# Chord voicing introduction

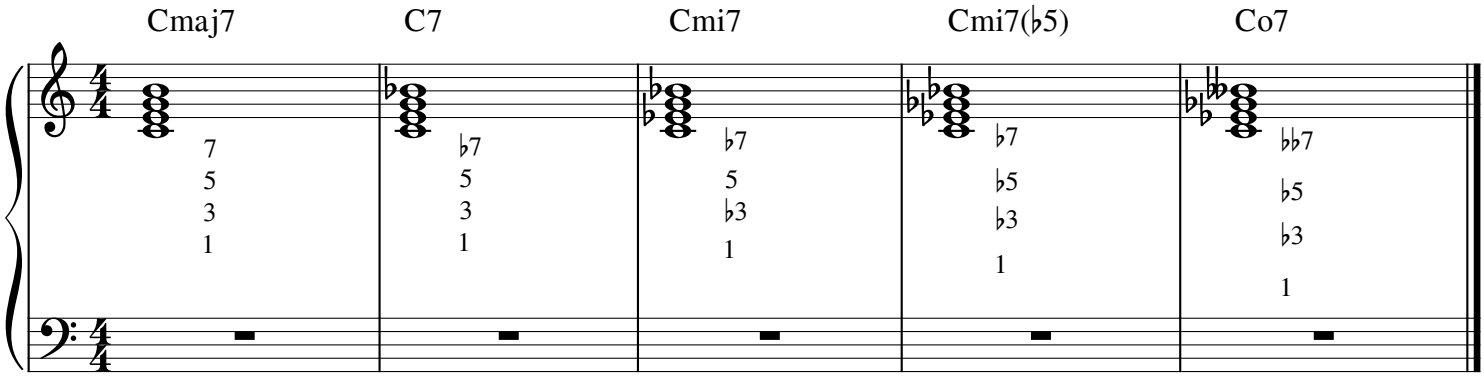
## What are jazz chords?

**There are five basic jazz chords.**

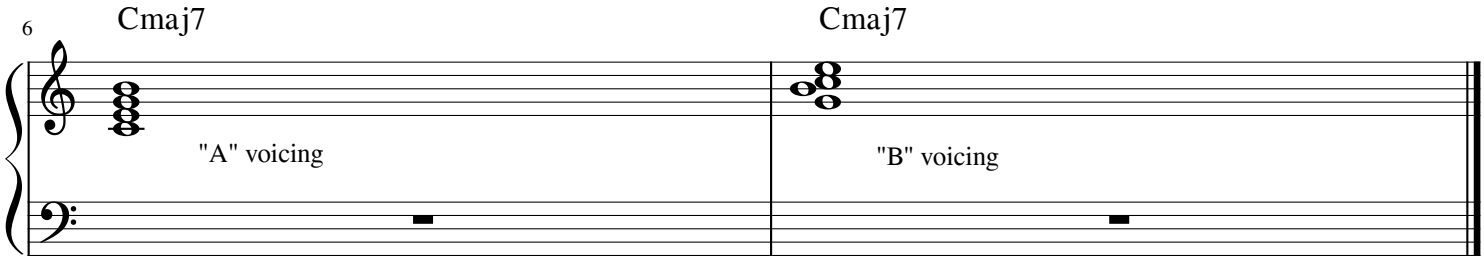
In jazz there are only five basic seventh chords, off which every other chord is built. If one knows all their major scales, the five basic jazz chords are easy to access using scale degrees.

For the purpose of explaining, we will use the root C on every chord. The chords are spelt as follows:

Major 7 - 1 3 5 7
7 - 1 3 5 ♭7
mi7 - 1 ♭3 5 ♭7
mi7( ♭5) - 1 ♭3 ♭5 ♭7
o7 - 1 ♭3 ♭5 ♭♭7

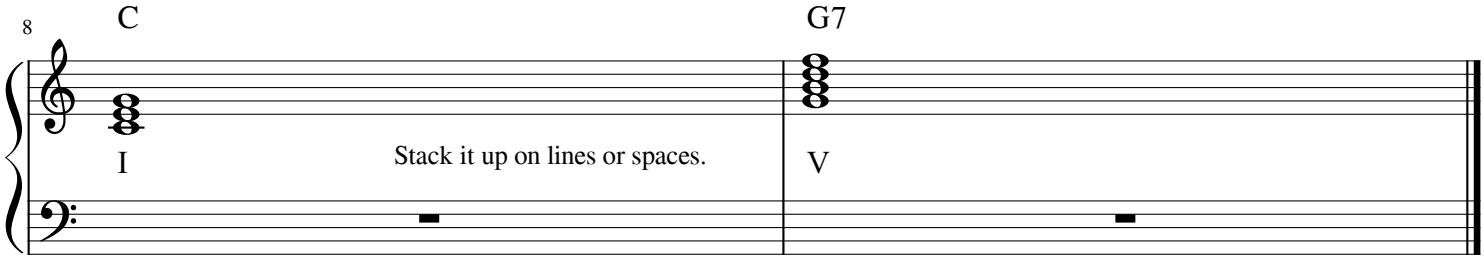



The two most common voicings of these basic seventh chords are root position and second inversion.
From hereon in these two voicings will be called “A” and “B” voicings respectively.

