SUPERIMPOSITIONS

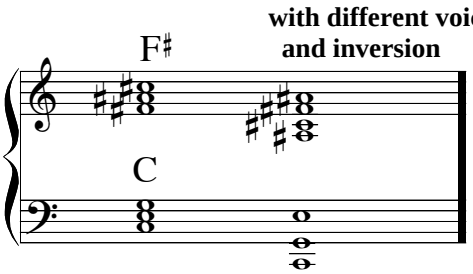
Superimpositions occur when a male chord has sex with a female chord. An example of a female chord is: A dominitrix seventh. Not really. Read on.

SUPERIMPOSITIONS

These are found when one chord is superimposed over another and the two are played together. They can range from being very mild to extremely dissonant.

The main reason for using superimpositions is that a complex chord can be thought of as two much simpler chords, thus making it easier to find the right notes. For pianists, this clear-cut approach is often used in place of a very involved chord symbol.

Let us have a look at some superimposed chords.

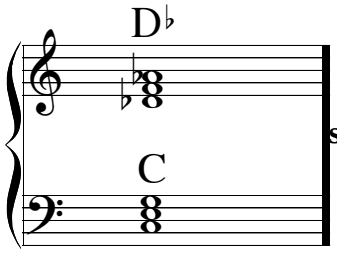


symbol: $\frac{F\sharp}{C^5}$ **or** $\frac{F\sharp}{C}$ **triad** **or** $C^{7(\flat 9+11)}$

This is a very simple case of superimposing an F# major triad on a C major triad.
Enharmonically, the sharps could also be written as flats to form a Gb triad.
So the higher chord can be seen to contain the minor seventh (Bb/A#),
the flattened ninth (Db/C#) and the sharpened eleventh (F#/Gb).
Note that the lower chord in the superimposition is called either C5 or C triad.
Were it to be just plain C, it could be interpreted as a C pedal note under an F# chord.

Where one of the notes of the upper chord could also form part of the lower chord and change it from a triad into another basic chord, this could be shown in the symbol,
So, in the previous example, the lower chord could be written as C7 instead of C5.
However, this might change the way the chord is voiced.

Other combinations can be even trickier and knowing what to write as a chord symbol can be problematical. For instance:



symbol: $\frac{D\flat}{C^5}$ **or** $C^{(\flat 2\flat 6)\text{add}4}$ **or** $C^{(\flat 9\,\flat 13)\text{add}F}$

or $C^{\text{add}D\flat\,F\,A\flat}$ **or** $C^{\text{add}\,D\flat}$ **triad**

As you can see there is no satisfactory way of writing this chord in normal chord symbols which would be easy to read and make sense. The superimposition on the other hand is

very clear. Don't be put off by the sound of this chord, it's only a theoretical example. But who knows, you might come across it one day.

There are many variations you can encounter. With regard to just triads - root position and inversions - you have:

major triads over major triads
major triads over minor triads
minor triads over major triads
minor triads over minor triads

Try experimenting to see which you like. By varying the voicings you can get some very interesting sounds this way. Instead of the complete triad in the lower part, you could use just the root and fifth which will produce some nice clashes.

A lot of other superimpositions also involve triads on top. Major triads in particular are very strong-sounding and this strength rubs off on the complete chord. For example, triads over a dominant seventh are very powerful and are often used in big band writing by arrangers such as Thad Jones.

Other basic chords can be superimposed too. For example:

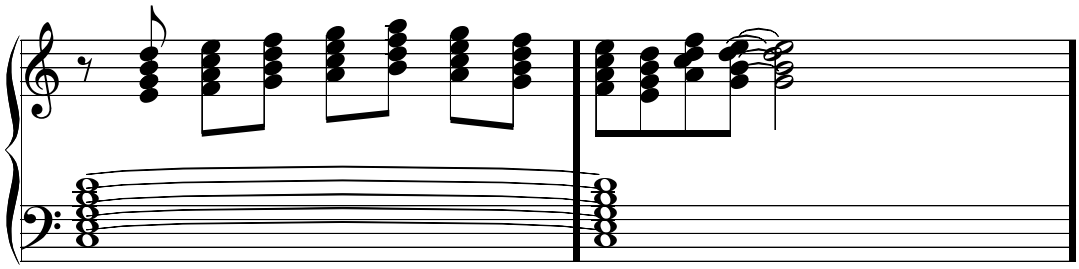
dominant seventh over another dominant seventh
minor seventh over another minor seventh

and so on, as well as different types of chords on the top from the bottom.

