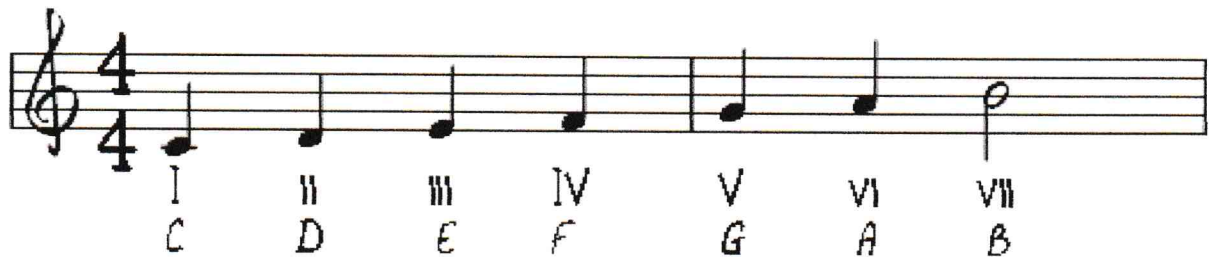


What Are I IV V (1 4 5) Chords and Why Should You Care?

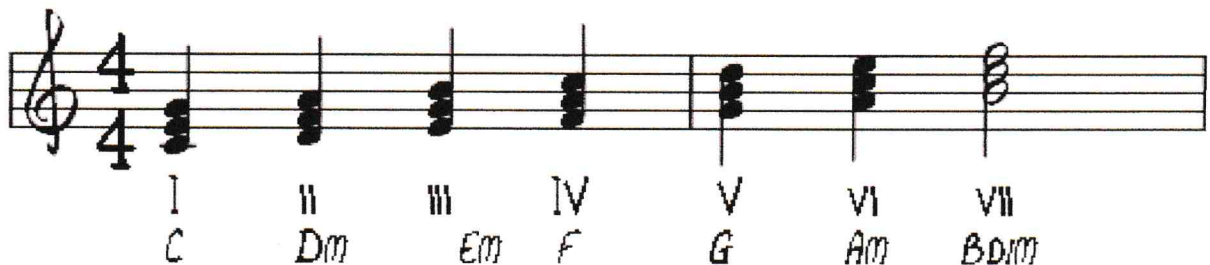
If you hang around musicians long enough, you'll start to hear them talking about numbers and in particular the chord numbers **1 (I)** **4 (IV)** and **5 (V)**. You may be wondering what they mean as you may know the chords **A**, **D** and **E7** but don't know how to play **I**, **IV** or **V** chords.

The numbers **I**, **IV** and **V** come from a musical relationship between notes. If you can get your head wrapped around this relationship writing your own songs can be easy and less mysterious.

The numbers **I**, **IV** and **V** refer to the 3 main chords used in many country, blues, folk, rock and pop songs and how they work together. To explain this further we're going to learn some basic music theory. The **I**, **IV**, and **V** number designations are based on the ascending steps of a major scale. Below you'll see the **C major scale** with each note labelled with a number in Roman numerals.



Next we'll create chords by stacking extra notes on top of the scale notes. These chords are called triads as they use 3 notes. The extra added notes are called the **3rd** (note) and the **5th** (note). The notes used to create these chords come from the **C major scale**. You'll see that some chords are major and written in capital roman numerals (e.g. **I**, **IV** & **V**) and some minor written in lowercase (e.g. **ii** & **iii**, or small case **m**).



The **I** chord is called the **tonic** or the **root** chord and acts as the home base in a song. A song usually starts and ends on the **I** chord as it sounds right to the ear and feels comfortable just like going home. The 2 other chords that act as big signposts pointing to this "home" chord are the **IV** chord (called the **sub dominant**) and the **V** chord (called the **dominant**). Ninety-nine

percent of the time, in nearly all songs, the **V** chord resolves to the **I** chord which means that if you play a **V** chord in a song followed by the **I** chord it sounds like the song is going home to rest or ending.

