



Every chord in jazz can be 'voiced' many different ways, and each of these different arrangements is called a 'chord voicing'.

Some chord voicings are simple - they stick to the chord tones only (1 3 5 7) and can be played in one hand.

Other chord voicings are complex - they use lots of extended notes (9ths, 11ths, 13ths) and require two hands to play.

In this ebook I'll show you five types of jazz piano chord voicing - used by professional jazz pianists, which you can use to voice any jazz song.

CHORD VOICING PRINCIPLES

First let's cover some good principles that most chord voicings follow:

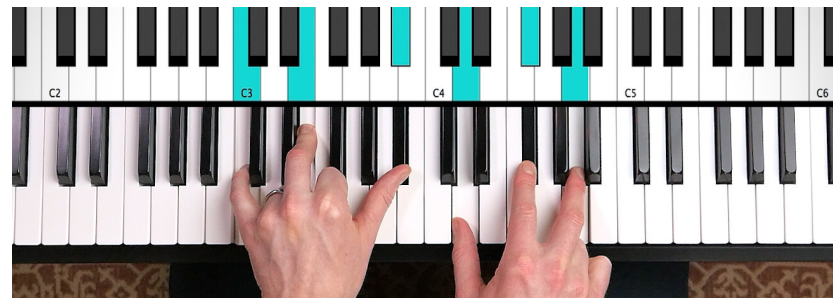
1. Play each note once (don't repeat notes). Most strong chord voicings will play each note once. This way you can get maximum color from each finger. So if your left hand is already playing the chord's 3rd - you wouldn't normally repeat the 3rd in your right hand. Instead you'd look to add a new 'tonal color' with each note you play.



Notice that the chord voicing I'm playing above (for a **C7 b9 #11** chord) plays each note once - there are no repeats.

2. Root, 3rd & 7th are voiced low down in the chord.

Most chord voicings will play the root, 3rd and 7th at the bottom of the chord. This helps your ear to hear which type of chord it is (major 7, minor 7, or V7) because the bass notes carry more weight than the higher up notes, and these three notes tell the listener what chord it is. Once these three notes are in place, it's common to add the more colorful notes (9ths, 11ths, and 13ths) higher up the chord, where they won't confuse the listener.



Notice that the chord voicing I'm playing above (for a **C7 #11** chord) has the root, 3rd and 7th voiced in the bottom octave - and the 9th, #11th and 13th are voiced higher up.

3. Give the melody note space. The melody needs to be heard clearly, so it's best to leave a gap of a minor 3rd or greater

between the melody note (which will be the highest note you're playing), and the note below it (which will be part of your chord voicing). If you don't give your melody note space, your playing will sound muddy and it will be hard to hear the melody clearly above the chord.

Those are three strong principles that most jazz piano chord voicings stick to. However, these are not 'rules' and there will be some exceptions.

5 TYPES OF CHORD VOICING

Now let's look at the chord voicings themselves! I'm going to demonstrate all voicings lined up from C, and we'll use the three main types of 7th chord:

- **C major 7** (C E G B)
- **C minor 7** (C Eb G Bb)
- **C7** (C E G Bb)

In addition, you can tweak most of the upcoming chord voicings so that they fit the other types of 7th chord too - like C \emptyset , C $^{\circ}$ 7, and C min-maj 7.

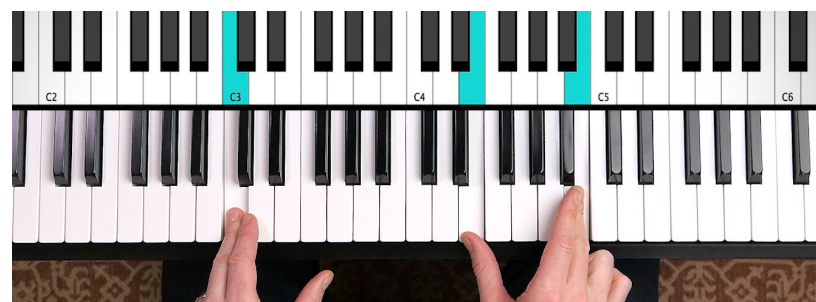
1. SHELL VOICINGS

Let's start with the most simple type of chord voicing. 'Shell voicings' are made of just three notes - the root, 3rd and 7th. These are the three most essential notes which tell your ear what type of chord it is (maj 7, min 7, or V7).

