

School Chart Voicings

by [Per Danielsson](#)

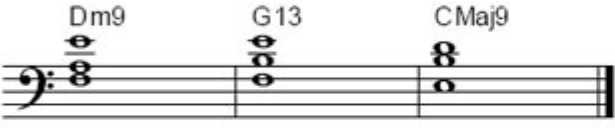
The most frequently asked questions from beginner jazz students relate to voicings. How do I get that jazz sound? How do I know what notes to use? Which notes are the important ones? There are no quick answers to these questions but there are some techniques and practice tips that can be applied in order to get a solid understanding of how voicings are built.

I decided to apply this one technique to a sample big band school chart (per request from one of our readers). Lower level school charts often come with very basic voicings to make it easy for the students to read and follow along in the chart. The problem is if the student does not have a knowledgeable teacher, he or she is going to get stuck with the given voicings, which don't necessarily have the jazz sound.


It is possible to write down a bunch of voicings but it is more helpful to learn some basic techniques that can help you learn how to create your own voicings. By learning the essential progression 1 and 2 you, will soon understand the concept on which standard jazz voicings are built. The most important thing to understand with these voicings is the importance of the 3rd and the 7th. The interval that these two notes create is the backbone of a jazz voicing. The voicing then becomes complete when you add a 9th, 13th, 11th and in some cases a 5th. In order to apply these voicings you need to understand and know the notes on which a chord is built. In other words, locate the tonic, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, 11th and 13th. Lets take a look at these essential progressions.

Essential progression 1.

The following two progressions are built on a ii-V-I progression which is the most common progression in the jazz language.

			Chord Construction		
	→		Dm7	G13	CMaj7
			E-9th	E-13	D-9th
			C-7th	B-3rd	B-7th
			F-3rd	F-7th	E-3rd

Essential progression 2.

			Chord Construction		
	→		Gm7	C9	FMaj7
			D-5th	D-9th	C-5th
			Bb-3rd	Bb-7th	A-3rd
			F-7th	E-3rd	E-7th

Note that all of these voicings contain the 3rd and the 7th. Even when played with only the left hand, the sound will differ greatly from the standard indicated voicings. Also pay attention to the rich and full sound that the 9th and 13th creates. These notes are called upper structure notes and they are the notes that give a voicing its unique character.

The following example is what many published big band piano parts look like. The voicings are very basic and there is also no rhythm indicated. Take a moment to look at these chords and analyze them.

1. Make sure you are secure about where the 3rd and 7th are.
2. Practice playing the chords with only the 3rd and 7th in the left hand.
3. Practice playing the 3rd and 7th in the right hand. If you want you can play the root of the chord in the left hand.
4. It is helpful if you indicate with a pen the 3rd and 7th.
5. Keep in mind that it doesn't matter in what order you play the 3rd and 7th. Actually, it is preferred that you change the order around so that sometimes you have the 3rd on the bottom and the 7th on top, and the other way around.

Medium Swing

School Chart

Dm7
G7
Em7
A7

Am7
D7
Abm7
Db7
1 CMaj7
A7

2 CMaj7
Gm7
C7

FMaj7
Bb7
Am7
D7
Dm7
G7

In this example I have incorporated the voicings from the essential progressions to build some nice sounding chords. The bracket indicates the foundation of the voicings. The added notes are either the root of the chord or other chord tones. Also, note that sometimes the essential voicing is spread out between the hands. By incorporating the voicings from the essential progression you will soon be able to explore the great sound of jazz voicings.

Dm9 G13 Em9 A13

The first system of music is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. Each measure contains a single chord: Dm9, G13, Em9, and A13. The chords are written in both treble and bass clefs.

Am9 D9 A \flat m9 D \flat 9 C^IMaj9 A13

The second system of music is in 4/4 time and consists of six measures. The chords are: Am9, D9, A \flat m9, D \flat 9, C^IMaj9, and A13. The first four measures are grouped together, and the last two are grouped together. The system ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

² C^IMaj9 Gm9 C9

Fine

The third system of music is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The chords are: C²Maj9, Gm9, and C9. The second measure contains a repeat sign. The system ends with a double bar line and repeat dots, and the word "Fine" is written below the bass staff.

F^IMaj9 B \flat 13 Am7 D9 Dm9 G13

The fourth system of music is in 4/4 time and consists of six measures. The chords are: F^IMaj9, B \flat 13, Am7, D9, Dm9, and G13. The system ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

D.C. al 2nd ending