

TRIADS

Welcome to Triads! For a guitarist, chord playing is an essential part of what we do. But too often we get trapped into seeing chords in only one area of the guitar.

This is a series on using triads for chord playing that I hope will change how you see chords on the neck of the guitar. Chords are not just two or three familiar forms – but they are combinations of certain tones that can be made all over the guitar in an incredible variety of shapes, inversions and voicings.

Triads are chords containing three different tones. This series focuses on three types of triads – Major, Minor and Dominant Seventh Triads.

Major triads consist of the ROOT, THIRD, and FIFTH notes of the major scale.

Minor triads consist of the ROOT, FLATTED THIRD & FIFTH of the major scale.

Seventh triads contain various combinations of the ROOT, THIRD, FIFTH and FLATTED SEVENTH of the major scale.

The notes within a triad can appear in any order.

Different arrangements of notes within a chord is called the chord's "voicing".

Here's what everything means...

- Numbers on TAB Staff: Show what fret you should be pressing down.
- Fingering Diagrams for Each Chord
 - "X" at end of Chord Diagram = Mute String
 - Open Circle at end of Chord Diagram = Open String
 - Open Diamond = Root of a Chord which can be Moved

Learn all you can and let's get started!





TRIADS

MAJOR

Triads

Triads can be a variety of different chords. Let's look at Major chord triads first.

Major triads consist of the ROOT, THIRD, and FIFTH notes of the major scale.

Voicings

The notes in the triad can be in arranged in any order.

OPEN VOICINGS are voicings greater than an octave and involve skipping strings.

CLOSED VOICINGS are voicings where all the notes in the triad occur within one octave and usually appear on adjacent strings.

This series will be focusing on closed voicings.

String Groupings

Triads in closed voicings use three adjacent strings and can be played on 4 different sets of strings.

String Set 1: Uses the 1st - 3rd strings.

String Set 2: Uses the 2nd - 4th strings.

String Set 3: Uses the 3rd - 5th strings.

String Set 4: Uses the 4th - 6th strings.

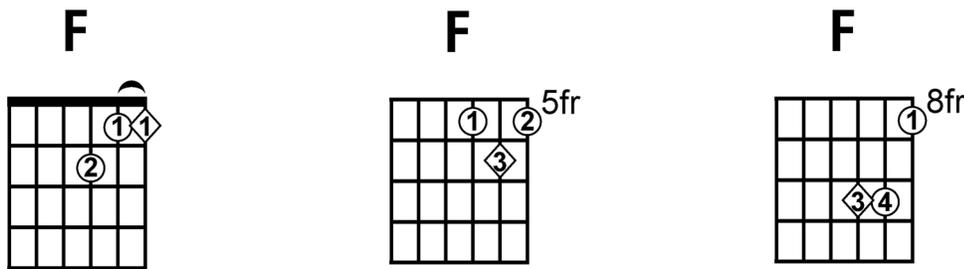
String sets 3 and 4 share the same fingerings because the tuning of the guitar is identical for those strings.

This series will be focusing on triads on strings sets 1 and 2 because they are the most commonly used.

Major Triad Forms (1st - 3rd Strings)

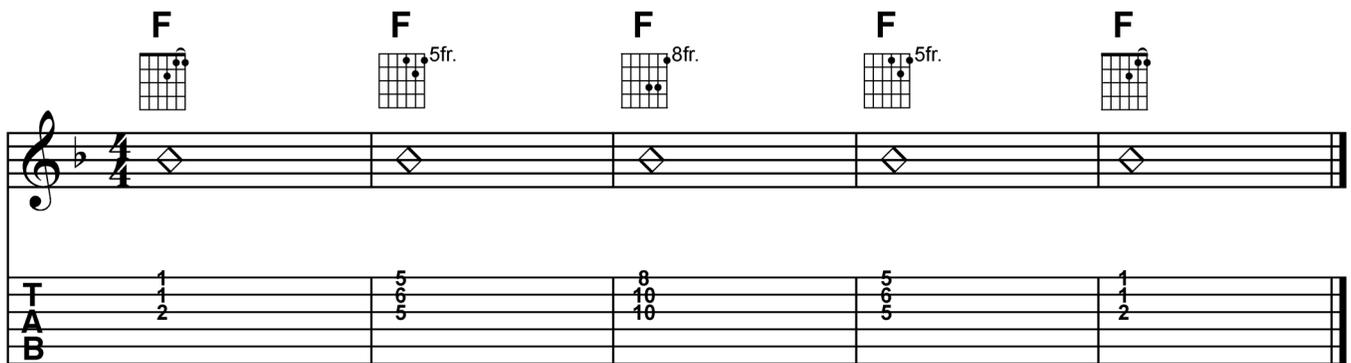
Here are the three closed voicing major triad shapes in the key of F using the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd strings.

The diamond indicates which note is the root in each form.

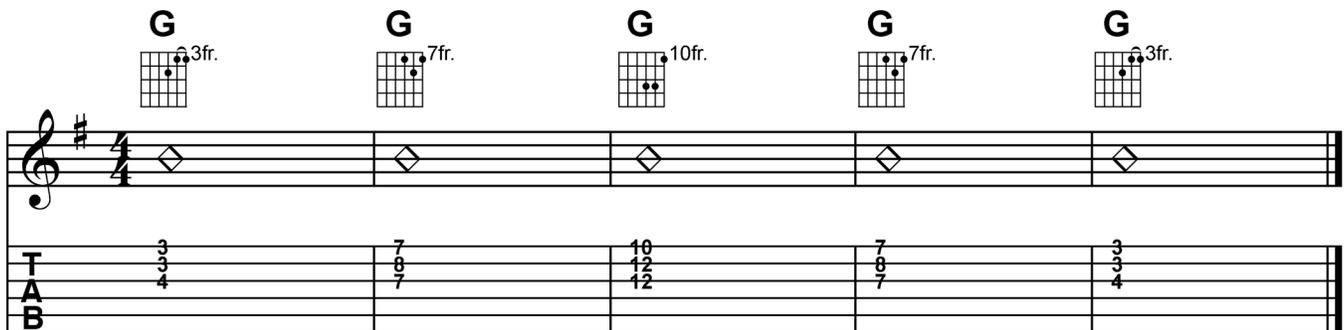


Let's Learn: Memorize these forms and where the root is located in each form.

Let's start by playing them up and down the neck in the key of F.



Now, let's do them in the key of G – two frets up.



And, two frets higher in the key of A...

Diagram illustrating five A major triads in the key of A, shown at different fret positions: 5fr., 9fr., 12fr., 9fr., and 5fr. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a diamond symbol and a tablature staff with fret numbers for strings T, A, and B.

Notice, as you move up the neck and the forms reach above the 13th fret the highest form can flip down an octave to a lower position on the neck.

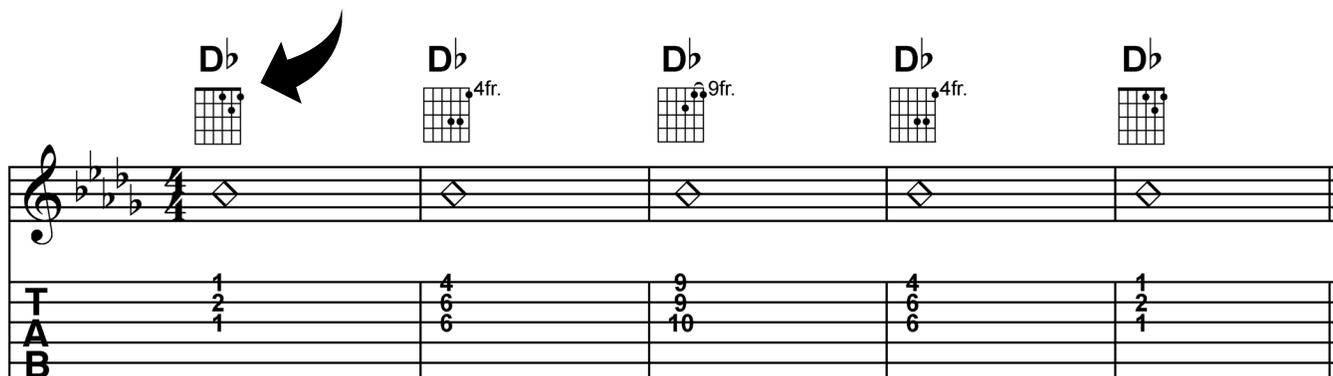
For example, if we go up a half step to the next key of B \flat , the highest form, which would be now above the 13th fret, can also be played an octave down at the 1st fret. Notice how the starting form is now the previously higher form.

Diagram illustrating five B \flat major triads in the key of B \flat , shown at different fret positions: 1st fret, 6fr., 10fr., 6fr., and 1st fret. A large black arrow points from the 10fr. diagram to the 1st fret diagram, indicating an octave shift. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a diamond symbol and a tablature staff with fret numbers for strings T, A, and B.

As we continue up through keys, let's play the major triads in the key of C.

Diagram illustrating five C major triads in the key of C, shown at different fret positions: 3fr., 8fr., 12fr., 8fr., and 3fr. The notation includes a treble clef staff with a diamond symbol and a tablature staff with fret numbers for strings T, A, and B.

When we move to the key of Db the highest voicing now gets above the 13th fret and can be flipped down an octave.



	1	4	9	4	1
T	2	6	9	6	2
A	1	6	10	6	1
B					

Let's Practice & Learn

Practice Challenge 1: Play through the major triad forms up and down the neck in this order...

- F
- F#
- G
- G#
- A
- Bb (the highest form flips down an octave)
- B
- C
- Db (the highest form flips down an octave)
- D
- Eb
- E.

Practice Challenge 2: Play through the major triad forms in a cycle of 4ths in this order...

