



Reading Chord Symbols

The shorthand used on almost every chart

Chord symbols tell you which notes to play without writing every note on the staff. Once you can decode the symbol, you can play from lead sheets, songbooks and charts.

The most common symbols

Symbol	Full name	Formula	Example notes
C	C major	1 3 5	C E G
Cm or Cmin	C minor	1 b3 5	C Eb G
C7	C dominant 7	1 3 5 b7	C E G Bb
Cmaj7 or CM7	C major 7	1 3 5 7	C E G B
Cm7	C minor 7	1 b3 5 b7	C Eb G Bb
Csus4	C suspended 4	1 4 5	C F G
Csus2	C suspended 2	1 2 5	C D G
C/E	C major, E bass	1st inversion	E G C
Cdim or C°	C diminished	1 b3 b5	C Eb Gb
Caug or C+	C augmented	1 3 #5	C E G#

Quick decoding rules

- Letter alone (C) = major triad
- m or min = minor
- 7 by itself = dominant 7 (flat 7)
- maj7 or M7 = major 7 (natural 7)
- / note = inversion (bass note after the slash)

Everything on this sheet maps directly to the formulas on the Chord Interval Chart.