GUITARTRAINING.ONLINE · MICRO COURSE

How Chords Work

From triads to 13ths

FREE SAMPLE · PAGES 1 AND 2

The first two pages of the 6-page course: the major scale and its numbers, how 1, 3 and 5 make a major chord, and how changing one note gives you minor, diminished and augmented chords.

Grab your guitar. Every chord box shows the note names and scale degrees on each string.

How Chords Work

From triads to 13ths

guitartraining.online
Beginner to improver
A step-by-step micro course

Every chord you play is built from the same simple idea: pick a starting note (the *root*), then add other notes counted as numbers from its scale. Once you can see those numbers, major, minor, sevenths, ninths and thirteenths stop being mysterious names and start looking like small, logical changes to the same three-note shape.

1 The major scale and its numbers

Start with C major. It has no sharps or flats, and it uses the same notes as the white keys on a piano:

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 / 1

We number the notes 1 to 7. The next C is 8 (the octave), and we can keep counting from there. Those higher numbers are how chord names such as 9th, 11th and 13th are written:

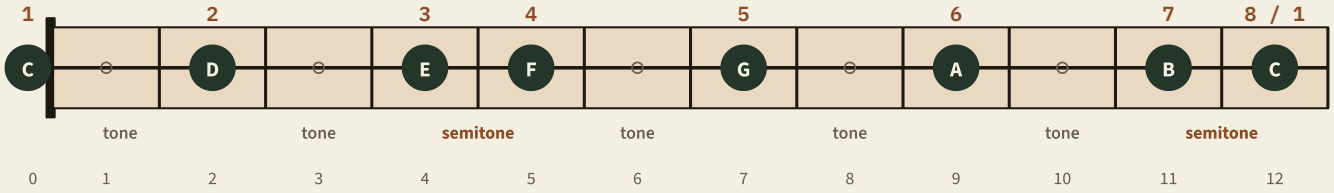
C MAJOR, TWO OCTAVES

Note	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Same as								1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Degree numbers keep going past the octave. **9 is the same note as 2**, **11 = 4**, and **13 = 6**, one octave higher.

On the guitar, one fret is one **semitone**. Two frets make a **tone**. The major scale is a particular pattern of those gaps: tone, tone, semitone, tone, tone, tone, semitone. That is why E to F and B to C are neighbouring frets, while every other step in the scale has a fret in between.

ANY STRING, STARTING FROM A C · ONE FRET = ONE SEMITONE

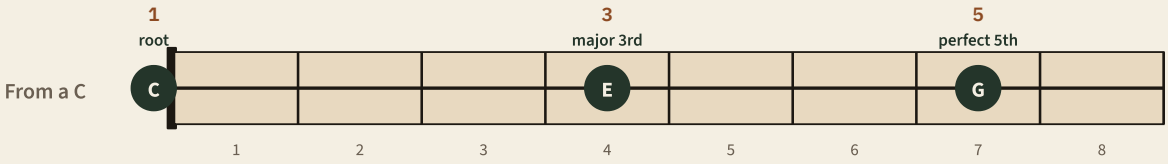


A few intervals you will use constantly, counted in frets from the root:

INTERVAL	DEGREE	FRETS	FROM C
Minor 3rd	♭3	3	E♭
Major 3rd	3	4	E
Perfect 4th	4 / 11	5	F
Perfect 5th	5	7	G
Minor 7th	♭7	10	B♭
Major 7th	7	11	B

The useful trick

9 is the same note as 2, just an octave higher. Likewise 11 = 4 and 13 = 6. We use the higher numbers when the chord already contains a 7th, to show that these notes are sitting above that 7th rather than replacing it.

