

Extended Chord Construction 101

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Extended Chords typically involve adding notes to a dominant seventh chord that are located above the eighth note (the octave). The three chords covered in this lesson are the ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords. These are all variations of dominant seventh chords.

It is recommended that the student is familiar with the information contained in my “Chord Construction 101” as it prerequisite to understanding information in this lesson.

First let’s review the information about 7th chords previously discussed in the “Chord Construction” lesson.

Seventh Chords

Seventh chords are a special breed. Not scary, not very logical, but special none the less. Why? Because there are two kinds – a seventh chord actually adds the FLATTED seventh note of a scale to a major or minor triad. So, in the key of C, a C7 is spelled C-E-G-B^b. C^{min7} would be spelled C-E^b-G-B^b.

A Major-seventh chord adds the seventh tone of the major scale to the major triad. So, in the key of C, a C major-7 is spelled C-E-G-B. A C major-minor-7 is spelled C-E^b-G-B. Note that the rules of stacking and inversions still apply. The seventh, whether it be a seventh or major seventh, can be anywhere in the ‘stacking’ of the chord.

C7 is the ‘funkier’ of the two. It is noted as either:

C7 or
C⁷

Major Seventh chords have a very sweet sound. The major seventh is explicitly noted as:

CMAJ7
CM7
C^{maj7} or with a triangle -
C^{Δ7}

Useful Info: Seventh Chords can be approached from either half step down or half step up. By extension (pun intended) extended chords can also be approached from either half step down or half step up. Mixing chromaticism and dominant chords can be good fun!

Extended Chords

Ninth Chords – add the ninth note of the scale to a dominant seventh. Think of the horn line in James Brown’s iconic “I Feel Good”. C⁹ would be spelled C-E-G-B^b-D.

Note: C+2 or C+9 would be spelled C-E-G-D. While similar to the ninth chord, these are not dominant chords as they lack the flatted seventh degree.

Eleventh Chords – add the eleventh note of the scale to a dominant seventh. C^{11} would be spelled C-E-G-B^b-F. The resulting chord is very haunting. I sometimes refer to it as the “Lava Lamp Chord”. It does have its uses.

Thirteenth Chords - add the thirteenth note of the scale to a dominant seventh. C^{13} would be spelled C-E-G- B^b-A. A favorite go to chord when playing up-tempo blues rhythms.

Altered Chords

Any extended chord can be altered by having one of their notes changed chromatically. Just use the name of the chord as a guide. For example:

$E^{7\#9}$ is E-G[#]-B-D-G. Also, known simply as the “Jimi Hendrix Chord” by folks of my generation.

A^{13b5} is A-C[#]-E-G-F[#]-D[#] (D[#] is enharmonically equivalent to E^b)

Don't let these kinds of chords intimidate you. Just follow the instructions. As with anything you practice – the more you do it, the easier it gets. Get a hold of a good jazz “Fake Book” and decipher the chords. Spell them out, as we did

It is important to understand the degrees of the scale. It is important to learn what each degree sounds like against the root. Some degrees provide severe tension, such as a root and a flat second – (i.e. A & B^b) - played simultaneously. Other degrees are very pleasing to the ear, such as a root and a fifth – (i.e. A & E) - played simultaneously.

Training your ear to hear the different intervals of the scale improves your musicianship immensely, as does developing your ear to hear chord changes.