

A non-chord tone (sometimes referred to as a non-harmonic tone) is a note which is not part of the accompanying harmony. It may be diatonic or chromatic and usually serves either to embellish or to "smooth out" melodic motion between or around chord tones. Melodic lines rarely remain exclusively within the confines of the given harmony.

Without these additional non-chord tones, musical lines would be able to only outline the triad or proceed in a homophonic texture.

Non-Chord Tone Name	(symbol)	Approached by	Resolves by	Type
Passing Tone	p.t.	Step	Step in same direction	Melodic
Neighboring Tone	n.t	Step	Step in opposite direction	Melodic
Neighbor group or Changing Tones	n.gr or c.t.	Step	(two notes: one above and one below chord tone)	Melodic
Appoggiatura	app.	Leap	Step in opposite direction	Melodic
Escape Tone	e.t.	Step	Leap in opposite direction	Melodic
Suspension	sus.	Same tone	Step down	Harmonic
Retardation	ret.	Same tone	Step up	Harmonic
Anticipation	ant.	Step or Leap	Same tone as following note and arrives early	Harmonic
Pedal Point	ped.	(none)	(suspension of the same tone throughout)	Harmonic

<http://smu.edu/totw/nct.htm>