Writing chords as superimpositions is occasionally used by arrangers to convey how they want a chord to be voiced. Thus, a Gb or F# major triad over a C triad (as in the first example) does suggest a particular way of playing the chord, whereas the chord symbol C7(b9(+11) suggests another.

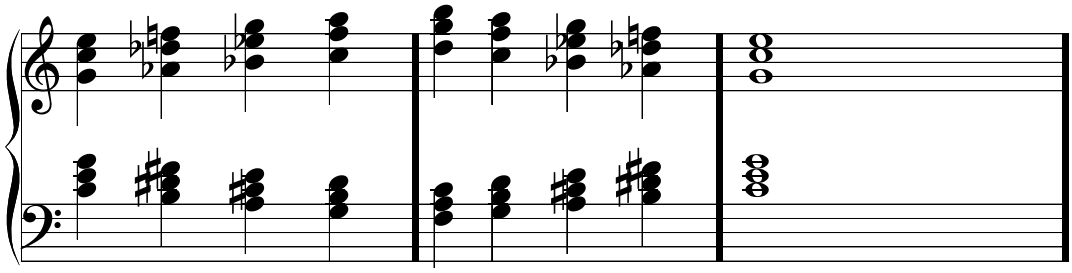
Sometimes two sets of chords progress independently, usually in different registers and with different tone colours. When this happens the ear is fooled into accepting harmonic clashes which could not be arrived at under more conventional means.

In its simplest form, a harmonised line may move while a chord played elsewhere remains static. For example:



This would have to be fairly rapid and the held chord would have to be much softer than the upper line.

The two sets of chords can also move in the same direction or opposite directions, in which case stepwise movement by whole or half-tones is usually used. This is often effective if the chord-type remains the same throughout for each line.



This opens up the possiblities of some wonderful temporary clashes. Normal rules of harmony do not apply in these circumstances as the logical progression of each line is paramount.

One problem with superimpositions is ascertaining what scale can be played over the top. A thoughtful arranger should provide some help in this direction. If not, you just have to work out something and trust your ear.

You will notice that the scored changes notation could be mistaken for superimpositions. To avoid that happening, the logo
SCALES
CHORDS
should always be included at the beginning as in the charts I provide.

Superimpositions, in the scored changes method are written like this:
C7 + D5 on the lower level (ie a D triad on a C7 chord).
The scale could be a Gm, so the full symbol would be this:

$$\frac{\text{Gm}}{\text{C}^{7}+\text{D}^{5}}$$

Admittedly this is rather a mouthful, but at least you know what notes you can use.

SOME COMMON SUPERIMPOSITIONS

The following superimpositions can be obtained by following these rules:

1. don't use a superimposed chord which gives a fourth of the underlying chord if that chord contains a major third;

2. don't use a superimposed chord which gives a minor seventh (note) of the underlying chord if that chord contains a major seventh or major sixth;

3. don't use a superimposed chord which gives a major seventh of the underlying chord if that chord contains a minor seventh (note)

4. don't include the fifth of the underlying chord until you see what will be produced by the superimposed chord - sometimes the natural fifth can be included, sometimes it is best to alter it in line with the superimposed chord;

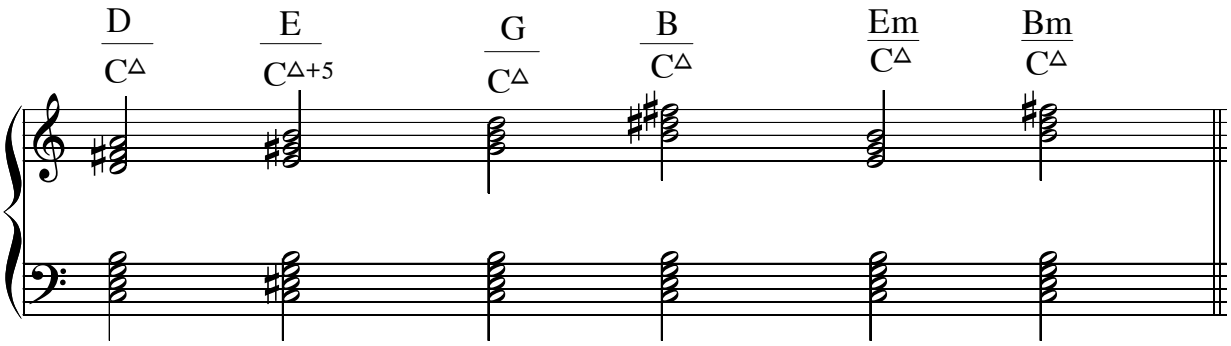
5. be careful about using superimposed chords which contain the root note of the underlying chord if that is a major seventh;

