

OPEN VOICINGS - Basic Formulas

The formulas work well for all the basic chord types:

Major 7
7 (dominant 7)
Minor 7
Major 6
Minor 6
Minor 7b5
Min-Maj7
Aug.7 (Augmented)
Dim.7 (Diminished)

The ***italicized*** number is the melody note or note being harmonized.

Substitute 6 for 7 in the formulas for Maj6 and Min6 chords.

Practice all nine chord types with all 4 formulas in 12 keys.
That's 9 x 4 x 12 or 432 chords. It's a big job and will require weeks or months of practice.

Practice the chords through the cycle of fifths, diatonically, chromatically and using random drill sheets.

Left Hand	Right Hand	
1-7	3-5- <u>1</u>	The root (1) is the top note, the melody note being harmonized
1-5	3-7- <u>3</u>	The third is the melody
1-5	7-3- <u>5</u>	The fifth is the melody
1-5	7-3- <u>7</u>	The seventh is the melody

HOW TO USE THE OPEN VOICING FORMULAS

Lead sheets only give you the melody and the harmony (chord symbols). Beginners often start by playing the melody with the right hand and the chords with their left. Open voicings allow the chord to be played by sharing the notes of the chord with both hands. The result is better sounding chords and more flexibility to add/alter tones to provide a richer harmonic palette. To use the formulas:

1. Select the melody notes to be harmonized. Typically these are notes on strong beats like beat 1 and beat 3 in 4/4 time.
2. Determine quickly if the melody note is part of the chord (root(1), 3rd, 5th, 7th), or a non-chord tone. If the note is part of the chord, ***you're in luck!*** Play the note as written with the appropriate formula filling in the chord underneath. In Fig. 1, the melody note is C and the chord is C7. Use the 1st formula since the melody is the 1 (root)

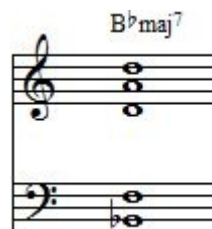
Examples:

- 1 The melody note is C and the chord is C7.
Use the first formula since the melody is the 1.
See Fig.1

Fig. 1



2. B♭ major seventh chord with the 3rd (D) on top.
Use the second formula. B♭maj7 would be played:
Left hand: B♭-A (1-7) and Right hand D-A-D (3-7-3)



Be sure that no interval except Left Hand 1-7 exceeds a 6th. In other words, don't have your hand far apart from each other on the keyboard creating a chord with a large interval between the hands.

3. Sometimes the melody note (top note) results in the open voicing being too low on the keyboard. When chords are placed too low on the keyboard, the chord is muddy and bad sounding. The Open Voicing formula can be changed to make the chord smaller so that it is placed in a more acceptable range.

Example: A song calls for a Ab7 chord and the melody note is middle C. Following the formula gives an acceptable chord but to some pianists, the chord will not have a pleasing sound because it is too low. The chord can be made smaller by eliminating the doubled note and moving the left hand up an octave.

Left hand: Ab-Eb (1-5) up an octave, and Right Hand: Gb-C (7-3) not 3-7-3.

The image contains two musical diagrams. The left diagram shows two staves in bass clef. The top staff is labeled 'Ab7' and shows a chord with notes Ab, Cb, Eb, and Ab. The bottom staff shows a similar chord with notes Ab, Cb, Eb, and Ab. The word 'OK' is written below the first chord and 'better' is written below the second. The right diagram shows two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and labeled 'Am7 with D as melody note', showing a chord with notes C, Eb, G, and D. The bottom staff is in bass clef and shows a chord with notes Ab, Cb, Eb, and Ab.

4. Many times, the melody note will not be a chord tone and can be dealt with several ways.

A. Find a chord formula where the top note is close to the melody note. Using the formula adjust the top note to make it the melody note. Example: Melody note is D and chord is Am7.

Since the melody note D is near the chord tone C (3rd of the chord Am7), select the 2nd formula and adjust the top note to D.

Left hand A-E (1-5); ----- Right hand C-G-D. (3-7- melody note)

B. If the melody note is a tension (and it usually is), refer to the [formulas for tensions](#).

C. Construct your own voicing.