

How to Use the “Chord Tone Instant Random Practice Recall Worksheet”

The “Chord Tone Instant Random Practice Recall Worksheet” should be thought of as a kind of flash card set for helping you instantly recall chord spellings. It is NOT a progression to practice melodies that connect the chords (“playing the changes”) or to practice comping. Why? Because I am a firm believer that any notes that aren’t spelled out explicitly in the chord symbol (non-chord tones) are determined by the style of music being played and where the chord is going to or coming from.

For example, if you see a plain old C7, any note (extension) that you play that isn’t spelled out in that chord (C-E-G-Bb) will be dependent on a number of factors. If you are in the key of F minor, the 9th of that C7 will probably sound best as a b9 (Db) and the 13th will probably work better in many instances as a b13 (Ab). If you’re coming from a C#mi7 and playing that C7 before going to Bmaj7, the 9th and 13th will probably sound best as natural (D and A), but the 11th can now be added as a #11 (F#) to add a nice color. If you’re playing in a rock band, any note other than those 4 in the chord may not sound right at all. There are many possibilities of how to add extensions to that chord.

This exercise takes away the question “how do I extend this chord” by putting together chords that rarely would come after one another in real music. Hopefully, it will help get you out of the habit (a bad habit many young jazz musicians have) of automatically adding extensions to chords without thought.

A great way to practice this is to just take a chord degree (say, the 3rd) and play it on every chord. Put your metronome on and play the thirds of each chord (The first line, for example would be Eb-C-D#-G-F#-Ab).

Another great exercise is to pick a note and then play the closest note to it in the next chord. I call this using “voice-leading”. Remember to only play notes spelled in the chord. You could slowly work your way up or down. (The first line could go G-Gb-F#-G-F#-F or G-Ab-A-Bb-A-Ab or many other places).

If things get overwhelming, just pick one line and repeat it over and over. Or slow down the metronome. Start with just the roots. If it gets too easy for you, speed it up or make each chord last only one beat. You could also simply spell the chords as an arpeggio.

This worksheet is also a great companion to my “Enclosure Practice Packet.” If you play each chord for a measure instead of for just two beats, you can practice the various enclosures in the packet over each.