

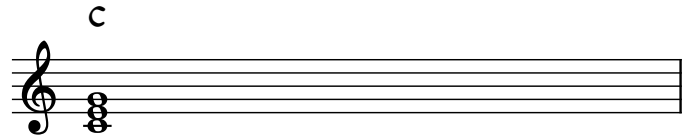
# 1. The Rules of Chord Symbol Notation

Chord symbol notation has had a messy start and for that reason different ways of writing chords and extensions exist today.

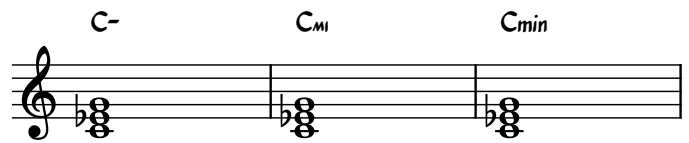
Because it is important to be clear and consistent when dealing with chord symbols, some ground rules need to be established. It helps to avoid confusion and eliminates conflicting ways of indicating harmony in a music sheet.

## TRIADS

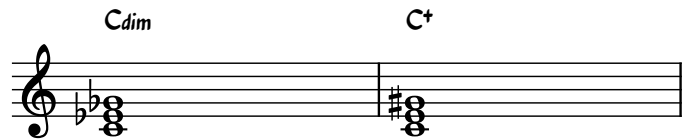
Major Triads are written by only indicating the root.



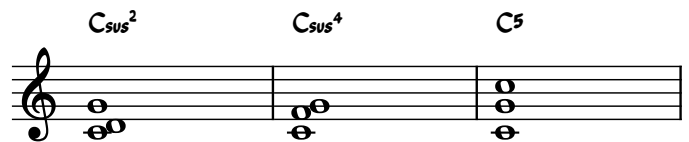
Minor Triads are written with a "-" (minus sign), "mi" or "min". The use of "m" is discouraged, as it resembles M (major).



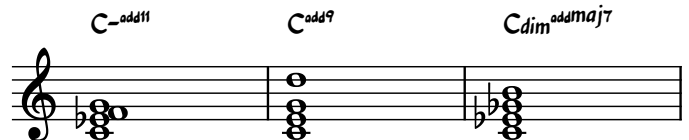
Diminished Triads are indicated with "dim", Augmented Triads with a "+" sign. The "+" is used in other chord types as well when the 5th is raised.



Sus2 Triads, Sus4 Triads and 5 Chords ("power chords"). These chords have an omitted third.

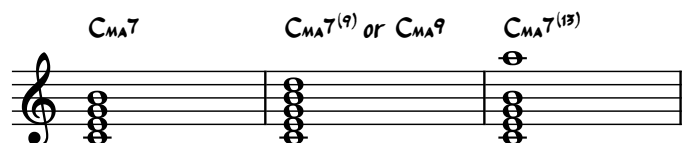


Extensions for triads are written with the word "add". *In which octave* the extension is added has no effect on it's name. Abbreviated chord symbols do not use "add" but they have their own limitations, as we will see later on.

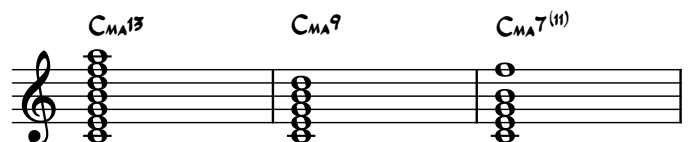


## 7 CHORDS

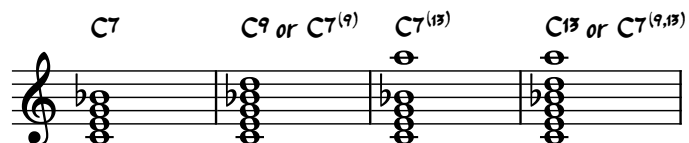
Major7 Chords are written the same way you pronounce them: Maj7. Abbreviations are allowed, as long as you are aware of their limitations.



Abbreviated symbols imply that the other extensions are present as well! Use parentheses if only specific tensions need to be present.



Dominant7 chords are recognised by the fact that their root name is followed immediately by either a 7, 9 or 13.



Be aware of the fact that although the 11 is present in abbreviated chord notations like C13, in practice it will hardly be used in chords with a major 3d. The 11 tends to clash with the major 3d and should be avoided for that reason. The topic of avoid notes will be covered in a later chapter.

