



THE

CHORD BOOK

VOLUME 1

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Introduction

Learning chord shapes is probably one of the first things we ever do when learning guitar.

We get our first two or three chord shapes in the first few frets, develop the muscle memory to be able to move in and out of them, and then put them together with some strumming to play our first song (cue unadulterated joy).

Craving more, it's a repeating cycle of learn these chords, now play this song. Everything's great until we start getting thrown curveballs like **E/G#**, **F#7(add11)** or even **Cm7(b5)** (what?!).

Things get confusing really quickly, and those basic chord shapes get stale fast!

The Chord Book is your comprehensive, step-by-step guide to everything you're going to need to know to (hopefully) take any confusion out of chord theory, and provide you with a whole load of new chords to try out.

But rather than just present you with chord boxes, I'll be breaking everything down at each stage so you know exactly *why* the chords are played in a certain way and *how* you can use them.

Borrowing some content from my [Guitar Rut Busters: Essential Theory](#) video course, we'll be learning where chords come from and how we group them together.

You'll learn how to play a chord anywhere on the fretboard with the CAGED system, and then how to play through progressions anywhere on the neck with the help of my Root Note Maps.

With the fundamentals firmly established, we'll get into all the indispensable chord substitutions that are available to us, including power chords, 'sus' chords, 'add' chords and seventh chords.

So before we launch in, here's a little introduction on what you can expect to see as I present each concept.

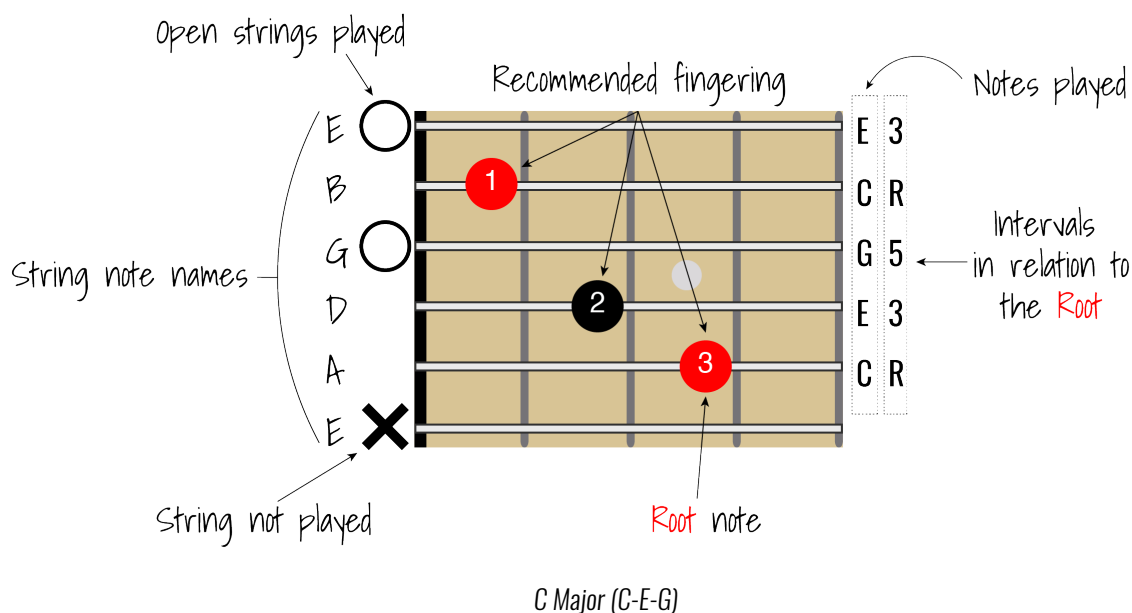
Reading Chord Boxes

Through the feedback I have received online, many players prefer to have chords presented on a horizontal fretboard, so this is the approach I have adopted for the book.

The fretboard is then orientated in the way that you would see the notes and fingers as you look down over the strings.

My apologies in advance to any left-handed players. I am very conscious of your struggle in the right-handed player world you find yourselves in. I have to produce the diagrams for the majority but, it is my intention to produce a left-handed version of this book as well in the future.

