

## Spelling Chords

A chord is a stack of at least three tones played simultaneously.

When chords are built on the diatonic scale used in most traditional music, three forms are created: major, minor and diminished. These are called “triads”.

### Major Chord

To form a major chord

- Begin with the tone that names the chord.
- Add a major 3<sup>rd</sup> above that fundamental tone
- Add a perfect 5<sup>th</sup> above the fundamental tone.

Examples: A C-major chord is spelled C – E – G. A D-major chord is spelled D – F# - A

### Minor Chord

To form a minor chord

- Begin with the tone that names the chord.
- Add a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> above that fundamental tone
- Add a perfect 5<sup>th</sup> above the fundamental tone.

Examples: An E-minor chord is spelled E – G – B. An A-minor chord is spelled A – C - E

### Diminished Chord

To form a minor chord

- Begin with the tone that names the chord.
- Add a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> above that fundamental tone
- Add a diminished 5<sup>th</sup> above the fundamental tone.

Examples: An F#-diminished chord (symbols are F#<sup>dim</sup> or F#<sup>o</sup>) is spelled F# - A – C. A C# diminished chord (C#<sup>dim</sup> or C#<sup>o</sup>) is spelled C# - E - G

Traditional music favors the keys of “D” and “G”.

### Expanding the Triad

Chords are often expanded by adding additional tones. The most common four-tone chord in traditional music is the “7<sup>th</sup>” chord. This is formed by adding to the major triad one additional tone that is the minor 7<sup>th</sup> of the fundamental of the chord.

Example: A D-major chord is spelled: D – F# - A. A D7 chord is spelled D – F# - A – C. That’s C-natural. You might be tempted to insert C# into this chord because C# is part of the key signature of “D”. But, always use the minor-7<sup>th</sup> of the scale.

A G-major chord is spelled: G – B – D. A G7 chord is spelled G – B – D – F. Again, that's F-natural not F#.

If you use the F# in the chord, it becomes a Gmaj7.

### Chords on the Diatonic Scale of G

Scale Tone	Chord Name	Chord Number	Members of the Chord
G	G-major	I	G – B - D
A	A-minor	ii	A – C - E
B	B-minor	iii	B – D - F
C	C-major	IV	C – E - G
D	D-major	V	D – F# - A
E	E-minor	vi	E – G – B
F#	F#-diminished	VII	F# - A - C

#### Things to note:

- Chord numbers are always given in Roman numerals: IV or iii. Intervals are always given in Arabic numbers: 2<sup>nd</sup>, perfect 5<sup>th</sup> and so forth.
- Major chords are always shown as uppercase Roman numerals
- Minor and diminished chords are always shown as lower case Roman numerals
- In every key there are always three major, three minor and one diminished chords.
- If you look at a piano score and wonder what the chord is, simply rearrange the tones so that each successively higher tone is the interval of a 3<sup>rd</sup>. The lowest tone in the stack will name the chord. There may be tones that do not fit into this stack of thirds. Those are chord extensions that modify the chord. No matter. The lowest tone will give the fundamental name of the chord.