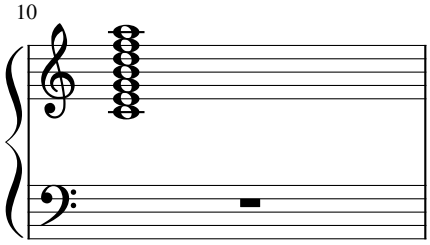


# What are extensions? What is a tall chord?

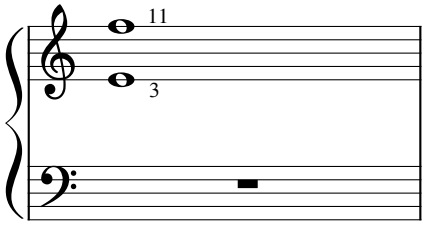
First off, to find a chord from a scale, one must simply skip notes within that scales,
stacking in “thirds” instead of “seconds”. For example, in basic classical harmony,
the I chord and the V7 chord are both spelt by stacking thirds up from their respective scale degrees.



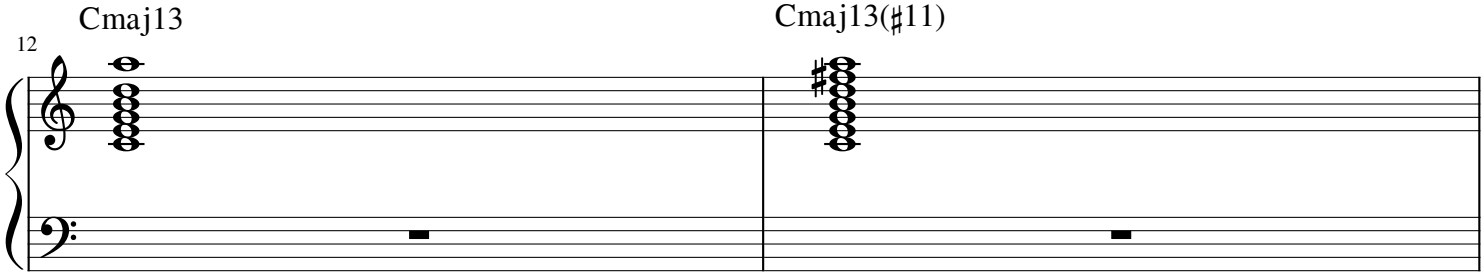

Tall jazz chords are found the same way - just stacked a little taller. For instance, here would be the beginnings
of a Cmaj13 chord. C, stacked thirds all the way up to high A, the 13 of C.



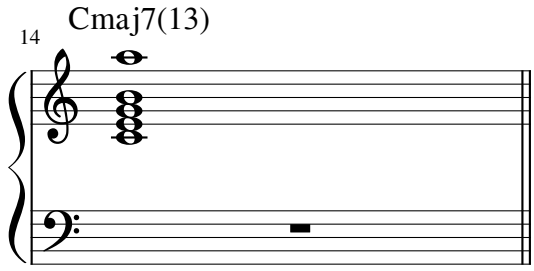

This voicing presents some issues, however.
It’s bulky, and has a harsh dissonance in it.
Namely, the minor 9 dissonance created between
the 3 and the 11.



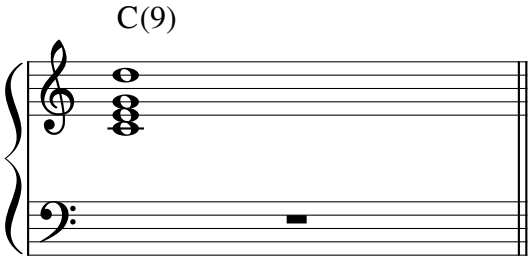

So, what we commonly do is either remove the 11 altogether, or sharpen it.
Both of these actions get rid of the dissonance in the chord. Thus the chord will spell as such:



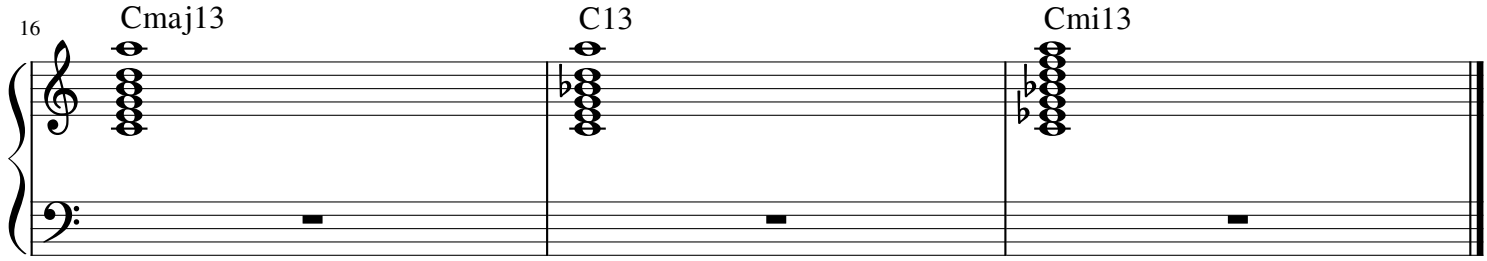
So, if a chord says "13" it includes all the chord tones beneath the thirteen, like the #11, 9, and 7. If you want a thirteen with no 9, you will write the chord like this:



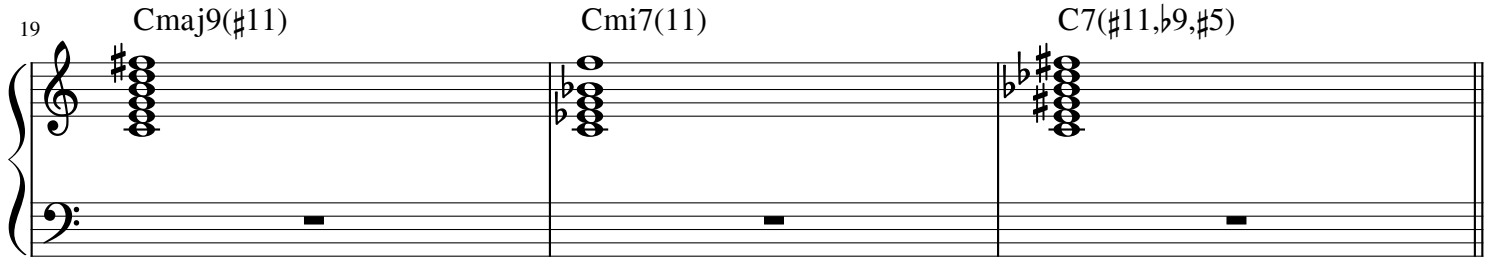

If you want to write a chord with an extension, but no seventh, do something like this:




Here are the major 7, minor 7, and dominant 7 chords again, this time stacked up in thirds as tall chords.




It should be noted, if a chord symbol tells you to add something, put it in the chord!
Be familiar with where your 9s, 11s, and 13s are. Here are some examples of how specific chord symbols can be:




# How can I divide these chords up?

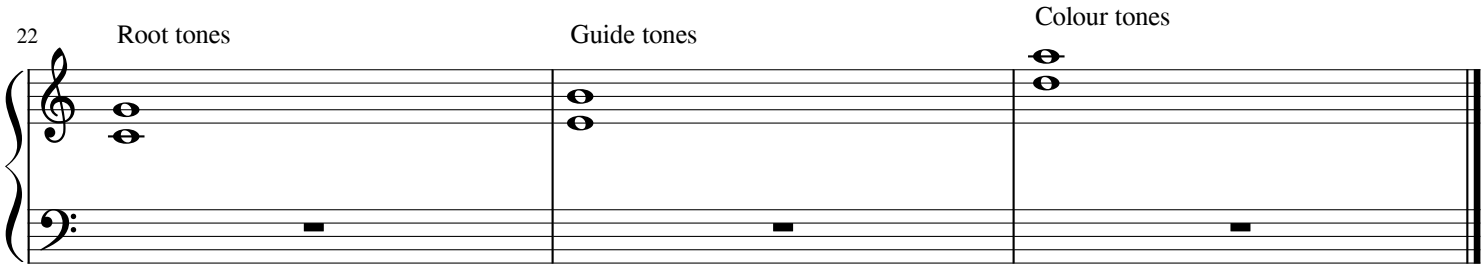
The voicings presented above for these chords are extremely bulky and boring.
So, we divide chords into three categories, to compartmentalize them and experiment in more interesting ways with the sounds - the three categories are:

Root tones - 1 and 5.

Guide tones - 3 and 7.

Color tones - 9, 11, 13, and any variation emanating therefrom.

So, in Cmaj13:




These notes can be arranged and rearranged to create rootless SATB spread voicings - the most basic and versatile voicings when comping for a horn player, or playing in a big band.