

## Common Types of Slash Chords and How They Function Harmonically

by Dennis Winge

A slash chord is a chord with a note other than the root in the bass. If the bass note is in the chord, it is considered an inversion of the chord. However, if the note is outside the chord, you must understand how it functions harmonically in order to determine an appropriate voicing.

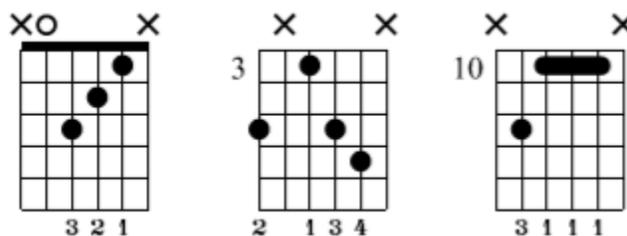
Let's explore some of the common slash chords and how they function harmonically. I am going to open a random fakebook (I chose "The Ultimate Pop/Rock Fake Book, 4<sup>th</sup> edition) and flip the pages until I see a song that uses slash chords (in this case, p. 319). The song "Little Jeannie" by Elton John is the example and it's in Bb.

It makes sense that the composer is a pianist because it is much easier for them to compose with slash chords than guitarists because they can simply play the bass note with the left hand and the chord with the right. It is very valuable for guitarists to learn about slash chords so they can make informed decisions about how to use them so can be as harmonically expressive as pianists.

I will deal with each of the slash chords used in this song individually:

**Eb/Bb** – This is a "second inversion" Eb chord. In other words, the 5<sup>th</sup> is in the bass. On guitar if you chose to leave the Bb out and just played the Eb chord, there would be no harm done, especially if there is a bass player playing with you. But the voicing is easy enough: play an Eb barre chord at the 6<sup>th</sup> fret and with the first finger, play the Bb underneath it on the 6<sup>th</sup> string.

**F/A** – This is a "first inversion" F chord, as the 3<sup>rd</sup> is in the bass. Again, if you just played an F chord, that wouldn't be a big deal. Or, you could simply play the open 5th string underneath a 4-note open F chord, as in the first of these possibilities:



**Ab/Eb** – This is a "second inversion" Ab chord. If you play a barre chord at the 4<sup>th</sup> fret and don't hit the 6<sup>th</sup> string root of *ab*, then your lowest note will be the *eb* and you're in business.

**Bb/F** – "Second inversion" Bb chord, which could be played at the first fret adding a low *f* or at the 6<sup>th</sup> fret leaving out string 6. (These are similar to some of the previous voicings. Working it out for yourself is better than reading a chord diagram.)

**C/G** – Same thing here: a "second inversion" C chord. Work out the fingerings in open position, 3<sup>rd</sup> fret, and 8<sup>th</sup> frets.

Eb/F – This is the first chord we see whose bass note is not part of the chord. It functions as an F9sus because the *eb*, *g*, and *bb* notes of the Eb chord are the b7, 9, and 4<sup>th</sup> of the key of F, which we now have to analyze the intervals according to because that is the root note of the chord. Knowing this theory means that, if in a pinch you had to play F7sus, that would be fine. It wouldn't have the 9<sup>th</sup> in it, but that's ok. On the other hand, if there is a bassist playing *f* then you could just play the Eb and leave it at that.

*Note: When you see a bass note that is a whole step up from a major chord, it functions as a 9sus chord to that bass root.*

Another page (p. 254) that has "I Won't Last a Day Without You" by Paul Williams and Roger Nichols shows an both Am/D and Am7/D. The Am has *a*, *c*, and *e* which is the 5<sup>th</sup>, b7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> to a D root. Thus, Am/D = D9 (no3rd) = D7sus2. The Am7 add the note *g* which is the 4<sup>th</sup> to the D root. Thus, Am7/D = D9sus. In reality you could most likely treat them both as Am7/D and sneak the *g* note in whether it's technically in the chord name or not. Boiling down even further, playing D7sus or even Dsus would also work.

*Note: When you see a bass note that is a fourth up from a minor chord, it functions as a 9sus chord to that bass root.*

It is also possible to see a slash chord such as G/F. Don't confuse this with F/G. They mean two completely different things. G/F means the chord is G7 with the 7<sup>th</sup> in the bass. If the chord was G/F# it would mean Gmaj7 with the 7<sup>th</sup> in the bass.

*Note: When you see a bass note that is a whole or half step below a major chord, it turns that chord into a major or 7<sup>th</sup> chord.*

The same is true for minor chords. Gm/F becomes Gm7 (3<sup>rd</sup> inversion), and Gm/F# becomes the 3<sup>rd</sup> inversion of a Gm(maj7), which simply means root, minor 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and major 7<sup>th</sup>.

*Note: When you see a bass note that is a whole or half step below a minor chord, it turns that chord into a minor 7<sup>th</sup> or a minor-major 7<sup>th</sup>, respectively.*

Other slash chords in this song are G(add9)/B, G(add9)/D which are the first and second inversions of a Gadd9, plus F/G and C/D which are similar to Eb/F we saw previously. So if this seems overwhelming, there are only a few common patterns to learn, and you'll see them over and over again.

Below is a summary of every possibility for slash chords after C and Cm. Some of them look complicated, and in certain cases I left the space blank because it was easier to conceive of the slash chord than think about the ambiguous function that is produced. Keep it simple: the ones to memorize are starred.

Example	Function
C/Db	Dbmin(maj7)b5
C/D*	D9sus (no 5 <sup>th</sup> )
C/Eb	Eb6b9
C/E	C, first inversion
C/F*	Fmaj9(no 3 <sup>rd</sup> )
C/Gb	
C/G	C, second inversion
C/Ab	Abmaj7#5
C/A	Am7
C/Bb*	C7, third inversion
C/B*	Cma7, third inversion
Cm/Db	Eb13, third inversion (Eb6 is same as Cm)
Cm/D	D7b9sus
Cm/Eb	Eb6 = Cm, first inversion
Cm/E	Cadd#9, first inversion
Cm/F*	F9sus(no 3 <sup>rd</sup> ) = F7sus2
Cm/Gb	
Cm/G	Cm, second inversion
Cm/Ab*	Abmaj7
Cm/A*	Am7b5
Cm/Bb*	Cm7, third inversion
Cm/B*	Cmin(maj7), third inversion