

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's *suffix* is optional; e.g., Cm⁷, Cm7, Cmi7, Cmin7, 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	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 ¹	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(b5)}	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. 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.