

Common Jazz Piano Voicings

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Basic chord symbols are merely abbreviations for particular scales (the general horizontal sounds of the symbols) from which the player may select notes to construct chords and/or improvise. These scales are by no means the only ones that can be used for improvisation, however, they are the symbols' most representative sounds. The most common basic symbols are C, C7, C-, CØ, Co, C-Δ, C7b9, C7alt, and C7+, representing the general sounds of major, dominant, dorian minor, half-diminished, diminished, melodic minor, dominant 7 flat 9, dominant 7 altered, and whole tone, respectively.

The 3rd and 7th are the most representative notes of any chord or scale and “should” be included in every voicing (except for a “sus” chord where the 4th is substituted for the 3rd). Common voicings usually contain at least one other chord tone, extension, and/or alteration as well. Moreover, any or all notes from the related scale (except for *avoid tones**) may be used in the pianist's chord voicing, depending on the player and the musical situation. A typical C7 piano voicing, for instance, might be constructed Bb E A D G (b7 3 6 9 5) if the player is looking for a relatively evenly spread two-handed chord or, perhaps, E A Bb D (3 6 b7 9) if looking for a left-handed close voicing. Notice that all these notes come from C mixolydian, C7's related chord scale. Also notice that the root is not included. As the root is primarily the bassist's responsibility, pianists and guitarists often omit the root when comping to avoid redundancy. For unaccompanied solo piano playing, however, the root is included much more often and generally voiced as the lowest note of the chord.

“Alt,” short for altered, refers to the raised and/or lowered 5th and 9th. In other words, the dominant 7 altered chord contains no regular 5th and no regular 9th, but instead, a flat and/or sharp 5th and a flat and/or sharp 9th. The difference between the dominant 7 flat 9 sound and the dominant 7 altered sound is that the former includes the natural 5th and 6th while the latter does not. Thus, the related scale for C7b9 (half-whole diminished) is composed of the root, b9, #9, 3 #4, 5, 6, and b7: C Db D# E F# G A Bb C; the related scale for C7alt (super locrian) is composed of the root, b9, #9, 3 #4, #5, and b7: C Db D# E F# G# Bb C (this scale is often enharmonically spelled C Db Eb Fb Gb Ab Bb C, using the note names from its parent scale, Db melodic minor, of which C super locrian is the seventh mode). A C7b9 might be voiced Bb E G Db (b7 3 5 b9) while its C7alt counterpart would be voiced Bb E G# Db (b7 3 #5 b9). Again, exactly which notes to use from these scales when constructing the chord is left up to the player.

Ten Most Common Chord Scales

<u>Chord Symbol</u>	<u>Scale Name</u>	<u>Formula</u>	<u>Scale Beginning On C</u>
CA	Major	major scale	C D E (F) G A B C
C7	Mixolydian	major scale with a b7	C D E (F) G A Bb C
C-	Dorian	major scale with a b3 and b7	C D Eb F G A Bb C
CØ	Locrian	notes from major scale ½ step higher	C (Db) Eb F Gb Ab Bb C
Co	Diminished (W/H)	W H W H W H W H	C D Eb F Gb Ab A B C
C-Δ	Melodic Minor	major scale with a b3	C D Eb F G A B C
C7alt	Super Locrian	notes from melodic minor scale ½ step higher	C Db Eb Fb Gb Ab Bb C
C7b9	Diminished (H/W)	H W H W H W H W	C Db Eb E F# G A Bb C
C7+	Whole Tone	all whole steps	C D E F# G# Bb C
C7 or C-	Blues Scale	1 b3 4 b5 5 b7 1	C Eb F Gb G Bb C

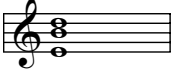


* Certain scales have “avoid tones,” meaning they should not be included in the related chord. For example, as a general rule, don't include a 4th in a major 7 chord, don't include a 4th in a dominant 7 chord (unless it's a sus chord in which the 4th replaces the 3rd), and don't include a b2nd in a half diminished chord. In the scales listed in the fourth column above, as well as those on pp. 6 & 7, the avoid tones are indicated in parenthesis.