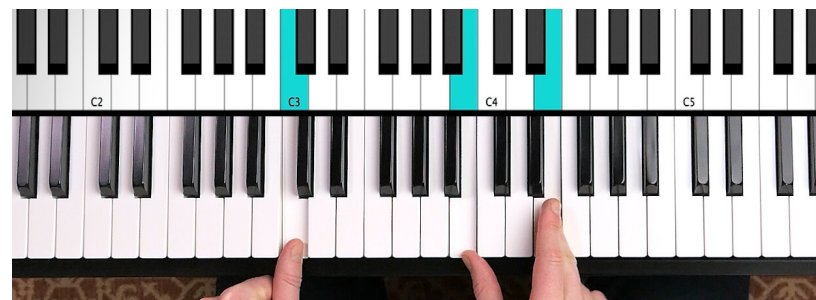
'Shells' are nice because they allow you to create contrast in your arrangements - you can play some simple sounding sections (using shells), juxtaposed with complex sounding sections (using rootless voicings, 4th voicings, the Kenny Barron voicing, and so on).

There are two ways to voice a chord using shells - 'position A' and 'position B'. In each case you'll play the root at the bottom of the chord, and then the 3rd and 7th can be played in either order above:

C MAJOR 7 - Shell voicing 'position A' (1 3 7)



C MAJOR 7 - Shell voicing 'position B' (1 7 3)

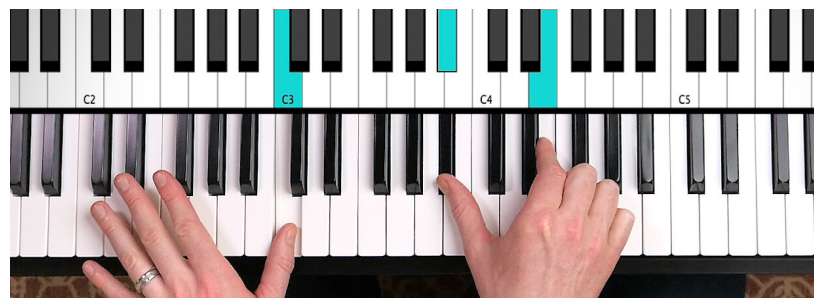


Next, let's apply these two shell voicings to the other types of 7th chord - just tweak the **3rd** and **7th** to fit each chord.

C MINOR 7 - Shell voicing 'position A' (1 3 7)



C7 - Shell voicing 'position B' (1 7 3)



C MINOR 7 - Shell voicing 'position B' (1 7 3)



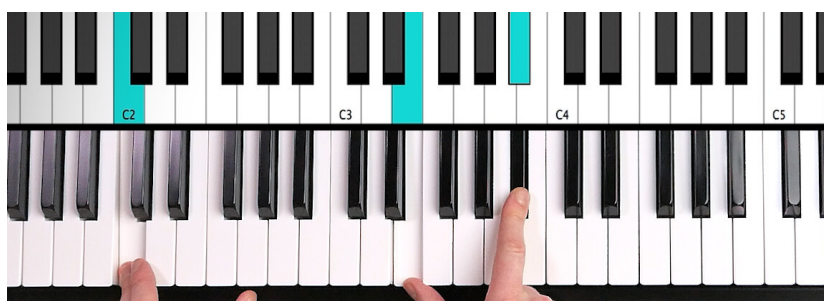
NOTE: You can transpose any chord voicing up or down an octave. You don't have to play in the ranges shown above. Use your ear to decide which register sounds best.

SUGGESTED USES: Use **shell voicings** when you want to create a bare and minimal sound. Shell voicings work especially well for songs where the melody plays a lot of 3rds and 7ths above each chord (like 'All The Things You Are'):

- When the melody plays the **3rd** - play **position A** (1 7 3).
- When the melody plays the **7th** - play **position B** (1 3 7).

