

Guitar basics

So, you just recently picked up a guitar from somewhere or haven't played for so long that you've forgotten what to do, and how to play it?

I've got a great solution for you. A little "How do I?" guide on the first baby steps into learning guitar.

1. How to start?

Firstly, pick up the guitar and look at it.



It probably looks something like that.

It's got 6 strings, 3 of them look lighter and finer, 3 of them look heavier and sturdier.

The first 3 are the **e**, **B**, **G** strings. They produce higher notes and are at most times responsible for creating the melody when playing in fingerstyle.

The latter 3 are the **D**, **A**, **E** strings. They make much heavier and bassy sounds and are most often responsible for creating the harmonic background for the melody.

The little metal plates on the neck of the guitar (the long part) are called frets. They let the guitarist play clean notes.

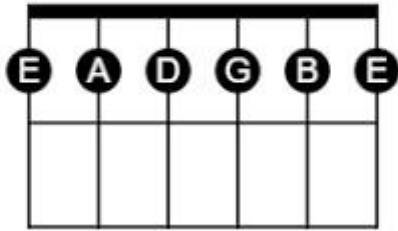
But how do I hold the guitar?

Unless you own a left-handed guitar, you hold the neck in your left hand and the body should sit on your right thigh.

To begin playing the guitar, you have to tune it.

Most songs use the thing known as the "standard tuning", it refers to the individual sounds the strings produce, and it looks as shown below.

Standard



If you have troubles remembering the tuning just say this “Edward Ate Dynamite, Good Bye, Eddy”.

There are also various mobile apps that will help you tune your guitar. I recommend DaTuner or GuitarTuna, but any other will work fine.

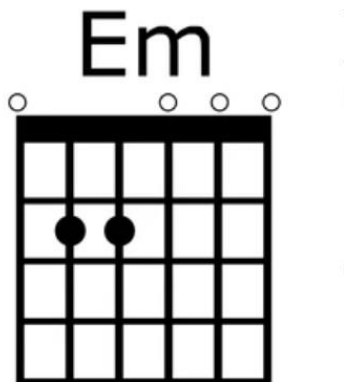
You tune a guitar by turning the pegs either left (if the sound is too low) or right (if the sound is too high).

2. Basic chords

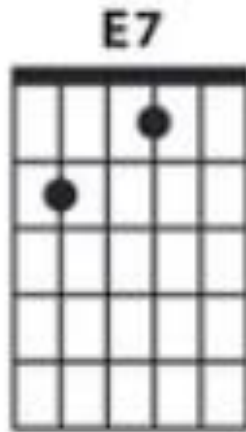
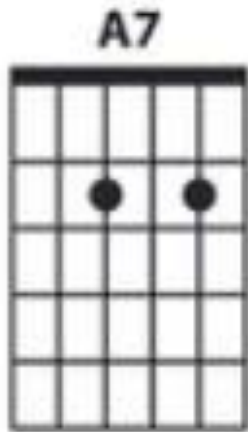
Once your guitar is tuned, it’s time to play some chords. If you know the basics, you may want to skip to chapter 4.

There are 14 chords that are commonly used in various songs. I’m going to group them by difficulty and number of fingers used to play the chords.

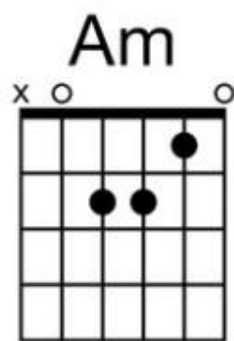
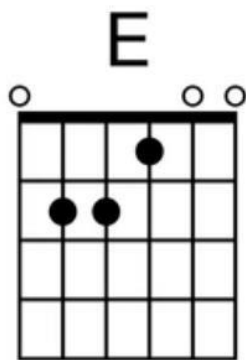
First group consists of one chord - **E minor** (in chord sheets mentioned as **e** or **Em**):



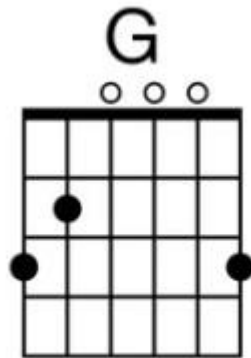
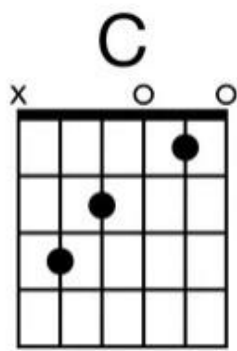
Second group – **A7** and **E7** – they sometimes appear in songs and add variety to the melody