Here is an example diagram that you will find in the book:



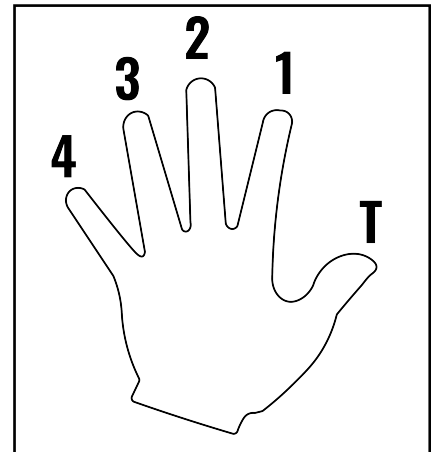
The strings from bottom to top are ordered from the thickest string 6(E) to the thinnest, string 1(E). I will always identify strings by both their number and note name.

The thick solid black line on the left is the guitar nut, beside the 1st fret. If you do not see the nut the chord shape is not being played in the first four frets of the guitar (known generally as the ‘**open position**’) and the diagram will have numbers underneath to indicate the fret in which the chord is played.

To the left of the diagram beside the nut, a cross (X) indicates a string that will be muted and/or not played for that particular chord (see in the example above that the low string 6(E) is not played).

A circle (O) indicates a string that will be played as an ‘open’ string (no fingers are pressing into any frets on that string). In the example, strings 3(G) and 1(E) will be played ‘open’.

In the absence of a cross or circle on the left-hand side, it means that a note is being played on that string by one of the fretting hand fingers pressing into a specific fret (commonly termed **fretting** a note). The solid circles indicate which fret the finger is placed. The numbers within the circles indicate which finger I recommend using on that particular string (see diagram, right).



Fretting Hand Fingers

You will see some chord shapes for which I recommend using the thumb hooked over the top of the fretboard. In those instances you will see a 'T' for thumb.

Red notes on the diagram indicate the **Root note** of the chord. This will be explained fully in Section 1.

To the right of each diagram there will be the intervals in relation to this Root note. The specific note pitches contained within the chord will also be listed (when it is not a moveable chord shape).

You should memorise, at the very *least*, the arrangement of the intervals within each chord shape. Again, these concept will be explained fully within the book.

Each diagram (where applicable) will also have its name and the notes contained within that chord in the caption underneath.

Reading TAB

As well as my own chord charts, there will be accompanying TAB notation and vertical chord boxes created with Guitar Pro 7.

TAB (a diminutive of 'tablature') is a guitar-specific number notation method which indicates how the notes shown in the music (standard notation) are to be played on guitar. TAB is also commonly seen *without* accompanying standard notation.

Unlike standard notation (which has 5 lines) TAB has six lines to represent the six guitar strings. The bottom line being string 6(E), the top line is string 1(E).

If you are ever in any doubt, place your guitar face up in your lap. As you look down over the strings, this is how they are arranged in the TAB.

Numbers are placed on the lines to indicate that the string is played at that fret number. A zero (0) represents a string that is played open. Strings that are not played (the X in the chord diagram) will have nothing written on them.

With chords, the numbers are stacked on top of each other to show that they are all played at the same time. See how the open C major chord (right) is presented in the TAB.

Remember that the numbers refer to *fret* numbers, not fingers. You may see numbers written underneath TAB, which will indicate the fretting hand finger to use. That may also be seen in the accompanying chord diagram.

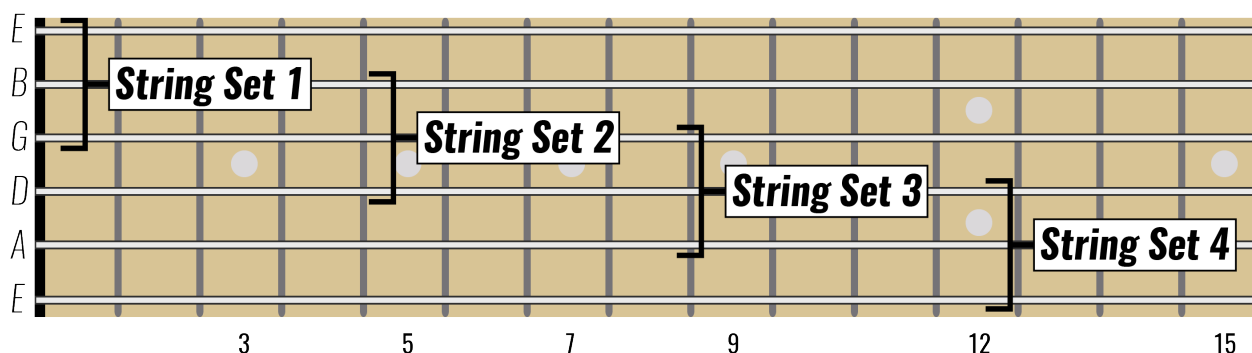
1(E) 0
2(B) 1
3(G) 0
4(D) 2
5(A) 3
6(E)