And finally let's apply shell voicings to the **V7** chord:

C7 - Shell voicing 'position A' (1 3 7)

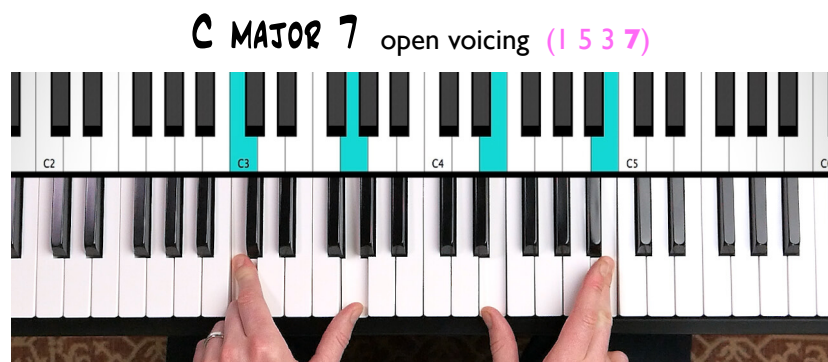


2. OPEN VOICINGS

Next let's look at 'open voicings'. Open voicings are four note voicings built from the chordal tones (1 3 5 7), but instead of playing the notes in series, they skip notes which creates a much wider sound, often spanning the bass, mid and treble (compared to 'closed voicings' which simply play the chord tones in series, 1 3 5 7, and which are contained in less than an octave).

Let's take a look at three of my favorite open voicings - each one has a different note as its top note (3, 5 or 7), and each voicing will require two hands to play.

First, here's an open voicing for **C major 7** with the **7th (B)** at the top (ideal for when the melody note is the 7th - like the first bar of 'Misty' for example):



Next, here's a second open voicing for **C major 7**, this time with the **3rd (E)** at the top (ideal for when the melody note is the 3rd):



And finally, here's a third open voicing for **C major 7** with the **5th (G)** at the top (ideal for when the melody note is the 5th - like the first bar of 'Moon River' for example):



So far we've used these three voicings on a **major 7** chord, but you can modify each voicing to fit any type of 7th chord - just by adjusting the chord tones to fit each chord type:

C minor 7 = C G Eb **Bb** - C G Bb **Eb** - C Bb Eb **G**.

C7 = C G E **Bb** - C G Bb **E** - C Bb E **G**.

Cø = C Gb Eb **Bb** - C Gb Bb **Eb** - C Bb Eb **Gb**.

SUGGESTED USES: Open voicings are best used when the melody note is a chord tone of the chord (1, 3, 5, or 7) and you want a clean sound with some bass to it:

- If the melody note is the **3rd** of the chord, then play 1 5 7 **3**.
- If the melody is the **7th** then play 1 5 3 **7**.
- If the melody is the **5th** then play 1 7 3 **5**.

3. ROOTLESS VOICINGS

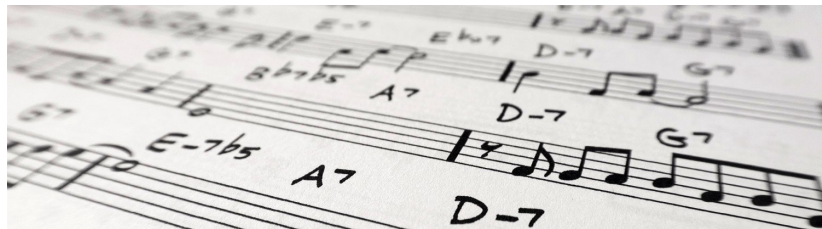
Now let's look at 'rootless voicings', which are my most-used jazz piano voicing.

Rootless voicings do not contain the root in them - they're designed for playing with a bass player, since you can leave the root of the chord for the bassist to play, while you play a rootless voicing in your left hand, and then the melody or solo in your right hand.

Or if you're playing solo piano (alone), you can play the chord's root in your left hand (the bass line), while playing a rootless voicing in your right hand above.

Rootless voicings are stacks of 3rds, but instead of starting from the chord's root, they start from the 3rd (3 5 7 9). This allows you to play up to the 9th, which adds a colorful and sophisticated sound to your voicings.

