

## Common Piano Voicings

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, C7b9, and C7alt, representing the general sounds of major, dominant, dorian minor, half-diminished, diminished, dominant 7 flat 9, and dominant 7 altered, 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*<sup>1</sup>) 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 comprised 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 comprised 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.

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<sup>1</sup> On the following chart, any avoid tones (i.e., notes to avoid when voicing the related chord) are in parenthesis in the Scale column.

### Common One-Hand and Two-Hand Voicings

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Scale Name</u>	<u>Scale</u>	<u>One-Hand Voicings*</u>	<u>Two-Hand Voicings</u>
<b>C</b>	Major	C D E(F)G A B C avoid tone: 4th (F)	<b>A</b> 3 7 9 (E B D) <b>A</b> 3 5 7 9 (E G B D) <b>A</b> 3 6 9 (E A D) <b>A</b> 3 5 6 9 (E G A D)  <b>B</b> 7 3 5 (B E G) <b>B</b> 7 2 3 5 (B D E G)	3 6 9 5 R (E A D G C) 3 6 9 5 7 (E A D G B)  7 3 6 9 5 (B E A D G)
<b>C<sup>7</sup></b>	Mixolydian 5th mode of maj	C D E(F)G A Bb C avoid tone: 4th (F)	<b>A</b> 3 b7 9 (E Bb D) <b>A</b> 3 6 b7 9 (E A Bb D)  <b>B</b> b7 3 6 (Bb E A) <b>B</b> b7 2 3 6 (Bb D E A)	3 b7 9 5 R (E Bb D G C)  b7 3 6 9 5 (Bb E A D G)
<b>C-</b>	Dorian 2nd mode of maj	C D Eb F G A Bb C	<b>A</b> b3 b7 9 (Eb Bb D) <b>A</b> b3 5 b7 9 (Eb G Bb D)  <b>B</b> b7 b3 5 (Bb Eb G) <b>B</b> b7 2 b3 5 (Bb D Eb G)	b3 b7 9 5 R (Eb Bb D G C)  b7 b3 5 R 4 (Bb Eb G C F)
<b>C<sup>6</sup></b>	Locrian 7th mode of maj	C(Db)Eb F Gb Ab Bb C avoid tone: b9th (Db)	<b>A</b> b3 b5 b7 R (Eb Gb Bb C) <b>B</b> b7 R b3 b5 (Bb C Eb Gb)	R b5 b7 b3 b6 (C Gb Bb Eb Ab) b5 R 4 b7 b3 (Gb C F Bb Eb)
<b>C<sup>0</sup></b>	Diminished (whole-half)	C D Eb F Gb Ab A B C	R b3 b5 6 (C Eb Gb A) any inversion	a tritone in each hand from any chord tone with a minor 3rd between hands e.g., R b5 6 b3 (C Gb A Eb)
<b>C<sup>7sus4</sup></b>	Mixolydian 5th mode of maj	C D(E)F G A Bb C avoid tone: 3rd (E)	any minor voicing a 5th up (C <sup>7sus4</sup> = G-)	any minor voicing a 5th up (C <sup>7sus4</sup> = G-)
<b>C<sup>7b9</sup></b>	Diminished (half-whole)	C Db Eb E F# G A Bb C	any "diminished" voicing from any chord tone but the root e.g., 3 5 b7 b9 (E G Bb Db) (E dim chord)	e.g., 3 b7 b9 5 (E Bb Db G) (E dim chord)
<b>C<sup>7alt</sup></b> <b>C<sup>7+9</sup></b>	Super Locrian 7th mode of mel min	C Db Eb Fb Gb Ab Bb C	<b>A</b> 3 #5 b7 b9 (E G# Bb Db) <b>A</b> 3 #5 b7 #9 (E G# Bb D#) <b>B</b> b7 b9 3 #5 (Bb Db E G#)	3 b7 #9 #5 b9 (E Bb D# G# Db) or b7 3 #5 b9 b5 (Bb E G# Db Gb)

\* "Category A" chords have the 3rd in the lowest voice; "category B" chords have the 7th in the lowest voice.

