



Spelling Triads

Triads are three note chords arranged an interval of a third apart. The members of a triad are root, third and fifth, referred to by their interval number above the root. The specific quality of the third and fifth define the four types of triads.

Triad spellings

All triads are spelled using letter names a third apart. First, learn to spell the musical alphabet in thirds. Practice until it becomes second nature.

C E G B D F A C E... Start on any letter and keep going up or down in thirds.

Since all triads are spelled in thirds, all possible letter names for triads are contained in this: CEG, EGB, GBD, BDF, DFA, FAC, ACE,

Triad Quality

Triads can have any of four qualities: Major, Minor, Diminished, or Augmented. The specific interval quality of the third and fifth relative to the root determine the quality of the triad:

Major Triad

A major triad consists of a root note and a major third and perfect fifth above it.

1 (Root); Major 3; Perfect 5

Minor Triad

A Minor triad consists of a root note and minor third and perfect fifth above it. Compared to a major triad, it is necessary to lower the third by $\frac{1}{2}$ step to make a minor third. The interval of root to 5 is the same for both major and minor.

1 (Root); Minor 3; Perfect 5

Augmented Triad

An Augmented triad consists of a root note with a major third and an augmented fifth above it. Compared to a major triad, it is necessary to raise the fifth by 1/2 step. The interval of root to 3 is the same for both major and augmented triads.

1 (Root); Major 3; Augmented 5

Diminished Triad

A Diminished triad consists of a root note with a minor third and a diminished fifth above it. Compared to a minor triad it is necessary to lower the fifth by 1/2 step. Compared to a major triad, it is necessary to lower the third by 1/2 step and lower the fifth by 1/2 step.

1 (Root); Minor 3; Diminished 5

Easy Way to Calculate Triad Spelling

Major Triad spellings use these rules for the 3 groups of note names.

GROUP 1: C, F, G Root:

The major chord built on these notes will have the same accidental for root, third and fifth. So if the root is Gb, the chord is Gb, Bb, Db. If the root is F#, the triad is F#A#C#.

The Major chord spellings are C E G; F A C; G B D

GROUP 2: A, D, E Root:

The major chord built on each of these notes will have the same accidental for the root and fifth and the third will have an accidental 1/2 step higher. So if Root is b, then 5 is b and 3 is Natural. If root is natural, then 5 is natural and 3 is sharp.

The Major chord spellings are D F# A; A C# E; E G# B

GROUP 3: B Root:

If the root of the chord is B then both the third and fifth of the chord (D and F) will be one accidental higher than the root for a major chord.

The Major chord spelling is: B D# F#; or Bb D F