

How to Interpret Chord Charts That Have Interval/Scale Degree Symbols

(See below for cheat-sheet)

Roman Numerals/Degrees For Scale Notes

Take the example of the C Major Scale, which includes the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, and B (white keys on the piano). We will symbolize these notes of C through B using the chord symbols I(C), ii(D), iii(E), IV(F), V(G), vi(A), vii(B). I through vii are the roman numerals for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

When in G Major, the notes run G, A, B, C, D, E, F#. G would be I in the key of G Major, and C would be IV.

When in G Minor, the notes run G, A, Bb, C, D, Eb, F. G would be 'i' in G minor, and V would be D.

More on upper/lower case numerals below.

Building The Chords For Each Scale Degree

We can build 7 triads (basic chords) with this set of notes - one starting on each note of the scale.

To build the triad starting on the first (I) note of the scale, we'd take the I, skip ii, take iii, skip IV, and use V. (1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the scale). In the key of C Major, that would be C - E - G, which makes a C major chord.

To build the triad on vi, one uses vi, skips vii, uses I, skips ii, and uses iii. (6th, 1st and 3rd notes of the scale). In the key of C Major, that would be A - C - E, which makes an A minor chord.

To re-iterate, in any scale, choose a "root note", and build a chord from it by taking every second note in the scale until you have 3 notes.

What's With The Capital Numerals?

When in a major key (any of the 12 keys), the I, IV, and V chords are always major chords. The ii, iii, vi, and vii chords are always minor, just by virtue of the tonal relationships between the notes in the major scale (actually, vii is a "diminished" chord). So, I use upper case numerals to symbolize major chords, and lower case numerals to symbolize minor chords. I find it easier to differentiate the chords when they're written this way and I'm trying to follow a complicated chart. For example, it's easy to mistake IV and VI in a busy chart, but less so with IV and vi.

(See Next Page for Cheat-Sheet)

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Chord/Interval Cheat-Sheet By Key

Major Scale	Related Minor Scale	I Chord	ii Chord	iii Chord	IV Chord	V Chord	vi Chord	vii Chord
C Major	a minor	C Maj	d min	e min	F Maj	G Maj	a min	b dim*
Db Major	b _b minor	Db Maj	eb min	f min	Gb Maj	Ab Maj	b _b min	c dim
D Major	b minor	D Maj	e min	f# min	G Maj	A Maj	b min	c# dim
Eb Major	c minor	Eb Maj	f min	g min	Ab Maj	Bb Maj	c min	d dim
E Major	c# minor	E Maj	f# min	g# min	A Maj	B Maj	c# min	d# dim
F# Major	d# minor	F# Maj	g# min	a# min	B Maj	C# Maj	d# min	e# dim
G Major	e minor	G Maj	a min	b min	C Maj	D Maj	e min	f# dim
Ab Major	f minor	Ab Maj	b _b min	c min	Db Maj	Eb Maj	f min	g dim
A Major	f# minor	A Maj	b min	c# min	D Maj	E Maj	f# min	g# dim
Bb Major	g minor	Bb Maj	c min	d min	Eb Maj	F Maj	g min	a dim
B Major	g# minor	B Maj	c# min	d# min	E Maj	F# Maj	g# min	a# dim

* Diminished
Chord