

*Section 4.2.1*

**FOUR-NOTE VOICINGS:  
MAJOR, MINOR, DOMINANT**

**Voicing**  
**Four-note voicing**  
**Rootless voicing**

**Voicing** is which chord notes to play and where to play them. The most common chord voicings, **four-note voicings** (or **rootless voicings**) use the third, fifth, seventh, and ninth. They can be played in the left hand of the piano when playing with a bass player, or in the right hand with the left hand playing the chord root underneath. They are also the basis for many jazz arrangements.

**7/9 surrounding patterns**

Think of sevenths and ninths as a pair of notes surrounding the root. For a major seventh chord, the ninth is a whole step above the root, and the seventh is a half step below. For minor seventh and dominant seventh chords, both the seventh and the ninth are a whole step away from the root. The examples below use D as the root.

The diagram illustrates the construction of 7/9 patterns for three types of chords, using D as the root. Each example shows two component notes being added together to form a 7/9 pattern.

- MAJ 7TH:** A note one half step below D (C#) is added to a note one whole step above D (E). The result is a 7/9 pattern (C# and E) for a major seventh chord.
- MIN 7TH:** A note one whole step below D (C) is added to a note one whole step above D (E). The result is a 7/9 pattern (C and E) for a minor seventh chord.
- MAJ 9TH:** A note one whole step above D (E) is added to a note one whole step above D (E). The result is a 7/9 pattern (E and F#) for a major ninth chord.

**Voicing minor seventh chords**

To voice minor seventh chords, start with the minor seventh 7/9 pattern and add the third and fifth (3/5). The 3/5 can be above or below the 7/9, so the lowest note will be the seventh or the third. Keep the lowest note between middle C and the C an octave below so the chord doesn't get too high or too low.

The diagram shows two ways to voice a D-7 chord in the bass clef. Both start with the 7/9 pattern (F and C) and add the 3/5 (D and G).

- Left voicing:** The 7/9 pattern is below the 3/5. The notes from bottom to top are F, D, G, C. Labeled as  $7/9 + 3/5 = 7/9/3/5$ .
- Right voicing:** The 3/5 is below the 7/9. The notes from bottom to top are D, G, F, C. Labeled as  $7/9 + 3/5 = 3/5/7/9$ .

**Voicing major seventh chords**

Voice major seventh chords like minor sevenths: start with the 7/9 major seventh surrounding pattern and add the third and fifth above or below. Again, the lowest note will be the third or the seventh, and should be between middle C and the C below.

**Voicing dominant seventh chords**

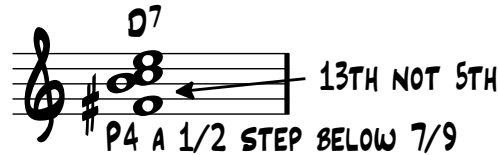
For major-minor seventh (dominant seventh) chords, jazz players usually play the thirteenth (=sixth) instead of the fifth. Otherwise, the process is identical to voicing minor seventh chords and major seventh chords.

**Stack-of-thirds voicing Type A voicing**

When the third is voiced on the bottom, the third, fifth, seventh, and ninth form a **stack-of-thirds voicing**. Some authors call this **Type A voicing**. For major seventh chords and minor seventh chords, the stack-of-thirds (3/5/7/9 without the root) will be the opposite of the chord quality (major for minor, minor for major). Consider:

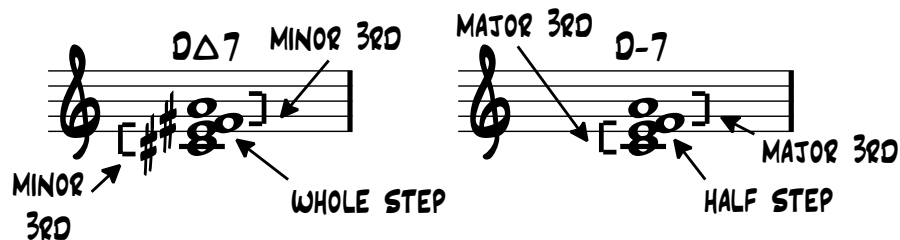
**Stack-of-thirds  
pattern for  
dominant chords**

For dominant sevenths with the third on the bottom (stack-of-thirds voicing or Type A voicing), the pattern is a perfect fourth a half step below the 7/9. Remember the fifth (here A) from the “stack-of-thirds” pattern is replaced by the thirteenth (=sixth, here B) when jazz players play dominant sevenths.



**Pair-of-thirds  
pattern  
Type B voicing**

When the 7/9 pair is on the bottom, a “pair-of-thirds” voicing pattern results: the 7/9 third and the 3/5 third. Some authors call this **Type B voicing**. For minor sevenths, the 7/9 and 3/5 are each major thirds with a whole step between. For major sevenths, the thirds are minor with a half step between. Again, notice the thirds are the opposite quality of the chord: major for minor sevenths and minor for major sevenths.



**Pair-of-thirds  
pattern for  
dominant chords**

For dominant sevenths (major minor sevenths) with the 7/9 on the bottom, the pattern is a perfect fourth a whole step above the 7/9.



**Four-note voicing  
summary**

- To voice minor seventh, dominant seventh, or major seventh chords:
1. Keep the bottom note between middle C and the C an octave below.
  2. Do not include the root in the voicing.
  3. Either the third or the seventh goes on the bottom.
  4. Use the correct 7/9 surrounding pattern (see above).
  5. Use 3/5 for major seventh and minor seventh chords; use the third and the thirteenth (=sixth) for major-minor (dominant) seventh chords.