6. to get reasonably even spacing in the voicing it may be necessary to double the lead note of the superimposed chord down the octave (to make the chords clearer this has not been done in the chart below;

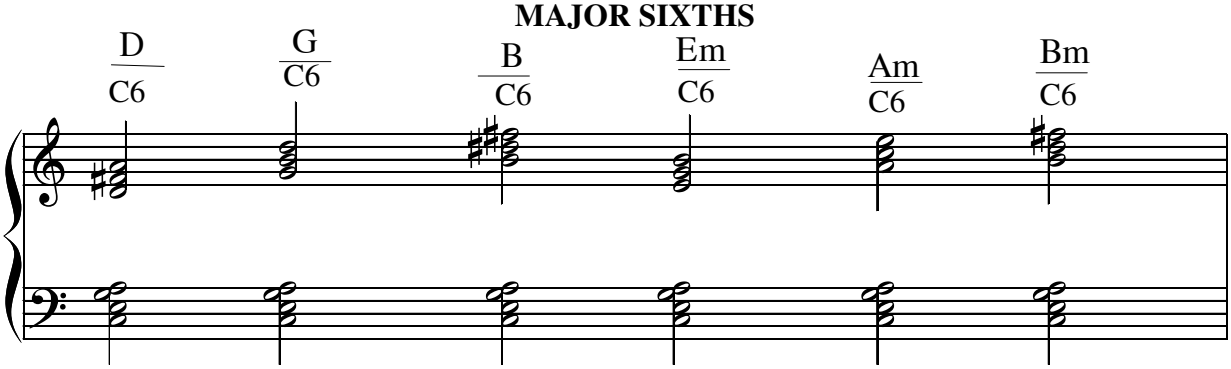
7. try out various superimpositions other than the common ones listed below and if it fits into the context, use it.

8. feel free to ignore all these rules if you find something you fancy.

