Chord Types and Construction

-Chords are built using the 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th notes of the major scale. Using the C major scale as an example, we would start with these notes:

C D E F G A B C

-There are five primary types of chords:

1. Major - Major chords use the 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th notes of the major scale

C Major 7th chord: C E G B

2. Minor - Minor chords use the 1st, flat 3rd, 5th, and flat 7th notes of the major scale. Minor chords sound "sad" or "moody"

C Minor 7th Chord: C Eb G Bb

3. Dominant - Dominant chords use the 1st, 3rd, 5th, and flat 7th notes of the major scale. Lowering the 7th of the chord by a half step gives this chord a "jazzy" or "bluesy" sound.

C Dominant 7th Chord: C E G Bb

4. Half Diminshed – Half diminshed chords use the 1st, flat 3rd, flat 5th, and flat 7th notes of the major scale. These chords are often also called "minor 7 flat 5" chords because they are spelled the same as a minor 7th chord with a lowered 5th scale degree.

C Half Diminished Chord: C Eb Gb Bb

5. Augmented – Augmented chords use the 1st, 3rd, and sharp 5th, and flat 7th notes of the major scale

C Augmented 7th Chord: C E G# Bb

-Chords are indicated with chord symbols typically above the staff and use these symbols to represent the different chord types:

       Major: Cmaj7   CM7   Cma7

       Minor: Cmin7   C-7   Cmi7

       Dominant: C7 (You can tell if a chord symbol is dominant because there are no letters after the root)

       Half Diminished: Cmin7(b5) or   C-7(b5)   or C∅7

       Augmented: Caug7   C7(#5)   C+7

-Sometimes composers want to add additional notes to the sound of a chord, so they use "extensions" or "alterations" to do that.   Some typical extensions include:

       9 = add the 9th note of the scale on top (one note past the octave)

       b5 = lower the 5th note of the scale by ½ step

       b9 or #9 = lower or raise the 9th by ½ step

Here are some chord symbols with extensions to help illustrate:

C 7(b9) = C dominant chord with the lowered 9th scaled degree added on top.   (C E G Bb Db)

Bb+7(#9) = Bb augmented 7th chord with a raised 9th scale degree (Bb D F# Ab C#)

Eb9(#11) = Eb Dominant 9th chord with a raised 11th scale degree (Eb G Bb Db F A)