

Here are a few examples of some of the more interesting and rarer chords found in some popular songs.

The first example is from the song "[Sincerity is Scary](#)" by The 1975. This loop repeats basically the entire song. The E/F chord, or F[°]Δ7, works as a diminished chord leading into the F#m7 chord. It is usually easier for me to calculate how to play an E/F chord rather than an F[°]Δ7 chord so that is why it is written that way. It is a matter of preference though so write it whichever way makes most sense to you.

| Dmaj9 | E/F | F#m7 | G9 |

This example comes from the song "[Cinderella](#)" by Mac Miller. The F/Db is really a Db+Δ7 chord borrowed from the harmonic minor scale, and works as an embellishment chord to the Dbmaj7 chord. Just like the last example, this chord is usually easier to read as a slash chord rather than an augmented major seventh chord which is why I chose to write it as F/Db. In this part of the song the guitar adds a 13 to the first Dbmaj7 and a 9 to the last one.

Dbmaj7 F/Db Dbmaj7
It's only right that right after love, I write my name

These three chords from Queen's "[We are the Champions](#)" are a combination of interesting dominant chords used to modulate to the chorus. The first chord, Ab/Bb functions as a B9sus4 chord with no 5. The next chord Ab+/Bb is really just an inverted C+7 chord in disguise. Of course with augmented chords there are many different ways to spell out the chord depending on how you want to think of it, but the simplest way to think of this chord is as an augmented seventh chord. Because the previous chord is an Ab/Bb chord, I wrote this chord as Ab+/Bb instead of C+/Bb to make it easier to think about. Fm/Bb could be written as Bb7sus2 but again it is easier to picture moving from Ab+/Bb to Fm/Bb rather than C+7 to Bb7sus2. Either way it is helpful to understand what type of chord you are playing.

Ab/Bb Ab+/Bb Fm/Bb C7
And we mean to go on and on and on and on

This is one of the weirder examples on the list from the song "[Unluck](#)" by James Blake. Gm/F# could be called an F+(b9) chord but the b9 is pretty subtle in the chord. This could also be thought of as an inverted G-Δ7 chord. Either way, this chord carries a bit of tension which dissolves into the next Eb chord.

Dm Gm/F# Eb Bb Am Gm
Only child take good care I wouldn't like you playing, falling there

The first chord in the song "[Too Late](#)" by Mat Zo is not only an interesting voicing for a dominant seventh chord, but also a unique way of using that chord in context with the song. The chord is played on the guitar with the B and C (3 and 11) played right next to each other creating some dissonance. This chord is similar to a C Δ 9sus4 chord and could be spelled as a B $^{\circ}$ (b9)/G or an F6sus#4/G.

G7add11 Ab6 Ebsus2 F G7add11
Look out the window... All I see is rain similar to C Δ 7sus4 or

This example and the next one are both from the song "[I Can't Help It](#)" by Michael Jackson. This progression was actually written by Stevie Wonder who is a great person to study if you want to learn practical uses of interesting chords. The A13(#11) chord in this song is played with the A and E (1 and 5) in the left hand with a G, B, C#, D#, and F# (7, 9, 3, #11, and 13) in the right hand. The easiest way for me to think of this chord is as a G Δ 7b5/A which doesn't actually include the D# note.

A13(#11) Abmaj9 A13(#11) Abmaj9
Looking in my mirror... Took me by surprise

The Eb+7(#9) chord from the same song is a very similar chord to A13(#11). In fact the only difference is that they have different bass notes. While A13(#11) could be thought of as G Δ 7b5/A, Eb+7(#9) could be spelled G Δ 7b5/E. As I mentioned earlier, some tetrads, like the major seventh b5 chord, that are rare on their own can come in handy when playing upper structure chords.

Db7sus2 Eb+7(#9) Emaj7 F#m7 G#m7 Amaj7
Running often through my mind

Similar to the previous example, these two chords from Kanye West's "[Violent Crimes](#)" can be thought of as G Δ 7b5/A and G6b5/D# respectively. Thinking about the chords in this way makes them easier to play, two chords that seem distant now only look like slightly different chords. The A7(9,13) is a very popular voicing that Stevie Wonder uses a lot for dominant chords. The D#+7(b9) chord is a less popular voicing but still used.

A7(9,13) D#+7(b9) G#-7
Even the scary nights

This example comes from an actual Stevie Wonder song, "[All in Love is Fair](#)". This voicing for the Am6(9) chord is easiest to think about as a C Δ 7(b5)/A chord. This is another example of the power of unpopular tetrads being used for upper structure chords. In this case it is used as a minor chord which then moves to D13 or really C Δ 7b5/D. Even though C Δ 7b5/D is

technically a D7(9,13,no5) chord, it is easier to write it as D13 because in essence it is a D13 chord. This also gives each musician the room to use their own favorite 13th chord voicings.

G#7/C C#m C#m/B A#m7b5 Am6(9)
But all is fair in love.... I had to go away
 D13 E/B C#9 F#13 B7sus2 E
A writer takes his pen to write the words again, that all in love is fair

The last few examples are from songs that I haven't written an analysis for, partly because they get pretty complicated at certain parts and I haven't yet felt like digging into all of that. With that being said the few lines that I have analyzed below each provide a lot of interesting chords to unpack and analyze.

