# Upper String Chord Voicings

by Mike Dana

## Theory Review

When we use the term "seventh" chords, we mean chords that use the R, 3, 5, and 7 of the scale. This is actually also the major 7 chord spelling. There are other seventh chords too. These are created by altering the basic R 3 5 7. Here are the main ones.

- Dominant 7 = R 3 5 ♭7
- Minor 7 = R ♭3 5 ♭7
- Half diminished or minor 7♭5) = R ♭3 ♭5 ♭7
- You can figure others out on your own :)

You can also use some chord tone substitutions to create different "colors" within a family of chords. For example,

- For major chords, sub the 6 for the 7, or the 9 for the R (or both!)
- For tonic minor chords, sub the 6 or the ♮7 for the ♭7, or the 9 for the R (or both!)
- For minor 7 chords functioning as a ii (as in a ii V I), keep the ♭7, but subbing 9 for R is fine.
- For dominant 7 chords, it gets more complicates. These chords have many more options for altering notes. Read on...

## Dominant 7

For dominant chords, there are 3 "untouchable" notes: the R, 3 and ♭7. The root can be omitted (or subbed by the 9), but the 3 and ♭7 give the chord its quality. Here are some common substitutions:

- Sub for R:
  - 9 (or ♭9 or #9)
- Sub for 5
  - ♭5 (sometimes spelled #11 or even #4) for 5
  - #5 (sometimes spelled ♭13) for 5
- "Go-togethers" are pairs of subs that sound extra cool together. Some common ones are
  - 9 and 13, 9 and #11, 13 and #11
  - ♭9 and #5
  - #9 and #5

## Fingerings

I generally avoid putting fingerings in chord diagrams. Most of the time they are pretty obvious. When there are options, here are the factors I consider. I try to:

- Bar if possible.
  - (UNLESS I'm playing with a pick, and I don't want a barred string to sound.)
- Use as few fingers as possible.
- Consider voice leading (what was the previous chord? What's the next?)
- In a chord progression, keep a given finger on the same string if possible.

# Upper String Major Chords

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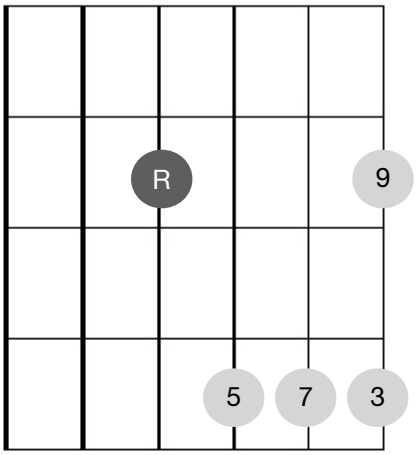
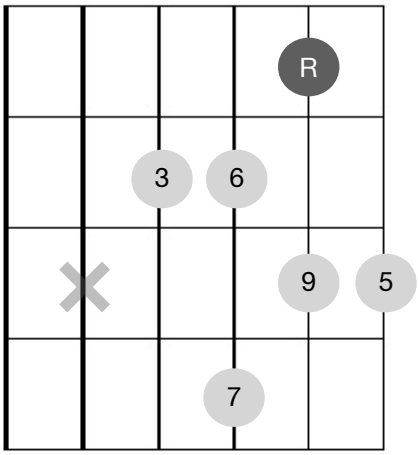


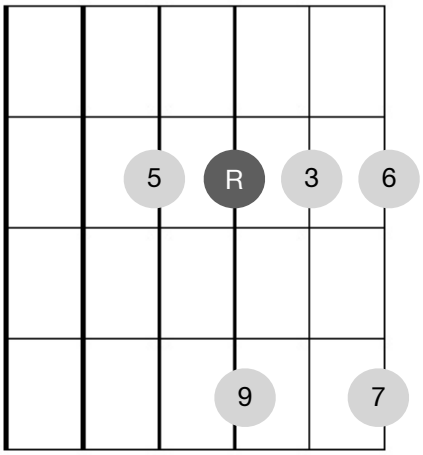

Notes

- Bar the 5 7 3
- ♭5 and ♯5 are nice alterations*
- R 5 7 9 sounds like Ma9, even without the 3



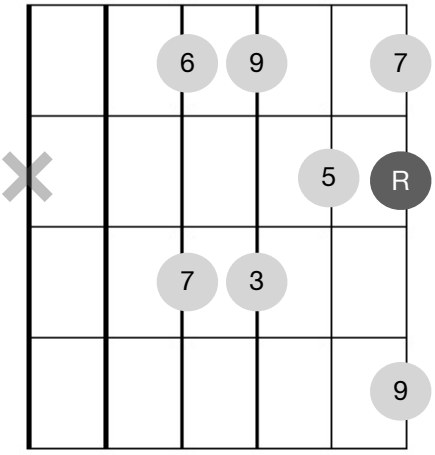

Notes

- Bar 3 6 and 9 5
- 3 6 9 5 is nice a quartal voicing
- 3 7 9 5 is a nice Ma9 voicing
- 3 7 R 5 is a stretch; nice dissonance between 7 and R




