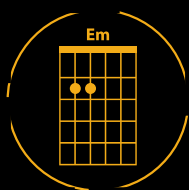


THE 4-STEP CHORD METHOD

ANYONE CAN LEARN



STEP 1

Start with chords that use just one finger.



STEP 2

Use one-finger chords to help you set up more complex chords.



STEP 3

Learn chord transitions between similar chord shapes.



STEP 4

Practice chord progressions using chords that share at least one finger until you can transition smoothly between complex chords.



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CHAPTER 4

THE METHOD: *step 1, 2, 3, and 4*

CHAPTER 5

WHAT'S NEXT?: *What your future
lessons will look like*

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CHAPTER 1

GREETINGS

Hey everyone,

This is Rodrigo Moreira, the founder of All Tempos. My mission here is to show you that learning guitar can be much more accessible than the way it is often taught.

To show you how our approach works, I chose to focus on one of the most important parts of learning guitar: chords.

Of course, music is not made up of chords alone. I could have used this ebook to show you how our approach works with other important parts of guitar playing, such as riffs, solos, rhythm, and more. But for many students, the main goal is simply to learn enough chords to play their favorite songs and sing along. So I chose a topic that can benefit the most people—and one where I can easily show you some of the problems with the way guitar is commonly taught, especially if you have ever tried learning from YouTube or TikTok videos.





If you go to Google or YouTube right now and search for “easiest guitar chords to learn” or “first guitar chords to learn,” chances are that most of the results will recommend some combination of these chords:

C, D, Dm, E, Em, G, A, and Am.

These chords are commonly known as “open chords,” so you will probably see that term a lot throughout this book. I lost count a long time ago of how many people have told me they tried to learn guitar by starting with these chords —and eventually gave up.

After struggling with them, many of these people came to the same conclusion:

“If these are the easiest guitar chords to learn and I can't play them, I must not have any talent.”

But that conclusion is simply not true.

There are TWO IMPORTANT REASONS why so many people struggle with this traditional approach—and understanding them will help you succeed.





1 These chords aren't actually the easiest ones to learn.

Most of these chords require you to use three or four fingers at the same time. But if you're a complete beginner, you haven't even learned how to position one finger on the guitar yet.

So why start by asking you to control three or four fingers at once?

2 Learning the chords is only half the problem.

Let's say you manage to learn a few of these chords. Great! Now you want to play a song that uses them.

That's when you may discover another problem: even though you know the chords, it takes you too long to move from one chord to the next. Before you know it, you've fallen behind the rhythm of the song.

And this is when many beginners realize something important:

The hardest part isn't necessarily learning the chords themselves. It's learning how to transition smoothly from one chord to another.





In the next few chapters, I'll show you a more efficient way to learn guitar chords.

By the end of this book, you'll understand why starting with these popular open chords isn't necessarily the best approach—and why our method works differently.

As we get closer to **Chapter 4**, where I'll show you our method step by step, I want you to keep these open chords in mind, along with the two main reasons beginners struggle with them:

Multiple fingers and difficult transitions.

Those two ideas will be important throughout the rest of the book.



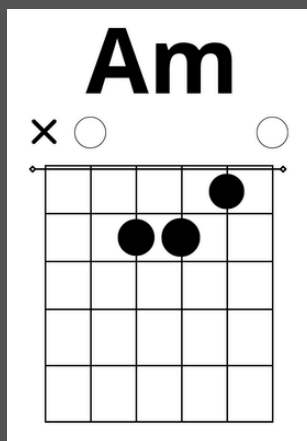


CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING CHORD DIAGRAMS

Before showing you the correct way to practice chords, I first need to show you how to read chord diagrams. This might be the longest part of the book, but once you understand it, you'll be able to move through the next chapters much more quickly.

If you've never heard this term before, a chord diagram is a visual representation of how to play a specific chord. It shows the chord symbol at the top and where to position your fingers on the guitar below it. The following image is an example of a chord diagram:



(Pronounced:
"A minor")



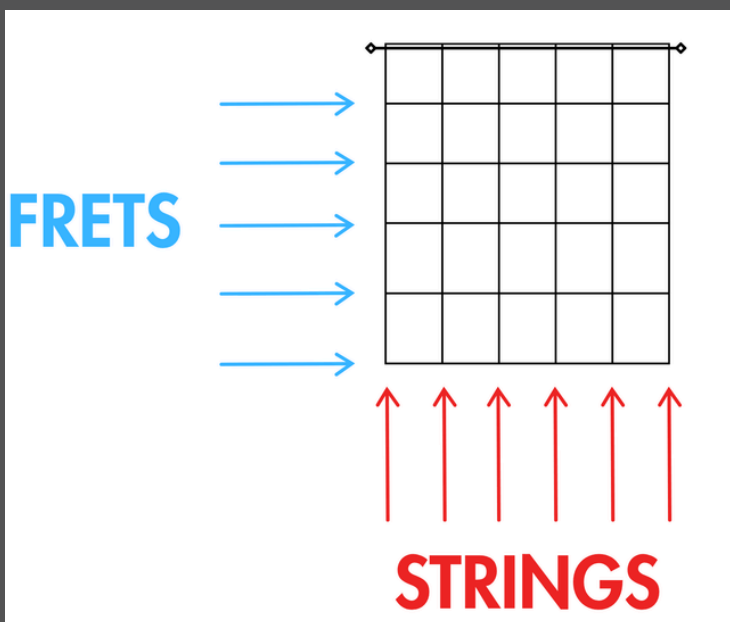
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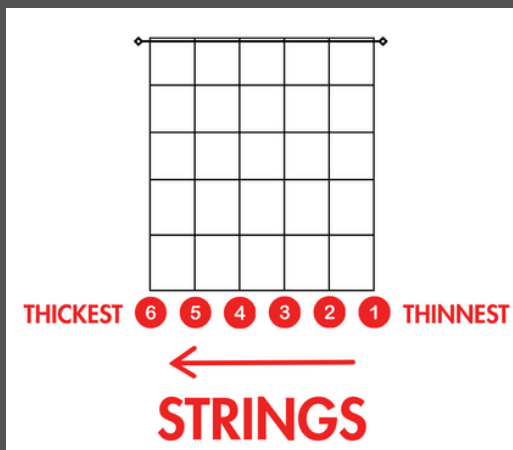
For a lot of people, a chord diagram looks like an Excel spreadsheet. It has 6 vertical lines that represent the 6 guitar strings and usually 4 or 5 horizontal lines that represent the frets.

If you've never heard the term "fret" before, frets are the metal bars embedded along the guitar's neck. That's why the guitar's neck is also commonly called the fretboard. Even though guitars generally have around 21 or 22 frets, chords usually don't span more than 5 frets, so chord diagrams typically show only a small section of the fretboard.

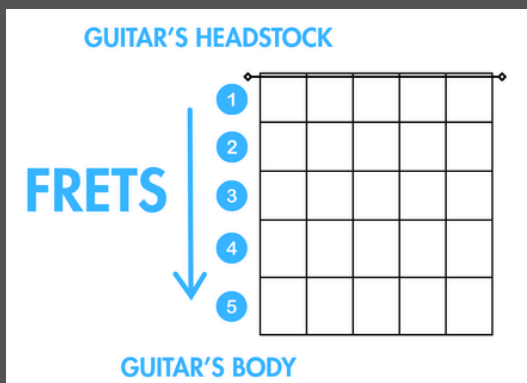




Another very important thing to know is that we count the guitar strings from the thinnest to the thickest.



And even though "frets" is technically the term used to describe the metal bars along the guitar's neck, the word "fret" became commonly used to describe the space between those metal bars. These are the spaces where we position our fingers.

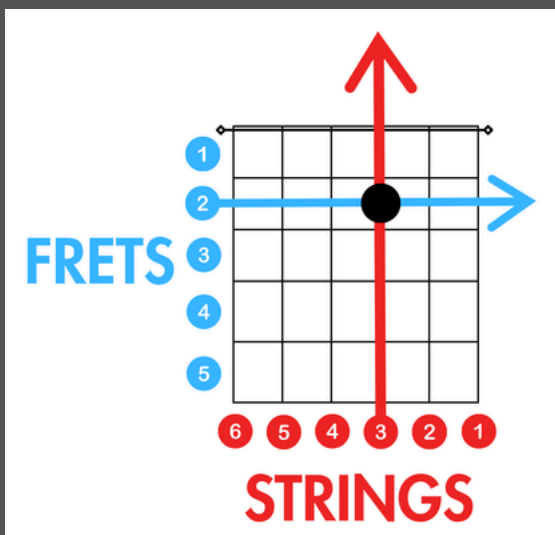




This is why a lot of people compare chord diagrams to an Excel spreadsheet. Instead of having columns and rows, we have strings and frets. The point where a string and a fret meet shows us where to position our fingers.

So, if your guitar teacher asks you to “put your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the 3rd string,” you should now know what that means. First, you count the strings from the thinnest to the thickest until you get to the 3rd string. Then, you count the frets until you reach the 2nd fret. The point where those two pieces of information meet is where you should place your finger.

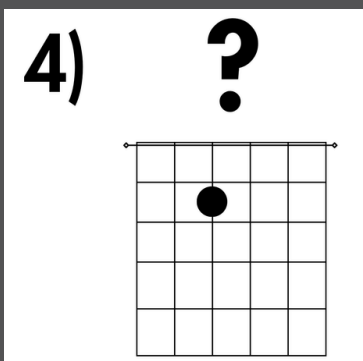
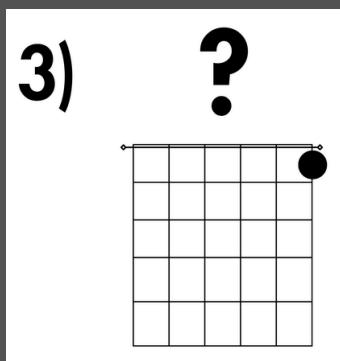
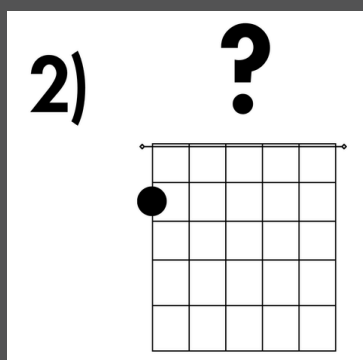
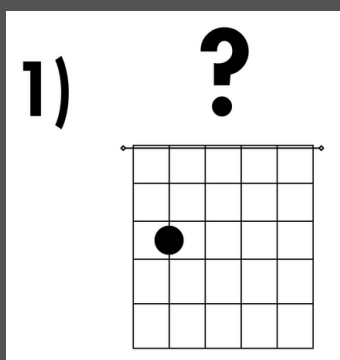
The following image shows where you should place your finger:





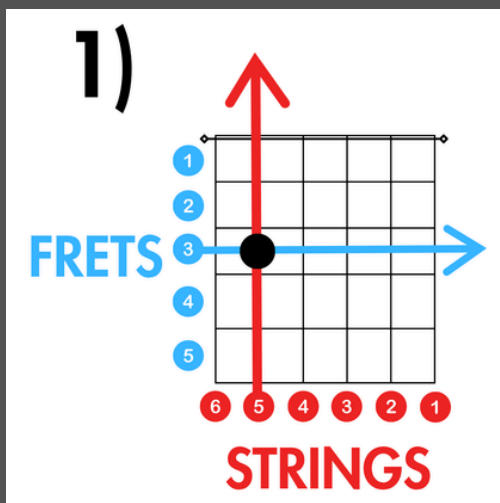
The black circle or circles show you where your finger or fingers should be placed.

Here are four chord diagrams for you to practice what you've learned so far. Can you identify which strings and frets your fingers should be positioned on? The answers are on the next pages.

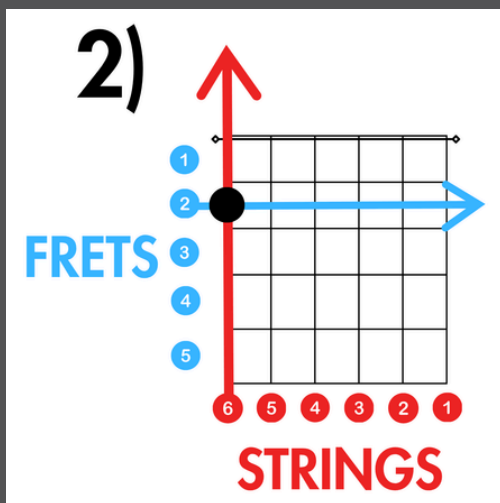




Answer 1) Finger should be placed on the 3rd fret of the 5th string.

