

Chords

7 White-Root Major Chords

All-White Family	
	C
	F
	G
Black-Middle Family	
	D
	E
	A
White-Black-Black Orphan	
	B

Chalky (white)
Family
Group

Drug
Enforcement
Agency

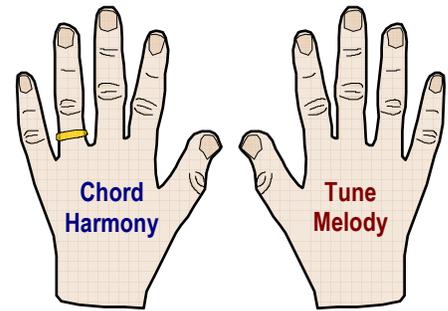
Each Black-Root Major is one key up (#) or one key down (b) from its White-Root counterpart.

5 Black-Root Major Chords

All-Black Orphan	
	F# / G ^b
White-Middle Family	
	C# / D ^b
	D# / E ^b
	G# / A ^b
Black-White-White Orphan	
	A# / B ^b

A chord is a *group of keys* used to add harmony to the melody of a song.

Melodies are normally played with the right hand. In fact, the *top* note of any group of notes is generally perceived by our ears as the melody, or tune, that we'd sing or hum.



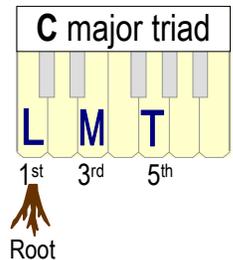
Harmonies and chords are normally played with the left hand. But technically, it's the specific keys that make up a chord that define it, so a chord's keys can be played in *any* order, with *any* hand, in *any* octave.

Standard Root Position (1-3-5)

A chord is in Standard or Root position when its keys are in 1-3-5 (Root, 3rd, 5th) order based on scale positions (which you can learn about in the *Practical Music Theory* section of these lessons). Three-key chords are commonly called *triads*. [TRII-adz].

Chord Names

Chords are named after their Root key, for example: C, D^b, E, F[#], etc.



12 Major Chords

Major chords produce strong, bright, cheerful sounds.

You can memorize the Major chords by their pattern of white & black keys. Chords with similar color patterns make up three families of three chords each. The three remaining orphan chords have one-of-a-kind patterns.

Once you memorize the Major chords, you can use the *Chord Variations* section of these lessons to convert each of them into dozens of others (minor, 7th, suspended, etc.) to evoke various emotions like sadness or tension.

White-Root Note Hints

C [CEG]: C (see) EGg

F [FAC]: FACTs

G [GBD]: Good Bir**h**Day

D [DF[#]A]: DeF[#]Ame

E [EG[#]B]: EG[#]Bearer

A [AC[#]E]: AC[#]E pilot

B [BD[#]F[#]]: Be D[#]F[#]erent

Playing By Chords

“Playing by chords” is a popular shortcut. Piano-bar entertainers, who are asked to play dozens of songs on request, often rely on *lead [lead] sheets*, which contain one-note, right-hand melodies with chord letters above. *Fake Books* contain hundreds of lead-sheeted songs for “faking” it.

Professionals have learned tricks to enhance lead sheets, but even new players find it fairly easy to read and play a single-note melody and add in the chords from memory.

Chords are also used to enhance melodies that are picked out by ear. (See the *Playing By Ear* section of these lessons.)

Lead Sheet

Twin-kle, twin-kle lit - tle star,

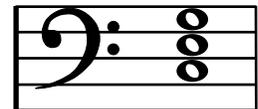
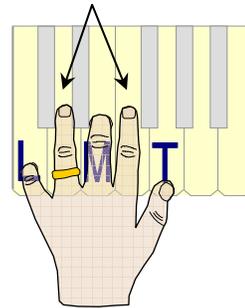
Chord Styles

Block Chord

This is the standard chord style with all keys pressed at the same time. With your playing fingers fixed in a curled position and your non-playing fingers straighter and slightly elevated, press your entire hand down.

Tip: If you tend to press *all* your fingers down at once, start by pressing and holding the playing fingers one at a time to signal your brain which keys to press, then lift up and press just those fingers down together.

Slightly straighten and lift non-playing fingers.



C major triad in Standard Notation.

