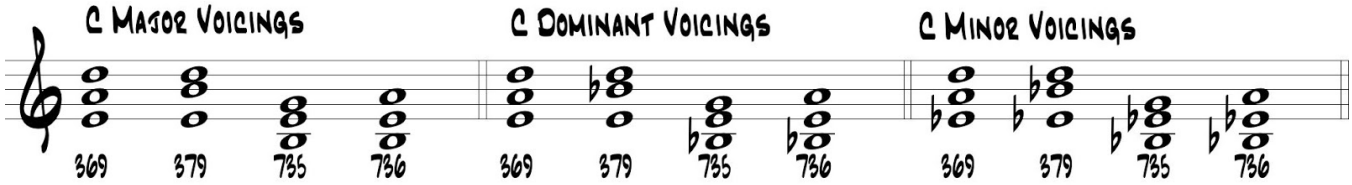
Jazz Chord Voicings - day 5

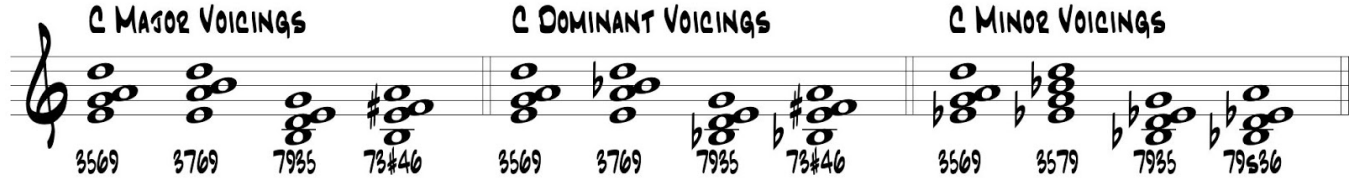
Rootless Shell Voicings

In jazz, we don't generally play root position voicings. Using inversions facilitates smooth connection of chords in a progression. Since, the 3rds and 7ths are the most important chord tones that identify the quality of a chord (major 7th, dominant 7th, minor 7th, etc.), shell voicings that include those tones are very effective in sounding the harmony.

First, we will examine four voicing shells that are very versatile: 3 - 6 - 9, 3 - 7 - 9, 7 - 3 - 5 and 7 - 3 - 6. Since probably 75% or 80% of all the chords we use are major 7th, dominant 7th or minor 7th chords, we will examine only those three families of chords at first.

Below are the four voicings applied to the three families of C chords, C Major, C Dominant and C Minor.



All four voicing shells are good for major chords. 3 - 6 - 9 may be used for a dominant 7th chord but doesn't have the 7th in it so does not give a clear picture of the chord which needs a lowered 7th! The other three voicings are good for dominant 7th chords. All four voicings are okay for minor chords but the 3 - 6 - 9 voicing is not a good choice if the minor chord is a II chord. When a II chord resolves to a
V chord, the 7th of the II chord moves down to the 3rd of the V chord. So a minor II chord should have a 7th in it! The 7 - 3 - 6 voicing is very dissonant and should be used cautiously!

We can add chord tones into these "shells" to make them fuller sounding and to supply needed extensions. Also, if a tone is added that is either a whole step or a half step away from another chord tone, it adds a "tension" which makes the voicing sound "warmer." The next example shows added tones in the voicings.