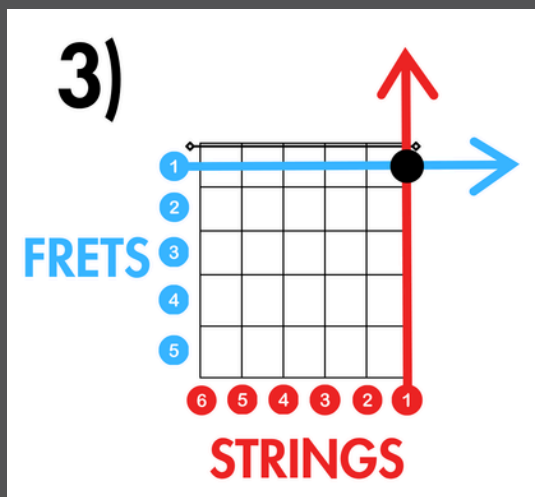


Answer 2) Finger should be placed on the 2nd fret of the 6th string.

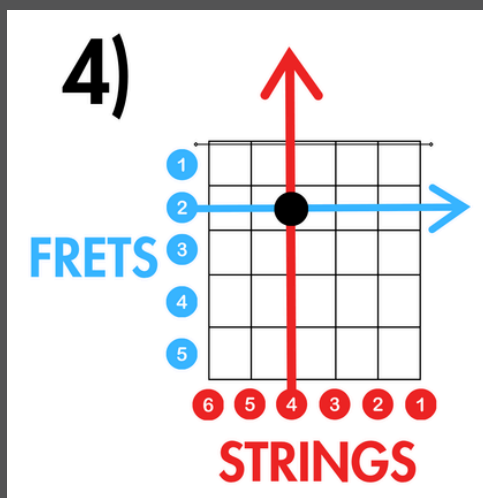




Answer 3) Finger should be placed on the 1st fret of the 1st string.



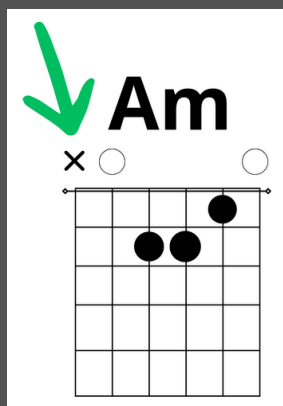
Answer 4) Finger should be placed on the 2nd fret of the 4th string.





There are a few more things you need to know. When we play chords, we're playing multiple strings at the same time, usually by strumming them. But that doesn't mean we have to strum all 6 strings for every chord.

The image below shows the same chord diagram as the first example of this chapter, and it represents an Am chord. Did you notice the "X" above the 6th string, the thickest string?



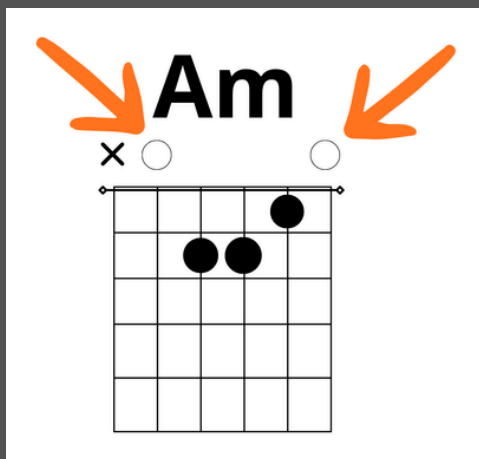
The "X" means that when you strum this chord, you should avoid playing the 6th string. You should strum all the other strings instead.

Now, let's put together everything you've learned so far. When looking at this Am chord diagram, you can see that it requires 3 fingers, because there are 3 black circles. You also know that when strumming the chord, you should avoid the thickest string.





But there's one more thing. Have you noticed that there's a circle above the 1st and 5th strings?



That circle means "open string." An open string is a string that should be played without placing any finger on it.

This is important to understand because many beginners think they only have to strum the strings where they have their fingers placed. That's not the case. When playing a chord, you might have some strings fretted with your fingers, some played open, and others that you need to avoid altogether.

Last but not least, I want to show you how to pronounce the name of a chord based on its chord symbol.





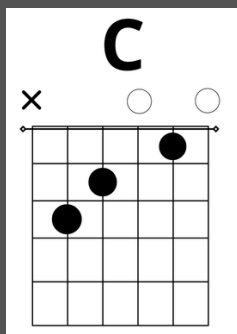
Whenever you see a chord represented by just a letter, such as "C," we simply call it "C" or "C major." The same applies to G, which can be called "G" or "G major," and so on.

Whenever you see a letter followed by a little "m," it stands for "minor." So, for example, the Am chord shown above should be called "A minor."

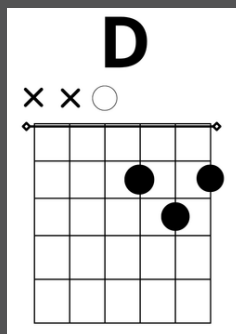
Of course, there are many different ways to name and write chords, but these are the most important ones for now and the ones you'll need to understand the rest of this book.

Below are some common open chords. Notice how many fingers each one requires. In the next chapter, you'll learn simpler versions of some of these same chords.

