

Identifying Basic Jazz Chord Symbols

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Over the years composers have used a variety of ways to notate chord symbols. Regardless of the notation style, all chord symbols must indicate the quality of the chord (i.e. whether a chord is major, minor, dominant, half-diminished or diminished). Listed below are examples of the most common chord notation styles for the five basic seventh chords.

Major Seventh Chord Symbols: Chord Tones 1, 3, 5, 7

C^Δ7
CM7
CMA7
CMA₇

Minor Seventh Chord Symbols: Chord Tones 1, b3, 5, b7

Note: Lower case letters may be used as well when notating minor chords.

C-7
Cm7 or Cm7
Cmi7
Cm₇

Dominant Seventh Chord Symbols: Chord Tones 1, 3, 5, b7

Jazz Gem * Many music notation software programs now use small uppercase letters to represent lower case letters. For Example: M7 is Major seventh and m7 is minor seventh (both letters look identical, however, one is slightly smaller and it indicates minor). Unfortunately, for us jazz musicians, these new jazz fonts make reading chords symbol a little more difficult. Now, in some cases, musicians will also have to look closely at the SIZE of the letter to discern the chord symbols quality.

C7
C₀₀M7

Half-Diminished Seventh Chord Symbols: Chord Tones 1, b3, b5, b7

Cø7
C-7(b5)
Cm7(b5)
Cmi7(b5)
Cm₇(b5)

Diminished Seventh Chord Symbols: Chord Tones 1, b3, b5, bb7

Cø7
C_oim7