

## Adding Color To Your Chords

So you've got a chord progression and melody together for the first verse of your newest song, but something keeps nagging at you in the back of your head.

You've heard this combination used a hundred times before and it just seems bland! You're accompanying chord progression and vocal melody doesn't really seem to "justify" all the depth and work you put into writing the lyrics. It's almost as if the lyrics are a vibrant and colorful extension of yourself, but the accompanying music/melody is a separate being...floating in a colorless world. Well, in this article I will discuss 1 of the many compositional techniques to help unify your lyrics, accompanying music, and melody all in a very unique and musically colorful way.

I enjoy playing easy open chord based songs too, because there is just something about strumming an acoustic that is just plain enjoyable. So I thought, why not show some ways to add color to some otherwise boring or basic chords.

### **DOMINANT CHORDS**

Here's the absolute easiest way to understand adding dominants to a basic chord.

#### **Dominant 7<sup>th</sup> Chords:**

To make a chord dominant 7th you need to add a 7th, which is always 2 tones below the root. In a C chord the 7th is A#, as A# is 2 tones below the root of C.

C7 = C E G Bb

#### **Dominant 9<sup>th</sup> Chords:**

If you add a major 9 to a dominant 7th chord, then you have a dom9th. A major 9th is 2 tones above the root. So, in a C chord the major 9th is D. Simply add a D to a C7 to make C9.

C9 = C E G Bb D

So, if we build our chords: Root, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, etc, we can see that the sequence for a C chord in F Major will be:

Root, 3, 5, 7 = C7

While the interval from C to Bb is a minor, or flatted 7<sup>th</sup>, you wouldn't call it a minor 7<sup>th</sup> because in F Major it is just the 7<sup>th</sup> of the root C.

The other part worth noting is that the term Cdom9 is rarely used. C9 assumes that it's a C E G Bb D. Normally we specify C maj9 or C min9 but not Cdom9.

Whether chords are major, minor, augmented or diminished will generally be calculated using the Root-3-5-7 (and etc. for upper partials) and that is the quantity.

You fill in the letter names as they suit the chord you're looking for.

THEN, you calculate quality. Quality is determined primarily by the 3 and 7th.

You should play these side by side so you can see how one small change to one note in the chord changes its identity.

Here's the basic formula:

- Maj7 = R-3-5-7
- Dom7 = R-3-5-b7
- m7 = R-b3-5-b7
- m7b5 = R-b3-b5-b7
- Dim = R-b3-b5-bb7

### Using C as our example

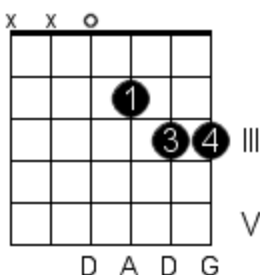
- Cmaj7 = C-E-G-B
- C7 = C-E-G-Bb
- Cm7 = C-Eb-G-Bb
- Cm7b5 = C-Eb-Gb-Bb
- Cdim7 = C-Eb-Gb-Bbb <----Note I do not use the note "A" here. Why? Because A is not a note in the C chord. Remember quantity first, quality second. That's why double flats and sharps exist.

### Suspended Chords

Ever since I starting playing guitar I always wondered what the heck "sus4" meant. Well, I finally figured it out, and I am now going to tell you what they are. The "sus" in a sus2 or sus4 means suspended, a theory term for notes not fitting into the root-third-fifth chord structure.

In major or minor chords, there are three different notes: the root, third, and fifth. Therefore, a D chord has D, F#, and A. In a *sus4* chord, the third is replaced by the fourth, so the chord contains a root, fourth, and fifth. This pattern gives a sus4 chord the following structure: 1-4-5. The fourth of D is G, so the Dsus4 contains D, G, and A Therefore, the fingering for a Dsus4 chord looks like this:

Dsus4

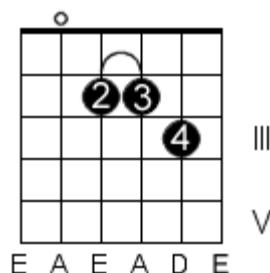


As another example, an Asus4 chord (formed x02230) is made up of A, D, and E, as shown here:

### *Asus4 Chord*

A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
<i>root</i>	<i>second</i>	<i>third</i>	<i>fourth</i>	<i>fifth</i>			

Asus4



Once you understand this, the following fingerings of common sus4 chords becomes apparent:

Asus4 x02230

Bsus4 x24452

Dsus4 xx0233

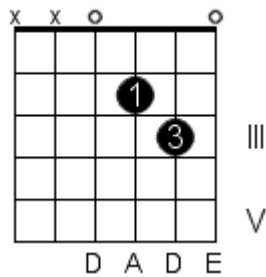
Esus4 022200

F#sus4 244422

Gsus4 3x0013

Once you understand the theory behind sus4 chords, sus2 chords are very similar. Instead of the root, fourth, and fifth in a sus4 chord, a sus2 chord contains the root, second, and fifth. Sus2 chords have the pattern 1-2-5. Therefore, a Dsus2 will contain D, E, and A, giving a fingering which looks like this:

Dsus2

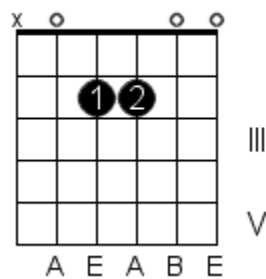


As another example, an Asus2 chord (formed x02200) is made up of A, B, and E, as shown here:

*Asus2 Chord*

A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
<i>root</i>	<i>second</i>	<i>third</i>	<i>fourth</i>	<i>fifth</i>			

Asus2



Once you understand this, the following fingerings of common sus2 chords becomes apparent:

**Asus2 x02200**  
**Bsus2 x24422**  
**Dsus2 xx0230**

Moving on from suspended chords, next we will look at added tone chords, or just "add" chords - so called because of the way we notate them - as we'll see soon.

Let's think about a 9th ... as an extended chord, we know that we name the chord for the highest of the added tones. In the case of a 9th, that we take a basic major triad and add a 7th and a 9th. In this case the 7th is implied. It's the same for a 13th for instance - in this case the 7th, 9th and 11th are all implied.

(Aside: on a guitar they are often not all played but they are technically part of the chord - on guitar we have to choose a voicing that allows us to play the most important notes of the chord, a kind of compromise that we don't make in pure theory).

By contrast, if we take a triad and add a 9th to it without the intervening notes (the 7th in this case) we end up with an add9 chord. So, for instance, C9 is:

C E G Bb D (remember that the 7th is flattened unless otherwise noted)

but Cadd9 is:

C E G D

An add9 can also be called a +9 chord. You could play a C+9 (Cadd9) like this:

E---x---

B---3---

G---0---

D---2---

A---3---

E---x---

The same principle applies to +11 and +13. You can't have a +7 because that would be identical to a dominant 7th chord in any case. The only remaining tone worth mentioning is a 6th - this is technically an added tone chord but is notated as if it were an extended chord - we would talk about C6 for instance and we would mean a C major triad with an added 6th note.

C+6 would mean the same thing but is rarely if ever used. The astute amongst you might have noticed that a 6th is the same as a 13th, so is there any difference between C6 and C+13? When you add guitar voicings into the equation there is very little difference, C6 is mentioned a lot more often than C+13.

Since a 6th is the highest note in the 4 notes anyway, there is no real difference between this and the +13 variation.

A C6 consists of these notes:

C E G A

And you could play it like this:

E---x---

B---1---

G---2---

D---2---

A---3---

E---x---

Again, this is a compromise voicing, as it doesn't include a 5th (a G), but it does include the all-important 6th (A).