# Piano Voicing Mnemonics

## I. One-Handed Jazz Voicings for Major 7, Dominant 7, and Minor 7 Chords

### A. Category A (3rd in the lowest voice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chord Quality</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
<th>Voicing in C</th>
<th>Mnemonic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>3 7 9</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Chord Diagram" /></td>
<td>Look at root at the top and “spread out” (up a whole, down a half); 3rd in lowest voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
<td>3 b7 9</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Chord Diagram" /></td>
<td>Look at root at the top and “spread out” (up a whole, down a whole); 3rd in lowest voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>b3 b7 9</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Chord Diagram" /></td>
<td>Look at root at the top and “spread out” (up a whole, down a whole); b3rd in lowest voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### B. Category B (7th in the lowest voice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chord Quality</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
<th>Voicing in C</th>
<th>Mnemonic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>7 3 5</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Chord Diagram" /></td>
<td>Look at triad and lower root a half step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
<td>b7 3 6</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Chord Diagram" /></td>
<td>Look at triad and “spread out” outer voices a whole step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>b7 b3 5</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Chord Diagram" /></td>
<td>Look at minor triad and lower root a whole step</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Common LH Chord Fingering:** 5 2 1  
**Common RH Chord Fingering:** 1 3 5  
(exception -- category B dominant 7 voicing: 1 2 5)

## II. II V I Progression in Major

### A. Chord Qualities
1. II chord is minor 7 (II-)
2. V chord is dominant 7 (V7)
3. I chord is major 7 (IΔ)

### B. Example in the key of C

1. C major scale:  
   ![C Major Scale](image)  
   
2. II V I in the Key of C: D- G7 CA  
   
   note: any 3 chords in a row progressing counterclockwise around the circle is a II V I in the key of the 3rd chord, e.g., C- F7 BbΔ is a II V I in Bb; F- Bb7 EbΔ is a II V I in Eb; etc.

### C. Good voice-leading: 3rd to 7th and 7th to 3rd
1. the 7th moves down a half step to become the 3rd of the next chord  
2. the 3rd stays on the same note to become the 7th of the next chord

Note that to progress from a II- to a V7: only one note moves (the 7th of the II- moves down a half step to become the 3rd of the V7); the other two notes remain the same
Example 1: Category A to B to A

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II-</td>
<td>V7</td>
<td>I∆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b7</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b3</td>
<td>b7</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY OF C

D - G7 C∆

KEY OF F

G - C7 F∆

KEY OF Bb

C - F7 Bb∆

Example 2: Category B to A to B

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II-</td>
<td>V7</td>
<td>I∆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b3</td>
<td>b7</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b7</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY OF C

D - G7 C∆

KEY OF F

G - C7 F∆

KEY OF Bb

C - F7 Bb∆
IV. One-Handed Jazz Voicings for Half Diminished and Dominant 7 Altered Chords

A. **Category A** (3rd in the lowest voice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chord Quality</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
<th>Voicing in C</th>
<th>Mnemonic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CØ</td>
<td>b3 b5 b7 R</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="image" /></td>
<td>m7b5 chord in first inversion (b3 on bottom, root on top)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7alt</td>
<td>3 #5 b7 b9</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="image" /></td>
<td>think category A dominant 7 voicing, lower 9th (and add #5 which is a whole step below the b7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. **Category B** (7th in the lowest voice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chord Quality</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
<th>Voicing in C</th>
<th>Mnemonic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CØ</td>
<td>b7 R b3 b5</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="image" /></td>
<td>m7b5 chord in third inversion (b7 on bottom, “point” to root)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7alt</td>
<td>b7 b9 3 #5</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="image" /></td>
<td>think category B dominant 7 voicing, lower 6th (and add b9 which is a half step above the root)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Common LH Chord Fingering:** 5 3 2 1  
**Common RH Chord Fingering:** 1 2 3 5

*note: for Category B half diminished chord, use 5 4 2 1*

V. II V I Progression in Minor

A. **Chord Qualities**
   1. II chord is half diminished (IIØ)
   2. V chord is dominant 7 altered (V7alt)
   3. I chord is minor (I-)

B. Example in the key of C minor: **DO G7alt C-**

C. **Good voice-leading:** 3rd to 7th and 7th to 3rd
   1. from the **IIØ**, find the whole step interval in your voicing and “spread out,” i.e., the *higher note moves up a half step* and the *lower note moves down a half step* (the other two notes remain the same), then you’re automatically on the V7alt chord
   2. from the **V7alt**, the b7 moves down a whole step; all other voices move down a half step
Example 1:  Category A to B to A

**KEY OF C MINOR**

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\text{IIØ} & \text{V7alt} & \text{I-} \\
\hline
R & H & b5 & H & 9 \\
b7 & H & 3 & H & b7 \\
b5 & b9 & H & 5 \\
b3 & b7 & W & b3 \\
\end{array}
\]

**KEY OF G MINOR**

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\text{IIØ} & \text{V7alt} & \text{I-} \\
\hline
R & H & b5 & H & 9 \\
b7 & H & 3 & H & b7 \\
b5 & b9 & H & 5 \\
b3 & b7 & W & b3 \\
\end{array}
\]

---

Example 2:  Category B to A to B

**KEY OF C MINOR**

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\text{IIØ} & \text{V7alt} & \text{I-} \\
\hline
b5 & b9 & H & 5 \\
b3 & b7 & W & b3 \\
R & H & #5 & H & 9 \\
b7 & H & 3 & H & b7 \\
\end{array}
\]

