

How we get the 6 basic chords

(There are 7 but we actually only work with the first 6)

1. We start with a Major scale. In this example, it is C Major.

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
T				0	2	0	1
A							
B	3	0	2	3			

2. We then stack notes on top of each scale note using every other letter creating chords (CEG, DFA, etc.)

CEG	DFA	EGB	FAC	GBD	ACE	BDF	CEG
T		0	1	3	0	1	3
A	0	2	2	4	1	3	5
B	2	3	3	5	2	4	5

3. Each of these chords sounds either happy (Major) or sad (minor) and is named after the original scale note name. (The chord on the 7th note is "diminished", more on that later.)

C	Dmi	Emi	F	G	Ami	B°	C
T		0	1	3	0	1	3
A	0	0	2	4	1	3	5
B	2	2	3	5	2	4	5

4. Each note of the scale is numbered (using Roman Numerals). Upper case for Major, lower case for minor. The formula is the same in ALL 12 keys:

Major, minor, minor, Major, Major, minor, diminished? (7 different chords total)

C	Dmi	Emi	F	G	Ami	B°	C
T		0	1	3	0	1	3
A	0	0	2	4	1	3	5
B	2	2	3	5	2	4	5

5) By adding one more note from the scale to the top of the stack, we get various types of 7th chords. The most important 7th is the one which changes the G Major to G7 on the V chord. A V7 chord "wants" to go back to the I chord. Play the G7 chord and then play the C chord. Listen how the G7 resolves to the C.

	CMaj ⁷	Dmi ⁷	E ^{mi} ⁷	FMaj ⁷	G ⁷	A ^{mi} ⁷	Bdim ⁷	CMaj ⁷
	IMaj ⁷	ii ⁷	iii ⁷	IVMaj ⁷	V ⁷	vi ⁷	viidim ⁷	
T	0	1	3	0	1	3	5	7
A	0	2	4	1	3	5	6	8
B	2	3	5	2	4	5	7	9
B	3	5	7	3	5	7	9	10

Listen to the difference between the 3 note chords and the 4 note chords. In pop music, the mi⁷ chords are used extensively while the Maj⁷ are not.

6) When trying to find the chords to a song in a folk, pop, rock or country style, start with the I, IV and V(7) chords. When it sounds like you need an additional or different chord, try the minor chords.

Each minor chord can augment or substitute for it's relative Major chord.

Here's how it works:

Use: Dmi⁷ for F

E^{mi}⁷ for G

A^{mi}⁷ for C

JAZZ

7) Once you add notes to the stack above the 7th, you get into Jazz. The jazz style deals extensively with the 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths and their alterations: b9, +9, +11, b13, +13.

8) The other note which is altered in pop and more so in jazz is the 5th: b5 or +5.

9) Just remember that the numbers refer to that step of the scale: A 9th is the 9th step of the scale, etc. And the alterations either raise that note one half step or lower it one half step. So if you see a chord that says: D7 (+9 b13), you play up the D Major scale, stop at the 7th note (C#) and lower it a half step (to C). Then stop at the 9th note and raise it a half step. Then stop at the 13th step and lower it a half step. Here's a short cut: the 9th is the same as the 2nd, the 11th is the 4th, and the 13th is the 6th. The reason the high numbers are used is because the notes need to appear in their proper place in the stack.

10) By the way, the formula for figuring out a Major scale is:

Whole, whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half.

These are the steps from the first note to the second, second to third and so on.

When finding the various intervals, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th, you must use the Major scale based on the chord name.