

A Guide To Chord Symbols

Since there is no one universally accepted set of standardized chord symbols, there are various ways of notating similar chord types. If you were to view two distinct arrangements of a song that were included in separate fakebooks, the chord symbols may appear to be slightly different at first glance. Depending on the preference of the arranger, an F minor 7 chord change may be notated as Fm7 on one lead sheet and as F-7 on another. Both methods represent the same minor 7 chord type. This is just one example of an alternate chord symbol. In this reference guide, you will find examples of the most frequently used alternate spellings for major, minor, dominant, half-diminished, and diminished chord types. With the ability to interpret the numerous chord symbols utilized in nomenclature, you will be able to successfully navigate through any lead sheet or chord chart.

Major:

C, CM, CM7, CMa, CMa7, CMaj, CMaj7, C^Δ, C^Δ7, CMaj9, CMaj11, CMaj13, C6, C⁶

Minor:

C-, C-7, Cm, Cm7, Cmi, Cmi7, Cmin, Cmin7, Cm6, Cm9, Cm11, Cm13

Dominant:

C7, C9, C11, C13

Half-Diminished:

Cm7^b5, Cmi7^b5, Cmin7^b5, C-7^b5, C^ø, C^ø7

Diminished:

Cdim, Cdim7, C^o, C^o7

Slash Chords:

CMaj7/B

By definition, a slash chord is simply a chord played over a bass note, and even though there are many combinations of slash chords available, they are all read in the same fashion. For a bassist, the most significant information in a slash chord is located to the right of the slash because that is the note which should be played or emphasized in bass lines. If a pianist or guitar player is providing chordal accompaniment, they will play the chord on the left side of the slash. As a soloist, the notes found in the chord to the left of the slash, as well as the notes contained within that chord's associated scale, may be used without the concern of generating phrases which clash with the harmony.

With regard to deciphering any type of chord symbol, if someone took the time to note a particular alteration or set of alterations in a chord such as lowered or raised scale degrees, those alterations should be integrated into your lines.