Piano Voicing Mnemonics

I. One-Handed Jazz Voicings for *Major 7*, *Dominant 7*, and *Minor 7* Chords



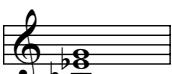
A. Category A (3rd in the lowest voice)

Chord Quality Voicing Voicing in C Mnemonic

CA	3 7 9		Look at <i>root</i> at the top and “spread out” (up a whole, down a half); 3rd in lowest voice
C7	3 b7 9		Look at <i>root</i> at the top and “spread out” (up a whole, down a whole); 3rd in lowest voice
C-	b3 b7 9		Look at <i>root</i> at the top and “spread out” (up a whole, down a whole); b3rd in lowest voice

B. Category B (7th in the lowest voice)

Chord Quality Voicing Voicing in C Mnemonic

CA	7 3 5		Look at <i>triad</i> and lower root a half step
C7	b7 3 6		Look at <i>triad</i> and “spread out” outer voices a whole step
C-	b7 b3 5		Look at <i>minor triad</i> and lower root a whole step

Common LH Chord Fingering: 5 2 1

Common RH Chord Fingering: 1 3 5

(exception -- category B dominant 7 voicing: 1 2 5)

II. II V I Progression in Major

A. Chord Qualities

1. II chord is minor 7 (II-)
2. V chord is dominant 7 (V7)
3. I chord is major 7 (IΔ)

B. Example in the key of C

1. C major scale: 

2. II V I in the Key of C: D- G7 CA

note: any 3 chords in a row progressing counterclockwise around the circle of 5ths is a II V I in the key of the 3rd chord, e.g., C- F7 BbΔ is a II V I in Bb; F- Bb7 EbΔ is a II V I in Eb; etc.

C. Good voice-leading: 3rd to 7th and 7th to 3rd

1. the 7th moves down a half step to become the 3rd of the next chord
2. the 3rd stays on the same note to become the 7th of the next chord

Note that to progress from a II- to a V7: only one note moves (the 7th of the II- moves down a half step to become the 3rd of the V7); the other two notes remain the same

Example 1: **Category A to B to A**

II-		V7		IA
9		6	<i>W</i>	9
b7	<i>H</i>	3		7
b3		b7	<i>H</i>	3

KEY OF C

D- G7 CΔ

II-		V7		IA
9		6	<i>W</i>	9
b7	<i>H</i>	3		7
b3		b7	<i>H</i>	3

KEY OF F

G- C7 FΔ

II-		V7		IA
9		6	<i>W</i>	9
b7	<i>H</i>	3		7
b3		b7	<i>H</i>	3

KEY OF Bb

C- F7 BbΔ

Example 2: **Category B to A to B**

II-		V7		IA
5		9	<i>W</i>	5
b3		b7	<i>H</i>	3
b7	<i>H</i>	3		7

KEY OF C

D- G7 CΔ

II-		V7		IA
5		9	<i>W</i>	5
b3		b7	<i>H</i>	3
b7	<i>H</i>	3		7

KEY OF F

G- C7 FΔ


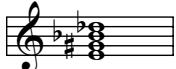
II-		V7		IA
5		9	<i>W</i>	5
b3		b7	<i>H</i>	3
b7	<i>H</i>	3		7

KEY OF Bb



C- F7 BbΔ

IV. One-Handed Jazz Voicings for *Half Diminished* and *Dominant 7 Altered* Chords

A. **Category A** (3rd in the lowest voice)

<u>Chord Quality</u>	<u>Voicing</u>	<u>Voicing in C</u>	<u>Mnemonic</u>
CØ	b3 b5 b7 R		m7b5 chord in first inversion (b3 on bottom, root on top)
C7alt	3 #5 b7 b9		think category A dominant 7 voicing, lower 9th (and add #5 which is a whole step below the b7)

B. **Category B** (7th in the lowest voice)

<u>Chord Quality</u>	<u>Voicing</u>	<u>Voicing in C</u>	<u>Mnemonic</u>
CØ	b7 R b3 b5		m7b5 chord in third inversion (b7 on bottom, “point” to root)
C7alt	b7 b9 3 #5		think category B dominant 7 voicing, lower 6th (and add b9 which is a half step above the root)

