Chord Extensions Cheat Sheet

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Which extensions and alterations go on which chord, what the symbols mean, and the notes to avoid. Spelled on C.

EXTENSIONS IN ONE LINE

9 = the 2nd, an octave up C → D
11 = the 4th, an octave up C → F
13 = the 6th, an octave up C → A
♭ and ♯ alter them by a semitone.

What fits on each chord type

Natural extensions sound settled; alterations add tension

CHORD	EXTENSIONS	ALTERATIONS	AVOID HOLDING	SCALE IT COMES FROM
maj7	9, 13	♯11	11 (clashes with the 3rd)	Ionian; Lydian for ♯11
m7	9, 11, 13		♭13 on a ii chord	Dorian (ii), Aeolian (vi)
7	9, 13	♭9, ♯9, ♯11, ♭13	11 (unless sus)	Mixolydian; altered scale
m7♭5	11, ♭13, 9		♭9 (the Locrian 2nd)	Locrian; Locrian ♮2 for 9
°7	9, 11, ♭13, maj7			whole-half diminished
m6 / m(maj7)	9, 11		♭13	melodic minor

Reading extension symbols

What the number tells you, and what it leaves out

SYMBOL	NOTES	WHAT IT MEANS
C9	C E G B♭ D	A 9 implies the ♭7. C9 is a dominant chord.
Cadd9	C E G D	add means no 7th. A triad with an extra 9.
Cmaj9	C E G B D	major 7th plus 9.
Cm11	C E♭ G B♭ D F	minor 7th plus 9 and 11. The natural 11 is fine on minor chords.
C11 / C9sus4	C F G B♭ D	On a dominant the 11 replaces the 3rd: a sus chord.
C13	C E B♭ D A	♭7 and 13, usually with the 9. The 11 is left out.
C7(♭9)	C E G B♭ D♭	Brackets list added alterations: C7(♭9 ♯11), C7(♯9 ♭13).
C7alt	C E B♭ + D♭ D♯ F♯ A♭	Any altered 5ths and 9ths. Play the altered scale (C♯ melodic minor).
C6/9	C E G A D	A home chord with no 7th at all.
Cmaj7♯11	C E G B F♯	The Lydian chord. The ♯11 replaces the clashing natural 11.

Upper-structure triads

A triad from the extensions, played over the chord. Easy to see, easy to finger.

OVER	PLAY THIS TRIAD	GIVES YOU	SOUND
Cmaj7	D major (D F♯ A)	9, ♯11, 13	Lydian, bright
Cmaj7	G major (G B D)	5, 7, 9	smooth major 9th
Cm7	B♭ major (B♭ D F)	♭7, 9, 11	Dorian, open
Cm7	D minor (D F A)	9, 11, 13	Dorian colour
C7	D major (D F♯ A)	9, ♯11, 13	Lydian dominant
C7	A major (A C♯ E)	13, ♭9, 3	13♭9, diminished sound
C7	A♭ major (A♭ C E♭)	♭13, 1, ♯9	altered
C7	G♭ major (G♭ B♭ D♭)	♯11, ♭7, ♭9	altered, tritone sub
Cm7♭5	A♭ major (A♭ C E♭)	♭13, 1, ♭3	dark half-diminished

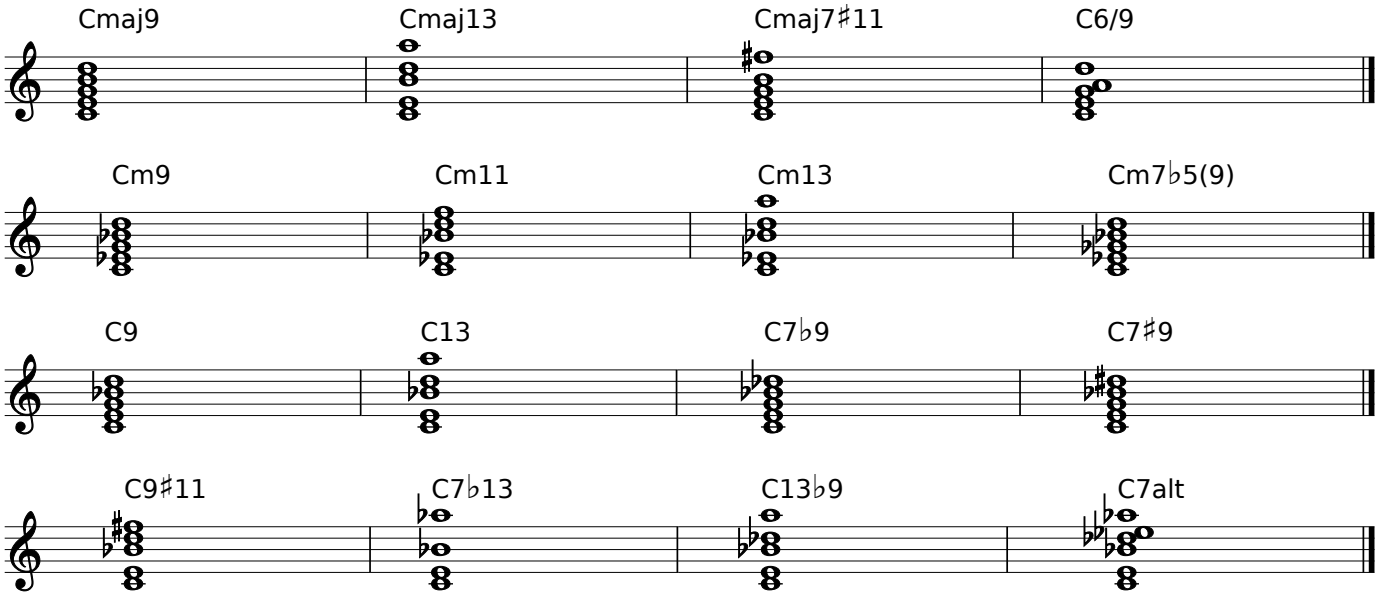
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Extensions on the stave

Chord tones (1 3 5 7) at the bottom, extensions stacked above, all on C



Playing extensions on a single-line instrument

Saxophone, clarinet, flute, trumpet

FOUR STEPS

1 Arpeggiate from the 3rd: 3-5-7-9. On Dm7 that is F A C E, which is an F major 7th: the 9 comes for free.
2 Hold an extension as a target note. Land on the 9 of a minor chord or the 13 of a dominant and let it ring.
3 Learn the upper-structure triads above. Three notes you already know, giving three tensions at once.
4 Save ♭9, ♯9 and ♭13 for dominant chords that resolve, then resolve them by a step into the next chord.

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