

Learn Your Degrees

INTERVAL NAME	SCALE DEGREE	DEGREE NAME	C MAJ SCALE
Prime	I	Tonic	C
Major Second	II	Supertonic	D
Major Third	III	Mediant	E
Perfect Fourth	IV	Subdominant	F
Perfect Fifth	V	Dominant	G
Major Sixth	VI	Submediant	A
Major Seventh	VII	Subtonic or Leading Note	B

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF CHORDS CREATED FROM THE SCALE OF C MAJOR:

CHORD TYPE	INTERVALS	SCALE DEGREES	EXAMPLE	NOTES
Major Chord (Major Triad)	Prime, Major Third, Perfect Fifth	I, III, V	C, E, G (C maj or C)	On a piano, try moving this chord up half a step at a time. The chord after C maj will be D, maj.
Minor Chord (Minor Triad)	Prime, Flatted Third (or Minor Third), Perfect Fifth	I, flatted III (or iii), V	C, E \flat , G (C min or Cm)	Minor chords can be made by flattening the middle note of a major triad.
Diminished Chord	Prime, Flatted Third (or Minor Third), Flatted Fifth (or Diminished Fifth)	I, flatted III (or iii), flatted V (or v)	C, E \flat , G \flat (C dim)	A fairly jarring chord, often used to create tension.
Major Seventh Chord	Prime, Major Third, Perfect Fifth, Major Seventh	I, III, V, VII	C, E, G, B (C maj7 or CM7)	Don't confuse with a dominant seventh chord, which flattens the VII note to B \flat .
Minor Seventh Chord	Prime, Flatted Third (or Minor Third), Perfect Fifth, Flatted Seventh (or Minor Seventh)	I, flatted III (or iii), V, flatted VII (or vii)	C, E \flat , G, B \flat (C min7 or Cm7)	Minor sevenths are popular chords in jazz music.

■ CHORDS—GROUPS OF NOTES PLAYED TOGETHER

—are building blocks of music. They are also responsible for much of music's emotional power. Depending on what notes are combined and what their relationships are to each other, chords can seem happy, or blue, or tense, or angry.

Major chords, for instance, create a bright, uplifting feeling. To our ears, they sound "right." Of course, if all music were played in major chords, it would be boring, so other types of chords convey diverse moods.

Music theory says a major chord of three notes—a triad—such as C major is consonant, or stable. Consonant chords start with a note called the tonic, or prime, and add notes that play well with that tonic. Dissonant chords, on the other hand, add notes that sound a little jarring. It's said that they are unstable, or unresolved—and sometimes they leave our ears wanting the music to return to notes that are consonant with the tonic.

There are a few ways of expressing what notes must follow a tonic to create either consonant or dissonant chords. Using scale degrees is one way; using intervals is another.

C major is made up of the consonant notes C, E, and G. C is the tonic, E is the third note in the scale of C major, and G is the fifth note in this scale. (Log on to www.makingmusicmag.com/pdfs/clip06may.pdf for a reminder of how to play major and minor chords.)

Thus, one way to express the C major chord combination is to say it's made up of scale degrees I, III, and V. Another way is to say it's the prime, plus a major third and a perfect fifth. Our chart shows the names of scale degrees, intervals, and their relations. The same applies to C maj's relative minor key, A minor, except that the third scale degree is written iii for a minor third, rather than a major third, in all minor keys.

The beauty of these two naming systems is that you can apply them to any major or minor scale to create many more chords—uplifting major chords or bluesy minor chords. For instance, the chord of G major is also made up of the I, III, and V scale degrees, but in the scale of G major—the notes G, B, and D.