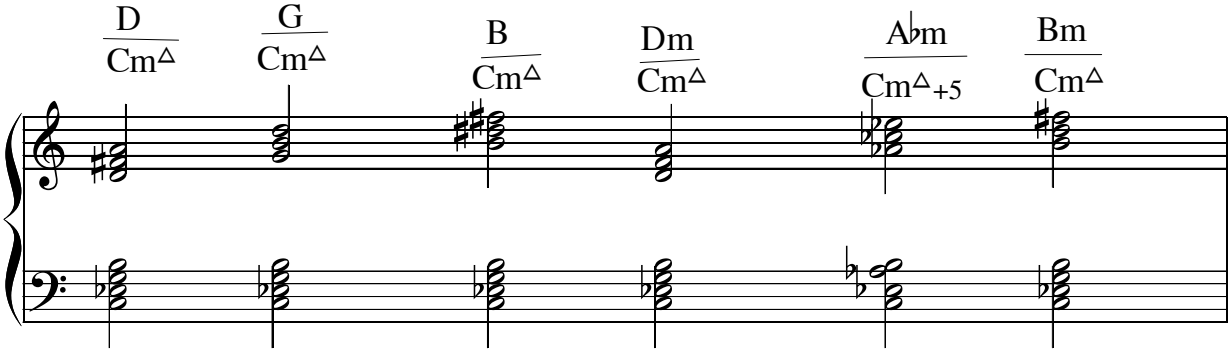
MAJOR SEVENTHS



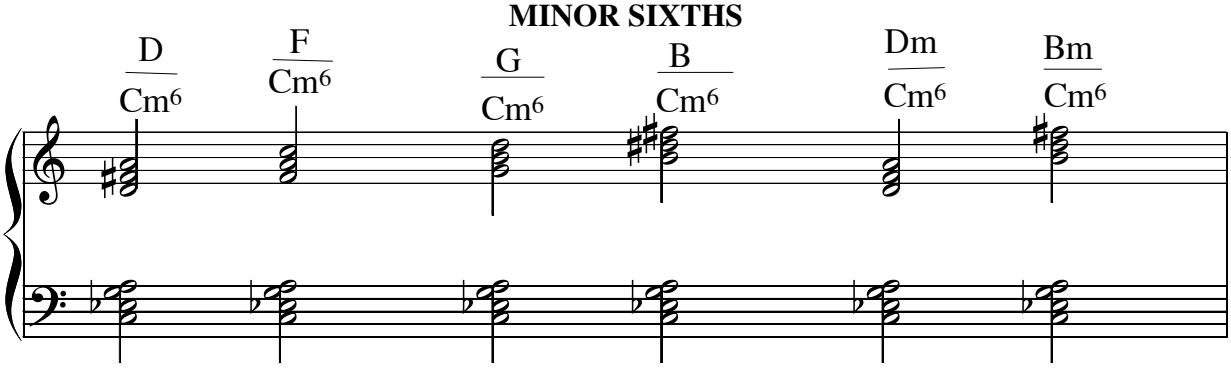
MAJOR SIXTHS



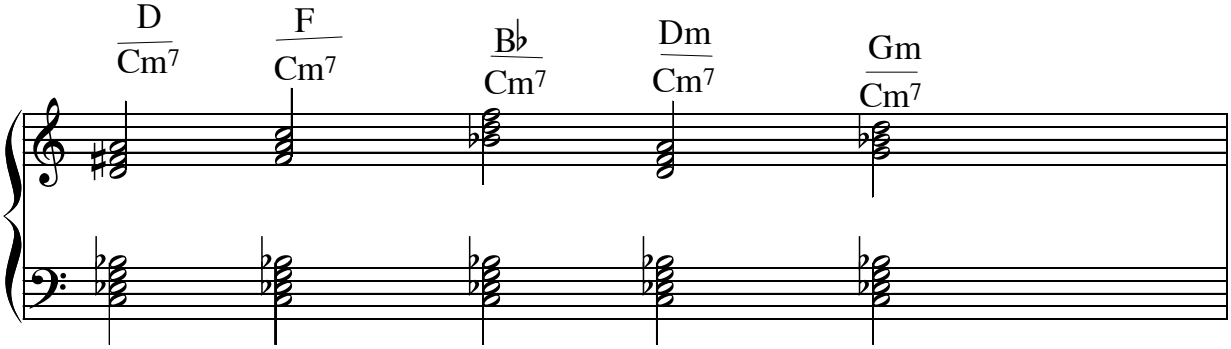
MINOR MAJOR SEVENTHS



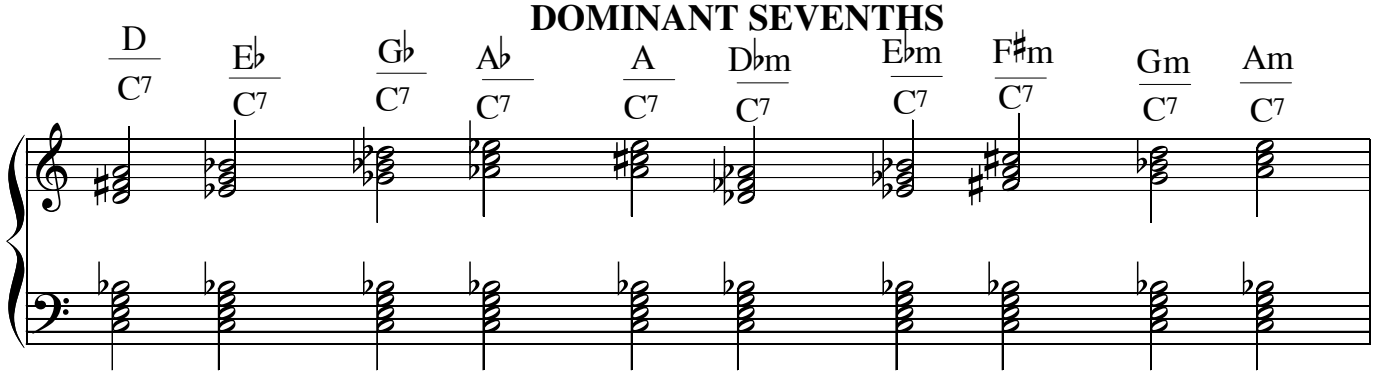
