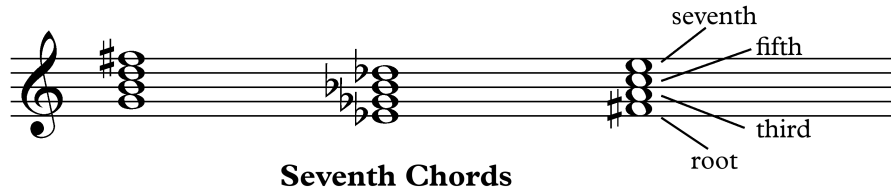


MU 1310 (Feurzeig): The Dominant Seventh Chord

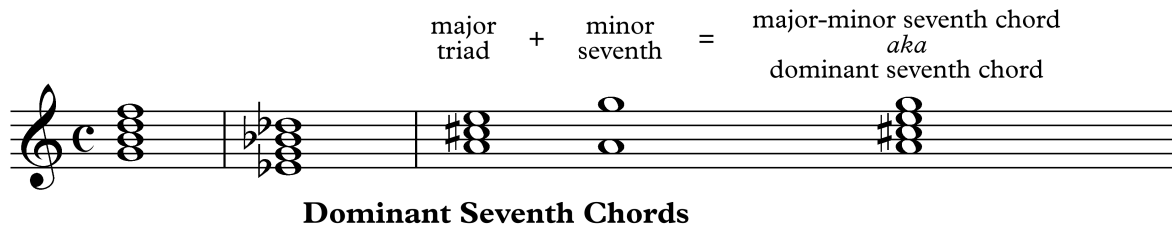
Seventh Chords

A **seventh chord** is a 4-note sonority formed by a triad plus a note a third above the triad fifth. In other words, we continue the process of stacking thirds that we used to form triads; a seventh chord is a stack of three thirds. The members of the chord are called the root, third, fifth, and seventh. The top note is a seventh above the root, hence the term *seventh chord*.



Dominant Seventh Chords

Like triads, seventh chords come in several **chord qualities**. If the triad is major and the seventh is minor, the quality is **dominant** and the chord is called a **dominant seventh chord**. If you're thinking in terms of the thirds stack, it is a major triad topped by a minor third, that is, the note a minor third above the chord fifth.



For this reason it is sometimes called a **major-minor seventh chord**. “Major” here refers to the triad quality, “minor” to the quality of the seventh between the root and top note.

In a major scale, the only place this particular chord quality occurs is over scale degree $\hat{5}$ as root. Hence the term **dominant seventh chord**, or simply **dominant seventh** for short. The complete chord is **sol-ti-re-fa**, or $\hat{5}-\hat{7}-\hat{2}-\hat{4}$.

Although the chord occurs **naturally** in major keys only on the dominant, chords of this quality are called “dominant seventh” **quality** no matter what the context or scale degree of the root. For example, the chromatically altered second and third chords in the following example would be called “A dominant seventh” and “E dominant seventh”, even though the roots A and E are (respectively) the subdominant and tonic in the key of E. The term “dominant seventh” has its origin in the location of this chord in the major scale, but it has become the generic name for a chord of this quality no matter what its root.



MU 1310 (Feurzeig): The Dominant Seventh Chord

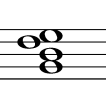
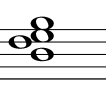
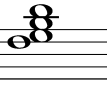
But in major-key music, dominant-quality chords will mostly be built on the actual dominant. In analytic notation, this chord is indicated by a roman numeral **V** with a 7 superscript: **V⁷**. The lead-sheet symbol for dominant seventh chord is simply the letter-name of the root (capital as always) followed by the numeral 7.

Inversion

Because seventh chords have four notes, there are **four** positions possible: root position (root in the bass), first inversion (third in the bass), second inversion (fifth in the bass) and **third inversion** (**seventh** in the bass).

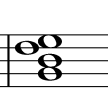
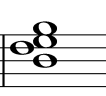
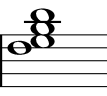
In lead-sheet symbols, inversion is handled by slash notation, exactly as with triads.

In analytic notation, inversion is indicated with figured-bass numbers. Just as with triads, these numbers indicate the intervals over the **bass** (not the **root**) if the inversion in question is written compactly (within an octave).

	E ⁷	E ⁷ /G [#]	E ⁷ /B	E ⁷ /D
				
A major:	V $\frac{7}{5}$	V $\frac{6}{3}$	V $\frac{6}{4}$	V $\frac{6}{2}$
	root position	first inversion	second inversion	third inversion

In order for the **V** in analytic notation to have meaning, you must indicate the key (tonic) as a reference point at the start of the analysis.

In practice, the figured-bass inversion indications are usually **abbreviated** as follows:

				
A major:	V ⁷	V ⁶ ₅	V ⁴ ₃	V ⁴ ₂
	root position	first inversion	second inversion	third inversion