

Building Triads

A triad is two intervals—both thirds, stacked on top of each other, snowman style. The Common Practice Period uses this type of **tertian harmony** (built on thirds). A triad actually contains three separate intervals. From the root to the third is one interval—a third. From the third to the fifth is the second interval—another third. The two outside tones, the root and the fifth, also create an interval—a fifth.

HOW TO BUILD A TRIAD

1. Build the “snowman” in thirds above the root. **Tertian harmony thirds will either be all lines or all spaces.**
2. Identify the quality of the lower third as major or minor.
3. Identify the quality of the fifth (between the root of the triad and the fifth) as perfect, diminished, or augmented.
4. Identify the chord with a letter (the root of the “snowman”).
5. Identify the quality of the triad:
 - **M3 + P5 = major triad** (or M3 + m3)
 - **m3 + P5 = minor triad** (or m3 + M3)
 - **m3 + dim5 = diminished triad** (or m3 + m3)
 - **M3 + A5 = augmented triad** (or M3 + M3)

HOW TO BUILD A TRIAD

M3 + P5 = G Major/GM

m3 + P5 = a minor/am

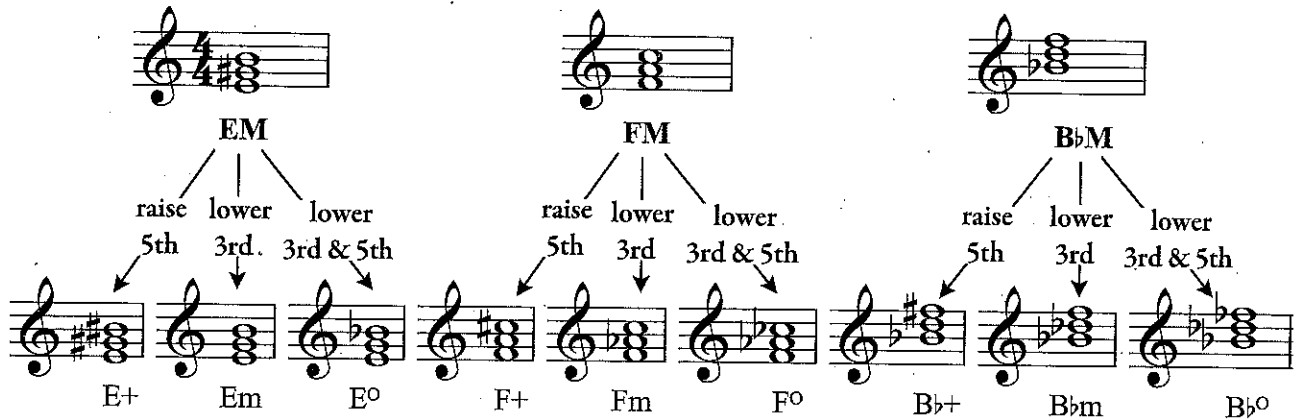
m3 + dim5 = c diminished/c°

M3 + A5 = D augmented/D+

If you know what the **major triad** is, then you can easily adjust the third and the fifth to create the other chord qualities.

- From major, raise the fifth to create an augmented triad.
- From major, lower the third to create a minor triad.
- From major, lower the third *and* the fifth to create a diminished triad, or lower only the fifth from the *minor triad*.

The key to this method is *knowing* what the Major triad is!



➡ See Appendix A for more information on visually identifying major chords.

Recognizing Triads

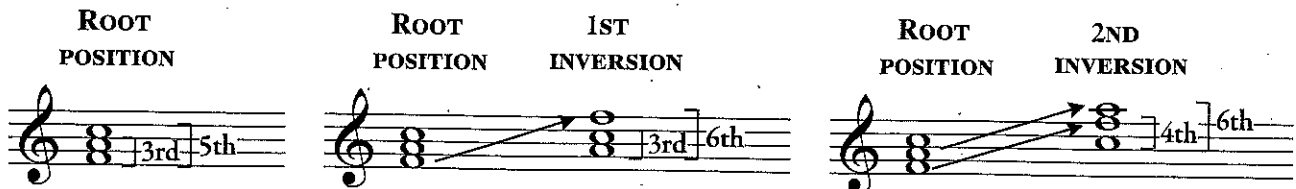
Once you are comfortable with building triads in all qualities, it's time to look at real music and recognize chords in context. Much of the music we study in AP Music Theory has four parts, or voices. When we have four parts and only three chord members, then one note of the chord has to be doubled, usually the root. When you are analyzing music for chord quality, the first thing that has to be determined is the root of the chord. Chords are not always written in nice, neat order. The lowest sounding note is **not** always the root, so

- Stack your snowman in thirds.
- Find the root, and determine the quality of the triad.
- Label the chord by the root name and quality (such as GM, gm, g°, or G+).