NOTE: You can always add 9ths, 11ths and 13ths to any 7th chord - you don't have to wait for the lead sheet to say 'C minor 9' to play a 9th. In fact, most chords in a lead sheet will be written as 7th chords:



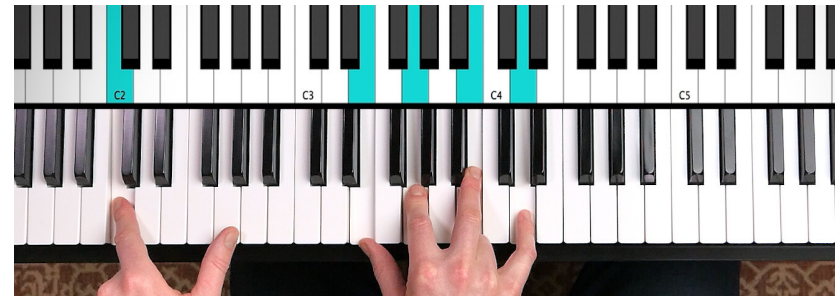
Most arrangers stick to writing 7th chords, because it allows you to read the chords quickly without getting bogged down with 'b9' '#11' 'b13' etc. It also gives you the freedom to decide which extensions you want to add to your chord voicings.

Rootless voicings can be played in two positions - 'position A' and 'position B' (just like shell voicings). Position A is built from the

chord's 3rd, and position B is built from the chord's 7th (just like shell voicings).

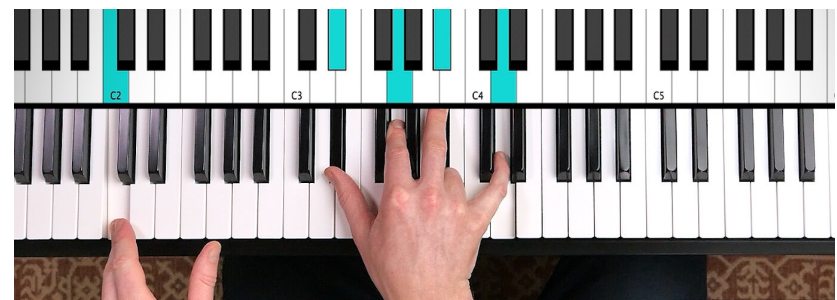
Let's look at **position A rootless voicings** for the three main chord types:

C MAJOR 7 rootless voicing A (1 / 3 5 7 9)



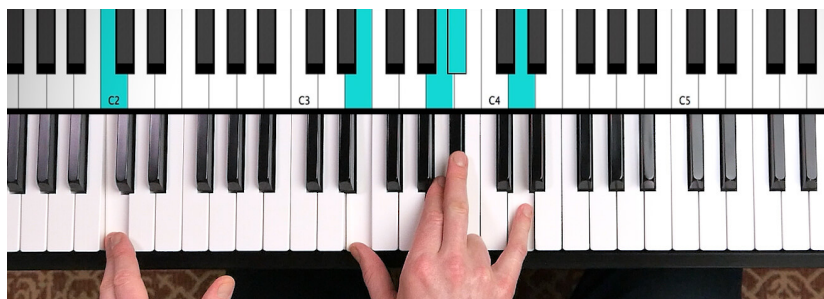
To play the rootless voicing shown above, just find the chord's major 3rd (E) and then play a minor 7 chord (E minor 7 = E G B D).

C MINOR 7 rootless voicing A (1 / 3 5 7 9)



To play the rootless voicing shown above, just find the chord's minor 3rd (Eb) and then play a major 7 chord (Eb major 7 = Eb G Bb D).

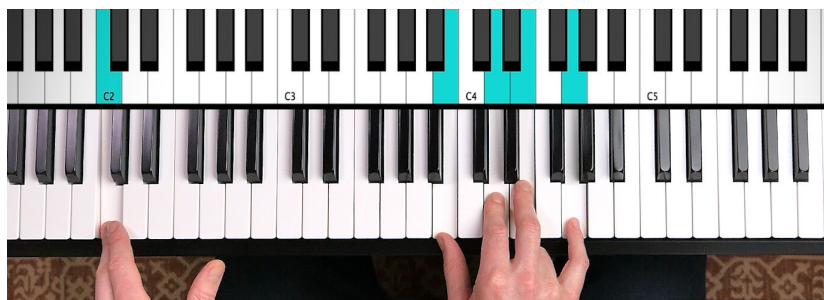
C7 rootless voicing A (1 / 3 6 7 9)



For V7 chords, it's common to tweak the rootless voicing's **5th**, and play the **6th** (or 13th) instead. This only happens for V7 chords.

