

Lesson 16: Seventh Chords

Basic Music Theory for Guitar

What you will learn: how to add a 4th note to a triad, and the 5 most important seventh chords.

What is a seventh chord?

A **seventh chord** is a **triad plus one more 3rd** on top: the **7th**. So it has 4 different notes: **1, 3, 5 and 7**. Seventh chords sound richer and more colorful than triads. They are used a lot in blues, jazz, soul and R&B.

There are 3 kinds of 7th:

- **7** (major 7th): 11 frets above the root, 1 fret below the octave
- **b7** (minor 7th): 10 frets above the root, 2 frets below the octave
- **bb7** (diminished 7th): 9 frets above the root. It sounds the same as a 6th.

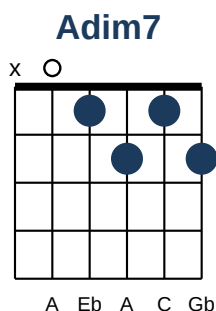
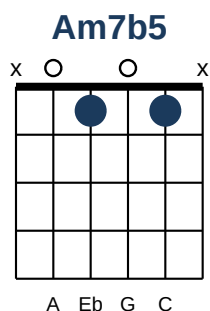
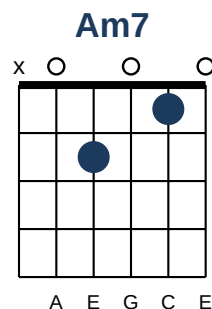
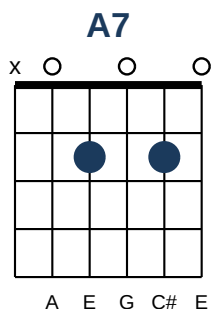
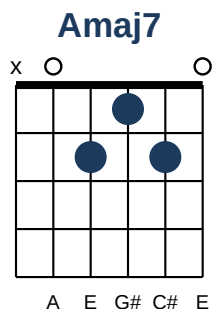
The 5 seventh chords

Chord	Formula	Triad + 7th	Notes from C	Symbol	Sound
Major 7	1 3 5 7	major + 7	C E G B	Cmaj7	soft, dreamy
Dominant 7	1 3 5 b7	major + b7	C E G Bb	C7	bluesy, wants to move
Minor 7	1 b3 5 b7	minor + b7	C Eb G Bb	Cm7	smooth, mellow
Minor 7 b5	1 b3 b5 b7	dim + b7	C Eb Gb Bb	Cm7b5 or Cø	dark, jazzy
Diminished 7	1 b3 b5 bb7	dim + bb7	C Eb Gb A	Cdim7 or C°7	very tense, spooky

Watch the name: "C7" alone always means **dominant 7** (with b7). For the major 7th, you must write **maj7**. This is the most common mistake!

5 seventh chords with A as the root

Compare these shapes. Look at the note on string 3 or string 1, which is the 7th:



Why the dominant 7 is special

The **dominant 7** chord sounds like it **wants to move** to another chord. Play **E7**, then **A**: it feels like coming home. In every major key, the dominant 7 is built on the **5th note** of the scale. In A major, that is E, so **E7** leads home to **A**. This is also the main sound of the **blues**.

In your chord book

Your book changes the 7th chords with small numbers: **C7(-5)** is a 7 chord with a b5, **C7(+5)** has a #5, **C7(-9)** adds a b9, and **Cm7b5** is the minor 7 b5 above. Now you know what all of them mean!

Practice

1. Play the 5 A chords above, one after another. Listen to how each one feels.
2. Play A, then A7, then Amaj7. Only one note changes each time.
3. Play E7, then A. Feel the "going home" sound.
4. Build these chords with the formulas: G7 (G B D F), Dm7 (D F A C), Fmaj7 (F A C E).

Next lesson: Chords in a Key