

Chords

Memorize the Majors!

7 WHITE Root Major Chords		
All-White Family		
	L M T	C
	L M T	F
	L M T	G
Black-Middle Family		
	L M T	D
	L M T	E
	L M T	A
White-Black-Black Orphan		
	L M T	B

Chalky Family Group



Drug Enforcement Agency

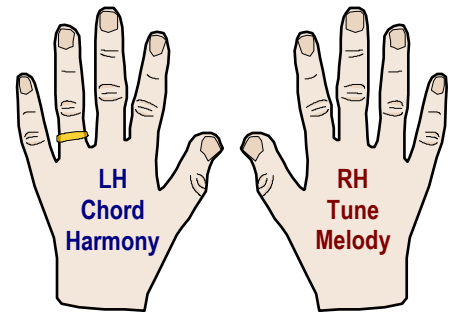
Each Black Root Major is one key up (#) or one key down (b) from its White Root counterpart.

5 BLACK Root Major Chords		
All-Black Orphan		
	L M T	F# / G ^b
White-Middle Family		
	L M T	C# / D ^b
	L M T	D# / E ^b
	L M T	G# / A ^b
Black-White-White Orphan		
	L M T	A# / B ^b



A chord is a *group of keys* typically 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.

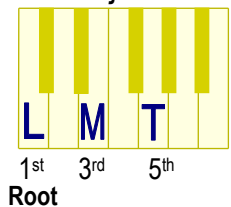


Harmonies and chords are normally played with the left hand. But technically, it's the specific keys that make up a chord that define it, so a chord's keys can be played in *any* order, with *any* hand, in *any* octave.

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 more about in the *Practical Music Theory* section of these lessons. Three-key chords are commonly called *triads* [TRII-adz].

C major triad



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(seige)EG

F [FAC]: FACT

G [GBD]: GaBbeD

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

E [EG[#]B]: EG[#]Bert

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

B [BD[#]F[#]]: BoD[#]yF[#]at

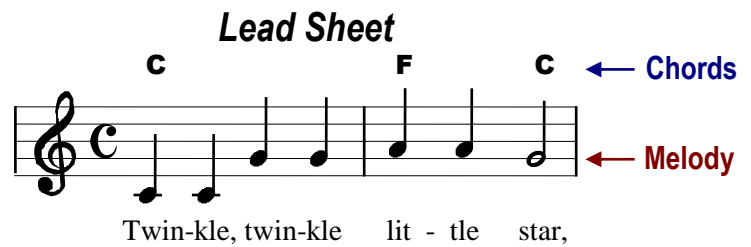
The FAcT is, AC[#]E was under CEG (seige) to help EG[#]Bert lose BoD[#]yF[#]at so no one GaBbeD about or DeF[#]Amed him.

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 display single-note melodies with chord letters written above. So-called *Fake Books* contain hundreds of lead-sheeted songs for “faking” it.

Professionals use tricks to embellish lead sheets (see *Improvisation Techniques*), but even new players find it fairly easy to read and play a single-note melody and add in the chords from memory.

Lead Sheet



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

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

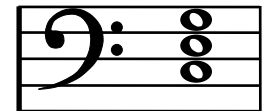
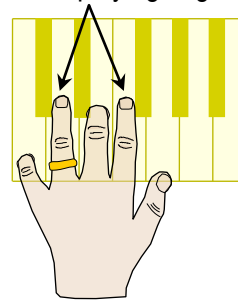
Chord Styles

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 and press just those fingers down together.

Slightly straighten and lift non-playing fingers.

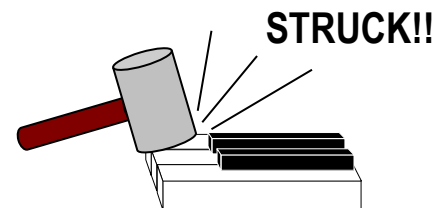


C major triad in Standard Notation.

Struck vs. Strummed

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

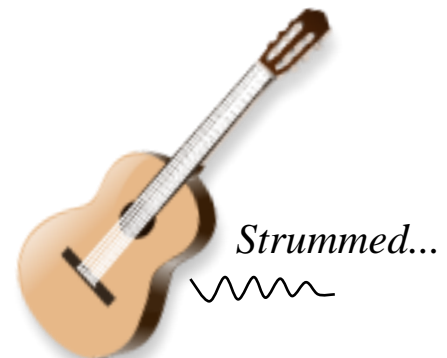
Instead learn to *strum* your chords. When playing chords on a guitar, its strings are typically strummed down or up, but they are not all played together. Strumming breaks up the solid chord sound. You can do the same thing on the piano.