Notes

- Bar!
- Can sub 6 for 7
- ♯5 is a nice alteration
- 5 9 3 7 is a nice Ma9




Notes

- Bar 6 9 (7) and 5 R
- 6 9 5 R is a nice quartal voicing
- 7 3 5 9 is a nice Ma9 voicing
- 6 9 5 7 is a nice Ma13.
- 7 3 5 R is "correct" but pretty dissonant

**Using these chord shapes**

These are based on the inversions of the major chord.

The top note will always "feel" like the melody.

X = "phantom root" for 6th and 5th string bass notes.

Remember these substitutions:

- 9 can sub for R
- 6 can sub for 5
- 6 can also sub for 7
- *The ♭5 is enharmonically the same as the ♯4/♯11; good for Lydian sounds and non-tonic major chords.
- *The ♯5 is an adventurous Ma7 alteration, best used when 3 or 7 is in the melody.

7 to ♭7 to 6 is a cool chromatic sound.

Avoid doubling a chord tone in 4 note voicings, unless for effect.

# Upper String Minor Chords

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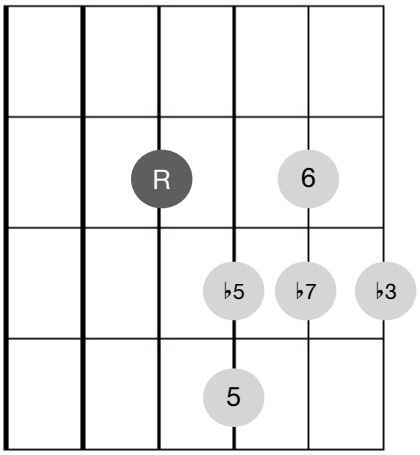
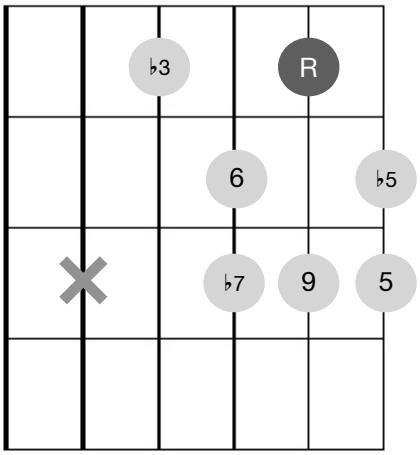


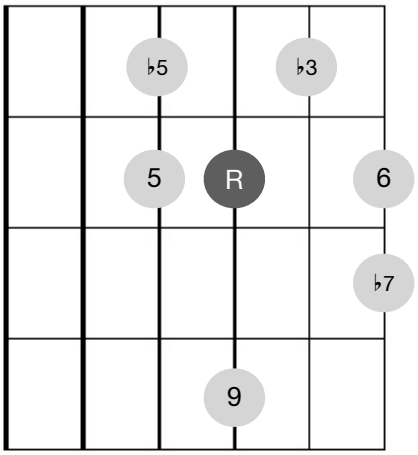

Notes

- Bar when possible
- Use ♭5 for mi7(♭5) [half dim] chords



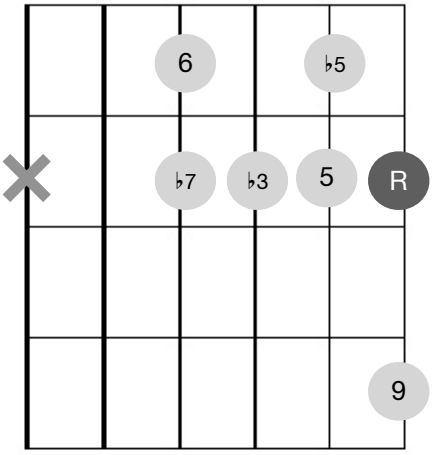

Notes

- Bar when possible
- Use ♭5 for mi7(♭5) [half dim] chords
- ♭3 6 9 5 = mi6/9
- ♭3 ♮7 9 5 = mi9(Ma7)




Notes

- Bar when possible
- 5 9 ♭3 ♭7 has nice dissonance
- Use ♭5 for mi7(♭5) [half dim] chords




Notes

- Bar when possible
- Use ♭5 for mi7(♭5) [half dim] chords
- 6 ♭3 5 9 = mi6/9
- ♮7 ♭3 5 9 = mi9(Ma7)

**Using these chord shapes**

These are based on the inversions of the minor 7 chord.