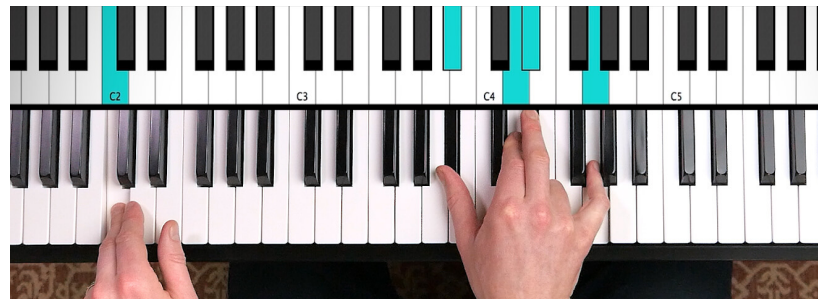
Now let's look at **position B rootless voicings**. Position B uses the same 4 notes as the position A voicings - but this time we'll play the position A voicings in 2nd inversion (which means to drop the top two notes down an octave):

C MAJOR 7 rootless voicing B (1 / 7 9 3 5)



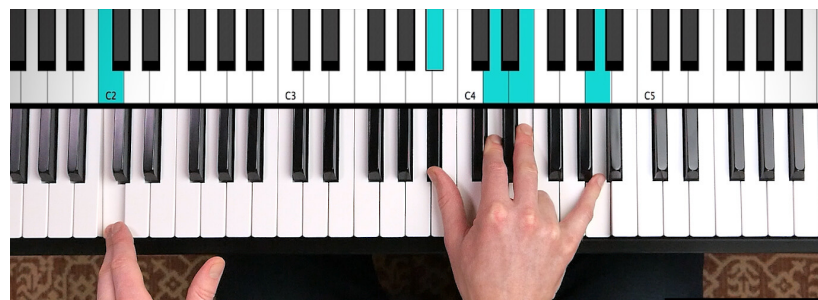
The rootless voicing above is still the same **E minor 7** chord as before (E G B D), but now it's inverted (B D E G).

C MINOR 7 rootless voicing B (1 / 7 9 3 5)



The rootless voicing above is still the same **E \flat major 7** chord as before (E \flat G B \flat D), but now it's inverted (B \flat D E \flat G).

C7 rootless voicing B (1 / 7 9 3 6)



SUGGESTED USES: If you're playing solo jazz piano, use rootless voicings when the melody note is the **9th** (3 5 7 9), or the **5th** (7 9 3 5). Play the root of the chord in your left hand, and the rootless voicing in your right hand - which will also result in playing the melody note since it's the top note of the voicing.

Or if you're playing with a bass player, you can play rootless voicings in your left hand while also playing the melody or a solo in your right hand (since the bassist will play the root of each chord).

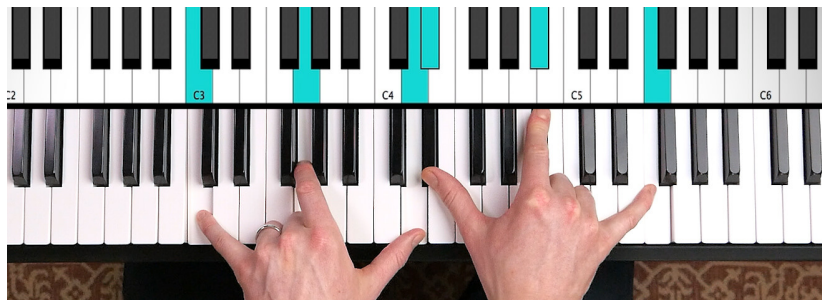
4. THE KENNY BARRON VOICING

The 'Kenny Barron voicing' is a lovely two-handed chord voicing, made famous by the jazz pianist, Kenny Barron (you can hear it at the beginning of his composition, 'Spiral').

Most of the notes in the Kenny Barron voicing are spaced a 5th apart, and this is one of few voicings in jazz that requires big hands to play (you'll need to be able to stretch a 9th in each hand).

