

# Chord Variations

To build any chord, download the Chord Constructor Chart  
<https://www.maxlearning.net/Piano/ChordConstructor.pdf>

In their quest to produce new sounds and emotions, composers have created an endless variety of chords. It would be daunting to memorize each chord. Fortunately, nearly every variation can be derived from its Major chord by applying a simple rule. All you need remember is the Major chord!

**Your Turn:** Apply the variation rules listed below to the D chord by filling in the boxes with finger letters for the moved key or keys. Play the C and D variants to ensure they share the same tonal/emotional quality. Some chord types have more than one notation, for example, Cdim = C<sup>o</sup>. Remember: Flat = to the left, down one key; Sharp = to the right, up one key.

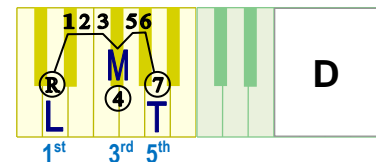
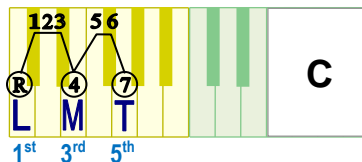
## 3-KEY CHORDS

### Major

Rule: 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>

Tone: bright, cheerful\*

KeyCount: (R)-4-7\*\*

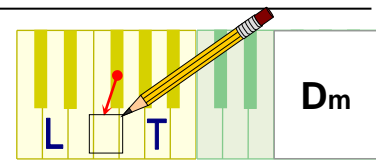
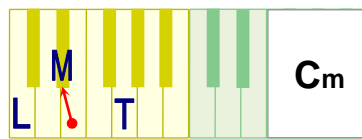


### Harmonic Minor

Rule: Flat the 3<sup>rd</sup>

Tone: dark, sad

Has same Root as Major chord

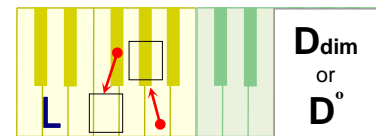
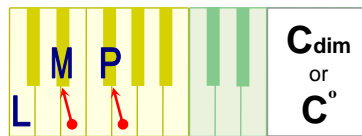


### Diminished

Rule: Flat the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>

Tone: foreboding

Decreases the overall interval

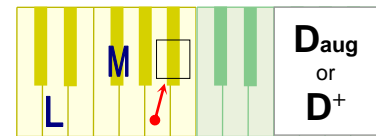
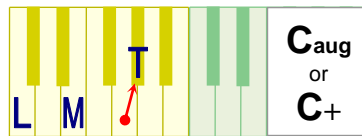


### Augmented

Rule: Sharp the 5<sup>th</sup>

Tone: fretful

Increases the overall interval

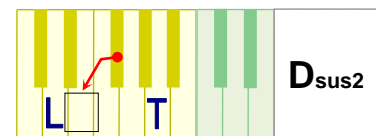
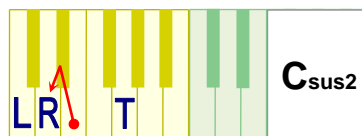


### Suspended 2nd

Rule: Double-flat the 3<sup>rd</sup> (= 2<sup>nd</sup>)

Tone: anticipating

Resolved by return to Major chord

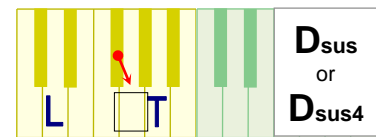


### Suspended 4th

Rule: Sharp the 3<sup>rd</sup> (= 4<sup>th</sup>)

Tone: expectant

Resolved by return to Major chord

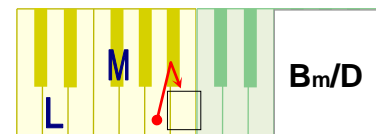
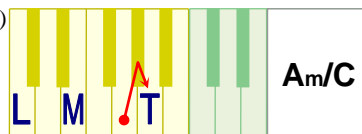


### Relative Minor (showing 1st Inversion of Minor)

Rule: Double-sharp the 5<sup>th</sup> (= 6<sup>th</sup>)

Tone: wistful

Same Key Signature as Major chord

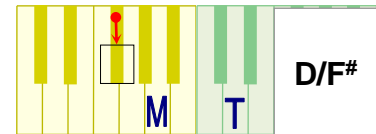
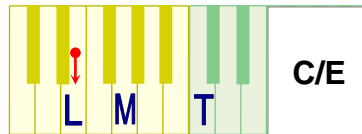


### Altered Bass (showing 1st Inversion of Major)

Rule: Play chord with slashed /bass

Creates an inversion or a 4-key chord

Bass = Bottom key (lowest on left)



\* Tonal emotions vary by listener and song. Also, the same chord may sound dark in lower octaves but bright in higher octaves.

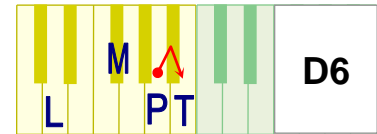
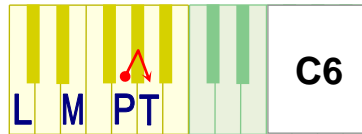
\*\* From the (R)oot, count 4 keys up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> then 3 more keys to the 5<sup>th</sup>. For details, see the *Practical Music Theory* section.