Common LH Chord Fingering: 5 3 2 1

Common RH Chord Fingering: 1 2 3 5

note: for Category B half diminished chord, use **5 4 2 1**

V. II V I Progression in Minor

A. Chord Qualities

1. II chord is half diminished (IIØ)
2. V chord is dominant 7 altered (V7alt)
3. I chord is minor (I-)

B. Example in the key of C minor: **DØ G7alt C-**

C. Good voice-leading: *3rd to 7th* and *7th to 3rd*

1. from the **IIØ**, find the whole step interval in your voicing and “spread out,” i.e., the *higher note moves up a half step* and the *lower note moves down a half step* (the other two notes remain the same), then you’re automatically on the V7 alt chord
2. from the **V7alt**, the *b7 moves down a whole step; all other voices move down a half step*

Example 1: Category A to B to A

IIØ		V7alt		I-
R	<i>H</i>	b5	<i>H</i>	9
b7	<i>H</i>	3	<i>H</i>	b7
b5		b9	<i>H</i>	5
b3		b7	<i>W</i>	b3

KEY OF C MINOR

Musical notation for Example 1 in C minor. The first chord is DØ (D minor triad), the second is G7alt (G dominant 7th with altered 9th), and the third is C- (C minor triad). Interval markings are shown above the notes: H for half steps and W for whole steps.

IIØ		V7alt		I-
R	<i>H</i>	b5	<i>H</i>	9
b7	<i>H</i>	3	<i>H</i>	b7
b5		b9	<i>H</i>	5
b3		b7	<i>W</i>	b3

KEY OF G MINOR

Musical notation for Example 1 in G minor. The first chord is AØ (A minor triad), the second is D7alt (D dominant 7th with altered 9th), and the third is G- (G minor triad). Interval markings are shown above the notes: H for half steps and W for whole steps.

Example 2: Category B to A to B

IIØ		V7alt		I-
b5		b9	<i>H</i>	5
b3		b7	<i>W</i>	b3
R	<i>H</i>	#5	<i>H</i>	9
b7	<i>H</i>	3	<i>H</i>	b7

KEY OF C MINOR

Musical notation for Example 2 in C minor. The first chord is DØ (D minor triad), the second is G7alt (G dominant 7th with altered 9th), and the third is C- (C minor triad). Interval markings are shown above the notes: H for half steps and W for whole steps.

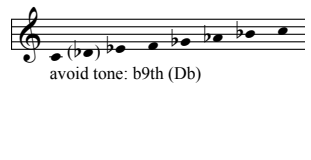
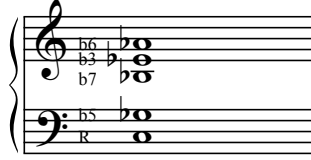


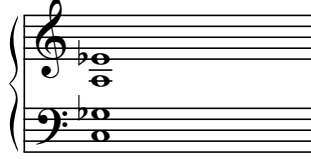
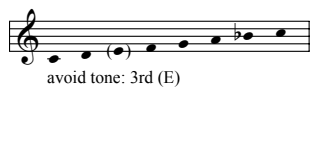

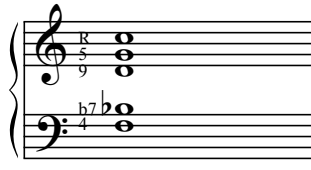





IIØ		V7alt		I-
b5		b9	<i>H</i>	5
b3		b7	<i>W</i>	b3
R	<i>H</i>	#5	<i>H</i>	9
b7	<i>H</i>	3	<i>H</i>	b7

KEY OF G MINOR

Musical notation for Example 2 in G minor. The first chord is AØ (A minor triad), the second is D7alt (D dominant 7th with altered 9th), and the third is G- (G minor triad). Interval markings are shown above the notes: H for half steps and W for whole steps.

Common Two-Handed Piano Voicings (two notes in the LH, three notes in the RH)**

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Scale Name</u>	<u>Scale</u>	<u>Two-Hand Voicings*</u>	<u>Mnemonic</u>
C	Major	<p>avoid tone: 4th (F)</p>	<p>A</p>	RH pinky on the root, come down in 4ths in both hands
			<p>A</p>	same as above - just lower top note 1/2 step
			<p>B</p>	RH pinky on the 5th, come down in 4ths in both hands
C ⁷	Mixolydian 5th mode of maj	<p>avoid tone: 4th (F)</p>	<p>A</p>	RH pinky on the root, come down in 4ths in RH; 3 & b7 in LH
			<p>B</p>	RH pinky on the 5th, come down in 4ths in RH; b7 & 3 in LH
C-	Dorian 2nd mode of maj		<p>A</p>	RH pinky on the root, come down in 4ths in RH ; b3 & b7 in LH
			<p>B</p>	“point” to root in RH and go up a 4th and down a 4th; b7 & b3 in LH