Guitar TAB

The String Sets

For all 3-note chord forms in the book, I will provide diagrams for the chord shapes in all their possible note configurations on each of the string sets.

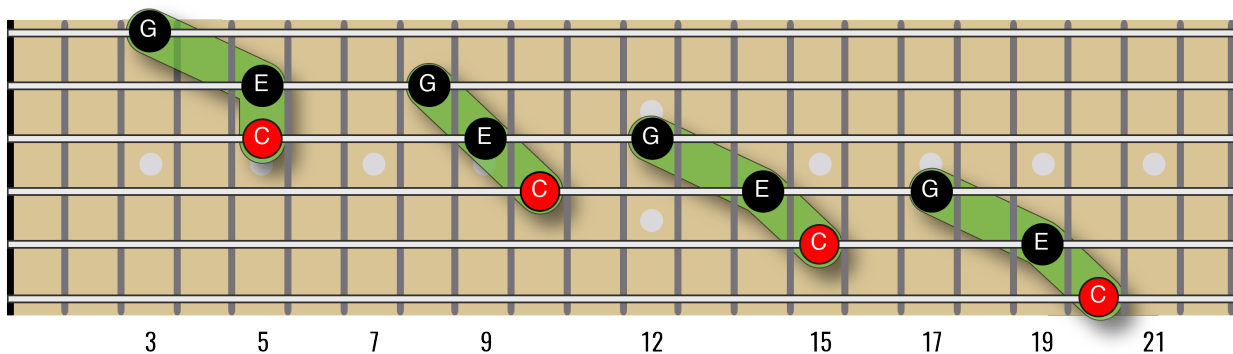
For a 3-note in a **closed voicing** (in which the notes will appear as close in pitch as they possibly can be) the guitar strings can be grouped into four different 3-string sets:



	Strings	Notes	Intervals between Strings
String Set 1	3-2-1	G-B-E	Major 3rd (G-B) + Perfect 4th (B-E)
String Set 2	4-3-2	D-G-B	Perfect 4th (D-G) + Major 3rd (G-B)
String Set 3	5-4-3	A-D-G	Perfect 4th (A-D) + Perfect 4th (D-G)
String Set 4	6-5-4	E-A-D	Perfect 4th (E-A) + Perfect 4th (A-D)

If intervals is a new concept to you, don't worry. You'll learn about them throughout the book. The key thing to remember here is that the distances between the string notes are different on string sets 1, 2 and 3. The same chord will have a different shape on each of the string sets (a big negative of standard tuning).

String set 3 and 4 have the same intervals between each string, so the same chord on these two sets will have the identical shape (hooray!). For example, see how these same three notes (C-E-G) appear in different ways across each string set:



For the sake of completeness, I'll present the chord shapes on all 4 string sets, but remember that chords on string sets 3 and 4 will be identical in shape.

Moveable Chord Shapes

To learn chords that are found above the 4th fret of the guitar, I will be using the **CAGED system** as the basis for memorising the different shapes.

At each stage you will be presented with a fretboard showing the notes of an example chord and then a TAB of the CAGED chord forms:

The diagram illustrates six different chord shapes for D6 across the fretboard. Each shape is shown with a fretboard overview, a chord chart, a musical staff notation, and a TAB notation.

- Shape 1 (Fret 3):** D6. Chord chart: XX00. Musical staff: D4, F#4, A4. TAB: 2020.
- Shape 2 (Fret 5):** D6(no5). Chord chart: X---X. Musical staff: D4, F#4, A4. TAB: 345.
- Shape 3 (Fret 7):** D6. Chord chart: X---X. Musical staff: D4, F#4, A4. TAB: 745.
- Shape 4 (Fret 9):** D6/A. Chord chart: XX---. Musical staff: D4, F#4, A4. TAB: 777.
- Shape 5 (Fret 12):** D6. Chord chart: X---X. Musical staff: D4, F#4, A4. TAB: 10119.
- Shape 6 (Fret 15):** D6. Chord chart: XX---. Musical staff: D4, F#4, A4. TAB: 141412.

