

BEGINNING HAMMER DULCIMER

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CHORD BASICS

Spelling Major Chords

Major chords are the backbone of much of music. You must become familiar with their sound and how to determine each of the three members of a chord. Major chords are most often identified by the simple symbol of a capital letter. A “C major chord” is usually just written as “C”. Occasionally this will be unclear and the composer will write CMAJ or less frequently CM. NEVER will anyone write Cm. That symbol is reserved for minor chords.

The Formulas. The most basic form of a major chord has three members and is often called a major “triad”. When we talk about the individual tones of a triad or chord, we often talk about “spelling” the chord. There are two formulas for spelling a major chord. Pick whichever one is easiest for you to remember. They both produce the same result. That result is three tones which define the major chord.

Formulas for a major chord:

1. A major chord contains three tones
 - ✓ The tone that names the chord
 - ✓ A tone that is a major 3rd above the naming tone, and
 - ✓ A tone that is a perfect 5th above the naming tone.

Or, the same result can be produced using this formula.

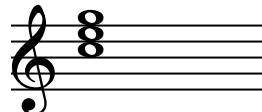
2. A major chord contains three tones
 - ✓ The tone that names the chord
 - ✓ A tone that is a major 3rd above the naming tone, and
 - ✓ A tone which is a minor 3rd above the second tone of the chord

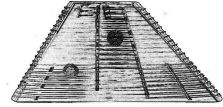
Making Major Chords. Here are some examples of using these rules to build major chords. Start with a “C” chord.

- ✓ The tone that names the chord is: C
- ✓ A major 3rd above “C” is: E
- ✓ A perfect 5th above “C” is: G

Note that you can also arrive at the final member of the chord, “G,” by using rule two. “G” is a minor 3rd above the second member of the chord “E”.

Here’s how the “C” chords looks on the treble clef.





One thing you must remember in constructing major chords is that tonality matters. A “C” chord is constructed assuming the key of “C” is its total center. Likewise an “A” chord assumes that the totality is the key of “A.” That doesn’t mean you can’t play an “A” chord in a key other than “A.” It does mean that in constructing the “A” chord, you must be faithful to the key signature of the key of “A”. So, for example, in building an “A” chord:

- ✓The naming tone is: **A**
- ✓A major 3rd above “A” is: **C#** (*yes sharp not just plain old C*)
- ✓A perfect 5th above “A” is: **E**

If you have trouble with the key signatures, review the Circle of 5ths diagram. The key to understanding these relationships lies there.

Spelling Minor Chords

Minor chords give a sad, melodramatic, or poignant sound. They are melancholy and vital sounds in music. When a minor chord is called for, you will often see the symbol written as, in the case of a “C” minor chord, Cmin or Cm. The suffix on the chord name is ALWAYS in lower case for a minor chord.

The Formulas. The most basic form of a minor chord has three members and is often called a minor “triad”. There are two formulas for spelling a minor chord. Pick whichever one is easiest for you to remember. They both produce the same result. That result is three tones which define the minor chord.

1. A minor chord contains three tones
 - A. The tone that names the chord – often called the “root” tone
 - B. A tone that is a minor 3rd above the naming tone, and
 - C. A tone that is a perfect 5th above the naming tone.

Or, the same result can be produced using this formula.

2. A minor chord contains three tones
 - A. The tone that names the chord
 - B. A tone that is a minor 3rd above the naming tone, and
 - C. A tone which is a major 3rd above the second tone of the chord

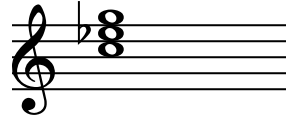
Making Minor Chords. Here are some examples of using these rules to build minor chords. Start with a “C” chord.

- ✓ The tone that names the chord is: **C**
- ✓ A minor 3rd above “C” is: **E_b**
- ✓ A perfect 5th above “C” is: **G**



Note that you can also arrive at the final member of the chord, “G,” by using rule two. “G” is a major 3rd above the second member of the chord “Eb.”

Here’s how the “C” minor chord looks on the treble clefs.



Just as in constructing minor chords, tonality matters. A “C” minor chord is constructed assuming the key of “C” minor is its total center.

Chords You Must Know. Most dulcimer music is played in the keys of D and G. Occasionally a tune in A shows up. Less frequently a tune will use the key of C. This limits the number of chords we have to know.

<u>Key</u>	<u>Chord Name</u>	<u>Chord Members</u>
D	D	D F# A
	Em	E G B
	F#m	F# A C#
	G	G B D
	A	A C# E
	Bm	B D F#
G	G	G B D
	A	A C E
	Bm	B D F#
	C	C E G
	D	D F# A
	Em	E G B

Note that the chord built on the 7th degree of the scale (*C# in the key of D and F# in the key of G*) has been omitted. This chord is a “diminished” chord. That’s a subject for the course on arranging.