makes a chord major or minor. Take it out, put a **2nd** or a **4th** in its place, and the chord is **suspended** — hanging in the air, neither happy nor sad, waiting to land.

SWAP OUT THE 3RD

C

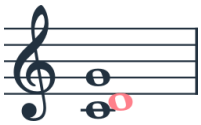
C - E - G



The **3rd** (E) decides: major. Lower it to E♭ and it is minor.

Csus2

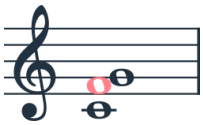
C - D - G



The 3rd drops **down a step** to the 2nd. Open and airy.

Csus4

C - F - G
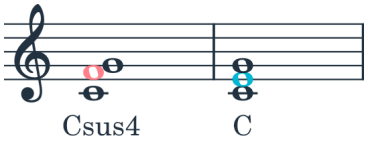


The 3rd climbs **up a half step** to the 4th. Tense, leaning.

Coral marks the note standing in for the 3rd. With no 3rd, the chord has **no major or minor color** — Csus4 fits C major and C minor alike.
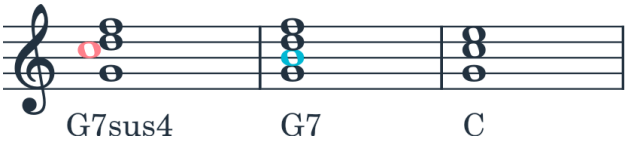
THE 4TH WANTS TO FALL TO THE 3RD

sus4 → major



F slips down a half step to **E** and the chord finally knows what it is. That fall, **4 → 3**, is the classic *resolution* of a suspension.

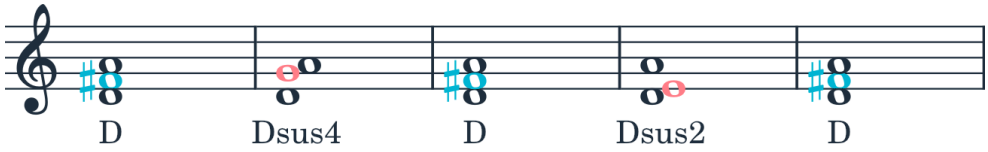
V7sus4 → V7 → I



Same move on the dominant: C falls to **B**, turning G7sus4 into G7 (Handout 212), and then B rises right back to C for home. Twice the waiting, twice the arrival. Bach's Prelude in C has V7sus4 in bars 26 and 30 (Handout 377).

Hymns and chorales (Handout 385) do this at many of their endings: the 4th is held over from the chord before, then falls on the last beat. The sus2 is less pushy — it may rise **2 → 3**, or simply stay as a color.

SUS AS COLOR: THE POP SHUFFLE



Keep D and A still and let one finger dance around the 3rd: up to the **4th**, home to F♯, down to the **2nd**, home again. Guitarists and pianists use this shuffle constantly in pop and rock to make a single chord **move** without ever changing it.

Try it Play **C–E–G**, then swap the E for **F** (sus4) and for **D** (sus2). Now play **Csus4** and hold it… then let F fall to E. Feel the sigh of relief? Try the whole chain **G7sus4 → G7 → C**, and finally the D shuffle with a steady beat — four counts per chord. Make up your own sus chords: Gsus4 is G-C-D, Fsus2 is F-G-C.

LISTEN
Scan to hear every example
tissimo.co/worksheets/suspended-chords

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