(Pronounced:
"C" or "C
major")



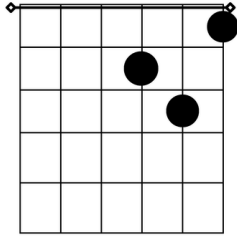
(Pronounced:
"D" or "D
major")





Dm

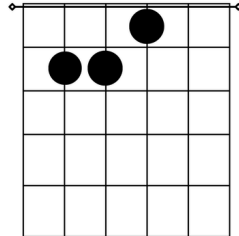
x x o



(Pronounced:
"D minor")

E

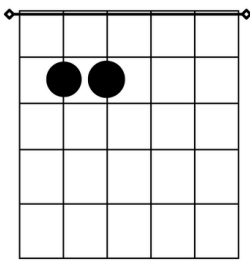
o o o o



(Pronounced:
"E" or "E
major")

Em

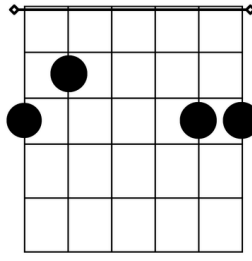
o o o o



(Pronounced:
"E minor")

G

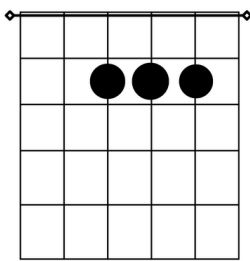
o o



(Pronounced:
"G" or "G
major")

A

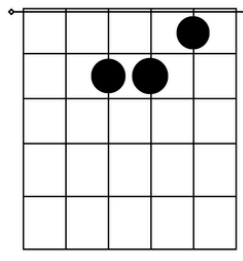
x o o



(Pronounced:
"A" or "A
major")

Am

x o o



(Pronounced:
"A minor")



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If you understand everything we've talked about in this chapter, you're ready to move on. There's no additional information you need to understand the next chapters.

In the following chapter, I'm going to show you a sequence of chords that I use to demonstrate to my students how they can play an entire chord progression from the very beginning of their musical journey.

More importantly, this chord sequence will help demonstrate the foundation of our method.





CHAPTER 3

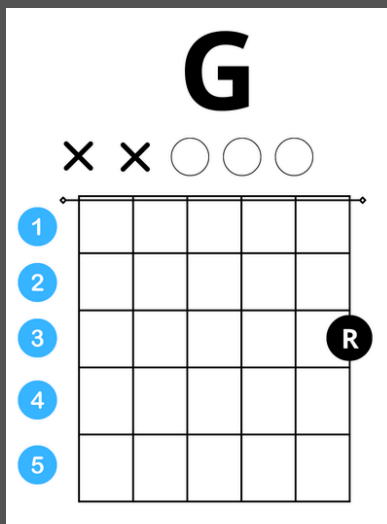
THE CORRECT WAY TO PRACTICE CHORDS

If you already have a guitar, take it out of the case and put it on your lap. You don't need a guitar to understand this exercise, but if you can actually try it and experience how easy it is, you'll feel much more encouraged to start learning guitar. Just make sure your guitar is tuned!

Take a look at the following chord diagram and answer these questions:

- What is the name of the chord?
- How many fingers do you need to play it?
- Which string and fret should you place your finger on?
- Are there any strings you should avoid when strumming this chord?





If your answers were "G" or "G major," one finger, the 3rd fret of the 1st string, and that the 5th and 6th strings should be avoided, then you nailed it!

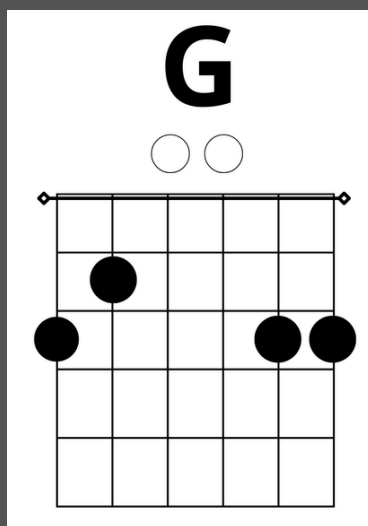
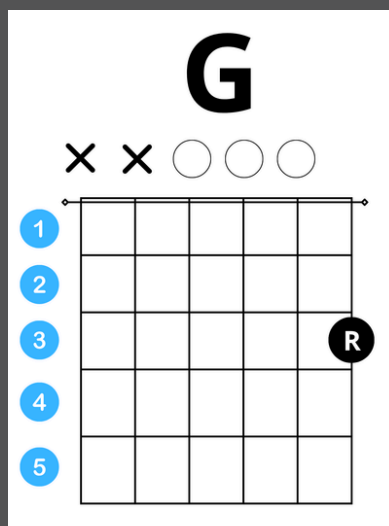
You probably noticed that there's an "R" inside the black circle. The reason for that is very simple. I like to make everything as easy as possible for our students, and that letter tells you which finger you should use to play the chord. The "R" stands for ring finger. Whenever you see other letters such as I, M, or P, they stand for Index, Middle, and Pinky fingers, respectively.

You'll also notice that I added some numbers to the left side of the chord diagram. Those are the fret numbers, and I added them to make the chord easier and faster to understand.





You might have noticed something weird now. If you're thinking, "Wait! Is this the G chord? Did he just show me another way to play the G chord at the end of the previous chapter that's much harder to play instead of using just one finger?" The answer is yes! Here are the two ways to play the G chord side by side.



In short, there are many ways to play the same chord. In fact, there are more than 30 different ways to play the same chord on the guitar.

These different versions give us a useful starting point: we can choose a simpler shape now and build toward more complex ones as you become comfortable.





The chords I showed you at the end of **Chapter 2** are some of the most common ones, and that's why you'll often see other people recommending that beginners start with them.

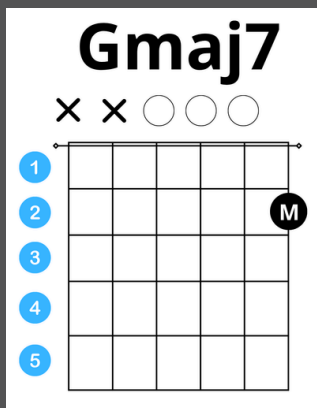
But the truth is that just because a chord is common or frequently used doesn't mean it's easy to learn.

There are many other ways to play the same chords that are much more accessible to beginners. We can use these easier versions to gradually work our way toward more complex ones. This helps avoid frustration and gives students a better understanding of how each finger should move from one chord to another, instead of asking them to move multiple fingers at the same time from the very beginning.

So, if you just started learning guitar—or if you're thinking about starting—this is your G chord. Don't forget how to play it! By the end of this chapter, we'll put it together with other chords and turn it into an entire exercise.