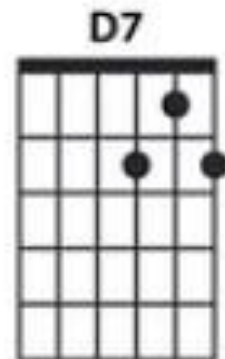
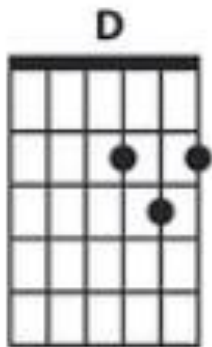
Third group – **E major (E)** and **A minor (a or Am)** – they look similar, use the same pattern, just are placed differently on the fretboard.



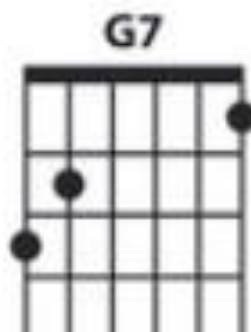
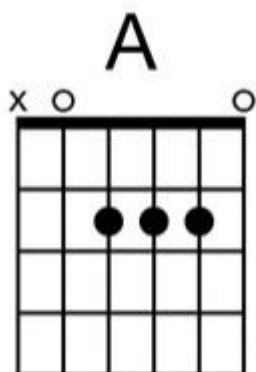
Fourth group – **C major (C)** and **G major (G)** - the Tonic and Dominant of the C major scale (I'll expand on this later)



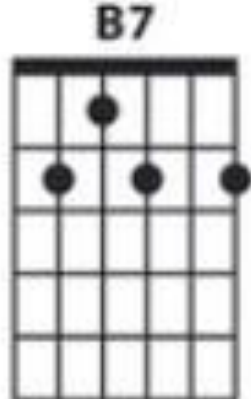
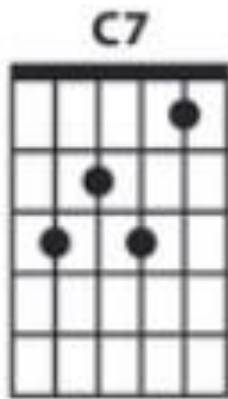
Fifth group – the **D** chords – **D major (D)**, **D minor (d or Dm)** and **D7** – they appear in many songs and are very versatile.



Sixth group - **A major (A)** and **G7** – A major is the last basic chord to cover and the G7 makes the C major key more complete.



Seventh group – two last chords – **C7** and **B7** – as the rest of the $\square 7$ chords, they provide nice tunes for the songs (the B7 chord is often paired with the E major chord)



3. So, I know my basic chords, what can I play with them?

To be honest, basically anything you want. Sea shanties, rock songs, some DMC songs (Devils Never Cry for example).

With Devils Never Cry mentioned, I'd like to introduce chord sheets. They are, to explain as simple as possible, cheat-sheets that display chord annotations above lyrics.

Let's take a look at the clean vocals section of Devils Never Cry:

Am	Dm
Bless me with the	
E	Am
Leaf of off the tree	
C	G
On it I see	
Em	Am
The freedom reign	

It's clearly visible, which chord and when it should be played.

The last thing to cover is the strumming, the way how and when your right hand should move across the strings.

The simplest way to play Devils Never Cry would be a downward movement every beat, as shown below:

V V V V

Bless me with the

V V V V

Leaf of off the tree

V V V V

On it I see

V V V V

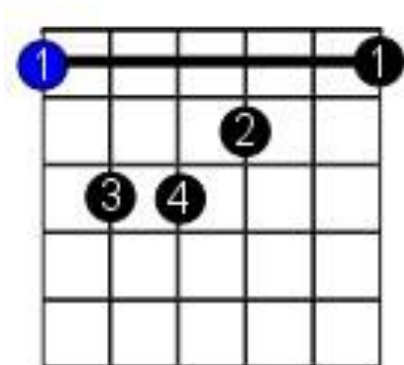
The freedom reign

4. But I want to play “Bury the light” What should I do?

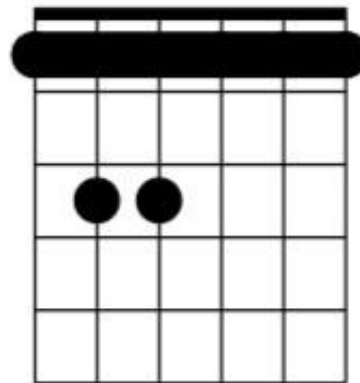
Let me introduce you to barre chords. There are four basic barre chords and they’re all based off of the basic chords mentioned before. How does one make them? Use your left hand’s index finger as a bar that holds all of the strings on a designated fret and use the rest to cover the shapes of the chords.