For Minor7 Chords, the same notation rules apply.

In this case however, the 11 is an available extension, which means that minor7 chords can be extended with 9, 11 and 13 (although the 13 will not always sound good in all cases).

This results in more possibilities for notation and also for more abbreviations.

Four measures of music showing the following chords: C-7, C-7<sup>(9)</sup> or C-9, C-7<sup>(11)</sup>, and C-11.

Four measures of music showing the following chords: C-7<sup>(13)</sup>, C-7<sup>(11,13)</sup>, C-9<sup>(13)</sup>, and C-13.

Four measures of music showing the following chords: C-7<sup>(b5)</sup>, C-9<sup>(b5)</sup>, C-7<sup>(b5,11)</sup>, and C-11<sup>b5</sup> or C-7<sup>b5(9,11)</sup>.

Halfdiminished7 Chords are written as -7(b5). Normal rules for extensions apply.

One measure of music showing the Cdim7 chord.

Diminished7 Chords are written as dim7. Normal rules for extensions apply.

7sus4 Chords.

Normal rules for extensions apply.

Four measures of music showing the following chords: C7<sup>sus4</sup>, C9<sup>sus4</sup> or C7<sup>sus4(9)</sup>, C7<sup>sus4(13)</sup>, and C13<sup>sus4</sup> or C7<sup>sus4(9,13)</sup>.

## 6 CHORDS

Major6 Chords are written with only the number 6. When the 9 is added, a slash may be used but commas and parentheses are allowed as well.

Two measures of music showing the following chords: C6 and C6/9 or C6<sup>(9)</sup>.

Minor6 chords are written with a minus-sign.

Two measures of music showing the following chords: C-6 and C-6/9 or C-6<sup>(9)</sup>.

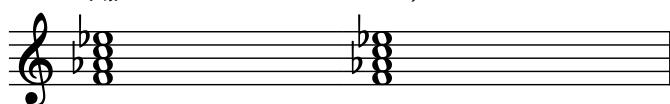
Be aware of the fact that the 6 means something different than 13 in chord symbol notation: 6 is a chord tone when no 7 is present, 13 is an extension when a 7 is present.

As a recap for these rules, let's review the most important *do's and don'ts* for chord symbol notation as well as some common mistakes that can be made.

1) Do not use m for minor 7 chords. Use -, mi or min instead.

*INCORRECT*                      *CORRECT*

$F_m7$                                        $F-7$ ,  $F_{mi}7$  or  $F_{min}7$



2) When you are used to writing  $\Delta$  for major7 chords, then also use dim for diminished chords.

If  $F\Delta7$ , then also  $F_{dim}7$



3) When you are used to writing maj, Maj or Ma for major 7 chords, you can use  $\circ$  for diminished chords.

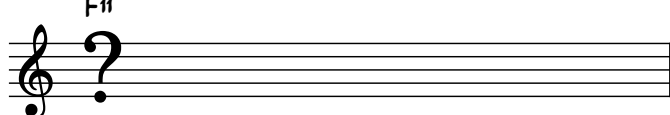
If  $F_{maj}7$ , then also  $F^{\circ}7$



5) The F11 chord is NOT a thing. It does not exist. Wipe it from your mind. (F7sus4 or F-11 do exist, though.)

*INCORRECT*

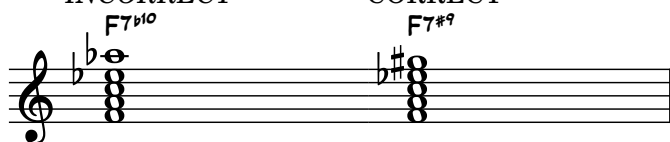
$F_{11}$



6) The extension  $b10$  does NOT exist because 10 is a chord tone. What you meant to write was #9.

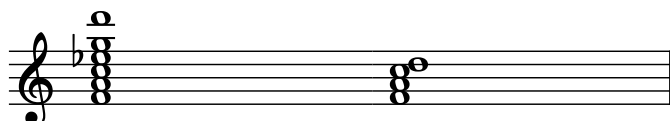
*INCORRECT*                      *CORRECT*

$F7^{b10}$                                        $F7^{\#9}$



7) F13 is NOT the same as F6 (not even functionally).

$F_{13}$  not the same as  $F_6$



8) Also, F13 is NOT the same as F7(13).

$F_{13}$  not the same as  $F7^{(13)}$