See how this sounds by first playing a C chord to establish the **tonic(I)** chord sound and then play a **G (V)** chord followed by that **C** chord (or, tonic chord) again. Doesn't this sound like going home or the end of a song?

Listen to this audio example to hear the **C (I)** to **G (V)** to **C (I)** chords [here](#).

Try this also by playing the **C** chord (**I**) followed by the **F** chord (**IV**) then the **C** chord (**I**) again. This should sound like going home, but not as strong as the **G (V)** going back to the **C (I)**. To better understand this relationship, use the analogy of gravity making objects fall to the ground with the **V** chord being heavier than the **IV** chord like a lead weight falling faster than a feather.

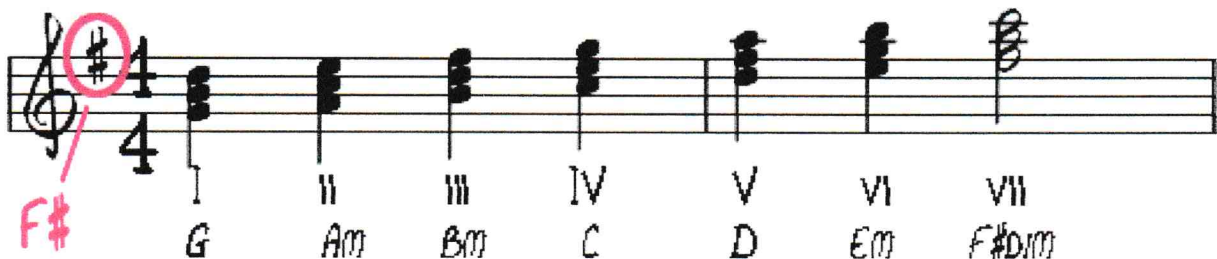
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Keys

So now that we have an idea of how these chords work together, we can look at how they work in songs. While thousands upon thousands of songs use **I IV V** chords (or, C, F and G), it is important to know that these 3 fundamental chords - I, IV, V - are an inherent part of all keys! The term "key" may open up a whole new can of worms, but not really when we look at how a key (or, scale) is created at a particular starting point, (or note). Let's use the Key of G (below) as one of the 12 starting points in music.

But first, know that at each of those 12 starting points a major scale has a uniform sound based on the steps or "intervals" between the notes. These intervals will remain the same regardless of your starting note in a major scale. The note intervals of a major scale are **W W H W W W H**.

For example for the key of **G major** the note **F** needs to be changed to **F sharp (#)** up one fret to fit the pattern. If this isn't done and the **F** note is left as a "natural" note the scale doesn't sound quite right.



Looking at the diagram above you will see that the **I IV V** chords of **G major** are **G, C** and **D major**. I like to call these 3 chords the fundamental chords of country, rock, folk and pop music

because hundreds of thousands of songs in all these musical idioms are derived from some either strict adherence to, or slight variation of, the I, IV, and V chords in ANY key.

Below is a table showing the **I, IV, and V** chords for some of the most common keys. You can use it to work out the **I IV V** chords used in how man? YES, hundreds of thousands of songs.

| Key | I | IV | V |
|------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| C | C | F | G |
| D | D | G | A |
| E | E | A | B |
| F | F | Bb | C |
| G | G | C | D |
| A | A | D | E |
| B | B | E | F# |

Transposing

Now we know what **I, IV, and V** means and how it works as a formula used in thousands and thousands of songs, the next use for thinking of chords as numbers is being able to "*transpose*" or change songs into different keys.

Sometimes a song isn't in the right key for a singer meaning that it's not comfortable for them to sing as certain notes are too low or too high. Therefore the song needs to be transposed to a key that better suits their vocal range.

To do this use the table to work out the **I, IV, and V** chords for a key that suits them best. For example they may struggle to sing "**Wild Thing**" in the key of **A (A D E chords)** but may be able to hit all the notes in the key of **D (D G A chords)**.