This first example comes from the ending of "New York State of Mind" by Billy Joel. The second chord in this phrase is another example of the 'Hendrix Chord'. Again it might be easier to think of as a G#°Δ7/E chord when voicing the chord. The last three chords of the song are the more interesting chords in this section. The piano actually plays them as D-7, DbΔ7(13), and then CΔ7(9,#11,13). The violin plays a G note over the last three chords giving the D-7 chord it's 11 and the DbΔ7 chord its #11. The b9 in the DbΔ7 chord actually comes from the saxophone so the separation of instruments eases some tension between the C, Db and D notes. The last chord can be thought of as a B-7/C polychord with a C triad in the left hand and a B-7 in the right. When the last chord is played it almost feels as if we've shifted the tonic up a whole step.

| C | E7(#9) | Am7 | Bb9 | Eb6 AbΔ7 | D-7(11) DbΔ7(b9,#11,13) | CΔ7(9,#11,13) |

This progression comes from the song "Too High" by Stevie Wonder and it is all played on one keyboard. It might look complicated at first glance but the first 6 chords follow a simple pattern of descending Δ7b5 chords down the whole tone scale, all with an E in the bass. With that being said, these chords can all be analyzed on their own without the bass note in mind, or they can all be analyzed in respect to the E in the bass. The first 6 chords could be analyzed just as one weird E chord that eventually resolves down to Am9. In this case the upper part of the one big E chord follows a 'constant structure' which is a type of progression that moves the same type of chord either up or down by the same number of semitones. Each of the 6 E chords analyzed on their own are all interesting in their own way. The first chord can be analyzed as a weird sort of Esus2(b5,b9,b13) chord. This one is definitely the hardest one to analyze in respect to E because it has an E, F, and F# note. The second chord is just EΔ7b5 but it could also be analyzed as an EΔ7(#11) chord with no 5. The third chord is the E13 voicing we talked about earlier. The fourth chord could be thought of as Esus2(b13). The fifth could be seen as an E7sus4(b5) chord and the last chord is E+7(#9) which resolves perfectly into an Am9 chord. Am9 might be easier to think of as CΔ7/A.

GbΔ7b5/E EΔ7b5 DΔ7b5/E CΔ7b5/E BbΔ7b5/E AbΔ7b5/E Am9

I'm too high, I'm too high, but I ain't touched the sky

This example is one of the more unconventional ones on the list. Usually I would try to avoid spelling a chord with an added 10 (major 3), one because major chords already have it included and minor chords usually specifically don't include that note for a reason, and two because it's just not that popular and could end up confusing people. If we were spelling this chord regardless of the order of notes I would probably call it a $C\Delta 7(\#9)$ chord, but because of how the chord works in this context, it is probably best understood as $C-\Delta 7(10)$. The original song that this comes from is "As The World Caves In" by Matt Maltese which has a less complicated harmony than the one listed above. This particular harmony that I wrote down actually comes from a video that stirred up some discourse on Tik Tok. Adam Neely does a pretty in depth video about it which can be watched here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqsnqlw--RU&t=528s>. Some of the reasons I named it a $C-\Delta 7(10)$ chord instead of $C\Delta 7(\#9)$ is because the original progression plays it as a minor chord and in the Tik Tok video the major 3 is sung in the harmony. The harmony actually sings an $E(10)$ a semitone above the $Eb(b3)$ that the piano is playing, creating some more spice in the harmony. As Adam Neely explains it in his video, although the added 10 creates tension with the $b3$, the 10 harmonizes well with the $\Delta 7$ sung in the melody which is why this chord could work. The melody is singing the $B(\Delta 7)$ a fifth above the harmony. The piano just plays a C to Cm while the strings play an Eb an octave higher than the harmony. Personally I really like this chord especially when used in this way. Analyzed on its own it's hard to classify as a major or minor chord, it seems most like a mixture of both to me but it could be guided in any direction. Chords or harmony like this blur the lines between the concepts of major and minor which is why there are many different schools of thought when it comes to defining major chords and minor chords. We will explore this concept a little more later on in the conclusions.

$C\Delta 7$ $C-\Delta 7(10)$ $C-6/9$ $G6$ $B+ B7$
Oh girl it's you that I lie with as the atom bomb locks in

This last progression is a cadence I came across while messing around on the piano. It is somewhat similar to the last 3 chords of "New York State of Mind" that we looked at earlier only with a few added notes. Because it is a little difficult to read, I included 4 different ways of analyzing the two 7-note chords and one 8-note chord. The first shows the chords written out normally, just below that is the notes used in each chord in order, below that is the chords expressed as polychords, and lastly what scale each chord fits into. The last chord is really the main chord I wanted to highlight because it is a pretty strange chord especially when written down. The obvious note that sticks out is the $C\#$, especially since there is already a C note and a D note. Because of this I can only think to call the $C\#$ a $\#8$ because the 1 and 2 are already involved in the chord. Similarly to the previous example, the $C\#$ note harmonizes with the $F\#$ a fifth below which harmonizes with the B another 5th below. These harmonies conflict with the root chord, but they still provide some interesting and even satisfying harmonies that resonate against the other main harmonies of the chord. Like the example from "New York State of Mind"

the tonic note is a little more fragile with the last chord as it almost seems to shift up a whole step.

| Dm7(9,11,13) | G7(b9,11,13) | CΔ7(9,#11,13) +#8 |

(D,A,F,C,E,G,B) (G,D,F,B,E,Ab,C) (C,G,E,B,D,F#,A,C#)

CΔ7/Dm

E+/G7

DΔ7/CΔ7

C major scale C harmonic major C Lydian with added #8

More song analyses can be found [here](#).

The full study of every possible chord can be found [here](#).

Study on dominant chords and their movements can be found [here](#).