Major Diatonic Chords

Diatonic chords are chords from the same key (e.g. C major). Chords from more than one key are called **chromatic**.

Start with the C major scale:

![C major scale](image)

The numbers are the **degrees** of the scale, with 1 being the tonic and 7 being the **leading tone**, so called because it leads back to the tonic. The leading tone plays a major role in classical music.

**Triads**

If we add two successive thirds on top of each note in the scale, we get the set of **triads** in the major scale.

![Triads](image)

The roman numerals label each triad, and are derived from the scale degree on which each triad is built. There are three types of triad in a major scale:

1. Uppercase numerals indicate a major triad (I, IV and V), which is composed of a major third followed by a minor third above that. Thus C to E is a major third, and E to G is a minor third, so the I triad is a major triad.

2. Lowercase numerals indicate a minor triad (ii, iii and vi), which is composed of a minor third (e.g. D to F in the ii triad) followed by a major third (F to A).

3. Finally there is one diminished triad (vii°) which is composed of two minor thirds (B to D and D to F).

**Seventh chords**

By adding another third on top of a triad, we get the seventh chords:

![Seventh chords](image)

The types of seventh chords are:

1. The chords I’ and IV’ are major-major seventh (MM7) chords because they are composed of a major triad with a major seventh interval (C to B in I’) on top.

2. At ii°, iii° and vi° we have minor seventh (m7) chords, which are composed of a minor triad and a minor seventh interval (D to C in ii°) on top.

3. The V’ chord is unique in the scale as it consists of a major triad with a minor seventh on top, known as a major-minor seventh (Mm7).

4. The vii° is a half-diminished chord, consisting of a diminished triad with a minor seventh on top (dim7).
Minor Diatonic Chords

Minor Triads

We can follow the same procedure for the minor scale. In C minor, we have the triads:

We now have the following triad types:

1. The i and iv triads are minor (minor third + major third).
2. The III, V and VI are major triads. The III and VI are naturally major triads (that is, just by using notes from the scale they automatically come out as major triads). The V triad, however, would be minor if we had used the Bb from the scale. The note is changed to a B natural as a minor triad in the dominant position does not fit in well with the rules of harmonic progression. (More on this later.)
3. There are two diminished triads at ii° and vii° (minor third on top of minor third). Again, the Bb in the vii triad is raised to a B natural to make it fit in with harmonic progression. If we had used the Bb here, then this triad would be major (VII), but this is used mainly when we are progressing out of minor.

Minor Sevenths

The C minor seventh chords are as shown:

The chord types here are:

1. i° and iv° are minor 7ths.
2. ii°7 and vii°7 are diminished 7ths.
3. III°7 and VI°7 are major-major 7ths
4. V°7 is a major-minor 7th.

In classical music, some of these 7th chords (ii°7, iv°7, V°7 and vii°7) appear frequently. The i°7 and III°7 chords are very rare. VI°7 occurs usually as part of a progression of 7th chords.

Note that the only note that is modified in the minor chords is the Bb to a B natural, which is the leading tone in the major scale. The leading tone plays such an important role that these chords have been modified to include it.

The triads and 7th chords shown above represent the overwhelming majority of chords that are used in classical music.

Other chord types

Other types of music, such as jazz and pop, often contain other types of chords than those shown above. For example, the first chord in the excerpt below is often found in jazz:
The notes in the base clef are F, C and A, and together with the Eb in the treble, form a dominant 7th chord (that is, a V7 chord with a major-minor structure). A jazz musician would take the top two notes (the G and D) as part of the overall chord, which then becomes an F13 chord.

In classical music, the bottom four notes form the dominant F 7th chord, but the top two notes are classified as non-chord tones or NCTs; they do not form part of the chord. As such, these two notes must be resolved into part of the dominant 7th chord, so the G moves up to the A and the D moves down to the C, with the result that all six notes in the second chord are part of the dominant 7th chord.

In diatonic classical music, harmony is essentially restricted to the chord types described here.