So for a **C minor 11** chord, in your left hand you'd play a stack of 5ths built from the root (C G D), and in your right hand you'd build a stack of 5ths from the chord's minor 3rd (Eb Bb F) - like this:

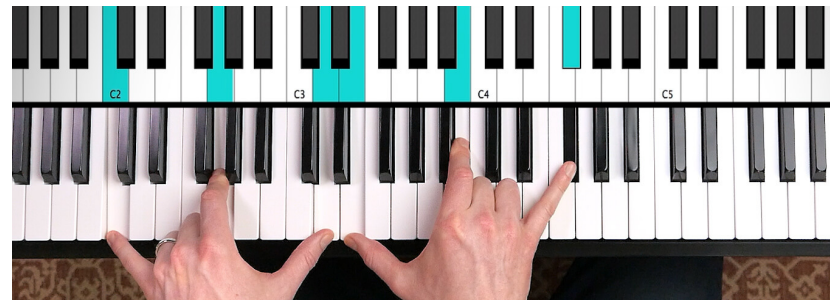
C MINOR 11 Kenny Barron voicing (1 5 9 / 3 7 11)



The chord voicing above is ideal when you see a **minor 7 chord** (C minor 7) and the melody note is the **11th** (F). Just play this voicing and you'll end up playing the **chord** and **melody note** at the same time.

We can also modify this chord voicing to fit **major 7 chords** - just shift your right hand up a half-step, and build the stack of 5ths from the **major 3rd** (E) instead of the minor 3rd:

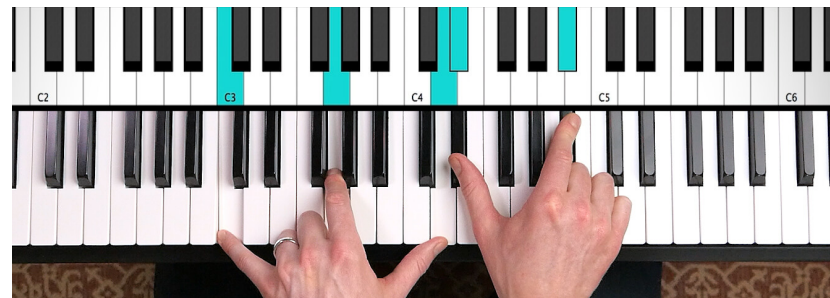
C MAJOR 7 #11 Kenny Barron voicing (1 5 9 / 3 7 #11)



The chord voicing above is ideal when you see a **major 7 chord** (C major 7) and the melody note is the **#11th** (F#). Just play this voicing and you'll end up playing the **chord** and **melody note** at the same time.

Lastly, if you can't stretch a 9th, you can play this 'sawn-off' variation instead - which cuts off the 11th. Just play the root and 5th in your left hand (C and G), then play the 9th, 3rd and 7th (D Eb Bb) in your right hand:

C MINOR 7 Kenny Barron voicing (1 5 9 / 3 7)



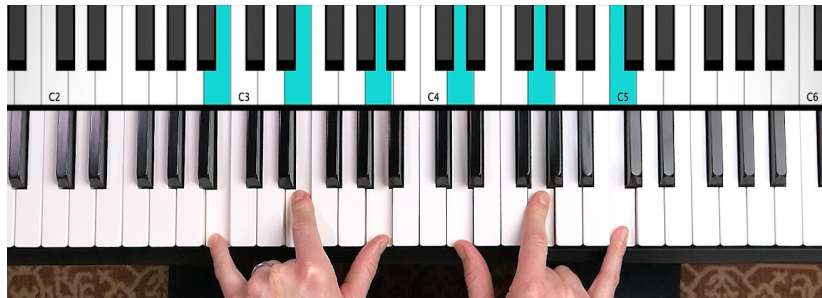
The chord voicing above is ideal when you see a **minor 7 chord** (C minor 7) and the melody note is the **7th** (Bb). Just play this voicing and you'll end up playing the **chord** and **melody note** at the same time.

5. FOURTH VOICINGS

Lastly for today, let's look at '4th voicings'. Traditionally, chords are built in 3rds (C E G B D etc). However 4th voicings rearrange the chord and play it as a series of 4ths instead (B E A D G C).