- F
- Bb
- Eb
- Ab
- Db
- F#
- B
- E
- A
- D
- G
- C

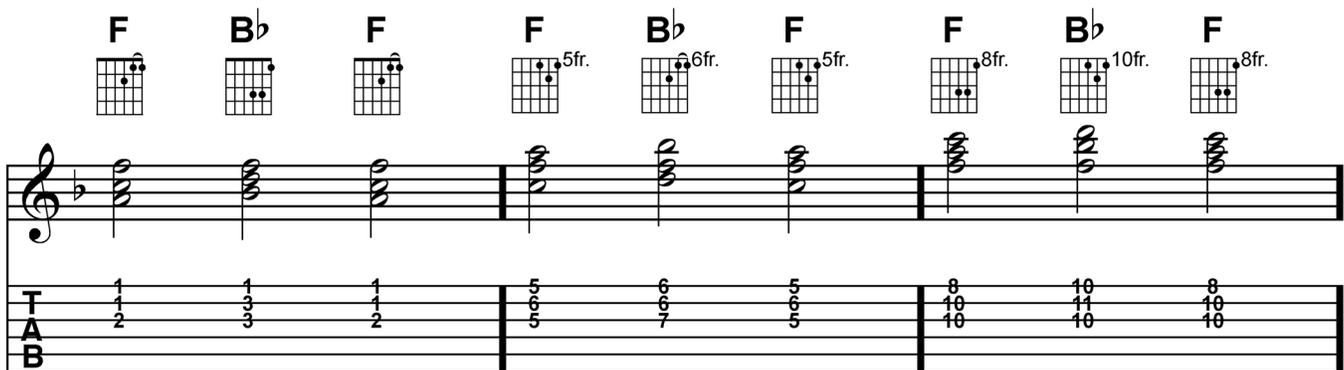
Major Triad Patterns (1st - 3rd Strings)

Now, that you've learned the forms on the neck let's start combining them to form common chord movements that you will see in songs.

I-IV-I Patterns

The first common movement is between the I and the IV chord in a key.

Here is the I-IV-I pattern in the key of F for all three triad inversion combinations.

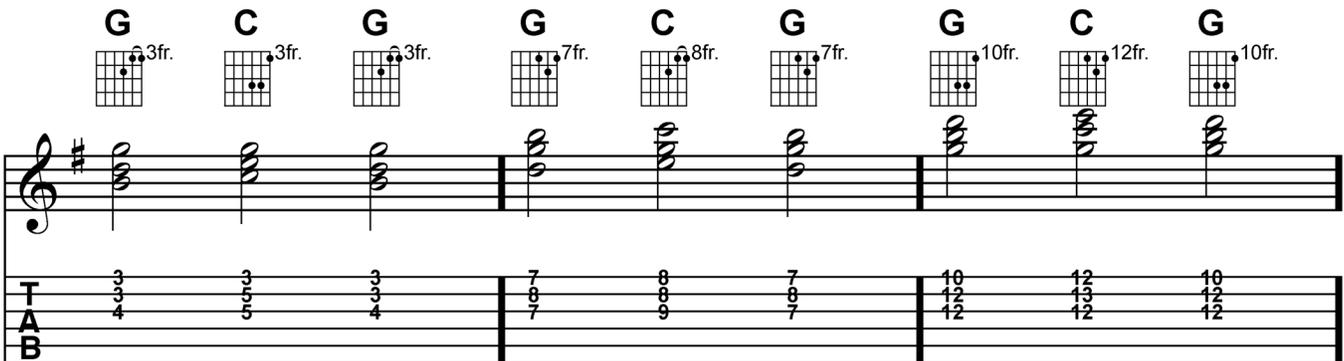


Chord diagrams and fret positions for the I-IV-I pattern in the key of F:

- F (1st fret)
- B^b (1st fret)
- F (1st fret)
- F (5th fret)
- B^b (6th fret)
- F (5th fret)
- F (8th fret)
- B^b (10th fret)
- F (8th fret)

TAB: 1 2 | 1 3 | 1 2 | 5 5 | 6 7 | 5 5 | 8 10 | 10 10 | 8 10

Here is the I-IV-I pattern in the key of G for all three triad inversion combinations.



Chord diagrams and fret positions for the I-IV-I pattern in the key of G:

- G (3rd fret)
- C (3rd fret)
- G (3rd fret)
- G (7th fret)
- C (8th fret)
- G (7th fret)
- G (10th fret)
- C (12th fret)
- G (10th fret)

TAB: 3 4 | 3 5 | 3 4 | 7 8 | 8 9 | 7 8 | 10 12 | 12 12 | 10 12

I-IV-I-V-I Patterns

Now, let's add the V chord to the previous pattern to create a I-IV-I-V-I chord progression.

Here is the I-IV-I-V-I pattern in the key of G for all three triad inversion combinations.

G C G D G G C G D G

T 3 3 3 2 3 7 8 7 5 7 10 12 10 10 10
 A 4 5 4 2 4 7 9 7 7 9 12 13 12 10 12
 B 4 5 4 2 4 7 9 7 7 9 12 13 12 11 12

I-IV-V-IV-I Patterns

Now, let's switch the chords to a different progression.

Here is the I-IV-V-IV-I pattern in the key of F for all three triad inversion combinations.