The first two are the **E form** chords – based off of the E major and E minor chords

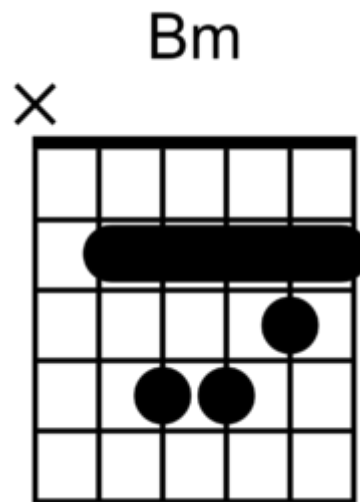
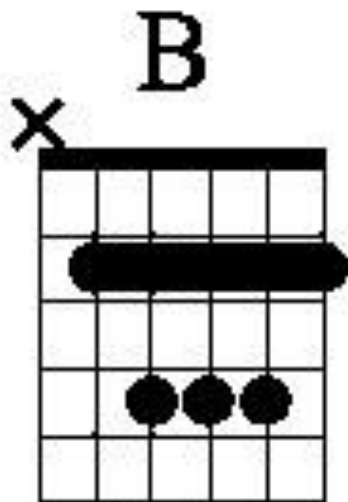
F



Fm



The rest are the **A form** chords – based off of the A major and A minor chords



E form this, A form that. But how do I know which is which? The answer is simple. You remember the tuning from before? The E form chords correspond to the E string, while the A form chords correspond to the A string. Bringing the tone those string up determines the chord. Every fret represents half a tone. So if you want to play a C minor chord, you have to bring the A string up by 3 frets (index finger flat on the 3rd fret, the rest form the shape of the A minor chord), since C is 3 frets higher than A.

Also, while we're here, you might stumble upon the □b (called a flat) or □# (called a sharp) chords. □b represents a chord one half of a tone lower, while □# represents a chord one half of a tone higher.

Let's take a look at a small fragment the chord sheet of "Bury the light"

Dm	Bb
I am the storm that is approaching	
Gm	Bm
Provoking black clouds in isolation	
D	Bb
I am reclamer of my name	
Gm	Dm
Born in flames, I have been blessed	

Bb	A
My family crest is a demon of death	
Dm	F
Forsakened, I am awakened	
C	G
A phoenix's ash in dark divine	
Dm	F
Descending misery	
C	G
Destiny chasing time	

As you can see there are three examples of barre chords – Bb major, B minor and G minor.

Bb major chord is made using an A major chord, brought up by one fret.

B minor chord is made using an A minor chord, brought up by 2 frets.

G minor chord is made using E minor chord, brought up by 3 frets.

Now the strumming.

As by the example of “Devils Never Cry”, it’s best to strum the strings downward on every beat, or every chord change. As shown below:

V	V
I am the storm that is approaching	
V	V
Provoking black clouds in isolation	
V	V
I am reclaimer of my name	
V	V
Born in flames, I have been blessed	
V	
My family crest is a demon of death	
V	V
Forsakened, I am awakened	
V	V

