

Chord Extensions and other alterations

In the same way a 7th chord is an extension of a triad (by adding another 3rd to the stack), 7th chords can be extended by stacking additional 3rds on to the structure. By adding more 3rds, we get higher, odd-numbered chords: 9ths, 11ths and 13ths.

This process is not as simple as it sounds; depending on what kind of 7th chord one is starting with, the types of extensions vary in their allowances and permutations (not all sound good, some sound great in a variety of interval qualities). For now we will focus on adding one more 3rd to the structure: allowing for the 9th chord.

The 9th Chord

Adding a 3rd on top of a 7th chord makes that a 9th chord, since the interval from the root to the top note is a 9th.

The image shows three chords in bass clef on a single staff. The first chord is Cmaj9, with notes C, E, G, Bb, D, F. The second is C9, with notes C, Eb, G, Bb, D. The third is C-9, with notes C, Eb, F, Ab, Bb. Below each chord is its name and a descriptive sentence.

Cmaj9
a major 7th chord with a major 9th above the root

C9
a dominant 7th chord with a major 9th above the root

C-9
a minor 7th chord with a major 9th above the root

Of the five most commonly-encountered 7th chords, the m7b5 the $^{\circ}7$ do not usually have 9ths added to their structures.

The 9th can appear in all three chords of a ii \rightarrow V \rightarrow I progression:

The image shows a ii-V-I progression in bass clef on a single staff. The first chord is Dm9, the second is G9, and the third is Cmaj9. Below each chord is its Roman numeral notation: C: ii, V, and I.

Dm9 G9 Cmaj9

C: ii V I

The Altered 9th

It is also common to have an altered 9th chord. This happens within the V chord, or any chord that has a dominant 7th structure. The 9th can be lowered a half step (a "flat 9") or raised a half step (a "sharp" 9).

The image shows three altered 9th chords in bass clef on a single staff. The first is G9, the second is G7(b9), and the third is G7(#9). Each chord is shown with its notes and the 9th alteration.

G9 G7(b9) G7(#9)

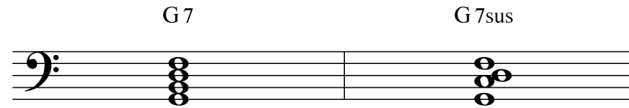
Notice that the notation for the altered 9th chords, the "7" notation is still included, followed by the sharp or flat 9 in parentheses.

Applications

Using 9ths and altered 9ths is a mainstay technique for spicing up a chord progression. There are times where a 9th is indicated in a chart, but more often than not, when a player sees a 7th chord in a chart, she or he knows that adding a 9th will sound great. When there is a dominant 7th chord in a chart, she or he knows that an altered 9th will likely sound great as well.

The suspended 4th (sus)

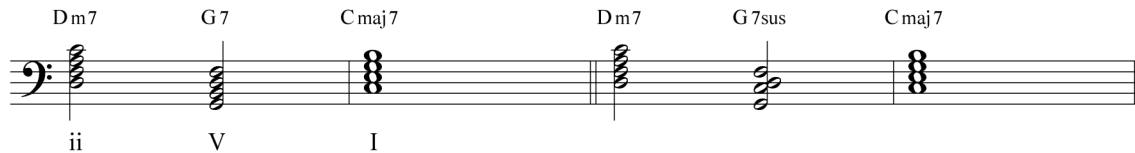
Another way to modify a chord (7th or possibly a 9th) is to replace its 3rd with a 4th (a P4th). This works best with dominant 7th chords. As with other alterations, the specific noted in the melody can make a difference as to how good it sounds.



In the first measure is a standard G7. The G7sus (sometimes called a "sus4") has taken its 3rd (the B) and moved it up to a 4th (the C).

The term "suspended" is used for this chord because the "raised" 4th creates a mild feeling of tension in that the ear wants the 4th to fall down to its ordinary (3rd) position. The 4th is heard as being held up (i.e. suspended). In some cases, a sus chord might be followed by the standard version of the chord, but more often a new chord will follow.

The sus chord is also one that might be written into a chart, but players and arrangers might choose to use it as a replacement/substitute chord for whenever a dominant 7th appears.



An ordinary ii V I progression

Here the G7sus replaces the regular G7