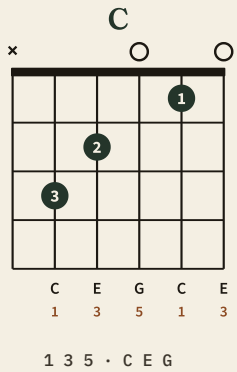


2 How 1, 3 and 5 make a major chord

Take notes 1, 3 and 5 of C major: **C, E and G**. That is a C major chord, written simply **C**. The 3rd is a **major 3rd**: four frets above the root (C up to E). The 5th is a **perfect 5th**: seven frets above the root (C up to G). Together, 1-3-5 is called a **major triad**. It is the home sound of most of the songs you already play.

If you play a C shape you will be using more than three strings, but every string is still a C, an E or a G. The extra notes are just the same three ingredients doubled in another octave.

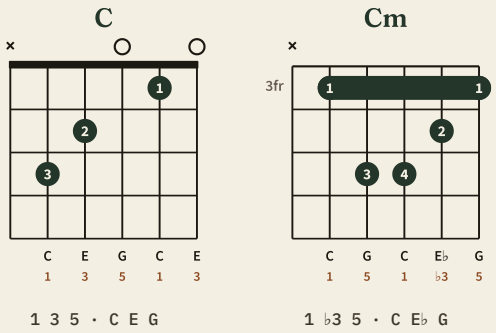
How to read the boxes. Strings run left to right: low E, A, D, G, B, high e. **×** means muted, an open circle is an open string, and a filled circle is a fingered fret (the number inside is the suggested finger: 1 index, 2 middle, 3 ring, 4 little). Note names sit under each string, with the scale degree in copper underneath. If a box starts above the first fret, the starting fret is marked at the side (for example *3fr*).



3 Flatten the 3rd, and it becomes minor

If you lower the 3rd by one fret (one semitone), E becomes E♭. The formula is now **1 ♭3 5**: **C, E♭, G**. That is C minor, written **Cm**.

The flattened 3rd is only **three** frets above the root. That smaller gap is what gives a minor chord its sadder, darker quality. The root and the 5th have not moved; only the middle note has dropped.



TRY THIS

Play C, then Cm, and back again. Keep the root (C) and the 5th (G) in your mind and listen for the 3rd dropping one fret, from E to E♭. That single fret is the whole difference between major and minor.

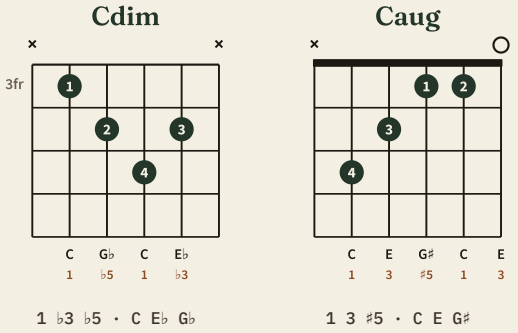
Two other triad flavours use the same idea of raising or flattening a note:

Diminished `Cdim` or `C°`

Flatten the 3rd *and* the 5th: **1 ♭3 ♭5**, **C E♭ G♭**. Tense and unstable, as if the chord wants to move.

Augmented `Caug` or `C+`

Keep the major 3rd, raise the 5th: **1 3 ♯5**, **C E G♯**. Bright and slightly unsettling, as if the chord wants to rise.



ENJOYED THE SAMPLE?

Get the full 6-page course and finish the journey to 13ths.

You have seen how triads are built. The full course carries the same idea all the way up, one small change at a time, with 27 chord boxes, “Try this” exercises and a summary table.

4 **Sevenths:** dominant 7, major 7, minor 7 and minor 7 flat 5, and why 7 and ♭7 are different notes.

5 **Ninths:** add9 versus 9, major 9 and minor 9.

6 **Sharp 9 and flat 9:** including E7♯9, the famous “Hendrix chord”.

7 **Suspended chords:** sus2, sus4 and 7sus4, and how they resolve.

8 **Elevenths and thirteenths:** stacking notes up to the 13th on six strings.

9 **Why guitarists leave notes out:** plus a one-page summary of twenty chord types in C and five exercises to try.

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