# 4-KEY CHORDS

## Sixth

Rule: Add the 6<sup>th</sup> (2 keys above 5<sup>th</sup>)

Tone: Finality

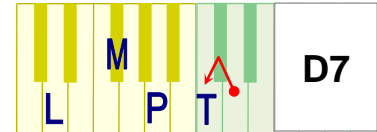
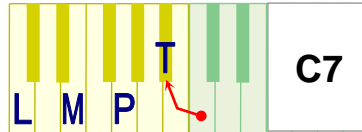


## Seventh

Rule: Add dominant 7<sup>th</sup> (2 below octave)

Tone: Tense

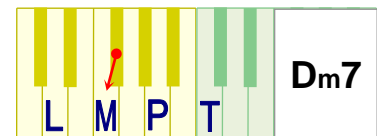
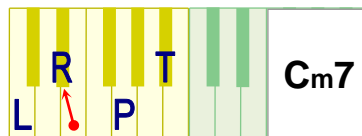
If V7 chord, resolves to I chord\*



## Minor Seventh

Rule: Flat 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Seventh chord

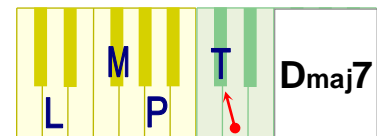
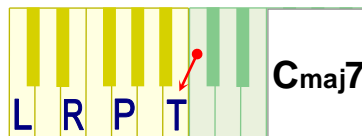
Tone: Thoughtful



## Major Seventh

Rule: Add the 7<sup>th</sup> (1 below octave)

Tone: Complex, modern



## Diminished Seventh

Rule: Flat 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> of Seventh chord

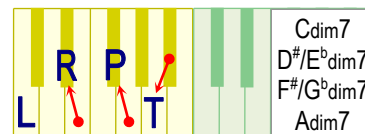
Tone: Menacing

Using this rule, each of the 12 Seventh chords can be individually converted to a Diminished Seventh.

Alternatively, dim7 variations can be derived and organized into 3 groups of *enharmonic* chords by sharpening each key of the previous group.

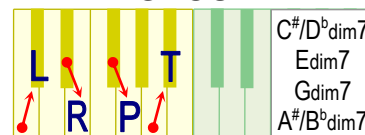
Enharmonic chords have identical keys but different names, in this case, 4 names for each Group as shown.

### GROUP 1



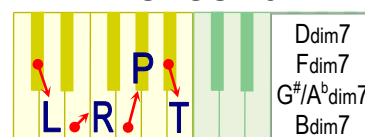
Flat 3-5-7 of C7

### GROUP 2



Sharp each Group 1 key

### GROUP 3



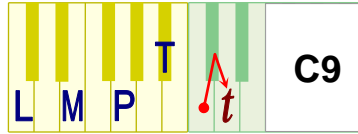
Sharp each Group 2 key

\* See Practical Music Theory to learn about Chord Numerals.

## 2-HAND CHORDS

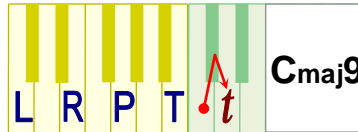
### Ninth

Rule: C7 + 9<sup>th</sup> (2 keys above octave)  
LH=C7 chord; RH=D key



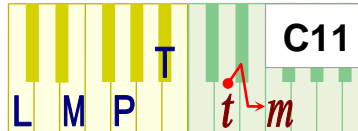
### Major Ninth

Rule: Cmaj7 + 9<sup>th</sup> (2 keys above octave)  
LH=Cmaj7 chord; RH=D key



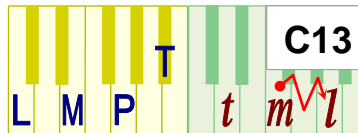
### Eleventh

Rule: C9 + 11<sup>th</sup> (3 keys above 9<sup>th</sup>)  
LH=C7 chord; RH=D+F keys



### Thirteenth

Rule: C11 + 13<sup>th</sup> (4 keys above 11<sup>th</sup>)  
LH=C7 chord; RH=Dm chord



## OTHER VARIATIONS

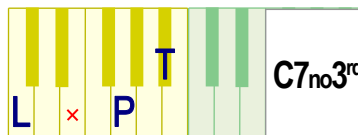
### Add

Rule: Add the specified key  
Cadd2 = Add the 2<sup>nd</sup> (D) to C chord



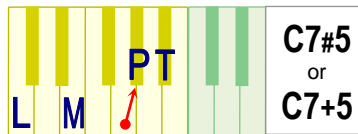
### No

Rule: Omit the specified key  
C7no3<sup>rd</sup> = Omit the 3<sup>rd</sup> (E) from C7



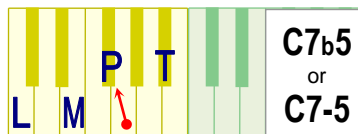
### # or +

Rule: Sharp the specified key  
C7#5 or C7+5 = Sharp the 5<sup>th</sup> (G) of C7



### b or -

Rule: Flat the specified key  
C7b5 or C7-5 = Flat the 5<sup>th</sup> (G) of C7



## Interval KeyCounts

Keys to count from the Root or Octave to reach a particular interval. (See *Practical Music Theory*.)

Interval	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup>
From Root	2	4	5	7	9	11	12					
From Octave								2	4	5	7	9

If desired, print the CHORD CONSTRUCTOR Chart (separate lesson section) and laminate it so you can use a dry-erase pen to build chord variations.