D6 played through the CAGED forms

Each example will have a specific Root note. The task for you will then be to start memorising them in different positions all over the fretboard with different Root notes.

The fretboard overview will help you visualise intervals and come up with some of your own shapes once you're confident with the theory behind their construction.

My 'House Style'

There are a couple of formatting approaches that I have adopted in the book that you should be aware of.

String names will be identified by both string number and note name, e.g. string 4(D).

Whenever I write about intervals found within chords I will use numbers **in bold**. For example the **5** of the chord...the **b3** of the triad etc. The Root note will often be abbreviated to **R**.

I do sometimes offer alternatives to the chord charts presented which will be written in the (X32010) format. This is a common short-hand approach to writing chords, much like TAB.

The numbers are written left to right from string 6(E) to 1(E). Any strings that are not played are written as an X. The example here is how to write the C major chord:

6(E)	5(A)	4(D)	3(G)	2(B)	1(E)
X	3	2	0	1	0

C Major Chord

Chords in Context

For each chord type I will present the musical situations in which a particular chord can (and cannot) be used.

To do so, I will use the key of C (the chords derived from the C major scale). This is the most user-friendly key to work with because the scale does not contain any sharp or flat notes.

Whole	Whole	Half	Whole	Whole	Whole	Half								
C	-	D	-	E	-	F	-	G	-	A	-	B	-	C

C Major

This makes it easier when considering the spelling of different chords and the intervals found within them. We shall review the theory of the major scale in Section 1 and learn about the chords in a major key in Section 4.

Whenever I introduce a new chord you'll see a breakdown of how the chord is formed, and I will always provide an example rooted on C, like this:

Half Diminished Seventh Chord = R- \flat 3- \flat 5- \flat 7

*(Root + Minor 3rd above Root+Diminished 5th above Root+Minor 7th above Root)
(Diminished Triad + Minor 7th)*

Cm7(\flat 5) = C-E \flat -G \flat -B \flat

*(Root + Minor 3rd above Root+Diminished 5th above Root+Minor 7th above Root)
(Diminished Triad + Minor 7th)*

How to Approach the Book

Firstly, I recommend you get confident with the theory of open chords and how chords are grouped into keys.

Then start exploring new ways of playing through progressions with the help of the CAGED moveable forms and the Root Note Maps. There are some strategies and practice exercises in Section 17.

When you have everything solid, start exploring possible substitutions for the chords. There are one-page references for all the moveable chord shapes in the appendices.

These chord shapes presented herein are not exhaustive. There is general agreement on most shapes but there is some freedom, especially with the moveable chords. As long as the required notes are present, a chord can be played. Always seek out more ways. Hopefully this book gives you the foundation with which to do so.

Feel free to contact me by email if you have any questions or feedback on the book.

I hope you find this really insightful and that you start to see chords differently.

Practise well 🙏

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1: The Major Scale and Major Chord

Before we delve into chords, you need to be rock solid on the major scale. Why? **The major scale is the ruler by which music is measured.** So let's review.

The easiest of all major scales to remember is **C major** because it's one octave of the musical alphabet beginning on C. No sharp or flat notes necessary:

The C Major Scale

C - D - E - F - G - A - B - C

The major scale is a set of seven notes going higher in pitch. The eighth note is a repetition of the first, but one octave higher (a distance of 12 frets horizontally on one string).

So much of popular music is based upon the major scale, so it sounds so familiar to us. Playing those notes in order gives that "Do-Re-Mi..." sound that you've known since you were small. It has a distinctly upbeat, happy sound.

Here is just one way you can play the C major scale on string 2(B). Notice how each note is separated by a distance no greater than two frets:

The diagram illustrates the C major scale on the second string (B) of a guitar. The fretboard is shown with frets 1 through 15. The notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, and C are marked with black circles on the second line. Below the fretboard, a musical staff in 4/4 time shows the notes on a treble clef. A tablature line below the staff indicates fret numbers: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13.