The top note will always "feel" like the melody.

To make any of these a min sus chord, replace ♭3 with 4.

Remember these substitutions:

- 9 can sub for R
- 6 can sub for ♭7 (for tonic minor.) Not recommended for ii chord in ii - V - I.
- ♮7 can sub for ♭7 (for tonic minor.) Not recommended. for ii chord in ii - V - I.

In ii - V - I progressions, usually best to keep ii as mi7 or mi9.

For tonic minor, mi6/9 and mi9(Ma7) sound great!

Avoid doubling a chord tone in 4 note voicings.

X = "phantom root" for 6th and 5th string bass notes.

# Upper String Dominant Chords

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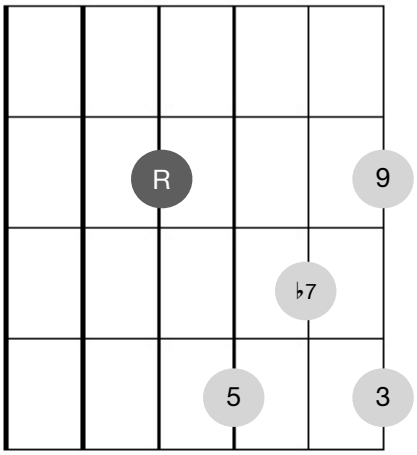
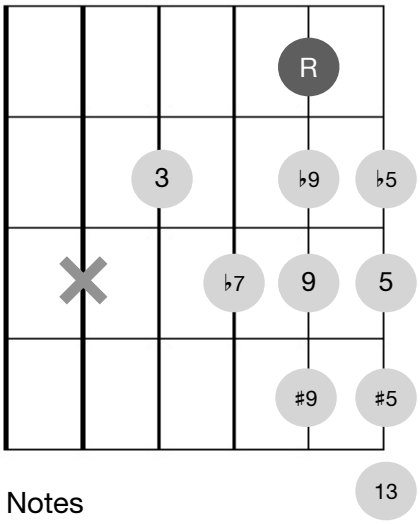


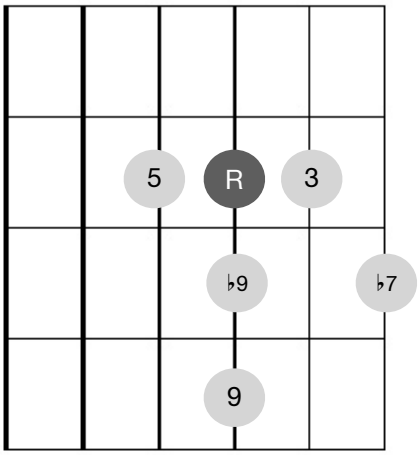

Notes

- Bar when possible
- I use this mostly for old-school blues



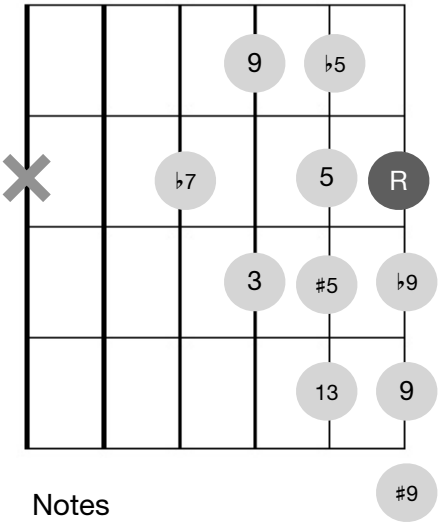

Notes

- Bar when possible
- 9 ♭9 R is a nice chromatic motion
- #9 9 ♭9 is a nice chromatic motion
- 13 ♭13 5 is a nice chromatic




Notes

- Bar when possible!
- 9 ♭9 R is a nice chromatic motion




Notes

- Bar when possible
- 9 ♭9 R is a nice chromatic motion
- #9 9 ♭9 is a nice chromatic motion
- 13 ♭13 5 is a nice chromatic

**Using these chord shapes**

These are based on the inversions of the dominant chord.

The top note will always "feel" like the melody.

To make any of these a sus chord, replace 3 with 4.

Remember these substitutions:

- 9 can sub for R
- 13 can sub for 5
- The ♭5 is enharmonically the same as the #4/#11
- The #5 is enharmonically the same as the ♭13

Remember these "go-togethers":

- 9 and 13
- ♭9 and #5
- #9 and #5

Remember the 3 5 ♭7 ♭9 (any inversion) = diminished 7 chord! You should find this in each inversion shape.

Avoid doubling a chord tone in 4 note voicings.

X = "phantom root" for 6th and 5th string bass notes.