An interval describes the relationship between two pitches in terms of size and quality. A chord is a grouping of three or more pitches; a chord of only three pitches is called a trichord. A triad is a chord of three pitches which is constructed of stacked thirds. In order to describe a triad's quality, you must describe the thirds from which the triad is built.

To build a major triad, write the note a major third above the given note. (That is the same as writing the third degree of a major scale built on the given note.) Then, above that note, write the note a minor third above that. (That's the same note as the fifth degree of a major scale built on the given note.)

A major triad is therefore composed of a major third plus a minor third, which is the same as the first, third, and fifth degrees of a major scale built on the given note.

To build a minor triad, write the note a minor third above the given note. (That is the same as writing the third degree of a minor scale built on the given note.) Then, above that note, write the note a major third above that. (That's the same note as the fifth degree of a minor scale built on the given note.)

A minor triad is therefore composed of a minor third plus a major third, which is the same as the first, third, and fifth degrees of a minor scale built on the given note.
Triads can be built on all the degrees of the scale. The quality of the triad built on a given degree of any major scale is constant. For example, the triad built on the third degree of a major scale will always be minor; a triad built on the fifth degree will always be major. The quality of these diatonic triads (that is, triads built using only the pitches of a specified scale) is important in understanding how harmony works. Each triad has a name which describes its relationship to the tonic (the triad built on the keynote).

Subdominant  Submediant  Leading tone  Tonic  Supertonic  Mediant  Dominant

To abbreviate these harmonic functions, we use Roman numerals to indicate the scale degree the triad is built upon, while major or minor quality are indicated by upper or lower case, respectively. The key is indicated by an upper or lower case note name, followed by a colon.

C: I ii iii IV V vi vii°

The triad which is built on the seventh degree of the major scale is neither major nor minor. It is made of two superimposed minor thirds, while the interval between its bottom and top notes is not a perfect fifth, but diminished. Because of that interval, a diminished triad is unstable and has a great need to resolve (move to a more stable harmony). To show that a diminished triad is most closely akin to the minor triad, we use a lower case Roman numeral; to show that it isn’t exactly the same, a ° (degree symbol) follows the Roman numeral. The leading tone triad, therefore, is abbreviated vii°, indicating a diminished triad built on the seventh degree of the scale.
Like intervals, triads can be inverted. The process is similar, moving a note from the top to the bottom or vice versa. Since there are three notes in a triad, three positions, or inversions are possible.

Unlike intervals, triads retain their quality when inverted. (The chords above form the same major triad in all three positions. In the above context of B-flat major, the three chords are each functioning as the dominant [V] triad.) To distinguish the inversions, we use a system based on the intervals generated above the lowest sounding pitch.

In a root position triad, the three notes form intervals of a fifth and a third above the lowest note (the root of the triad). A dominant triad in root position could then be indicated by the roman numeral V to show a major triad built on the fifth degree of the scale (the dominant), while the position could be indicated by super- and subscript arabic numerals which describe the intervals between the lowest note and the other two notes: V₃. However, in the conventional shorthand most musicians use, a roman numeral without any arabic numerals indicates a triad in root position: V.

In a first inversion triad, the three notes form intervals of a sixth and a third above the lowest note (in this case, the third of the triad). A dominant triad in first inversion could then be indicated by the roman numeral V to show a major triad built on the fifth degree of the scale, while the position could be indicated by super- and subscript arabic 6 and 3 which describe the intervals found in this position: V₆. However, the conventional shorthand notation for a triad in first inversion uses only the 6; the 3 is assumed: V₆.

In a second inversion triad, the three notes form intervals of a sixth and a fourth above the lowest note (the fifth of the triad). A dominant triad in second inversion could then be indicated by the roman numeral V to show a major triad built on the fifth degree of the scale, while the position could be indicated by super- and subscript arabic 6 and 4 which describe the intervals found in this position: V₆. In this case, there is no shorthand notation: to indicate a triad in second inversion both the 6 and 4 are necessary: V₆.
Music 100
Assignment #5

Write a triad of the specified quality above the given note.

Write the specified triads. Use accidentals, not key signatures.