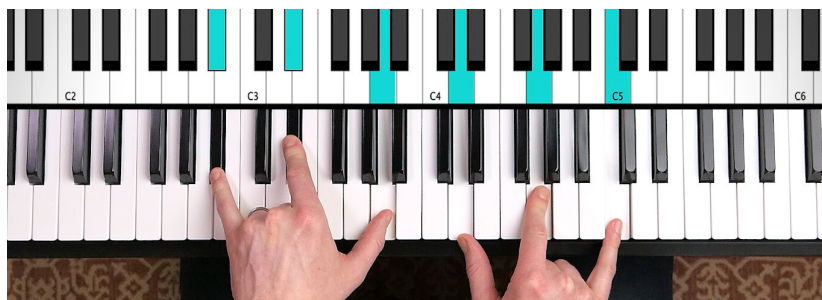
To play a chord in 4ths, build your voicing from the **7th** of the chord, and then play up a series of 4ths using notes from the scale. Play three notes in each hand, which will take you all the way up to the root:

C MAJOR 7 voiced in 4ths (7 3 6 / 9 5 1)



Now let's apply the 4th voicing above to a **minor 7 chord** - all we have to do is flatten the **3rd** and **7th** to fit a minor 7 chord (Bb and Eb) - *all other notes stay the same*:

C MINOR 7 voiced in 4ths (7 3 6 / 9 5 1)



We can also apply this 4th voicing to **V7 chords** - all we have to do is tweak the **3rd** and **7th** to fit a V7 chord (Bb and E) - *all other notes stay the same*:

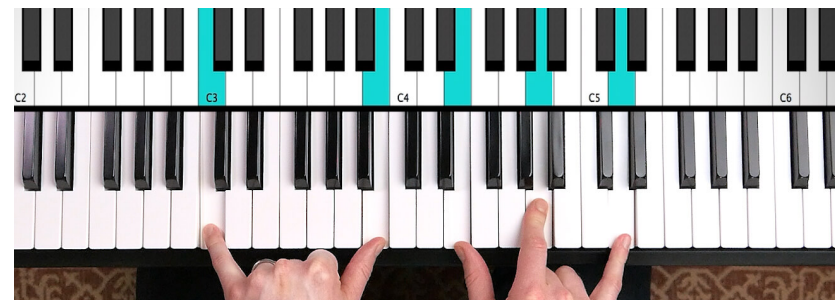
C7 voiced in 4ths (7 3 6 / 9 5 1)



SUGGESTED USES: 4th voicings work best when **playing with a band** (or at least a bass player) because it's hard to stretch the root in your left hand while also playing a 4th voicing above.

However, if you're playing **solo jazz piano**, you can 'saw off' the top two notes from the complete 4th voicing which allows you to stretch the bass line and voicing with two hands:

C MAJOR 7 voiced in 4ths (1 7 / 3 6 9)



This 4th voicing (above) would be ideal for a **C major 7** chord when the melody note is the **9th** (D). And of course, you can modify the 3rd and 7th to fit any type of 7th chord (**C minor 7** or **C7**).

PRACTICE TIP

To ingrain the chord voicings in this book, practice **one chord voicing at a time** (do not try to learn multiple chord voicings at once).

Spend a week practicing each type of chord voicing - until you can play the voicing note-perfectly built from all 12 notes. Only once you've mastered one voicing should you move on to the next.

To learn any chord voicing I suggest that you use 'side-slipping'. This means to play the chord voicing first from C, and then to transpose it up or down by a various intervals (e.g. 'up a whole-step', 'down a minor 3rd', 'up a 4th', etc). Transpose the chord voicing around at random until you can play it note-perfectly from all 12 notes.

So here's how I would practice an **open voicing (1 5 3 7)** for **minor 7 chords**:



IMPORTANT: Make sure you count out the **interval pattern** of the chord voicing each time you play it - do not try to remember a chord voicing by its note names - e.g. 'E G B D' - you should always count out the interval pattern of the chord voicing.

MELODY-MATCHING

With all of these different chord voicings available, you might be wondering - **"how do I choose which chord voicing to play?"** After-all, there's multiple voicings you can play for any given chord.

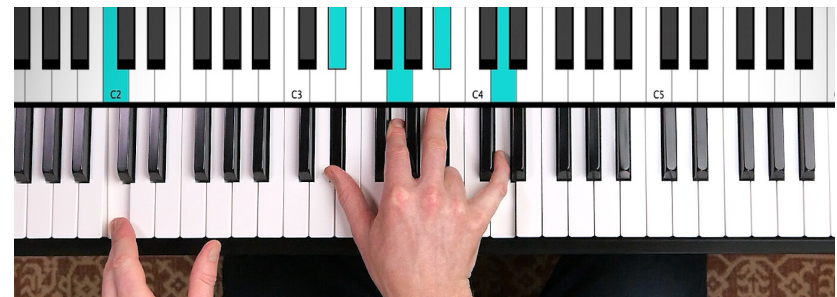
In my [Chord Voicing Intensive course](#) I teach a method called **'Melody-Matching'** - which works by playing chord voicings that already contain the melody note as their top note. This way, you're 'matching' your chord voicing to the melody note - and it allows you to play **chord** and **melody** together, just by using one carefully chosen chord voicing.

How to use Melody-Matching to voice a jazz song:

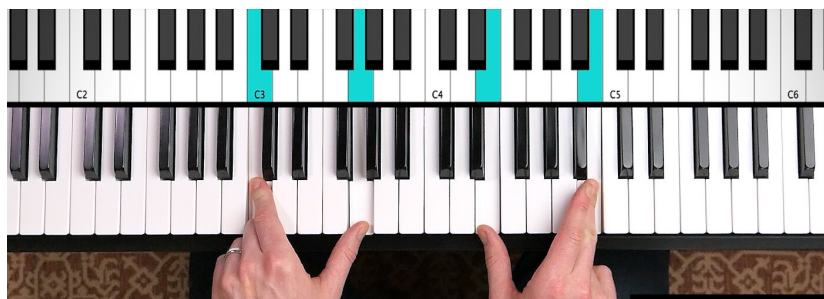
1. Look at the **chord symbol** - which tells you what type of chord it is (e.g. 'C major 7', 'C minor 7', 'C7', etc).
2. Look at the **melody note** and identify its scale degree in relation to the chord (e.g. **G** is the 5th of C, or **D** is the 9th of C, or **Eb** is the minor 3rd of C, etc).
3. Search through your 'memory bank of chord voicings' for a voicing that matches that particular **chord type** (e.g. maj 7, min 7, or V7), and which also has that **melody note** as its top note.

For example, if the chord symbol says '**C minor 7**' and the melody note is **D** - then you would search through your 'chord voicing memory bank' for a voicing that has the **9th** as its top note.

In this case, you could play a **rootless voicing** for **C minor 7** like this:

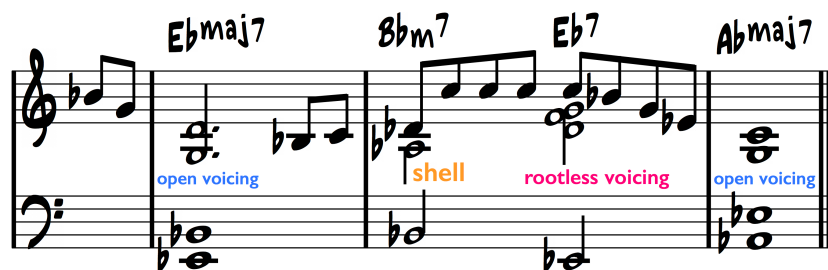


Or if the chord symbol says '**C major 7**' and the melody note is **B** - then you would search for a chord voicing that has the **7th** as its top note. In this case you could play an **open voicing** like this:



By using this Melody-Matching technique, you can play each **chord** and **melody note** together - and you know that it will sound good because the chord voicing itself already sounds good on its own - *and you're not adding a new un-tested melody note which may or may not sound good on top of the chord.*

As you play through a jazz standard using melody-matching, you'll find yourself using many types of chord voicing - **shells**, **open voicings**, **rootless**, **4ths**, **Kenny Barron**, etc. so your arrangements will end up having lots of variety (which is a good thing). To demonstrate this in action, look at how I might voice the first few bars of 'Misty':



NOTE: When using melody-matching, **you only need to look at the first melody note for each chord**, and choose your voicing based off that note. Most melodies will then change notes after the chord has

been played, and you can either hold down the chord voicing while you play the melody above it, or sometimes you'll need to release some of the top notes in the voicing if the melody runs downwards into the voicing and starts overlapping with the chord.

YOUR NEXT STEP

To learn more jazz piano chord voicings you can watch my **Chord Voicing Intensive** course today. [Click here for details](#)



In the *Chord Voicing Intensive* you'll discover:

- How to voice any jazz song using professional chord voicings
- Chord voicing patterns for the major and minor ii-V-I
- The secret to creating smooth voice-leading
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FINAL WORDS

I hope this short guide helps you to unlock new levels of sophistication in your jazz piano playing, and gives you hours of enjoyment at the piano!



Your friend,

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