Struck vs. Strummed

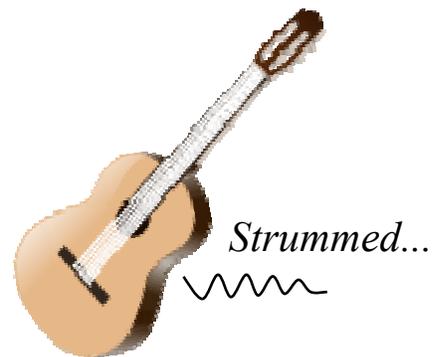
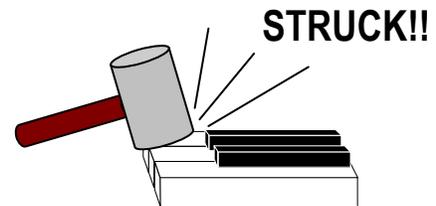
When playing block chords, beginning players, and especially children, have a tendency to POUND heavily on the keyboard. Chords struck this way are loud and unpleasant.

Instead learn to *strum* your chords. When playing chords on a guitar, its strings are typically strummed down or up, but they are not all played together. Strumming breaks up the solid chord sound. You can do the same thing on the piano.

Try drumming your fingers in sequence on a hard surface to make a “galloping horse” sound. This is the approximate motion you'll need in order to strum a chord on the piano.

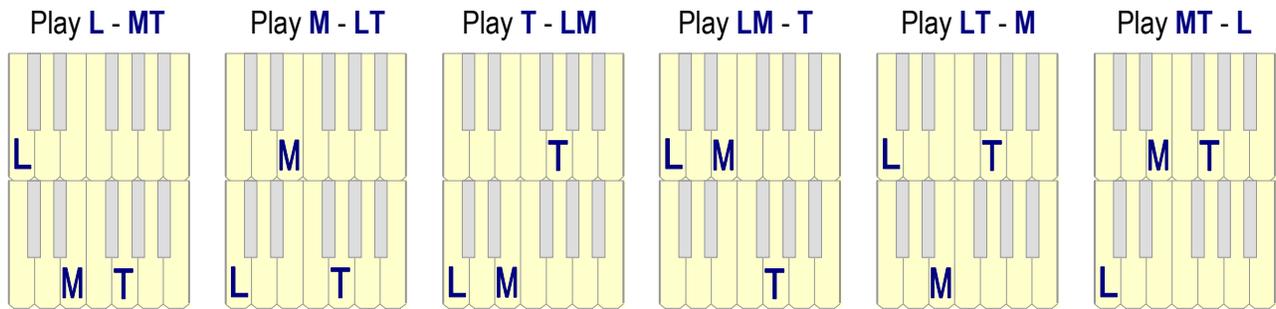
The goal is to play each chord key separately but quickly enough to make a single, blended sound. It doesn't matter if your fingers strum up, down, out, or in, just so long as each chord key isn't pressed at exactly the same time.

The effect of a strummed chord is comparable to the pleasant vibration or warble that a good singer achieves in his or her voice when holding a tone.



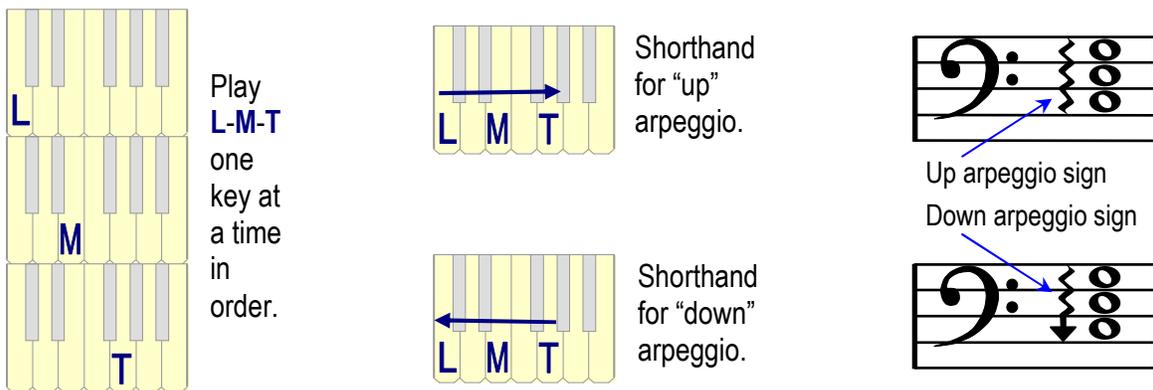
Broken Chord

Chords are often “broken” apart for musical effect and variety. With three keys, six broken-chord combinations are possible as shown. The **L** to **MT** combination is the most common.