C^{\flat}	Locrian 7th mode of maj			think A voicing of dominant 7 chord up a raised 5th ($C^{\flat} = Ab7$)
				think B voicing of dominant 7 chord up a raised 5th ($C^{\flat} = Ab7$)
C°	Diminished (whole-half)			start on any chord tone on the bottom; play a tritone above it, then skip a minor 3rd between hands; then play a tritone in the RH
$C7^{sus4}$	Mixolydian 5th mode of maj			think A voicing of minor 7 chord up a 5th ($C7^{sus4} = G-$)
				think B voicing of minor 7 chord up a 5th ($C7^{sus4} = G-$)
$C7b9$	Diminished (half-whole)			start on any chord tone but the root (i.e., 3, 5, b7, or b9); play a tritone above it, then skip a minor 3rd between hands; then play a tritone in the RH
$C7^{alt}$	Super Locrian 7th mode of mel min			think A voicing of dominant 7 chord and raise RH up 1/2 step
				think B voicing of dominant 7 chord and lower RH down 1/2 step

Note: In the Jamey Aebersold books and in *Pocket Changes*, $C7+9 = C7^{alt}$

* “**Category A**” chords have the 3rd in the lowest voice; “**Category B**” chords have the 7th in the lowest voice.

** All voicings have five notes with the exception of the diminished and dominant 7b9 voicings which have four (two notes in each hand)

Jazz Piano Pedagogy Voicings Teaching/Learning Sequence *

- I. Major
 - A. One-Hand Voicings
 - 1. Category A: LH root / RH chord
 - 2. Category B: LH root / RH chord
 - 3. Alternate A-B beginning with A: LH root / RH chord
 - 4. Alternate B-A beginning with B: LH root / RH chord
 - 5. All of the above: chord in LH (RH tacit)
 - B. Two-Hand Voicings
 - 1. Category A
 - 2. Category B
 - 3. Alternate A-B beginning with A
 - 4. Alternate B-A beginning with B
- II. Dominant 7
 - A. Repeat I with dominant chords
 - B. Play *Bb Blues* (first alone, then with play-along recording)
 - 1. LH root / RH chord (start with both A and B; use best voice leading)
 - 2. Chords in LH (RH tacit)
 - 3. Chords in LH / head in RH
 - 4. Two-Handed Voicings (start with both A and B; use best voice leading)
 - 5. Chords in LH / related chord scales in RH (not in tempo)
 - 6. Chords in LH / improvise in RH
 - C. Play *Watermelon Man*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
- III. Minor
 - A. Repeat I with minor chords
 - B. Play *Song for My Father*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
 - C. Play *Impressions*: follow steps II B 1-6 above (also learn “So What” voicing)
 - D. Play *Cantaloupe Island*: follow steps II B 1-6 above (also learn two-handed “Cantaloupe Island” accompaniment figure)
 - E. Play *Maiden Voyage*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
- IV. II V I in Major (II- V7 I)
 - A. Alternate A-B-A beginning with A: LH root / RH chord
 - B. Alternate B-A-B beginning with B: LH root / RH chord
 - C. A and B above: chord in LH (RH tacit)
 - D. A and B above: two-handed voicings
 - E. Play *Satin Doll*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
- V. Half-Diminished - Repeat I with half-diminished chords
- VI. Dominant 7 Altered - Repeat I with dominant 7 altered chords
- VII. II V I in Minor (II \emptyset V7alt I-)
 - A. repeat IV A-D with minor II V I
 - B. Play *Blue Bossa*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
 - C. Play *Summertime*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
 - D. Play *Footprints*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
 - E. Play *Autumn Leaves*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
- VIII. Diminished
 - A. Repeat I with diminished chords
 - B. Play *Doxy*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
- IX. Dominant 7b9
 - A. Repeat I with dominant 7b9 chords
 - B. Repeat VII A, substituting V7b9 for V7alt (II \emptyset V7b9 I-)
- C. Play *F Blues*: follow steps II B 1-6 above

* All tunes above can be found in Jamey Aebersold’s Play-Along Volume 54 (“Maiden Voyage”) and can be ordered from www.jazzbooks.com