F B \flat C B \flat F F B \flat C B \flat F F B \flat C B \flat F

T 1 1 3 1 1 5 6 8 6 5 8 10 12 10 8
 A 2 3 5 3 2 5 6 8 6 5 10 11 13 11 10
 B 4 5 4 3 2 5 7 9 7 5 10 10 12 10 10

Let's Practice & Learn

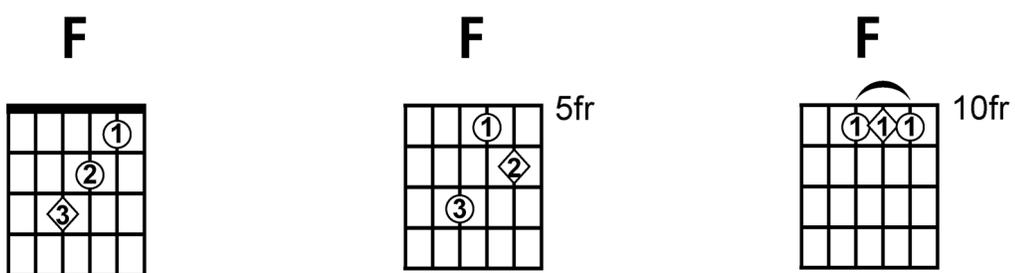
Practice Challenge 3: Play through all three of the the major triad patterns in all keys.

TRIADS

MAJOR

Major Triad Forms (2nd - 4th Strings)

Here are the three closed voicing major triad shapes in the key of F using the 2nd, 3rd and 4th strings.

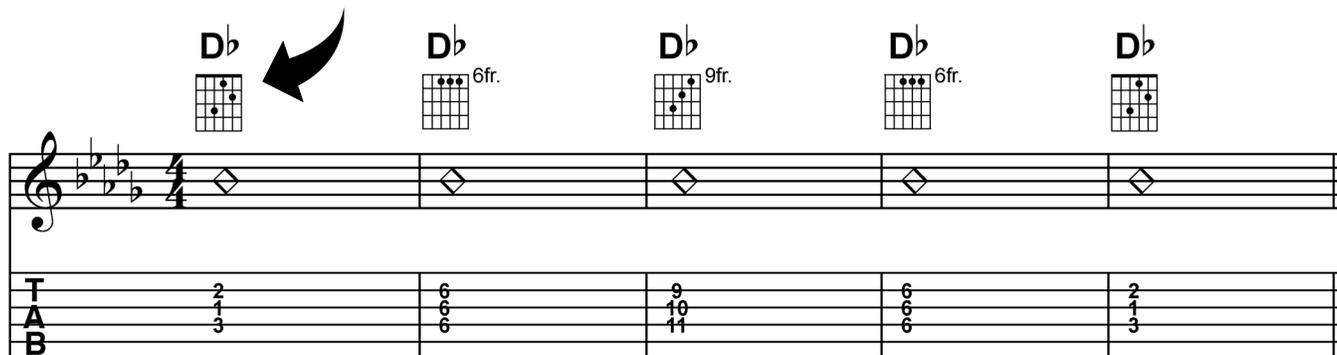


Let's Learn: Memorize these forms and where the root is located in each form.

Let's start by playing them up and down the neck in the key of F.

The first octave down shift from the high position occurs in the key of Ab.

The next octave down shift from the high position occurs in the key of Db.



T	2	6	9	6	2
A	1	6	10	6	1
B	3	6	11	6	3

Let's Practice & Learn

Practice Challenge 1: Play through the major triad forms up and down the neck in this order...

- F
- F#
- G
- Ab (the highest form flips down an octave)
- A
- Bb
- B
- C
- Db (the highest form flips down an octave)
- D
- Eb
- E.

Practice Challenge 2: Play through the major triad forms in a cycle of 4ths in this order...

- F
- Bb
- Eb
- Ab
- Db
- F#
- B
- E
- A
- D
- G
- C

Major Triad Patterns (2nd - 4th Strings)

Now, that you've learned the forms on the neck let's start combining them to form common chord movements that you will see in songs.

I-IV-I Patterns

Here is the I-IV-I pattern in the key of G for all three triad inversion combinations.

G 3fr. **C** 5fr. **G** 3fr. **G** 7fr. **C** 8fr. **G** 7fr. **G** 12fr. **C** 12fr. **G** 12fr.

T	3	5	3	8	8	8	12	13	12
A	4	5	4	7	9	7	12	12	12
B	5	5	5	9	10	9	12	14	12

I-IV-I-V-I Patterns

Now, let's add the V chord to the previous pattern to create a I-IV-I-V-I chord progression. Here is the I-IV-I-V-I pattern in the key of G for all three triad inversion combinations.

G 3fr. **C** 5fr. **G** 3fr. **D** 2fr. **G** 3fr. **G** 7fr. **C** 8fr. **G** 7fr. **D** 7fr. **G** 7fr. **G** 12fr. **C** 12fr. **G** 12fr. **D** 10fr. **G** 12fr.

T	3	5	3	3	3	8	8	8	7	8	12	13	12	10	12
A	4	5	4	2	4	7	9	7	7	7	12	12	12	11	12
B	5	5	5	4	5	9	10	9	7	9	12	14	12	12	12

I-IV-V-IV-I Patterns

Here is the I-IV-V-IV-I pattern in the key of G for all three triad inversion combinations.

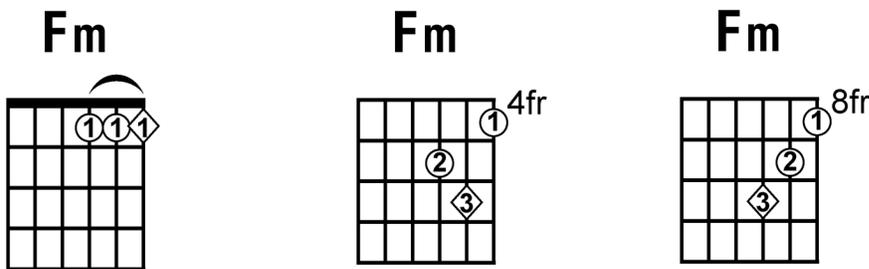
G 3fr. **C** 5fr. **D** 7fr. **C** 5fr. **G** 3fr. **G** 7fr. **C** 8fr. **D** 10fr. **C** 8fr. **G** 7fr. **G** 12fr. **C** 12fr. **D** 14fr. **C** 12fr. **G** 12fr.

T	3	5	7	5	3	8	8	10	8	8	12	13	15	13	12
A	4	5	7	5	4	7	9	11	9	7	12	12	14	12	12
B	5	5	7	5	5	9	10	12	10	9	12	14	16	14	12

Minor Triad Forms (1st - 3rd Strings)

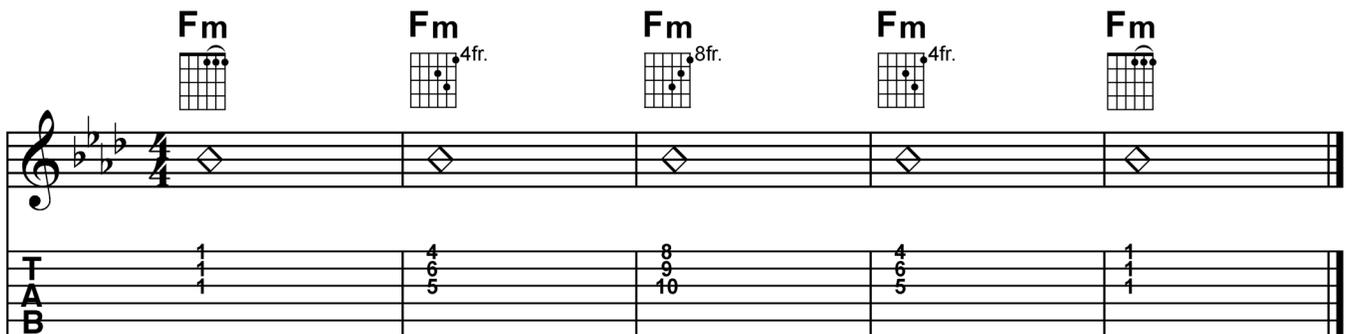
Minor triads consist of the **ROOT, FLATTED THIRD & FIFTH** of the major scale.

Here are the three closed voicing minor triad shapes in the key of F using the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd strings.

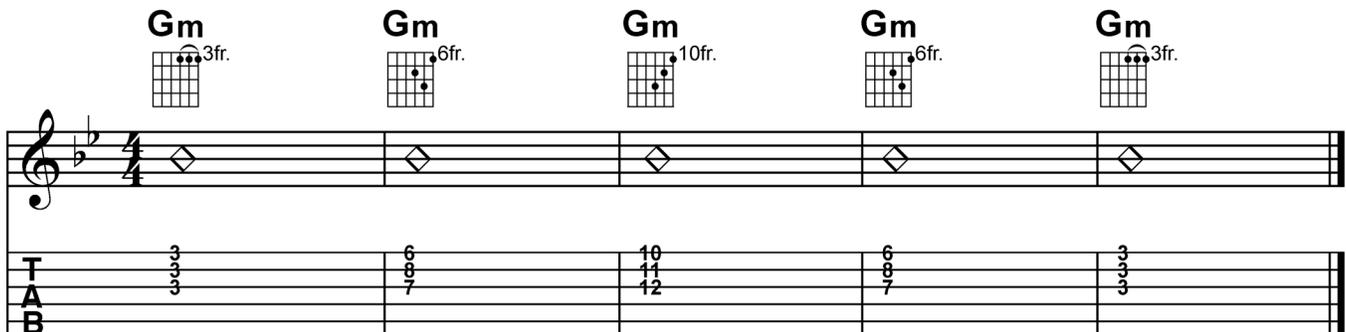


Let's Learn: Memorize these forms and where the root is located in each form.

Start by playing them up and down the neck.



Now, let's do them in Gm – two frets up.



And, two frets higher in the key of Am...

Am 5fr. Am 8fr. Am 12fr. Am 8fr. Am 5fr.

TAB: 5 5 5 | 8 10 9 | 12 13 14 | 8 10 9 | 5 5 5

Notice, as you move up the neck and the forms reach above the 13th fret the highest form can flip down an octave to a lower position on the neck.

For example, if we go up a half step to the next key of B \flat m, the highest form, which would be now above the 13th fret, can also be played an octave down at the 1st fret. Notice how the starting form is now the previously higher form.

B \flat m B \flat m 6fr. B \flat m 9fr. B \flat m 6fr. B \flat m

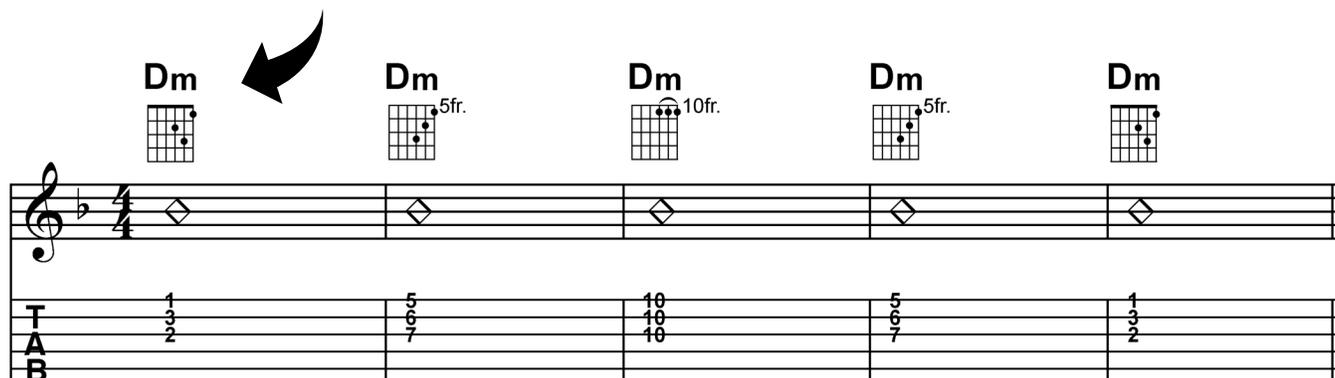
TAB: 1 2 3 | 6 6 6 | 9 11 10 | 6 6 6 | 1 2 3

As we continue up through keys, let's play the minor triads in the key of C.

Cm 3fr. Cm 8fr. Cm 11fr. Cm 8fr. Cm 3fr.

TAB: 3 4 5 | 8 8 8 | 11 13 12 | 8 8 8 | 3 4 5

When we move to the key of Dm the highest voicing now gets above the 13th fret and can be flipped down an octave.



Let's Practice & Learn

Practice Challenge 1: Play through the minor triad forms up and down the neck in this order...

- Fm
- F#m
- Gm
- G#m
- Am
- Bbm (the highest form flips down an octave)
- Bm
- Cm
- Dbm
- Dm (the highest form flips down an octave)
- Ebm
- Em.

Practice Challenge 2: Play through the minor triad forms in a cycle of 4ths in this order...

- Fm
- Bbm
- Ebm
- Abm
- Dbm
- F#m
- Bm
- Em
- Am
- Dm
- Gm
- Cm

Minor Triad Patterns (1st - 3rd Strings)

Now, that you've learned the forms on the neck let's start combining them to form common chord movements that you will see in songs.

I-vim-IV-V Patterns

The four most common chords in any key are the I-vim-IV-V. Let's add the minor form to the major forms we already learned to form this common chord progression.

Here is the I-vim-IV-V chord progression in the key of F for all three triad inversions.

Diagram illustrating the I-vim-IV-V chord progression in the key of F for all three triad inversions. The chords shown are F, Dm, B \flat , and C. The fret numbers for the strings (T, A, B) are provided below the guitar staff.

	F	Dm	B \flat	C	F	Dm	B \flat	C	F	Dm	B \flat	C
T	1	1	1	3	5	5	6	8	8	10	10	12
A	1	3	3	5	6	7	7	9	10	10	11	13
B	2	2	3	5	5	7	7	9	10	10	10	12

Now try picking as an arpeggio. Here is the I-vim-IV-V in F first set of inversions.

Diagram illustrating the I-vim-IV-V chord progression in the key of F, first set of inversions, showing an arpeggio pattern. The chords shown are F, Dm, B \flat , and C. The fret numbers for the strings (T, A, B) are provided below the guitar staff.

	F	Dm	B \flat	C
T	1	1	1	3
A	2	3	3	5
B	2	2	3	5

Try the same arpeggio pattern in the next set of inversions in F.

Diagram illustrating the I-vim-IV-V chord progression in the key of F, next set of inversions, showing an arpeggio pattern. The chords shown are F, Dm, B \flat , and C. The fret numbers for the strings (T, A, B) are provided below the guitar staff.

	F	Dm	B \flat	C
T	5	5	6	8
A	6	6	7	8
B	5	7	7	9

Try the same arpeggio pattern in the last set of inversions in F.

Now, let's switch to the key of D and play the I-vim-IV-V pattern in a different arpeggio pattern.

Here is the same arpeggio pattern used in the next inversion set in D.

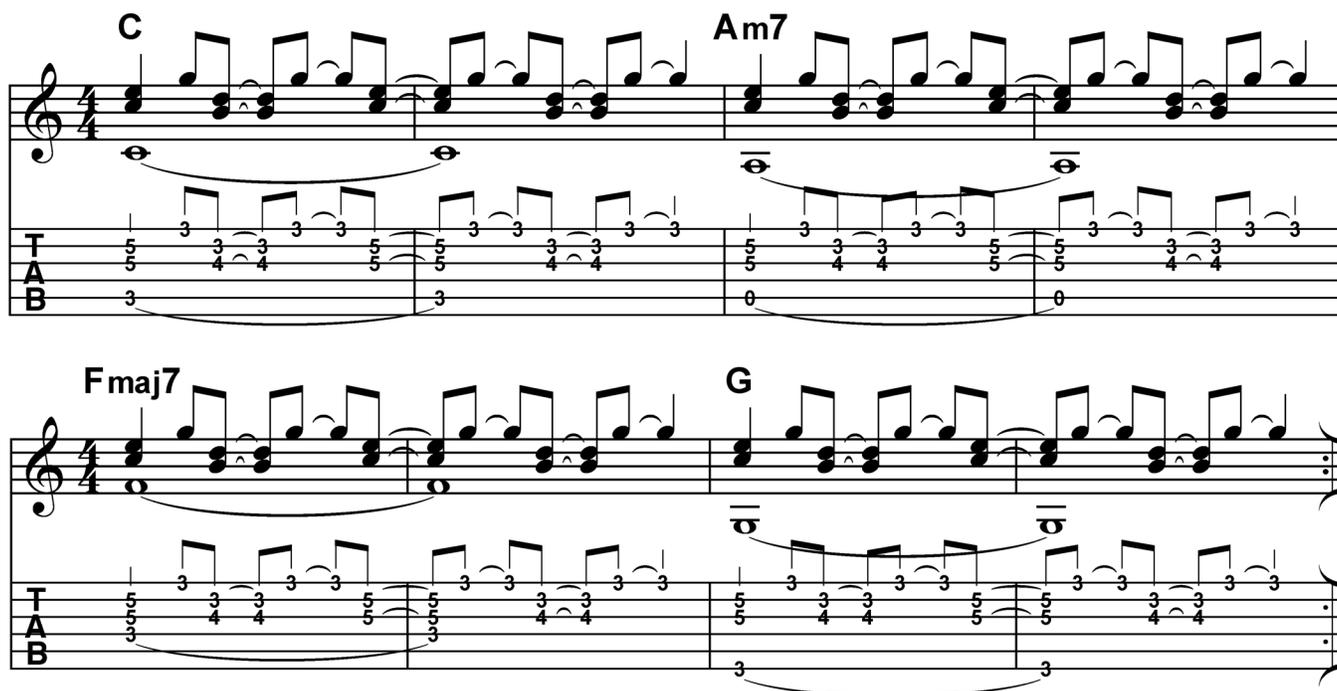
And, the same arpeggio pattern in the last inversion set in D.

Using the Patterns Over Multiple Chords

The triad patterns can be used over a variety of different chords to create extended, more complex harmonies.

Here is the I-V triad pattern in the key of C used over the C (I), Am7 (vim), Fmaj7 (IV) and G (V) to create a Pat Metheny-esque sound.

The included bass line is there for you to “hear” the chord changes but, if playing with other musicians, the guitar could simply play the top triad pattern for the same effect.



The image shows musical notation for a guitar exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers the C and Am7 chords. The second system covers the Fmaj7 and G chords. Each system includes a treble clef staff with a melodic line of eighth notes, a bass clef staff with a bass line, and a tablature staff with fret numbers and fingerings. The melodic line is a triad pattern: C (C4, E4, G4) for C, and Am7 (A3, C4, E4) for Am7. The bass line consists of a single note per measure: C3 for C, A2 for Am7, F2 for Fmaj7, and G2 for G. The tablature shows fingerings: 5-3-3 for C, 5-3-3 for Am7, 5-3-3 for Fmaj7, and 5-3-3 for G. The exercise is divided into four measures, with chord changes occurring at the end of the second and fourth measures.

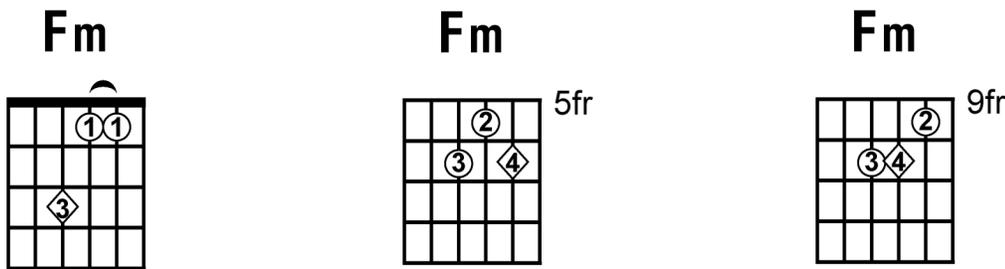
Let's Practice & Learn

Practice Challenge 3: Play various chord progressions using the I, vim, IV and V chords in any order in all keys.

Practice Challenge 4: Experiment playing various triad patterns over a variety of chords within a key to hear how the pattern adds harmony and interest to your guitar part.

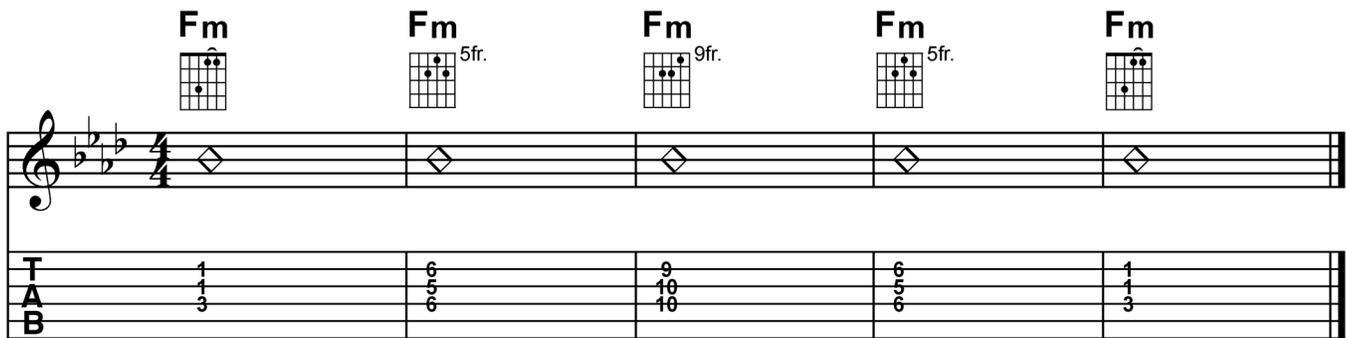
Minor Triad Forms (2nd - 4th Strings)