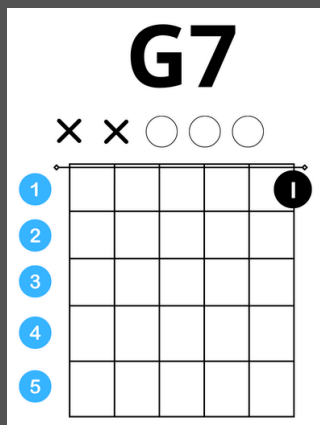
The following image shows the Gmaj7 chord, which should be pronounced "G major seven." There's no need to understand or memorize the name right now. Just focus on how to play it.





This chord is very similar to the G chord. The only difference is that now we're placing our middle finger on the 2nd fret of the 1st string. Everything else remains the same. We still avoid the 5th and 6th strings, so we strum only the other four strings.

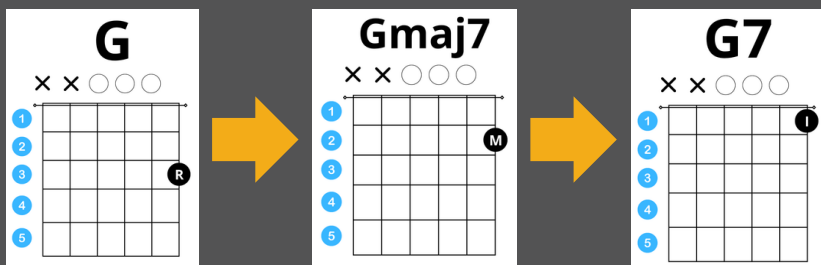
The following image shows the G7 chord, which should be pronounced "G seven." Again, there's no need to memorize the name.





This chord is very similar to the G chord. The only difference is that now we're placing our index finger on the 1st fret of the 1st string. Everything else remains the same. We still avoid the 5th and 6th strings and strum only the other four strings.

Before showing you more chords, if you have a guitar with you, I want you to play these three chords in the same sequence I just presented them.



You should strum each chord four times at a very slow tempo, paying close attention to the movement of your fingers. Start on the 3rd fret with your ring finger, then slowly move to the 2nd fret with your middle finger, and finally move to the 1st fret with your index finger.

Don't forget that we're strumming four strings at the same time while avoiding the 5th and 6th strings. Try to keep a steady movement with your strumming hand. You can use either a pick or your thumb to strum.





These three chords are among the easiest chords you can play. Not the ones people usually promote in YouTube or TikTok videos as the *“first chords you should learn.”* Most beginners who start with those chords can quickly become frustrated and give up.

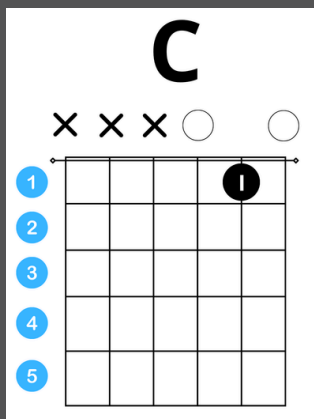
The good news is that if you were able to play these three chords—or if you could easily understand how to play them—then yes, you can definitely learn guitar.

Of course, not 100% of the people reading this will be able to immediately grasp the exercise. When we teach music, ideally, we show students exactly how we play it so they can understand the technique and the correct position of their hands. They can also hear what each chord is supposed to sound like.

Now I’m going to add three more chords to that same sequence. Each one will be a little more challenging than the previous one. These chords aren’t necessary for you to decide whether you can play guitar or not. They’re simply here to show you another important pillar of our method.

The following image shows the C chord, which should be pronounced “C” or “C major.”





For the first three chords, we only had to place our fingers on the 1st string. For the C chord, we only need to place our index finger on the 1st fret of the 2nd string.

There's one more important difference here. To play this chord, we need to avoid the 4th, 5th, and 6th strings.

We'll only be strumming the three thinnest strings. Why is this chord more challenging than the previous ones?

Well, something that happens to many students is that when they place their index finger on the 1st fret of the 2nd string, part of that same finger slightly touches the string below it—the 1st string. When that happens, your finger will “mute” the string, and you won't be able to hear it clearly.

There's no reason to worry. This happens to almost 100% of beginners at this point.

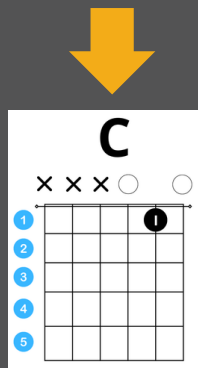
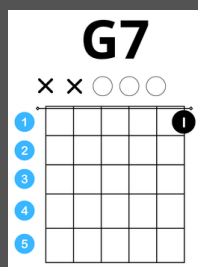
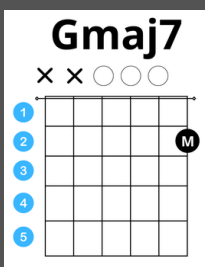
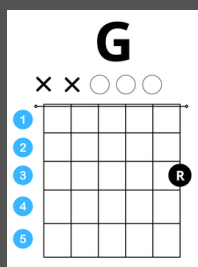




To avoid it, when you place your finger on the string, the point of contact should be the tip of your finger. In most cases, the solution is to imagine that your hand is holding a tennis ball or a baseball. Your fingers should stay naturally curved. When you do this, it becomes much easier to touch the string with just the tip of your finger.

Keep in mind, though, that this is not something you'll necessarily fix overnight. Developing the correct hand position takes time and practice.

Now I want you to play the whole exercise, or chord sequence, adding the C chord at the end. We'll now have:



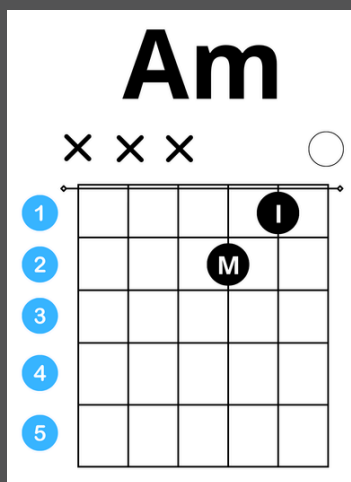


All you have to do when moving from the G7 chord to the C chord is move your index finger one string over. That's still a very easy chord transition.