**KEY OF G MINOR**

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\text{IIØ} & \text{V7alt} & \text{I-} \\
\hline
b5 & b9 & H & 5 \\
b3 & b7 & W & b3 \\
R & H & #5 & H & 9 \\
b7 & H & 3 & H & b7 \\
\end{array}
\]
### Common Two-Handed Piano Voicings

(two notes in the LH, three notes in the RH)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Scale Name</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Two-Hand Voicings*</th>
<th>Mnemonic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Major Scale" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Two-Hand Voicings" /></td>
<td>RH pinky on the root, come down in 4ths in both hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>same as above - just lower top note ½ step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RH pinky on the 5th, come down in 4ths in both hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C⁷</td>
<td>Mixolydian</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Mixolydian Scale" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Two-Hand Voicings" /></td>
<td>RH pinky on the root, come down in 4ths in RH; 3 &amp; b7 in LH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th mode of maj</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RH pinky on the 5th, come down in 4ths in RH; b7 &amp; 3 in LH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>Dorian</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Dorian Scale" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Two-Hand Voicings" /></td>
<td>RH pinky on the root, come down in 4ths in RH; b3 &amp; b7 in LH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd mode of maj</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“point” to R in RH and go up a 4th and down a 4th; b7 &amp; b3 in LH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*#5
**C**

- **Locrian 7th mode of maj**
  - Avoid tone: b9th (Db)
  - Think A voicing of dominant 7 chord up a raised 5th ($C^9 = Ab7$)

- **Diminished (whole-half)**
  - Start on any chord tone on the bottom; play a tritone above it, then skip a minor 3rd between hands; then play a tritone in the RH

- **C7sus4 Mixolydian 5th mode of maj**
  - Avoid tone: 3rd (E)
  - Think A voicing of minor 7 chord up a 5th ($C7sus4 = G$)
  - Think B voicing of minor 7 chord up a 5th ($C7sus4 = G$)

- **C7b9 Diminished (half-whole)**
  - Start on any chord tone but the root (i.e., 3, 5, b7, or b9); play a tritone above it, then skip a minor 3rd between hands; then play a tritone in the RH

- **C7alt Super Locrian 7th mode of mel min**
  - Think A voicing of dominant 7 chord and raise RH up ½ step
  - Think B voicing of dominant 7 chord and lower RH down ½ step

Note: In the Jamey Aebersold books and in Pocket Changes, $C7+9 = C7alt$

*“Category A” chords have the 3rd in the lowest voice; “Category B” chords have the 7th in the lowest voice.*

**All voicings have five notes with the exception of the diminished and dominant 7b9 voicings which have four (two notes in each hand).
Jazz Piano Pedagogy
Voicings Teaching/Learning Sequence*

I. Major
   A. One-Hand Voicings
      1. Category A: LH root / RH chord
      2. Category B: LH root / RH chord
      3. Alternate A-B beginning with A: LH root / RH chord
      4. Alternate B-A beginning with B: LH root / RH chord
      5. All of the above: chord in LH (RH tacit)
   B. Two-Hand Voicings
      1. Category A
      2. Category B
      3. Alternate A-B beginning with A
      4. Alternate B-A beginning with B

II. Dominant 7
    A. Repeat I with dominant chords
    B. Play Bb Blues (first alone, then with play-along recording)
       1. LH root / RH chord (start with both A and B; use best voice leading)
       2. Chords in LH (RH tacit)
       3. Chords in LH / head in RH
       4. Two-Handed Voicings (start with both A and B; use best voice leading)
       5. Chords in LH / related chord scales in RH (not in tempo)
       6. Chords in LH / improvise in RH
   C. Play Watermelon Man: follow steps II B 1-6 above

III. Minor
    A. Repeat I with minor chords
    B. Play Song for My Father: follow steps II B 1-6 above
    C. Play Impressions: follow steps II B 1-6 above (also learn “So What” voicing)
    D. Play Maiden Voyage: follow steps II B 1-6 above
    E. Play Cantaloupe Island: follow steps II B 1-6 above (also learn two-handed “Cantaloupe Island” accompaniment figure)

IV. II V I in Major (II- V7 I)
    A. Alternate A-B-A beginning with A: LH root / RH chord
    B. Alternate B-A-B beginning with B: LH root / RH chord
    C. A and B above: chord in LH (RH tacit)
    D. A and B above: two-handed voicings
    E. Play Satin Doll: follow steps II B 1-6 above

V. Half-Diminished - Repeat I with half-diminished chords

VI. Dominant 7 Altered - Repeat I with dominant 7 altered chords

VII. II V I in Minor (IIø V7alt I-)
    A. repeat IV A-D with minor II V I
    B. Play Blue Bossa: follow steps II B 1-6 above
    C. Play Summertime: follow steps II B 1-6 above
    D. Play Footprints: follow steps II B 1-6 above
    E. Play Autumn Leaves: follow steps II B 1-6 above

VIII. Diminished
    A. Repeat I with diminished chords
    B. Play Doxy: follow steps II B 1-6 above

IX. Dominant 7b9
    A. Repeat I with dominant 7b9 chords
    B. Repeat VII A, substituting V7b9 for V7alt (IIø V7b9 I-)
    C. Play F Blues: follow steps II B 1-6 above

* All tunes above can be found in Jamey Aebersold’s Play-Along Volume 54: “Maiden Voyage” and can be ordered from www.jazzbooks.com