

Defining Chord Terms

by Scott Wilson

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Chord: A combination of three or more notes sounded together.

Chord Quality: Refers to whether a chord sounds Major, Minor, Dominant, Half-Diminished, Fully Diminished or Suspended.

Chord Symbols: Letters, word abbreviations and/or Icons that represent a chord. (See the [Chord = Scale Cheat Sheet](#) for a detailed description of all chord symbols.)

Seventh Chords: A four note chord based on scale tones 1,3,5,and 7. There are FIVE basic types of seventh chords (Major, minor, Dominant, half-diminished & diminished).
Seventh Chords are the building blocks of the more complex extended chords.

Extended Chords: If any other notes are added to a Seventh Chord it is considered to be an extended chord.

Chord Extentions: Numbers (for example: 9, #9, b9, #11, 13 or #5) added to a chord symbol. Also known as **chord alterations**, these numbers represent specific notes (or scale pitches) to be added to the chord. These extentions are often referred to as the **color tones** of the chord. **Important:** Some chord extentions (or color tones) are implied by the presence of *other* chord extentions.

Chord Changes: Jazz slang referring to a chord or chord progression. This term is often shortened to just "Changes" (For example: What are the **changes**?)

Jazz Gem* A skilled jazz improviser can look at a chord symbol (with its extensions) and instantly determine the appropriate scale to play. This may sound hard at first, but there are only so many chords and many chords symbols share the same exact scale (Note: By using flash cards you can learn all of them in a very short amount of time).

Chord Symbols: The four examples below represent common chord symbols.

Chord Extensions
(usually numbers)

Seventh chord
1,3,5,7

CMaj ⁷	Cmin ¹³	C13(#11)	Csus ⁴
Chord Quality: Major	Minor	Dominant	Suspended

C^Δ7 can also be notated as CMaj⁷ or CM7. Since chord symbols may be notated several ways, make sure you review **Identifying Basic Jazz Chord Symbols** so you are familiar with the variety of chord symbols used by all composers, arrangers and publishers.

Jazz Gem* In this chord, the D natural and F natural are also chord extensions and color tones. Even though these numbers are not listed in the chord symbol, when 11th's or 13th's are listed by themselves, extensions below them (such as the 9th and 11th) are implied. If the composer only wanted the 13th and not the 9th or 11th, then the chord symbol would read Cmin7 (add 6).