

Understanding Bar Chords

Bar chords are physically more challenging to play than the fourteen most common chords that you have already played in the first few frets. Out of the fourteen common chords only the "F" chord does not have any open strings played as part of the chord, therefore the other thirteen chords are considered to be open type chords. At first a bar chord is hard to play but with practice the bar chord becomes just as easy to play as an open chord. It just takes a while to build up the muscle between the 1st finger and the thumb. Barring also puts extra stress on the wrist and requires building up more flexibility in your fingers. It can take a month to half a year for the bar technique to be mastered well enough to play songs without pain or pauses. After the hand becomes acclimated to the bar it will seem as if it really does not take all that much pressure on the bar to accomplish good tone. The attractive feature of bar chord technique is that so many more chords can be played in different positions, and all the sharped and flatted chords can be played that otherwise would have been much harder to do without the use of the bar.

Assignment: In the "Scales and Exercises" section of this book there are three exercises that really help in the mastering of the bar technique. If you have tried these exercises before make sure to review and master them now before moving on. If you have not done the following exercises, now is the perfect time to start doing them and to make sure they are mastered. Be patient and practice hard, the rewards will be great!

1. In the "Scales and Exercises" section of the book go to "The Bar Technique/Let's Try Barring," on page 2-10. There are a series of four exercises that you should do and start mastering right now.
2. In the "Scales and Exercises" section of the book find "The Barring Chromatic Scale," on page 2-11. Start playing through the exercise several times a day gradually increasing repetitions as the hand starts building up strength and endurance.
3. In the "Scales and Exercises" section of the book find "The Bar Exam" exercise on page 2-11. Play through this exercise several times a day gradually increasing repetitions as the hand starts building up strength and endurance. Remember that it can take a few months to master the bar technique but after a while you won't even have to think about playing a bar chord; it just starts happening with little effort or thought when you start trusting the fingers to instantly find their positions for a bar chord.

Now go to the chart in this section of the book entitled "The Fourteen Most Common Chords" and "The Six Most Common Bar Forms," on page 3-24. Make sure all fourteen chords are memorized and that you read the explanations of how to use the bar forms. If you understand all of this and commit it to memory you are in great shape to play most popular music.

Use the following chart to help identify and locate bar chords:

Bar Fret number	1	2	3	4	5
5th string root notes = A family	A# or Bb	B	C	C# or Db	D
6th string root notes = E family	F	F# or Gb	G	G# or Ab	A

Below are a few examples of how to locate bar chords up to the 5th fret. Use the above chart in conjunction with the chart entitled "**The Six Most Common Bar Forms**" that was mentioned earlier, (page 3-24).

1. Let's say that a song is calling for a "**Cm**" chord. Notice on the above chart that the "C" root note is found on the 5th string third fret, so therefore the bar is in the third fret. The 5th string root notes equals the "A" family which means that you have to look at the "A family bars" on the Six Most Common Bar Forms chart. For the final result, bar the third fret and use the "A" family/minor fingering. You have just played a Cm chord.

2. A song is calling for a "Gm" chord. The "G" root note is on the 6th string 3rd fret. Since "G" is in the third fret, you will be barring the third fret with this chord. Any time that the root note is on the sixth string, (the "E" string), you will always have to use the "E" family of bars on the Six Most Common Bar Forms chart. Since we are looking for a minor type chord in this case, just use the minor chord diagram in the E family. The end result is to bar the 3rd fret with the Em bar form to play a Gm chord.
3. A song is calling for a "C#7" chord. The "C#" root note is on the 5th string 4th fret. Since "C#" is in the fourth fret, you will be barring the fourth fret with this chord. Any time that the root note is on the fifth string, (the "A" string), you will always have to use the "A" family of bars on the Six Most Common Bar Forms chart. Since we are looking for a "7th" type chord in this case, just use the 7th type chord diagram in the A family. In short, bar the 4th fret with an A7th bar form to play a C#7 chord.
4. A song is calling for "F#7." Bar the second fret and use the E7th bar form.
5. A song is calling for "Bb." It is understood that this is a major chord since minor or 7th is not specified. Bar the 1st fret with an A major bar form.
6. A song is calling for "G#." Bar the 4th fret and use the E major bar form.

A REVIEW OF SIX COMMON MAJOR KEYS INCLUDING RELATIVE CHORDS

A brief explanation on how chords are grouped together has already been given in this section of the book. If you have not already started studying the theory section of this book, now would be an appropriate time to begin. Understanding music theory helps take away the mystery of how and why music fits together. Being able to compose, transpose, arrange, and picking music off tapes and CD's are all possible with basic theory knowledge. Listed below are six of the most common keys and their relative chords. There are a few exercises listed afterwards that you can start practicing that utilizes the chords listed below.

Key of C	F	G7	Am	Dm	E7
Key of G	C	D7	Em	Am	B7
Key of D	G	A7	Bm	Em	F#7
Key of A	D	E7	F#m	Bm	C#7
Key of E	A	B7	C#m	F#m	G#7
Key of F	Bb	C7	Dm	Gm	A7

Here are some exercises you can do with the above chart: (Be patient and practice these until they are fully mastered).

1. Play through all six chords of each of the above keys. All fourteen common chords will be used. Master finding the rest of the chords as bar chords. Do not bar above the fifth fret during this exercise.
2. Now work on building up speed on each key. Strum each of the six chords in each key once going as clean and fast as you can. Keep a steady beat when strumming the chords. The goal is to play six chords in each key in 3 to 6 seconds.
3. Master using one 4/4 strumming pattern per chord with each key. Use the " /-V/V/V " pattern that was used earlier on songs in this chord section. The goal here is not speed but to have smooth non-stop transitions on chord changes.