A phoenix's ash in dark divine

V V

Descending misery

V V

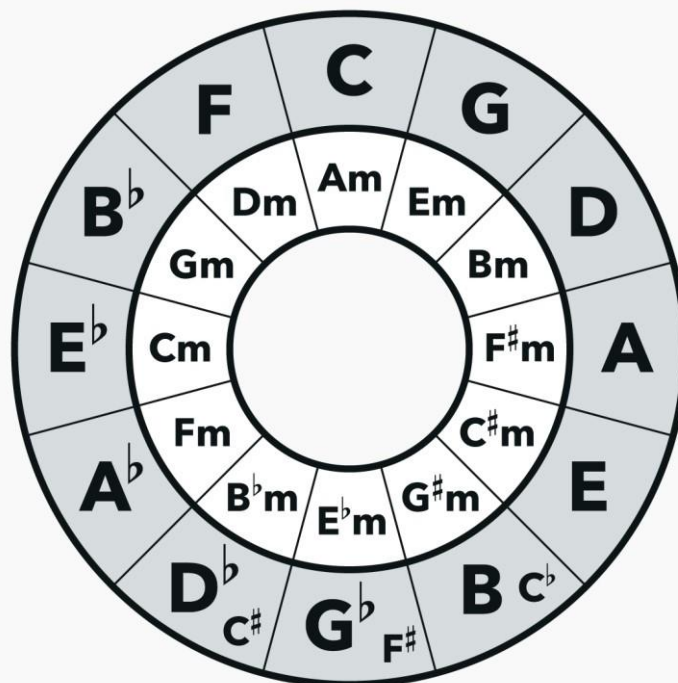
Destiny chasing time

For a more natural sounding guitar I recommend following the percussion's beat or the syllable changes.

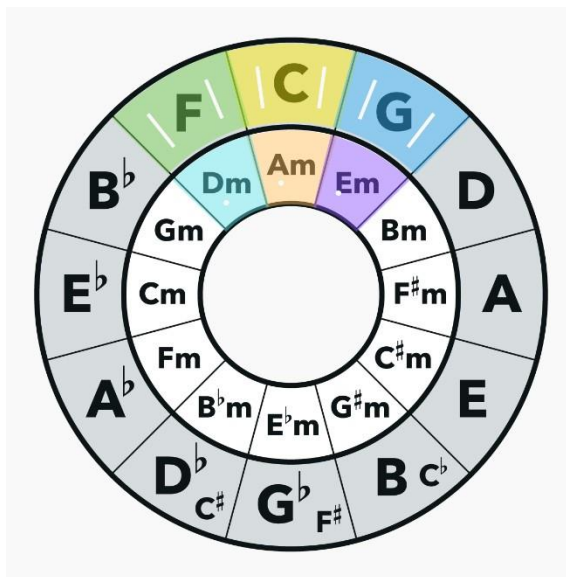
5. Beware, It's boring time (aka music theory yapping)

So, you made it here. If you thought the previous things were some advanced music theory stuff, I wasn't even scratching the surface.

Let's start with the circle of fifths. It's a tool that helps determine the basic chords in the given key.



The outer circle represents the major keys, the inner circle represents corresponding minor keys.



The yellow represents the Tonic – the key of a song;

The green represents a Subdominant – or a IV (that will be explained later in the chord progression section);

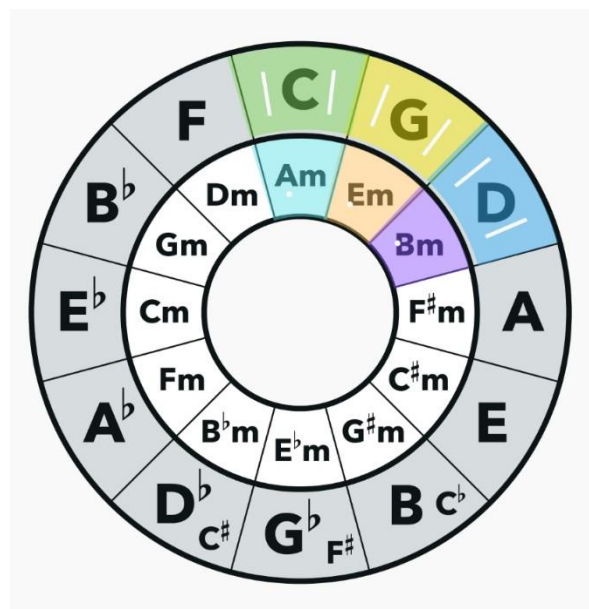
The blue represents a Dominant – or a V;

The orange represents a minor sixth (vi) – the minor counterpart of the major key;

The turquoise and purple are the minor second (ii) and third (iii).

Knowing the 6 chords allows you to play every song in the given key.

Below the same principle showed on the example of the G major key.



The next thing that's particularly useful is chord progressions, because once you figure out the progression, you will be able to play through the whole song (roughly).

There are some that are commonly used and appear in almost every song:

- I – vi – IV – V (for example C – Am – F – G)
- vi – IV – I – V (Am – F – C – G);
- ii – IV – I – V (Dm – F – C – G);
- ii – IV – I – V (Em – C – G – D)

- vi – IV – V – II (Em – C – D – A)

One last thing for the beginner guitar players. There's a device called capo, that allows you to change your guitar's tuning by not having to manually tune each string.



This way you can play the basic chords but in weird keys, like C# major, that otherwise would require only barre chords spread across the fretboard. Get one yourself, it's fun to use.