

Lead Sheet Chord Symbols

The chord symbols that appear above the staff in a lead sheet (Example 1) are called *lead-sheet symbols*. These symbols are introduced on the following pages in *Concise 2/e*:¹

1. *Triad Qualities* Examples 3.2-3.4, p. 34
2. *Seventh Chord Qualities* Examples 3.13-3.15, pp. 38-39

For a more comprehensive introduction, see the “Chord Symbols” chapter in *Open Music Theory*.² The four basic triad and seventh chord symbols are shown on root C below. These chord types may be *transposed* to any root. It is important to keep in mind that lead-sheet symbols are not standardized and the use superscripts in the chord symbol’s suffix is optional.

TRIADS

Chord type	Lead-sheet symbol	Chord spelling [†]
M	C	C, E, G
m	C _m or C ⁻	C, E _b , G
A	C ⁺ or C _{aug}	C, E, G [#]
d	C ^o or C _{dim}	C, E _b , G _b

COMMON SEVENTH CHORDS

Chord type ³	Lead-sheet symbol	Chord spelling [†]
Mm	C ⁷	C, E, G, B _b
MM	C _{maj} ⁷	C, E, G, B
mm	C _m ⁷ or C ⁻⁷	C, E _b , G, B _b
dm	C ^{o7} or C _m ⁷⁽⁵⁾	C, E _b , G _b , B _b
dd	C ^{o7} or C _{dim} ⁷	C, E _b , G _b , B _{bb}

† - Chord spellings are given using *list notation*

Slash Chords

The bass of a lead-sheet symbol is assumed to be the root unless otherwise specified. An alternate bass note may be specified using **slash chord** notation: e.g., C/G, C/E, C/F[#], C_m⁷/B_b, etc. The alternate bass note need not be a member of the chord.

Example. *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*, American patriotic song, lead-sheet notation

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 3/4 time. The first staff contains the first ten measures of the melody. Above the staff, chord symbols are placed above each measure: F, C, F, B^b, F, C, F, G_m, F/C, C, F. The second staff starts at measure 7. Above the staff, chord symbols are placed above each measure: F, C⁷, F, B^b, F, B^b, F/C, C⁷, F.

¹ L. Poundie Burstein and Joseph N. Straus, *Concise Introduction to Tonal Harmony*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2020).

² Megan Lavengood, "Chord Symbols," in *Open Music Theory*, Version 2 (VIVA Open Publishing, 2020). Available online at: <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/openmusictheory/chapter/chord-symbols/>.

³ Other seventh chord types are possible including: mM, AM, Am, etc.