One way to play the C major scale from fret 1 of string 2(B)

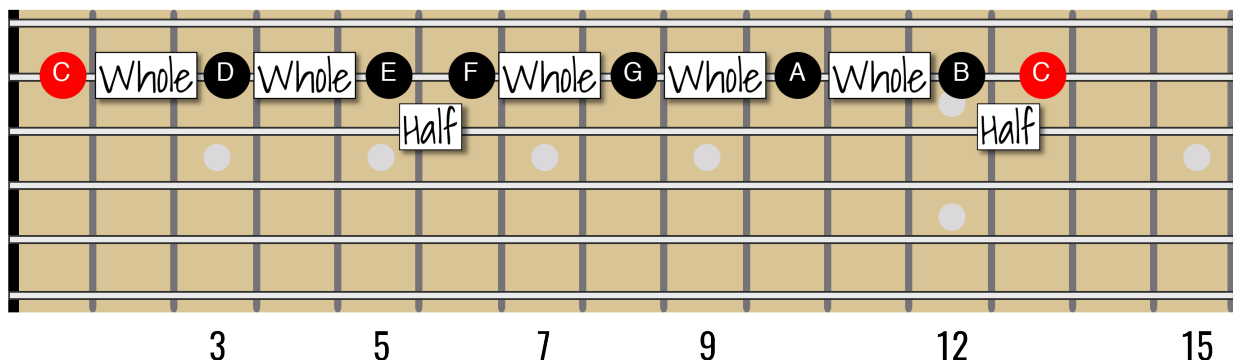
The Root Note

C is the most important note here as it's the starting point of the scale. This note is known as the *tonic*. You most commonly see it named as the **Root**, specifically when related to chords, so I'll be using that term going forward. **C is the Root note (R)**.

The sound of the major scale is a result of the distances from one note to the next and how they, in turn, relate back to the **Root**. Each of the notes will either be a whole step or a half step apart from one another:

Whole Whole Half Whole Whole Whole Half
C - **D** - **E** - **F** - **G** - **A** - **B** - **C**

The **whole step** (or **tone** to my British compatriots) is the distance of two frets up or down an individual string (e.g. 3rd to 5th fret). The **half step** (or **semitone** for the Brits) is one fret (5th to 6th fret).



Each note of the major scale is assigned a number (known as a **scale degree**), which is a shorthand way to identify how it relates back to the Root (i.e. the distance in whole and half steps between it and the Root).

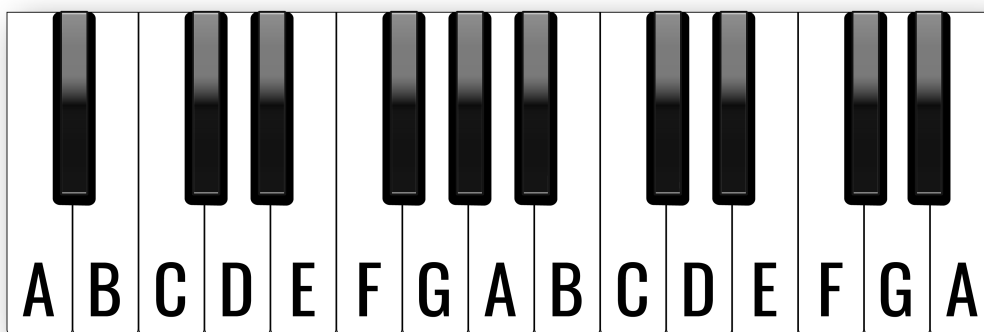
This is the same principle for the numbers that are assigned to chords (like **G5**, **Cm6**, **Dmaj7**). These numbers will refer to intervals (see below) *above* the Root note.

Whole Whole Half Whole Whole Whole Half
R - **2** - **3** - **4** - **5** - **6** - **7** - **R**
C - **D** - **E** - **F** - **G** - **A** - **B** - **C**

Every...single...major scale has the same formula of whole steps and half steps between each note. To illustrate that, here's another major scale example, the **A major scale**:

	Whole		Whole		Half		Whole		Whole		Whole		Half	
R	-	2	-	3	-	4	-	5	-	6	-	7	-	R
A	-	B	-	C#	-	D	-	E	-	F#	-	G#	-	A

The C major scale is the only one in which you play the notes of the musical alphabet (the white keys on a piano, also known as **natural notes**):