CHORD INVERSIONS

Triads that have a chord member *other than the root* as the lowest sounding voice (the bass) are called **inversions**. When you move the position of any of the chord members, an interval **inverts**. Any member of the chord may sound in the bass. Since there are three notes in a triad, there are three possible positions.

- Root position—the root of the chord is in the bass
- First inversion—the third of the chord is in the bass
- Second inversion—the fifth of the chord is in the bass



When a chord is in root position the intervals above the bass note (the root) are a 3rd and a 5th. When a chord is in first inversion the intervals above the bass are a 3rd and a 6th. When a chord is in second inversion, the bass note is the 5th of the chord and the intervals above the bass are a 6th and a 4th. Yes, the 4th above the bass in the 2nd inversion triad is a dissonant interval and must be handled with care. If you go back to the interval exercise we did on *Aurelia* you will notice that chords 4, 6, and 11, which have the P4 against the bass, are all second inversion chords. We will revisit this information again when discussing chord symbols and inversions, but for now let's move on to the discussion of chords with four different notes—seventh chords.

SEVENTH CHORDS

A **seventh chord** contains four notes—the root, 3rd, 5th and an **added 7th**. Because this arrangement of tones contains an interval of a 7th, which is a dissonant interval, all seventh chords are considered dissonant (unstable).

Building and Recognizing Seventh Chords

Given the types of triads combined with the types of sevenths, there are sixteen possibilities of seventh chords. Although other types are possible, five types of seventh chords are most often used in common-practice music and are prevalent on the AP Music Theory exam.



Five Basic Seventh Chords

- Major seventh (Major triad, Major 7th—**MM7**) or M3, m3, M3
- Dominant seventh or Major-minor seventh (Major triad, minor 7th—**Mm7**) or M3, m3, m3
- Minor seventh (minor triad, minor 7th—**mm7**) or m3, M3, m3
- Half-diminished seventh (diminished triad, minor 7th—**dim m7**) or m3, m3, M3
- Fully-diminished seventh (diminished triad, diminished 7th—**dim dim7**) or m3, m3, m3

Let's build these five seventh chords on G:

	MAJOR 7TH	DOMINANT 7TH	MINOR 7TH	HALF-DIMINISHED 7TH	FULLY-DIMINISHED 7TH
Triad+7th Quality:	M+M7	M+m7	m+m7	dim+m7	dim+dim7

With a four-note chord you must first stack the pitches in snowman style to be able to identify the root of the chord, then you must identify the quality of the triad and the quality of the seventh. Sometimes it is difficult to rearrange the four chord members into a snowman.

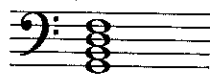
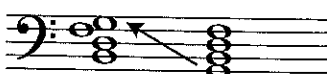
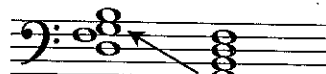
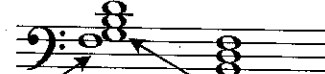
Try these helpful hints:

- Remember that a 7th inverts to a 2nd, so find the two notes that are a 2nd apart—the root of the chord is the **higher** of the two notes.
- Another way to “stack the snowman” is by memorizing the combinations. As with triads, there are only seven combinations of letter names:

Triads:	C-E-G	D-F-A	E-G-B	F-A-C	G-B-D	A-C-E	B-D-F
Seventh chords:	C-E-G-B	D-F-A-C	E-G-B-D	F-A-C-E	G-B-D-F	A-C-E-G	B-D-F-A

If you have spent time identifying intervals, then triads and seventh chords are just an extension of that information. Seventh chords are also found in root position and inverted. Because there are four notes there are four possible chord positions:

THE FOUR POSITIONS OF G⁷

ROOT POSITION	1ST INVERSION POSITION	2ND INVERSION POSITION	3RD INVERSION POSITION
			
Root in bass	3rd in bass	5th in bass	7th in bass

Note: A 2nd inverts to a 7th, so when you see two notes a 2nd apart, the higher of the 2 pitches is the **root**.

The **intervals above the lowest sounding note—(the bass)** that are created when a seventh chord is inverted will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. At this point we want to simply recognize a seventh chord, identify the note that is the root of the chord, determine the quality of the triad and the seventh, and determine the inversion if appropriate.

In order to apply this information, let's go back to the chorale on page 107 and identify the chords, quality, and inversions within the first phrase.