## 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 *Maiden Voyage*: follow steps II B 1-6 above
  - E. Play *Cantaloupe Island*: follow steps II B 1-6 above (also learn two-handed "Cantaloupe Island" accompaniment figure)
- 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 (IIø 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 (IIø V7b9 I-)
- C. Play *F Blues*: follow steps II B 1-6 above

## One-Hand 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)

<u>Chord Quality</u>	<u>Voicing</u>	<u>Voicing in C</u>	<u>Mnemonic</u>
CA	3 7 9	E B D	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	E Bb D	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	Eb Bb D	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)

<u>Chord Quality</u>	<u>Voicing</u>	<u>Voicing in C</u>	<u>Mnemonic</u>
CA	7 3 5	B E G	Look at <i>triad</i> and lower root a half step
C7	b7 3 6	Bb E A	Look at <i>triad</i> and "spread out" outer voices a whole step
C-	b7 b3 5	Bb Eb G	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 (IA)

#### B. Example in the key of C

1. C major scale: **C D E F G A B C**  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

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

note: any 3 chords in a row progressing counterclockwise around the circle 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**

#### KEY OF C

II-		V7		IA	D-		G7		CA
<b>9</b>		<b>6</b>	<i>W</i>	<b>9</b>	<b>E</b>		<b>E</b>	<i>W</i>	<b>D</b>
<b>b7</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>3</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>C</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>B</b>		<b>B</b>
<b>b3</b>		<b>b7</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>F</b>		<b>F</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>E</b>

## Example 1 Cont.: Category A to B to A

				<u>KEY OF F</u>			
II-	V7		IA	G-	C7	FA	
9	6	W	9	A	A	W	G
b7	3		7	F	H	E	E
b3	b7	H	3	Bb	Bb	H	A

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				<u>KEY OF Bb</u>			
II-	V7		IA	C-	F7	BbΔ	
9	6	W	9	D	D	W	C
b7	3		7	Bb	H	A	A
b3	b7	H	3	Eb	Eb	H	D

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## Example 2: Category B to A to B

				<u>KEY OF C</u>			
II-	V7		IA	D-	G7	CA	
5	9	W	5	A	A	W	G
b3	b7	H	3	F	F	H	E
b7	3		7	C	H	B	B

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				<u>KEY OF F</u>			
II-	V7		IA	G-	C7	FA	
5	9	W	5	D	D	W	C
b3	b7	H	3	Bb	Bb	H	A
b7	3		7	F	H	E	E

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				<u>KEY OF Bb</u>			
II-	V7		IA	C-	F7	BbΔ	
5	9	W	5	G	G	W	F
b3	b7	H	3	Eb	Eb	H	D
b7	3		7	Bb	H	A	A

#### IV. 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	Eb Gb Bb C	m7b5 chord in first inversion (b3 on bottom, root on top)
C7alt	3 #5 b7 b9	E G# Bb Db	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	Bb C Eb Gb	m7b5 chord in third inversion (b7 on bottom; "point" to root if playing chord in the RH; if playing the chord in the LH, 4th finger plays the root)
C7alt	b7 b9 3 #5	Bb Db E G#	think category B dominant 7 voicing, lower 6th on top (and add b9 which is a half step above the root)

##### Common LH Chord Fingering: 5 3 2 1

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

##### Common RH Chord Fingering: 1 2 3 5

#### 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

<u>KEY OF C MINOR</u>					
IIØ		V7alt		I-	
R	H	b5	H	9	
b7	H	3	H	b7	
b5		b9	H	5	
b3		b7	W	b3	

DØ		G7alt		C-	
D	H	D#	H	D	
C	H	B	H	Bb	
Ab		Ab	H	G	
F		F	W	Eb	

<u>KEY OF G MINOR</u>					
IIØ		V7alt		I-	
R	H	b5	H	9	
b7	H	3	H	b7	
b5		b9	H	5	
b3		b7	W	b3	

AØ		D7alt		G-	
A	H	A#	H	A	
G	H	F#	H	F	
Eb		Eb	H	D	
C		C	W	Bb	

## Example 2: Category B to A to B

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

KEY OF C MINOR

<b>DØ</b>		<b>G7alt</b>		<b>C-</b>
<b>Ab</b>		<b>Ab</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>G</b>
<b>F</b>		<b>F</b>	<i>W</i>	<b>Eb</b>
<b>D</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>D#</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>D</b>
<b>C</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>B</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>Bb</b>

KEY OF G MINOR

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

<b>AØ</b>		<b>D7alt</b>		<b>G-</b>
<b>Eb</b>		<b>Eb</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>D</b>
<b>C</b>		<b>C</b>	<i>W</i>	<b>Bb</b>
<b>A</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>A#</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>A</b>
<b>G</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>F#</b>	<i>H</i>	<b>F</b>