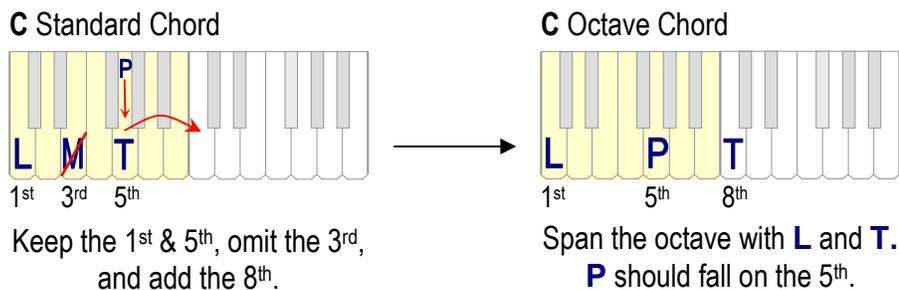
Arpeggio (Rolled) Chord

An arpeggio [ar-PEHJ-ee-oh] is the ultimate broken chord. Each key is played *separately* in succession either going up or going down, which creates a rising or falling movement in the music similar to a harp.

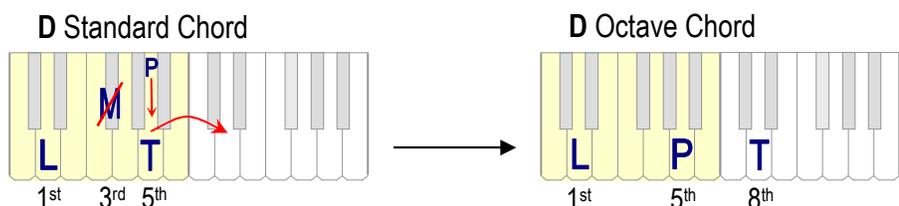


Octave Chord (1-5-8)

Stretching a standard chord over an octave produces a broader, more stimulating sound.



When the black key is omitted from a Black-Middle Family chord, it becomes all white.



Inverted Chord

Invert means to “turn upside down.” An inverted chord starts on a Bass (lowest) key that is *not* the Root key. [Bass is pronounced “base.”]

Chords are inverted for several reasons:

1) To Avoid Melody Conflicts

A chord played in Standard position (1-3-5) may trespass into the Middle C area, which is normally reserved for melody keys. Moving a chord’s top key or keys *down* an octave retains the chord sound while clearing the melody area.

2) To Produce Richer Sounds

Moving the top notes of a chord *down* produces a deeper, richer sound. Play the Standard F chord as shown, then the Inverted F to hear the difference.

3) To Simplify Chord Progressions

Inverting can make it easier to play chord progressions without looking at your left hand, freeing you to concentrate on the right-hand melody.

Play the standard C, F, and G chords in succession as shown *without* looking at your hand. It's challenging to do at speed without making a mistake, because your hand has to shift 4 keys from C to F.

The same problem applies going from F back to C.

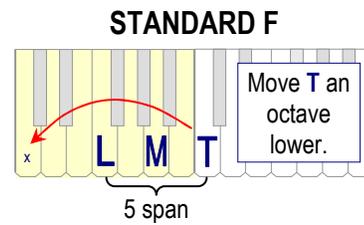
Now play the same progression with F & G inverted as shown, also *without* looking at your hand. It requires less hand motion and should be easier to play either going up or down.

1st & 2nd Inversions

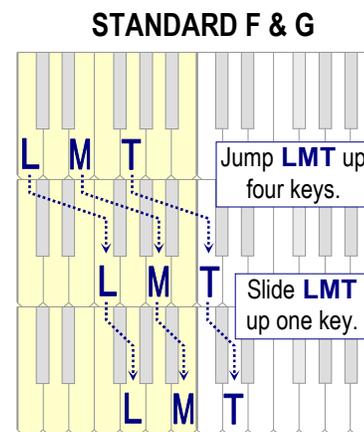
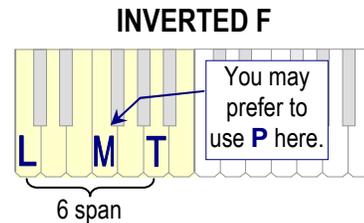
Technically, inversions take the current Bass key and move it *up* an octave.

- The 1st inversion moves the 1st (Root) up one octave, so the 3rd becomes the new Bass.
- The 2nd inversion moves the 3rd up one octave, so the 5th becomes the new Bass.

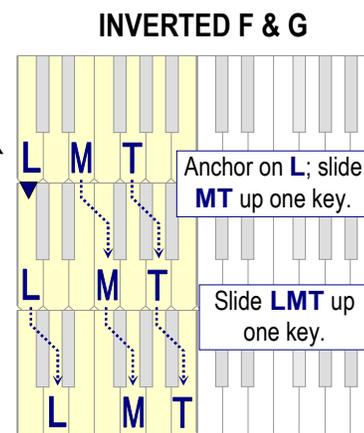
Inverted chords retain their original name followed by a slash and the altered Bass key.



Moving the top key down clears the melody area and produces a richer sounding chord.



It's tough to accurately play C to F or F to C *without* looking.



Inverting F & G makes this chord sequence easier to play.

