Lead Sheet Symbols

The chord symbols that appear above the staff in a contemporary *lead sheet* (Example 1) are called *lead sheet symbols*. These harmonic symbols, which typically represent the harmonic basis of an improvised performance, are introduced in the following chapter of *Open Music Theory*, Version 2 (Gotham et al. 2023):

Megan Lavengood, Chord Symbols

https://viva.pressbooks.pub/openmusictheory/chapter/chord-symbols/

1. Triad Qualities See Chord symbols for triads

2. Seventh Chord Qualities See Chord symbols for seventh chords

The four basic triad and five basic seventh chord symbols are spelled below on root C. These nine chord types may be *transposed* to any root. It is important to be aware that lead sheet symbols are not standardized and the use of superscripts in a chord' *suffix* is optional; e.g., Cm⁷, Cm7, Cmi7, Cmi7, and C–7 are all valid representations of the same chord.

TRIADS

Chord type	Lead sheet symbol	Chord spelling [†]
M	C	C, E, G
m	Cm or C-	C, E♭, G
A	C+ or Caug	C, E, G#
d	Co or Cdim	C, E♭, G♭

COMMON SEVENTH CHORDS

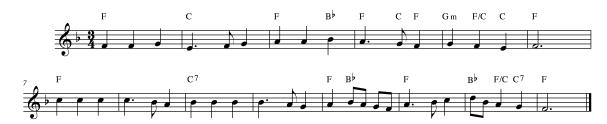
Chord type ¹	Lead sheet symbol	Chord spelling [†]
Mm	\mathbf{C}^7	C, E, G, B♭
MM	Cmaj ⁷	C, E, G, B
mm	Cm ⁷ or C ⁻⁷	C, E♭, G, B♭
dm	C ^{Ø7} or Cm ^{7(\b5)}	$C, E_{\flat}, G_{\flat}, B_{\flat}$
dd	C ^{o7} or Cdim ⁷	C, Eb, Gb, Bbb

^{† -} 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#, Cm⁷/Bb, etc. As shown in the chord C/F#, the alternate bass note need not be a member of the chord.

Example 1. My Country, 'Tis of Thee, American patriotic song, lead sheet notation



¹ Other seventh chord types are possible including: mM, AM, Am, etc.