Remember to play each chord four times at a steady tempo.

Now we're going to add a 5th chord to the sequence: the Am chord. This one will be more challenging than the previous chords because it requires the use of two fingers.

The following image shows the Am chord, which should be pronounced "A minor."



To play this chord, place your index finger on the 1st fret of the 2nd string and your middle finger on the 2nd fret of the 3rd string at the same time.

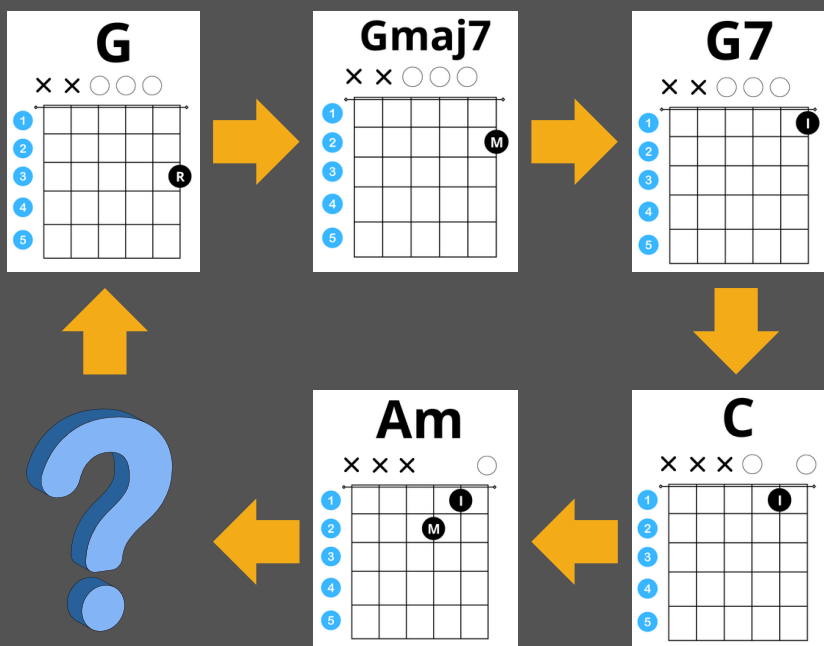




If you look at the “X” marks at the top of the diagram, you’ll see that we’re still avoiding the 4th, 5th, and 6th strings.

This isn’t necessarily an easy chord to learn, but if you add it to our chord sequence, you’ll notice that the C chord helps you “set up” the Am chord.

Why? Because when you play the C chord, your index finger is already placed on the 1st fret of the 2nd string. So, when you move to Am, all you have to do is keep your index finger in the same place and add your middle finger to the 2nd fret of the 3rd string.

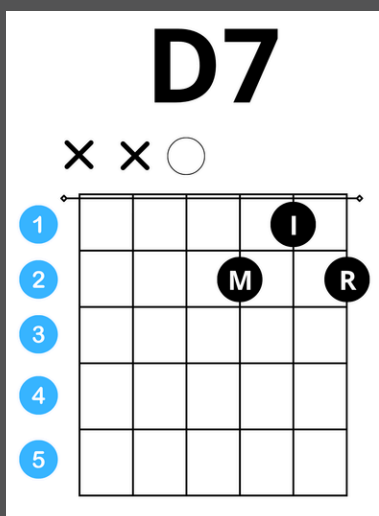




And this is another important pillar of our approach to learning chords: when learning more complex chords, we use easier chords to help us set up the correct fingering.

This makes the transition smoother and more accessible. The next—and final—chord we'll add to our sequence is another great example of this approach.

The following image shows the D7 chord, which should be pronounced "D seven."



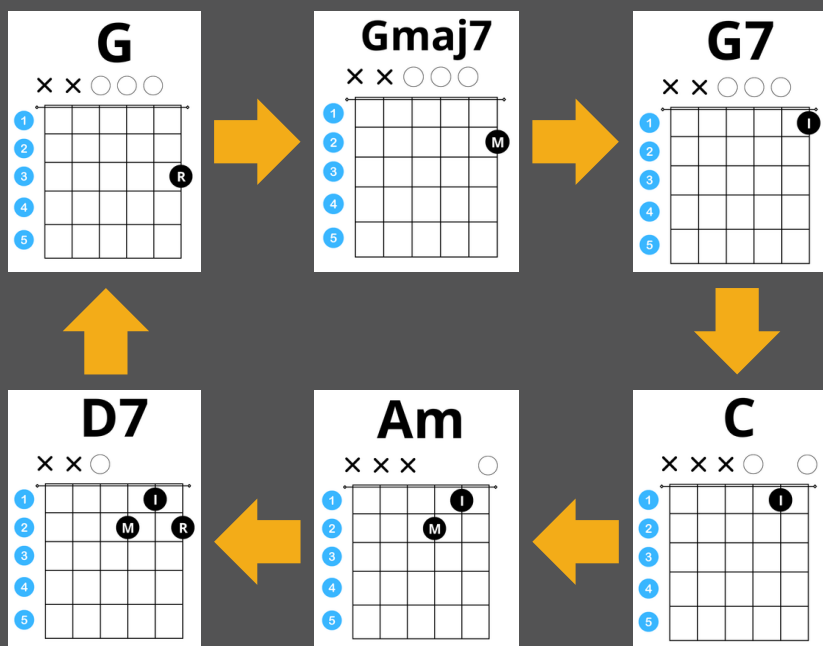
D7 requires three fingers, which can feel challenging at first. But you've already practiced placing two of them in the Am chord. Now you only need to add your ring finger.





The index finger should be placed on the 1st fret of the 2nd string, the middle finger on the 2nd fret of the 3rd string, and the ring finger on the 2nd fret of the 1st string. Notice that we're now back to avoiding only two strings and strumming the remaining four.

This is a very challenging chord for a beginner to learn. It's about as difficult as many of the chords other methods promote as the *"first chords you should learn."* But when you place it in our chord sequence, right after the Am chord, it becomes much more accessible.





