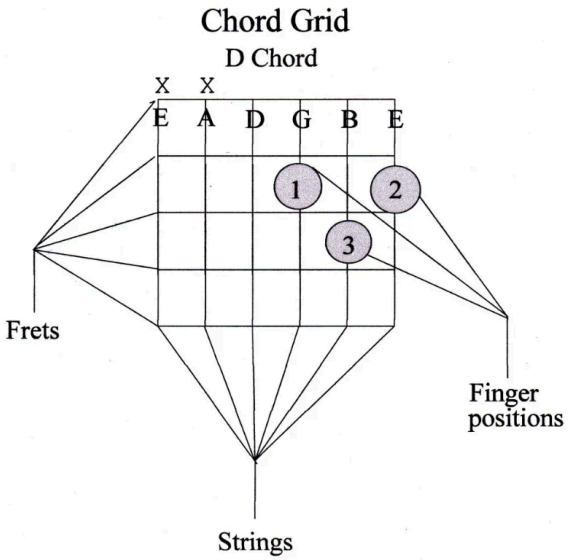
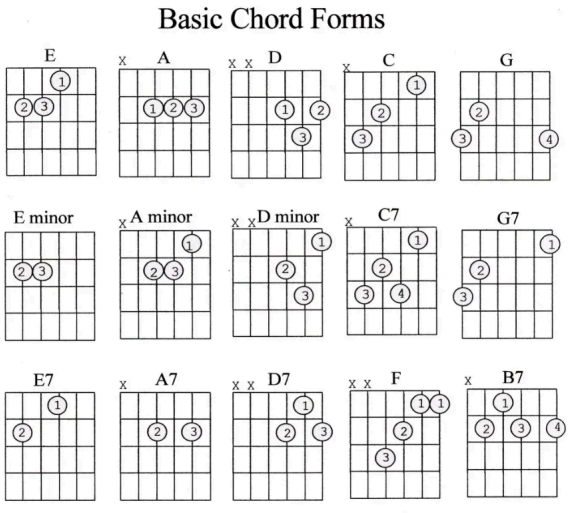
Guitar Chords Explained Part 1

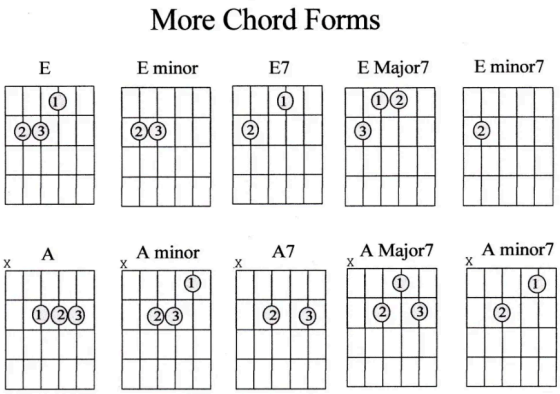
In most chord guides you look up the chord and it shows you what the chord form looks like. The guide may show you a few ways to play the same chord name. It is my goal to provide a basic understanding of how chords get their names as well as provide a vast library of chords for you to draw from. This guitar chord series will explain the theory that makes up the chords and teach you how to identify and make chords on your own. This will greatly help your writing abilities. PDF files of chord charts and diagrams will be provided.



Let's begin by learning how to read a chord grid. See the example above. The vertical lines represent the strings of the guitar. The very left line is the thickest string. The very right is the thinnest string. The horizontal lines represent the frets. Your fingers are numbered starting on the thumb side 1, 2, 3, and the pinky makes 4. The circles are where you put your fingers. Any X over the top of the grid means you don't play that string.

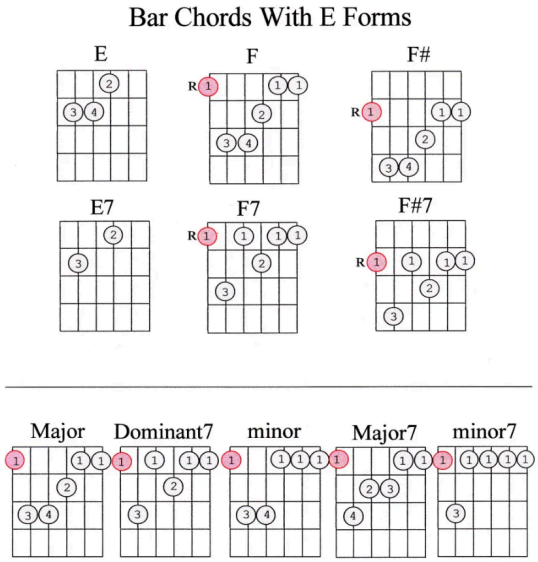


The most basic cords have three notes. These three note chords are called triads. The basic chords for guitar are major minor and dominant 7th chords. Dominant is omitted from the title. This type of chord is just written as 7. It has 4 notes in its structure. Major is another word that is also omitted from the title of a chord. So an E dominant 7 chord is just written as E7, and an E major chord is just written as E.



Now let's look at two more 7th type chords. In the above example, we see major 7 and minor 7. An E major chord will be written out as just E, An E minor chord will be written out as Em, An E dominant 7th chord will be written out as E7, An E minor 7 will be written out as Em7. An E major 7 will be written out as EM7. We have 5 E chord types and 5 A chord types in the above examples. These forms are the main forms we use to make bar chords. Let's go into bar chords with a little more detail.

Barre Chords or Bar Chords

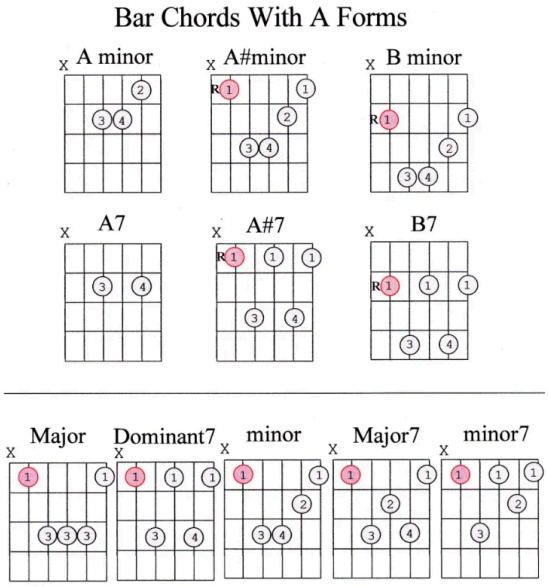


Here are what all the E forms look like as bar chords. In the first row of the example above you see an E chord. It is then moved up a half step. The first finger goes behind to create a bar. The chord becomes an F. It is then moved up another half step and the chord becomes an F#. The red note indicates the root note.

Whatever that red note is will determine the name of the chord. If the red note was a G then the whole chord will be a G chord. By learning the names of the notes on the low E string you can find and play all the major chords.

In the second row, we see an E7. It is then moved up a half step and once again the first finger places a bar behind the chord. The chord then becomes an F7. It is moved up a half step again. Now the chord becomes an F#7. Once again the red note is the root note and this note will determine the chord named.

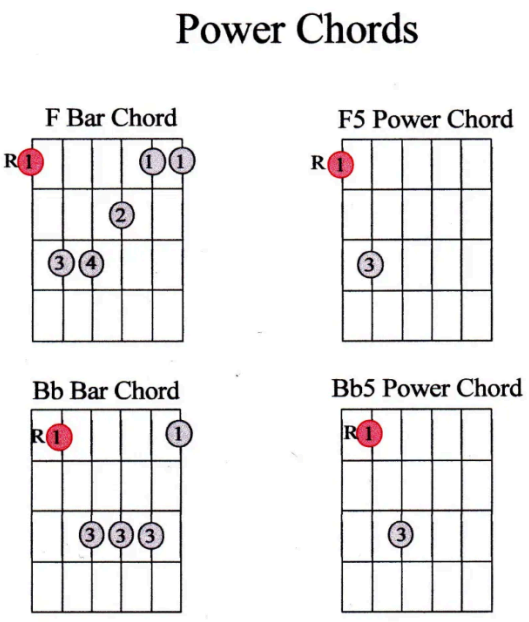
The last Row shows all the E forms and what they look like when they are barred. The red note is the root note and it determines the first part of the chord name. The type of chord determines the last part of the name. If this major 7 chord was played at the 4th fret then the chord would be called G#M7 (G Sharp Major 7). If you know the names of the notes on the low E string all the way up the neck to the 12 fret, and you also know these 5 E forms, then you would have 60 chord possibilities to draw from. Now let's look at A forms.



This works much in the same way as our last example. The only difference is we are using A forms and the root note is on the A string instead of the E string. In the first row, we are barring an Am. We move it up a half step and it becomes an A#m or a Bbm. Move it up another half step and it becomes a Bm.

Power Chords

The second row is a similar exercise. It is using an A7 chord. The last row shows you all the A forms barred. The red note is the root note of the chord. If you know all the names of the notes on the A string, (5th String) and you know the 5 A forms, then you would be presented with another 60 chord options. So in total, the bar chords we just covered will add 120 chord forms to your arsenal.



Technically it takes three notes to make a chord. Two notes are considered to be an interval. An interval is defined as the distance between two notes. Power chords came from bar chords and were made popular by

early blues and Rock music. They are intervals that just have the root note and the 5th note of the major scale. These notes are the same in all the chord forms we covered thus far. For that reason these chords are neutral. They can be played in place of Major Minor and all 7th type chords. With a little distortion, these chords become the backbone of Blues, Rock, and Metal music.

Basic Chord Theory All the chords we covered up to this point are built using two types of intervals. These intervals are known as a major 3rd and a minor 3rd. A major 3rd is 4 half steps. A minor 3rd has 3 half steps.

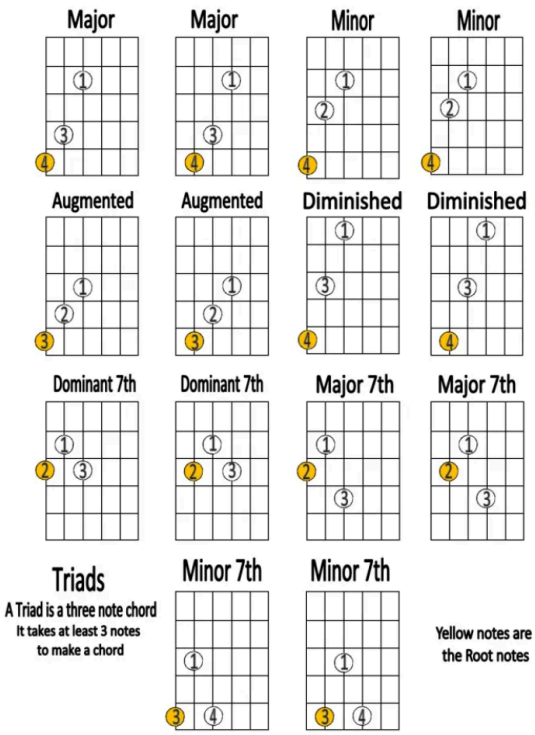
Chord Theory

Major 3rd = 4 half steps
minor 3rd = 3 half steps

Major	Maj 3rd	Min 3rd	
Minor	Min 3rd	Maj 3rd	
Augmented	Maj 3rd	Maj 3rd	
Dimminished	Min 3rd	Min 3rd	
Major 7th	Maj 3rd	Min 3rd	Maj 3rd
Minor 7th	Min 3rd	Maj 3rd	Min 3rd
Dominant 7th	Maj 3rd	Min 3rd	Min 3rd

A Maj 3 and a min 3 make a major chord. The Major chord is made up of the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the major scale. A minor chord has a min 3 and a Maj 3. A minor chord contains the 1st, flat 3rd, and 5th notes of the major scale.

When we add another 3rd we get 7th chords. A Major 7th chord is an M3, m3 and an M3. It contains the 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th notes of the major scale. A dominant 7th chord contains an M3, m3, and m3. It has the 1st, 3rd, 5th, and flat 7th of the major scale. A minor 7th chord contains an m3, M3, and an m3. It has the 1st, flat 3rd, 5th, and flat 7th from the major scale.



There are two chord types we have not talked about yet. One of these chords is called diminished. It is built with an m3 and an m3. It contains the 1st, flat 3rd, and flat 5th of the major scale. The other chord is called augmented. It is built with an M3 and an M3. It contains the 1st, 3rd, and flat 6th of the major scale.

The above chord grids show you the notes that make up every chord type We talked about so far. The root note is highlighted in yellow for every chord type. If you know the names of notes on the 5th and 6th strings of the guitar then you can use those chord patterns as templates to figure out the notes of any chord mentioned so far. The major 7, minor 7, and dominant 7 type triad chords have no 5th in them. The 5th note of the scale is the same in all of these chords and they add nothing to the identity of the chord.