

m7 Shell Chords

One of the most important chords in jazz, m7 voicings are used to outline both iim7 and Im7 changes, among others.

Because of this, you use m7 chords in both major and minor ii V I's, making them essential learning for any jazz guitarist.

Before you take these chords to the fretboard, here's how you build m7 chords from an intervallic standpoint.

As well, though it's not essential, it's helpful to know that m7 chords are related to the Dorian scale.

To build a m7 chord, you use the following intervals.

- Root
- b3 (minor 3rd)
- 5 (perfect 5th)
- b7 (minor 7th)

As you're studying shell chords, you don't play the 5th with m7 chords.

This means that you play the following intervals for each m7 chord.

- Root
- b3
- b7

Now that you know how to build m7 chords, you're ready to play them on guitar.

m7 Voicings

With the knowledge of how to build m7 chords under your belt, you now take these essential chords to the fretboard.

Here are two different m7 shell chords that you can learn and run through various keys in your studies.

There's one m7 chord with a root on the 5th string and one with a root on the 6th string.

When you have these shapes down, pluck the notes and sing each one as you create an ear training exercise from these shapes.

Audio Example 10

Dm⁷

R b3 b7 R b7 b3

T 5 10 10 10
A 3 10 10 10
B 5 5 10 10

m7 Shell Chords Exercises

With these m7 shell chords under your fingers, you're ready to bring them to all 12 keys in your practice routine.

Here's a 12-key progression that starts with Dm7 on the 5th string, and then moves to the other 11 keys from there.

Go slow with this exercise, bringing in a metronome when you feel ready.

If you can jam these chords to a metronome with confidence, add rhymes from the start of this book to take things further.

Audio Example 11

The image displays musical notation and fretboard diagrams for m7 shell chords in 12 keys. The first staff shows chords from Dm7 to Dbm7, and the second staff shows F#m7, Bm7, Em7, and Am7. Each chord is accompanied by a fretboard diagram showing the positions of the 3rd, 5th, and 7th strings (T, A, B) for the thumb, index, and middle fingers respectively.

Chord	T (3rd)	A (5th)	B (7th)
Dm7	5	3	5
Gm7	3	3	3
Cm7	3	1	3
Fm7	1	1	1
Bbm7	13	11	13
Ebm7	11	11	11
Abm7	11	9	11
Dbm7	9	9	9
F#m7	9	7	9
Bm7	7	7	7
Em7	7	5	7
Am7	5	5	5

In the next exercise, you run all 12 keys starting with Dm7 on the 5th string, moving to the closest next chords from that point.

Once you have this progression under your fingers, bring a metronome into your practice and vary the rhythms.

When ready, play the first and second versions of this m7 exercise back-to-back to compare them on the guitar.

Audio Example 12

Dm⁷ Gm⁷ Cm⁷ Fm⁷ Bbm⁷ Ebm⁷

T	10	10	8	8	6	6
A	10	8	8	6	6	4
B	10	10	8	8	6	6
10			8		6	

Abm⁷ Dbm⁷ F#m⁷ Bm⁷ Em⁷ Am⁷

T	4	4	2	14	12	12
A	4	2	2	12	12	10
B	4	4	2	14	12	12
4			2		12	

Taking m7 Shell Chords Further

If you can play m7 chords in all 12 keys, you can challenge yourself by raising the root note to the top of the chord.

These shapes come in handy when playing with bass players, or a second guitar, as they stay out of the range of a bassline.

They also focus on the highest note of the chord, which is a nice change from shell chords if you're comping for a long time on one song.

Here are two Dm7 chords with the root note raised to the upper strings.

Learn these shapes, and then when ready, take them to other keys and in your studies.

Audio Example 13

Dm7

The image shows a musical notation example for a Dm7 chord with the root note raised. The notation is in treble clef and shows two measures. The first measure contains a Dm7 chord with the root note (D) on the 2nd line (F#4). The second measure contains a Dm7 chord with the root note (D) on the 4th line (A4). Below the notation is a guitar fretboard diagram for the first four strings (T, A, B, E). The diagram shows two positions for the Dm7 chord. The first position has the root note (D) on the 2nd fret of the 4th string (E4). The second position has the root note (D) on the 4th fret of the 4th string (A4). The diagram also shows the 3rd and 7th of the chord for each position.

String	Position 1 (Root on 2nd fret)	Position 2 (Root on 4th fret)
T (Treble)	5	10
A (4th)	3	10
B (3rd)	3	10
E (2nd)	5	10

The last exercise removes the root note from each m7 shell voicing, leaving you with a rootless chord for each shape.

Rootless chords, in this case, contain the 3rd and 7th of the original chord.

The 3rd tells you if the chord is major or minor, and the 7th tells you whether it's maj7, 7, m7, dim7, etc. from there.

This is why the 3rd and 7th are the most important notes in any chord.

They also have their own name, guide tones, which you see a lot if you read lessons about jazz comping and soloing.

Even though you're not playing the root note, visualize the root as a guide to find the 3rd and 7th.

Here are two Dm7 rootless chords to get you started with these shapes in your studies.

If this material is beyond you right now, no worries. Go to the next chapter and when ready, return for another go at these shapes.

Audio Example 14

Dm7

Instrument	Chord 1 (F4, A4)	Chord 2 (F4, C5)
Tenor (T)	5	10
Alto (A)	3	10
Bass (B)	5	10