When moving from Am to D7, all you have to do is keep your index and middle fingers in the same place and add your ring finger to the 2nd fret of the 1st string.

That's the pillar I mentioned earlier.

The G7 and C chords have similar finger positions, which makes the transition between them easier. The C chord helps set up the Am chord, and the Am chord helps set up the D7 chord.

Everything in our method has a correct order in which it should be practiced, and every new topic or exercise is built on what you've already learned.

In the next chapter, I'll summarize the main pillars of our method. Then, in **Chapter 5**, I'll show you what your future lessons will look like.





CHAPTER 4

THE METHOD: *step 1, 2, 3, and 4*

If you've followed everything we've discussed in the previous chapters, you already have a good grasp of what each step of this method looks like. We've taken common chord progressions that can be used in countless popular songs and turned them into exercises that gradually take you from playing the easiest chords to more complex ones.

These chord exercises are based on the following four steps:

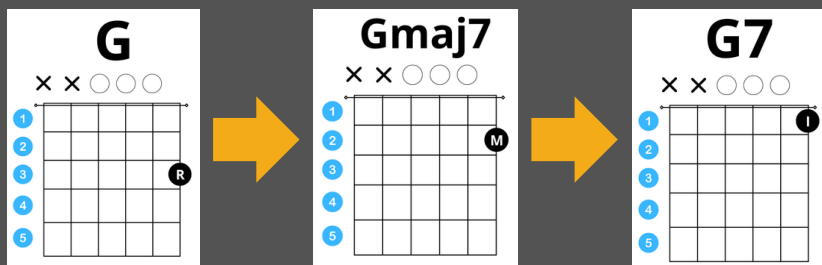
STEP 1:

We start by learning chords that require only one finger at a time and focus on the transitions between those chords.

The goal is to achieve very smooth transitions while making sure you're learning exactly how to move each finger, how to position your hand, and how the movement of your elbow and shoulder can affect your playing. This helps you develop an efficient technique while avoiding unnecessary tension.

An example of this step is the first three chords I showed you in the previous chapter: $G \rightarrow G\text{maj}7 \rightarrow G7$.

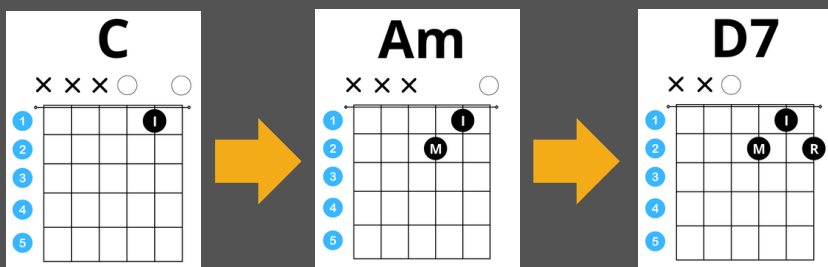




STEP 2:

Step two was also introduced in the previous chapter. Here, we use simple chords to set up more complex chord structures.

A good example is the sequence $C \rightarrow Am \rightarrow D7$, which we worked on in the previous chapter. If our goal is to learn a more complex chord like D7, which requires three different fingers, we first play the C chord, which helps set up the Am, which then helps set up the D7.

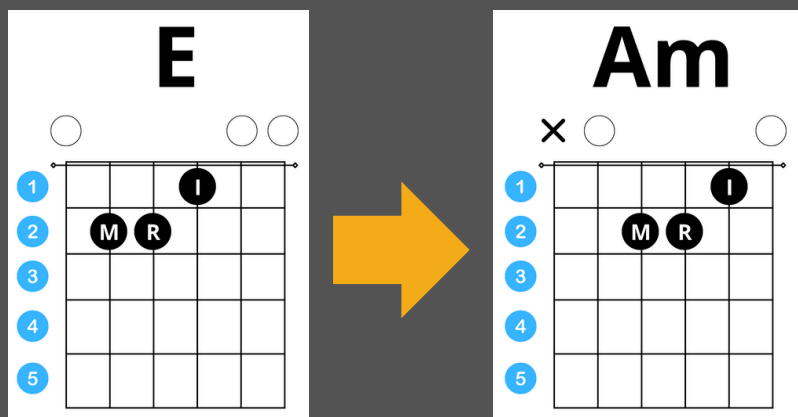




STEP 3:

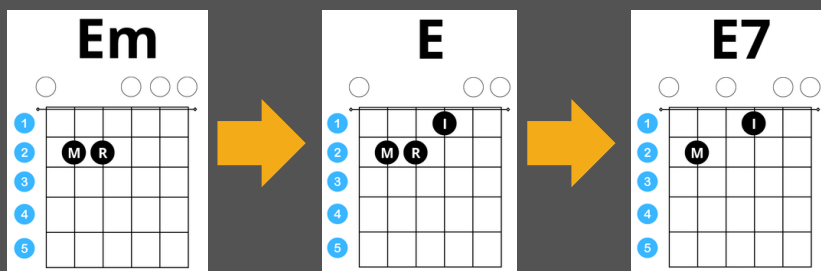
In step 3, we start working on more complex chords that require multiple fingers, but the transitions are still relatively easy because we focus on chords with similar fingerings.

The following image shows the E chord and the Am chord. They have the exact same fingering (or "shape," as we most commonly call it), but they're played on different strings. This is an excellent way to learn how to keep your fingers in the same position while moving the entire chord shape to a different set of strings.



Still in step 3, another way to work on complex chord structures while keeping similar shapes is to group together chords that only require one finger to move from one chord to the next.

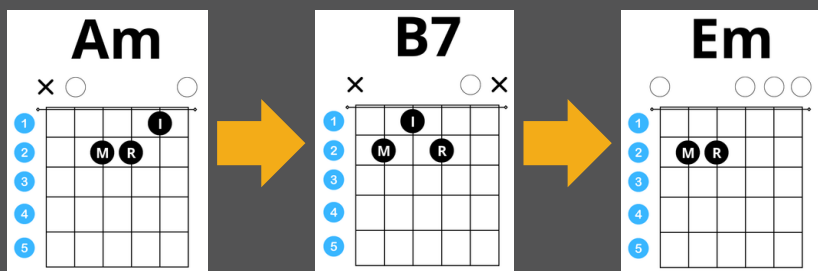




STEP 4:

The final step is split into two parts.

