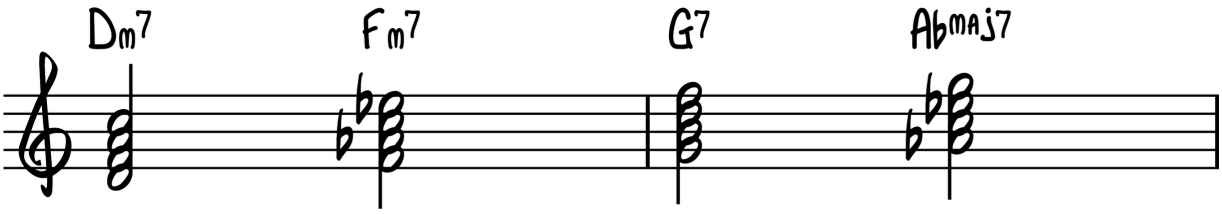
Make Your Chords Sound Neo-Soul
Resource Sheet

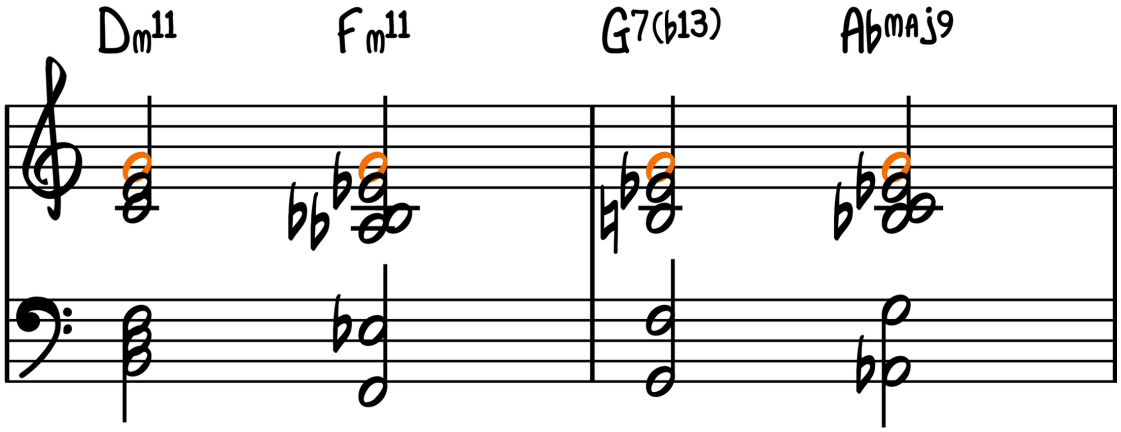
The following concepts can be applied to any chord progression to give that R&B / Neo-soul sound.

As an example, let's start with the following chord progression:



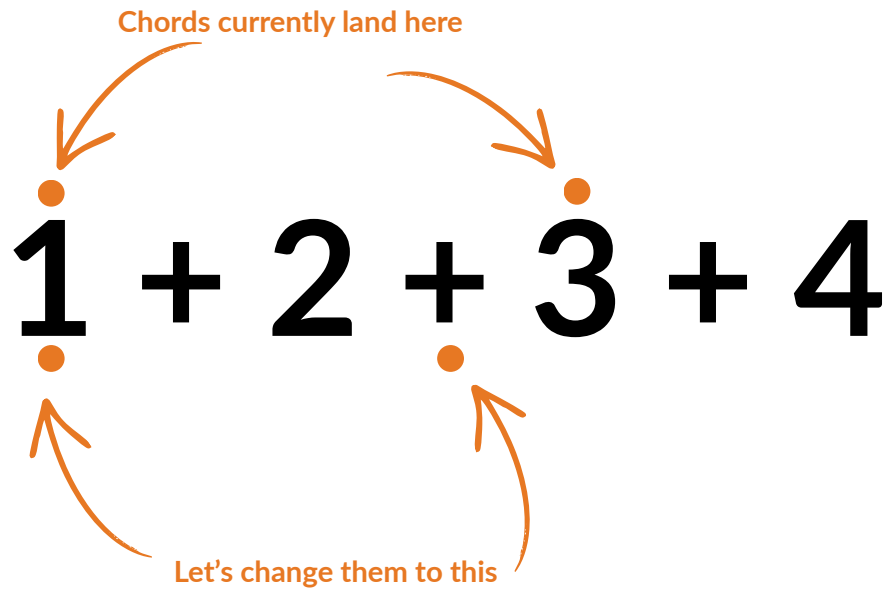
The first thing you want to do is find some more suitable voicings. There are many ways to approach this but one fantastic method is find a voicing for each chord with a common 'cover note'.

Eg, if we choose G as the cover note, this means we need to find a way of playing each voicing that has G on the top.

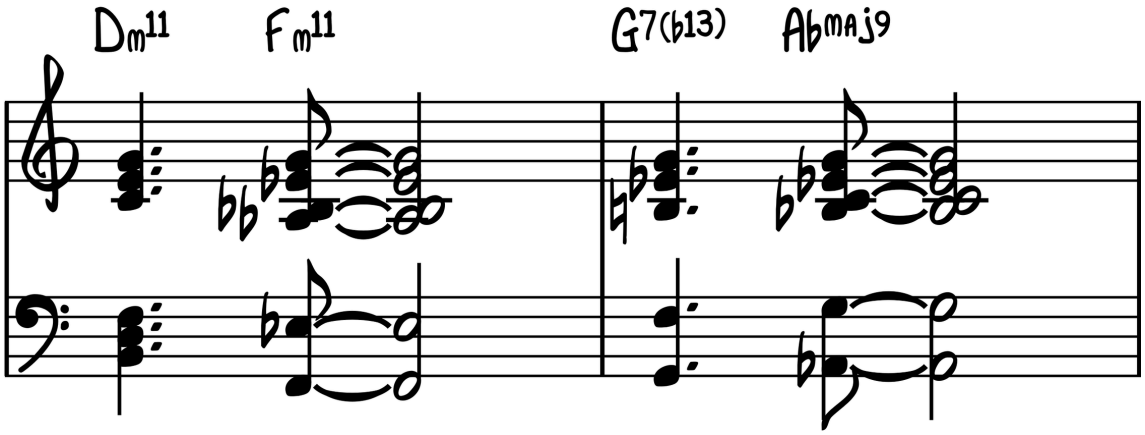


Notice how the top note is consistent across all the voicings. This creates very strong voice leading a gives that Neo-soul sound.

The next upgrade we could make to this progression is mix up the rhythm. At the moment, each chord lands on downbeats (1+3). We could move the rhythmic placement of some of the chords so that they land on the upbeats as well.



This is known as a 'pushed' rhythm. It adds some rhythmic interest to the progression.



Other options to upgrade your chords:

Chord Substitutions:
Try changing one of the chords in the progression to something less expected. Eg, swap out the Ab major for a C major. You could double the length of the progression and alternate between the two.

Note Rolls:
This is when you roll onto one of the notes within a chord. For the Dm chord, roll onto the note E from the D below. For the Ab major chord, roll onto the G from the F below.

Melody:
Add a simple pentatonic melody in between two of the chords.

RH Octave:
Play a 'delayed' octave in your RH towards the end of the progression. Play it high up on the piano and try adding a slight delay between the two notes.

If we take all of these concepts and apply them to the chord progression, we might end up with something that sounds like this:

