Chords you need to know

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ON YOUR **TG CD**

All guitarists use chords, but some are used more than others. Learn these basic open chords and you'll soon be playing along to some of your favourite records

The chords favoured by guitarists are the following eight: E, Em, G, A, Am, C, D, Dm. As a six-stringer's 'meat and potatoes', these chords are the ones learned first (referred to as the CAGED system due to their collective spelling of this word) as they use the first few frets with one or more open strings. Things may get more advanced later, but these eight set you up for everything else.

MAJOR AND MINOR CHORDS

All chords are made up of three different types of notes: a root (this creates the chord's name), a 3rd (the interval of a 3rd away from the root) and a 5th (the interval of a 5th away from the root). From this structuring, chords fall into two categories: major and minor. Major chords (denoted solely by a letter name) are 'happy' sounding chords and minor chords (denoted by a letter name and a little 'm') are 'sad' and 'melancholic' sounding chords.

This fundamental difference is created by altering one note: the 3rd of the chord. This means a major chord has a major 3rd and a minor chord has a minor 3rd. For example, if you look at the first two chords – E and Em – you can see how the difference is simply the use of your first finger (1st fret, third string) for the E chord and then removing it for Em. For the curious, the E chord contains the notes E (root), G# (major 3rd) and B (5th) while the Em chord contains E (root), G (minor 3rd) and B (5th).

CHORD PROGRESSIONS

On the TG CD are three examples (with backing tracks) of progressions using two chords enabling you to practise changing chord shapes. You'll find them on there as MP3 tracks. The first two feature the chords G-C repeated three times. The next track features Am-Em repeated three times and the next includes the progression Dm-A (again repeated three times). Each chord lasts for two bars (eight beats in total) before changing to the next chord, so strum and sustain each chord twice (one strum every bar/four beats). Strum from the thickest (low) string to the thinnest (high) string. Once you can manage this, increase your picking hand's work by playing four down strums per bar.

STOP THE BUZZING

To ensure that chords ring out clearly, press with the tips of your fingers close to the edge of the frets. For best results, use the pad of your thumb on the back of the guitar neck – and not the whole palm – to encourage a curved C shape for your hand (ie, between thumb/neck contact and fingertip/fretboard contact there will be a C-shaped gap).

CHORD SHAPES AND HAND POSITIONS

EX 1 (WITH BACKING)

These are suggested fingerings for the G and C chords. When changing from G to C, move your third finger first, then follow quickly with your second and first fingers.

EX 2 (WITH BACKING)

These are suggested fingerings for the Am and Em chords. Changing between them is straightforward – take your first finger off when you move to Em.

EX 3 (WITH BACKING)

These are suggested fingerings for the Dm and A chords. When you play A, move your second finger first, then put your third and fourth fingers next to it as shown to the left.

'CAGED' CHORDS
These chords create the CAGED system. Play a few together to make your own chord progressions.

E   Em   G   A   Am   C   D   Dm