The musical alphabet 'natural notes' on the piano keyboard

All other major scales will contain **sharp** (#) and **flat** (b) notes to respect the whole step-half step distances from one note to the next and to ensure that **each note of the musical alphabet is present once, and only once!**

Scales that need them will contain either sharp notes *or* flat notes (never both!). Make sure that you're choosing the right name for the sharp/flat notes. Imagine how confusing things would be if the A major scale looked like this:

	Whole		Whole		Half		Whole		Whole		Whole		Half	
R	-	2	-	3	-	4	-	5	-	6	-	7	-	R
A	-	B	-	D^b	-	D	-	E	-	F#	-	A^b	-	A

To help you learn which scales have sharps and flats it can be useful to study the **circle of fifths**. This forms part of the syllabus of my 'Guitar Rut Busters: Essential Theory' video course.

Appendix 1 is a chart with all the major scales you're ever likely to come across. It would be a great idea to print this and use it to check your understanding of all the concepts and chords that you will encounter in this book.

Going a little deeper... An introduction to Intervals

An '**interval**' is the musical term to define the distance between two notes. This distance is measured from the lower in pitch (or sound) of those two notes.

Each scale degree has a fuller, more descriptive interval name. Intervals have both a quantity (2nd, 3rd, 4th...) and a quality (major, minor, augmented or diminished).

Below is a table with the intervals names of the notes of the major scale:

	Scale degree	Interval	Distance
C to D	2	Major 2 nd	2 frets
C to E	3	Major 3 rd	4 frets
C to F	4	Perfect 4 th	5 frets
C to G	5	Perfect 5 th	7 frets
C to A	6	Major 6 th	9 frets
C to B	7	Major 7 th	11 frets
C to C	8	Perfect Octave	12 frets

All of the intervals of the major scale are **major** intervals...except the 4th and the 5th and octave, which are named **perfect** intervals.

Explaining why that is means getting deep into maths and ratios and musical overtones...for now let's just remember that they're named differently.

Chord Foundations

The Root note can be thought of as the **foundations upon which we build chords**.

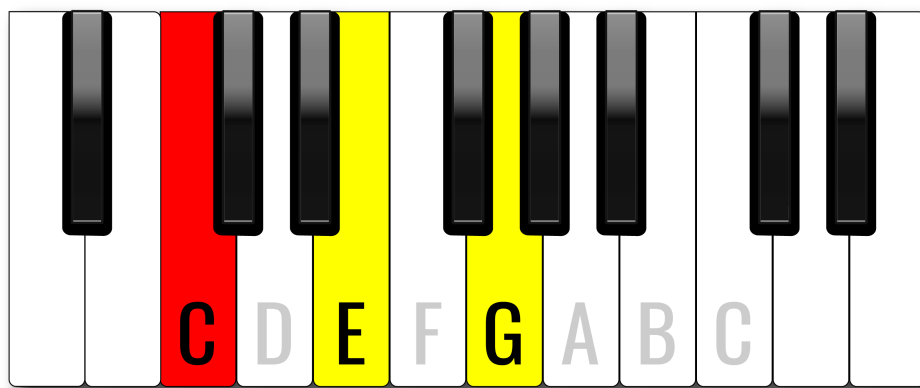
The Root gives a chord its name. For example, the Root of a D major chord is **D**. The Root of an A minor chord is **A**. The Root of an E7 chord is...that's right, **E**.

Whatever may follow the name of the note, that first note is the Root. The Root note of "F7(#5)(b9)" is **F** (don't panic...we won't be seeing those chords for a good while!).

Let's form your first chord from notes of the C major scale. The first type of chord we can form is by stacking thirds. 'Stacking' thirds is done by leapfrogging over a note in the scale.

Chords are most commonly built in thirds. The fancy word for this is **tertian** or **tertiary harmony**.

You'll always start from the Root note, and then you leapfrog over the **2** and **add the 3**. You then leapfrog over the **4** and **add the 5** to give three notes in total. This is very easy to do on the piano, like this:



Stacking thirds on the piano

Things aren't quite as simple on the guitar unfortunately.

The Major Triad

When you play the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the major scale together at once, it is known as a **major triad**.

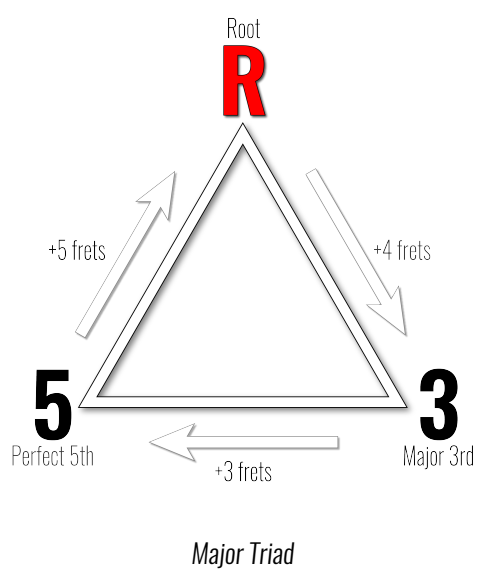
The **R**, **3** and **5** are the **chord tones** of a major triad:

Major Triad = R-3-5

(Root + Major 3rd above Root + Perfect 5th above Root)

C Major Triad = C-E-G

(Root + Major 3rd above Root + Perfect 5th above Root)



The distance between the **R** and the **3** is named a **major third** which spans three musical alphabet letters two whole steps apart (or 4 frets horizontally on one string).

	R	3	5
A	A	C#	E
B	B	D#	F#
C	C	E	G
D	D	F#	A
E	E	G#	B
F	F	A	C
G	G	B	D

This major third between the **R** and **3** is what gives the chord its positive, happy sound (like the major scale from which the chord is derived).

You can form any major triad directly from the notes of the major scale. Some other essential major triad spellings to learn:

The major triad/chord is generally written in songbooks and chord progressions simply as the **Root** note:

“C” = C major

“G” = G major

Major Triad Forms

As the major triad contains three notes, there are three possible combinations of the intervals (with the lowest note being raised one octave each time):

R-3-5
3-5-R
5-R-3

Taking the example of the D major triad (**D-F#-A**) below are the three **close** (or closed) **voicing** major triads across each of the string sets.

A chord 'voicing' relates to the arrangement of the notes and the spacing between each one. A voicing is close when the notes are, quite literally, as close as they possibly can be to one another (within one octave).

If these shapes are new to you, take a moment to play through each shape and hear how they are, in essence, the same chord but they sound *different*. The intervals are arranged in different voicings so, inevitably, they will have a different sound:

D/A D D/F#

3 5 10

T 3 10

A 2 10

B 2 11

D Major close triad voicings on String Set 1

D/F# D/A D

xx x xx x xx x

3 7 10

4/4 #8 #8

T 3 7 10

A 2 7 11

B 4 7 12

D Major close triad voicings on String Set 2

D D/F# D/A

x xx x xx x xx

2 7 11

4/4 #8 #8

T 2 7 11

A 4 7 12

B 5 9 12

D Major close triad voicings on String Set 3

D Major close triad voicings on String Set 4

For more on the naming of the chord shapes check out Section 8 (Slash Chords and Inversions).

Each of these 3-note chord shapes can be placed anywhere on the same string set. The key thing to remember is the location of each **R** within each shape to know where to place it for a major triad from any other Root note.

There are no other possible ways to play major close voicing triads on the fretboard. If you can memorise these twelve shapes (or nine shapes, given that string sets 3 and 4 are the same) you have them all. Well done!

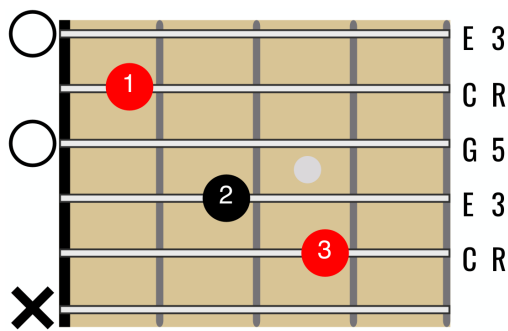
So why should you learn all of them? One immediate benefit is that it gives you a whole host of different ways to play through chord progressions. Not only that, but it really helps you to develop good **voice leading** which is the idea of finding chords close to one another, without large leaps in the notes or lots of moving around for the fretting hand.

For an in-depth study of triads across the fretboard you should check out my 'TRIADS: Inside Out' video course.