MINOR SIXTHS



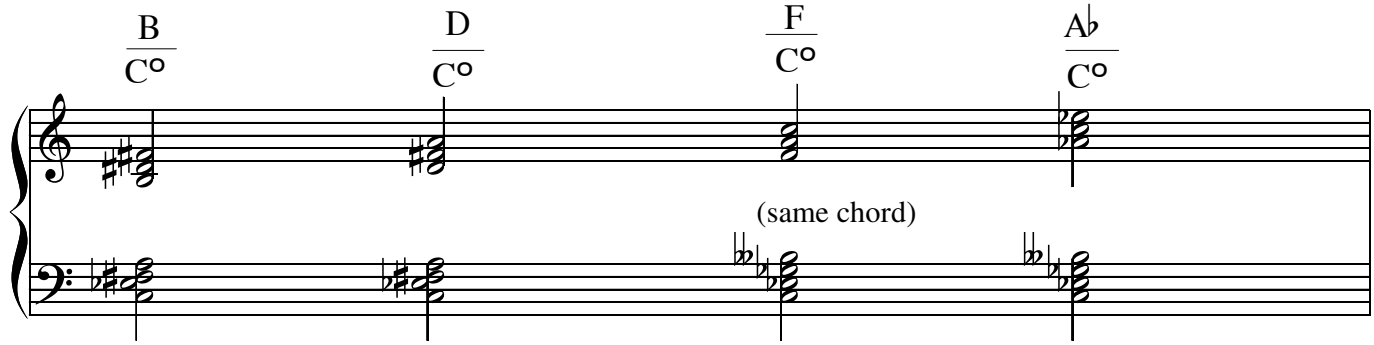
MINOR SEVENTHS



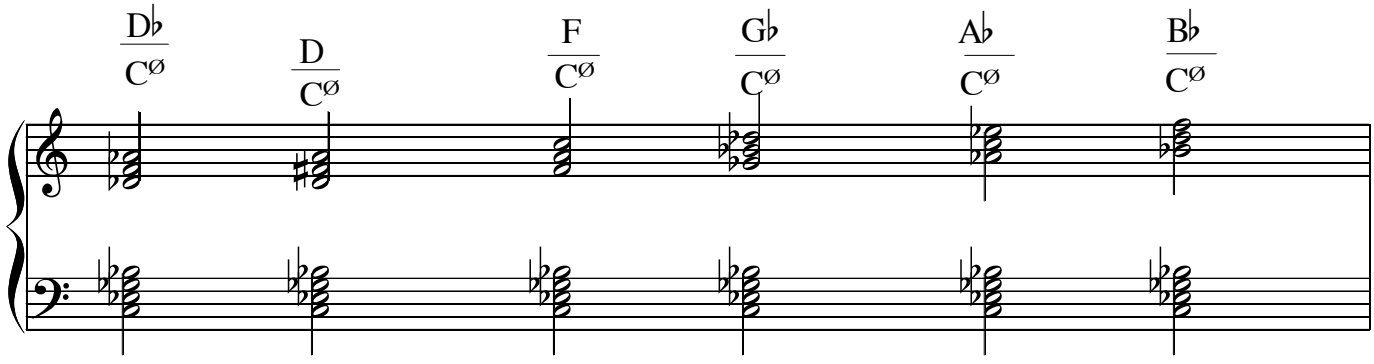
DOMINANT SEVENTHS

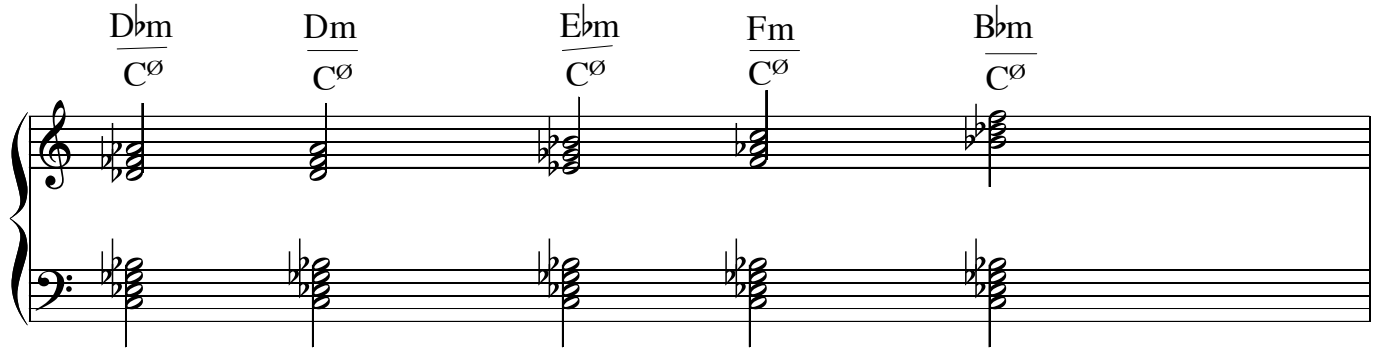


DIMINISHED



HALF-DIMINISHED





transpose into all keys