First, we start working on transitions between chords that have only one common note. The following image shows the Am → B7 → Em progression.



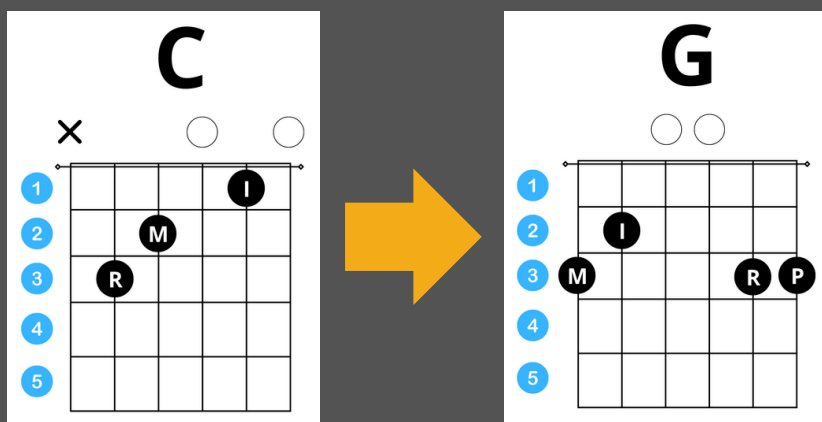
Notice that the Am and B7 chords have only one finger in common. The ring finger stays in the exact same position while the other two fingers move to different strings.





Then, from B7 to Em, the middle finger stays in the same position while the ring finger moves to another string, and we no longer need the index finger.

Secondly, as the student becomes comfortable with all the previous steps, we start working on chord structures that have no common fingers at all, such as the C → G transition.



Keep in mind that, even though I'm dividing the method into four easy steps, that doesn't mean you'll be able to play every chord you want after completing just four exercises.

For each step, we've developed many different chord exercises to fit each student's individual needs. We have exercises for virtually any situation, but the number of exercises each student needs will vary depending on the person and the songs they want to play.





You also don't need to complete all of these exercises before you start playing songs. In fact, most students begin learning some easy songs by their fourth or fifth exercise.

But again, this varies from person to person.

In the next chapter, we'll discuss what you should expect from your lessons and what we expect from you as a student in order to help you achieve your goals.





CHAPTER 5

WHAT'S NEXT? *What your future lessons will look like*

Of course, your lessons won't be only about chords. As I mentioned at the beginning of the first chapter, we've expanded this approach of "breaking everything down into the smallest possible step" to every important area of learning guitar—from chords to riffs, solos, melodies, and everything in between.

Our primary goal, however, is to teach you chords, different strumming patterns, and the basics of music notation so you can start reading and learning melodies. Ideally, we want to take you to the point where you can play the chords and melodies of the songs you like.

Once you get there, with a strong foundation in the areas I just mentioned, we can start adapting your lessons around any specific topic you'd like to learn. If you've always wanted to learn blues guitar, for example, we can adapt your lessons to work on the most common blues chords, the blues scale, how to actually use that scale to create melodies, and much more.





What should you expect from your lessons?

- A few minutes going over your homework and giving you feedback on what you could improve.
- A section of the lesson focused on chords.
- A section focused on reading music, including how to read single notes and rhythm so you can start playing melodies.
- A part of the lesson focused on developing your technique.
- And, if you're already familiar with some chords and basic music notation, we should always be working on a song.

What do we expect from you?

- To practice!

I repeat this a thousand times to our students. There's a famous saying in my country that I like to adapt to this situation. It goes something like this:

"It doesn't matter if you have the best instructor, the best methods, or the best instrument—you still have to pay the toll."





In other words, we can show you the most efficient way to get where you want to go, but you still have to do your part. If you don't practice, you're simply not going to move forward.

When you think about practicing, how much time comes to mind? An hour a day? Two hours? Do you have any idea how often you actually need to practice each week? When I answer that question for our students, they're usually surprised by how little—and how doable—it actually is.

Of course, every student is different, but after almost 15 years of teaching, I can give you a good starting point. As a complete beginner, 30 minutes, 3 to 4 times a week is perfect. If you commit to that routine, I can almost guarantee that in about 5 or 6 months, you'll be playing more songs than you expected.

I like to compare practicing an instrument to working out. The process—or, better yet, the routine—is pretty similar. If you work out three days a week, you can make great progress while still giving your body time to recover. The same idea applies to learning an instrument.





The days when you don't practice are almost as important as the days when you do. Your body and your brain need time to rest. During those periods, your muscles are still adapting, and your brain is still processing and absorbing the information you practiced.

I know that might sound a little abstract or even counterintuitive, but your brain really does keep working on what you learned while you're away from the instrument.

I've lost count of how many times I've heard a student say, "I didn't practice yesterday," only to be surprised by how much better they could play during the next lesson.

Of course, I'm not telling you to stop practicing and expect to magically play songs one day. I'm talking about balance. The periods when you rest are just as important as the moments when you practice.

There's another common situation I see all the time during lessons. A student tries to play something that's very challenging for them over and over again. They keep getting it wrong, become frustrated, and eventually start playing even worse.





When that happens, sometimes I'll completely change the subject. We might start talking about something random that has absolutely nothing to do with music. Then, a few minutes later, we try the exercise again—and suddenly, the student nails it.

It's not magic. It's simply how your brain learns.

Sometimes, you've already learned everything you need to learn. You know the correct technique, you understand the movement, and you've received the information. At that point, your brain simply needs some time to process and absorb it. There's nothing else you can do except give it that time.

I love writing about these topics, as well as music education in general, on my blog at alltempos.com/blog. Feel free to read as much as you want, and if you have any questions or feedback, I'd love to hear from you!

Going back to the main topic: can you imagine adding thirty minutes of practice, three to four times a week, to your routine?

If that sounds doable, don't hesitate to schedule your trial lesson. We're here to help you achieve your goals, just as we've helped many other people like you.





All my best,
Rodrigo Moreira

SCHEDULE TRIAL LESSON



ALL TEMPOS
MUSIC FOR EVERY JOURNEY