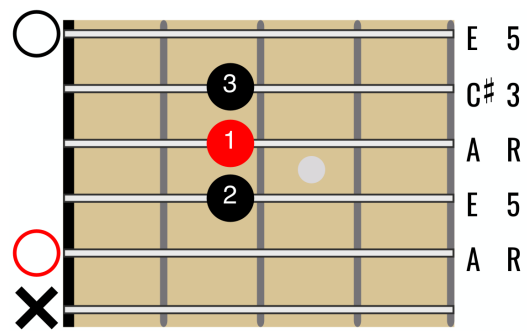
Open Chords

A major triad is formed from three notes, but many common chord grips are played across five or all six strings (i.e. five or six different notes). So what's going on?

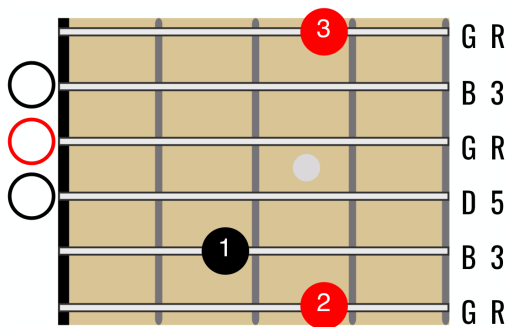
If you look at the five major chords that don't require any barre finger (C, A, G, E and D major) and work out the notes and intervals, you will see that they only contain the three chord tones of the major triad - Root (**R**), major third (**3**) and perfect fifth (**5**):



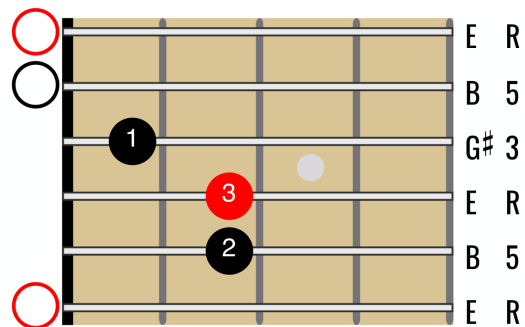
C Major (C-E-G)



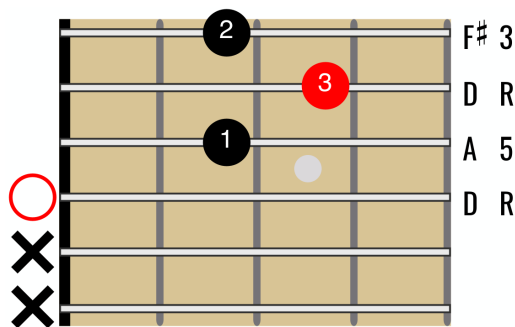
A Major (A-C#-E)



G Major (G-B-D)



E Major (E-G#-B)



D Major (D-F#-A)

These are named as major 'chords', despite containing only three chord tones. 'Triad' is a term that is used in the study of the three-note chord (and arpeggio) shapes.

'Open chords' (those which incorporate both fretted notes and open strings) will often have repeating intervals. For example, all of the chords contain *at least* two Root notes in different octaves.

It does not matter which octave the notes are in. An E note will always be considered the **3** of a C major triad, even if it's four octaves above the Root.

A couple of other things to consider. Each chord begins with the Root as the lowest note. When the Root is the lowest note, the chord is identified as being in a **root position**.

However, the intervals in the chord do not *necessarily* appear in sequential order (**R-3-5**). The C major chord is a perfect example of when the intervals *do* appear in ascending sequential order, but the A major has the **R** on string 5(A) followed by the **5** at the 2nd fret of string 4(D).

Whilst you probably already knew the shapes, you should take a moment here and learn both the notes and (more importantly) the **intervals** found in each chord grip. This will be a **big** help as you progress.

Maybe add it to your practice time. Play a chord and then pluck each string one by one and say the note and interval (in relation to the Root) upon each string.

Summary

- All chords have a Root note which names the chord
- All major chords are built from notes of the major scale beginning on the Root
- The major scale formula is *whole-whole-half-whole-whole-whole-half*
- The major triad is formed by taking the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the major scale
- The spelling of a major triad (major chord) is **R-3-5**
- Even if they contain more than three strings, major chords will *only* contain these three intervals
- Open chords are those which combine fretted notes and open strings