Your Turn: 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. Then experiment by strumming some chords.

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.

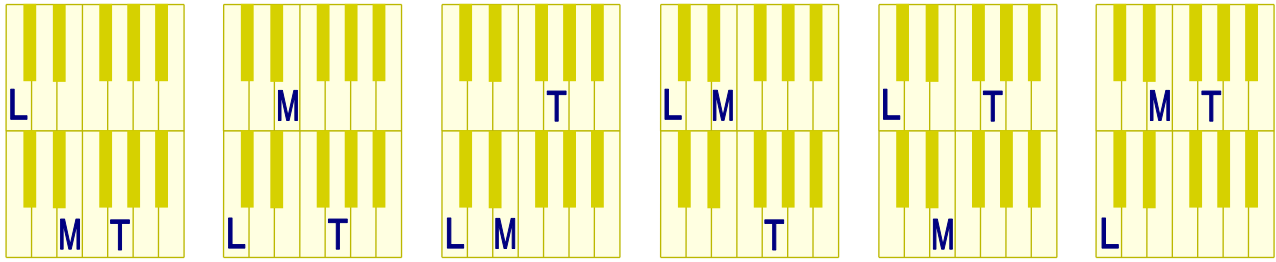
The effect of a strummed chord is comparable to the pleasant vibration or warble that a good singer achieves in his or her voice when holding a tone.



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.

Your Turn: Play each broken-chord pattern, e.g., play **L** alone then **MT** together.



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.

Your Turn: Play the arpeggio going up then going down.

Allcanplay Notation

Standard Notation

Octave Chord (1-5-8)

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

Your Turn: Play the C and D Octave Chords.

C Standard Chord

1st 3rd 5th

Keep 1st & 5th, omit 3rd, add 8th

C Octave Chord

1st 5th 8th

Use **L&T** to span octave. **P** should fall on the 5th

D Standard Chord

1st 3rd 5th

D Octave Chord

1st 5th 8th

Notice when the 3rd is omitted from a Black-Middle Family chord, it becomes all white.

Inverted Chord

The leftmost or lowest key in a chord is called its bass [base], which is normally the Root key. Invert means to “turn upside down.” An inverted chord has its keys flipped around so the Root is no longer the bass key.

Chords may be 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 up several keys. The same problem applies 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.

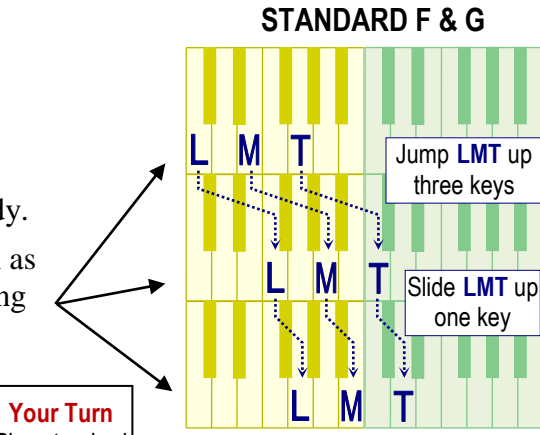
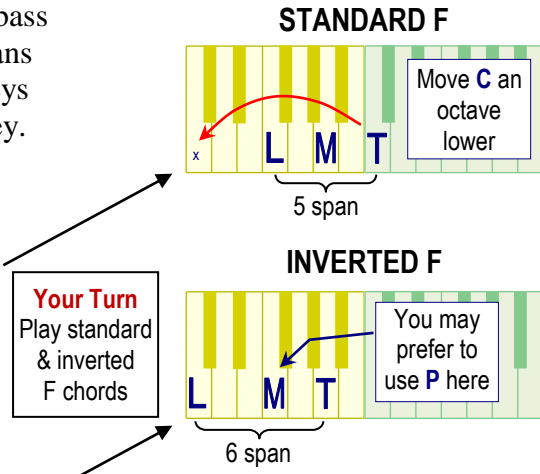
1st & 2nd Inversions

The example shown above moved the top key down an octave. Technically, inversions take the current bass key and move it *up* an octave.

- The 1st inversion moves the 1st (root) key up one octave, so the 3rd becomes the new bass key.
- The 2nd inversion takes the 1st inversion and moves the 3rd key up one octave, so the 5th becomes the new bass key.

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



1st Inversion
 Root came in 1st in race in top-note position.
2nd Inversion
 Root came in 2nd in race in middle-note position.