Here are the three closed voicing minor triad shapes in the key of F using the 2nd, 3rd and 4th strings.



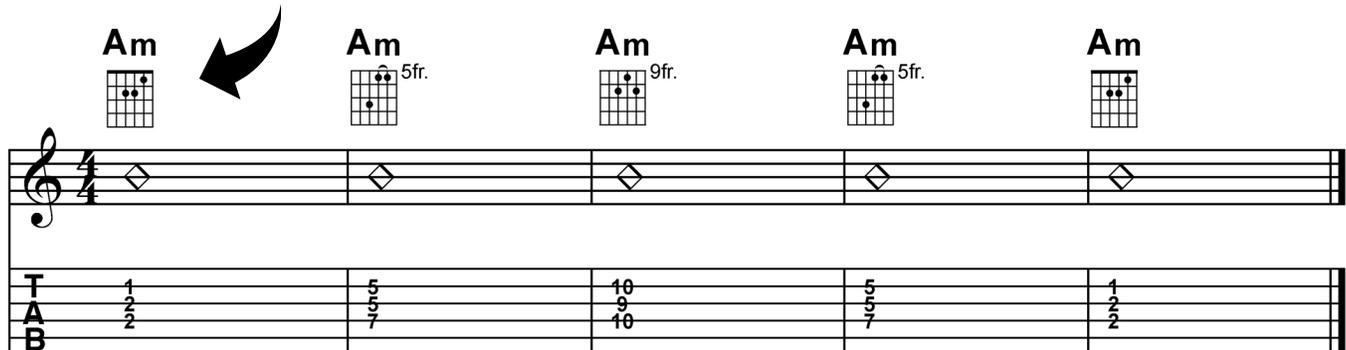
Let's Learn: Memorize these forms and where the root is located in each form.

Let's start by playing them up and down the neck in the key of Fm.



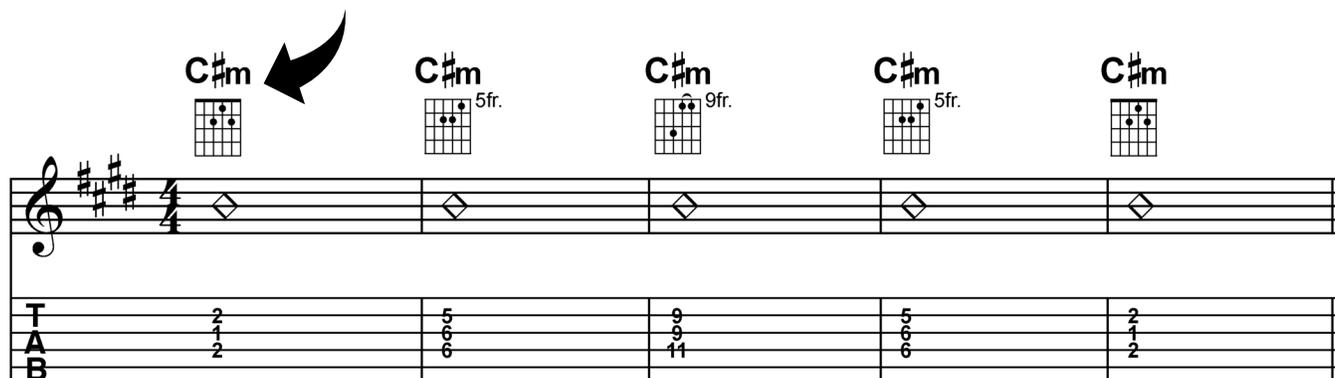
T	1	6	9	6	1
A	1	5	10	5	1
B	3	6	10	6	3

The first octave down shift from the high position occurs in the key of Am.



T	1	5	10	5	1
A	2	7	9	7	2
B	2	7	10	7	2

The next octave down shift from the high position occurs in the key of C#m.



Five C#m triad diagrams are shown at the top, with an arrow pointing to the first one. Below them is a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The staff contains five diamond-shaped notes. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with strings T, A, B and frets 2, 5, 9, 5, 2.

Let's Practice & Learn

Practice Challenge 1: Play through the minor triad forms up and down the neck in this order...

- Fm
- F#m
- Gm
- Abm
- Am (the highest form flips down an octave)
- Bbm
- Bm
- Cm
- C#m (the highest form flips down an octave)
- Dm
- Ebm
- Em.

Practice Challenge 2: Play through the minor triad forms in a cycle of 4ths in this order...

- Fm
- Bbm
- Ebm
- Abm
- C#m
- F#m
- Bm
- Em
- Am
- Dm
- Gm
- Cm

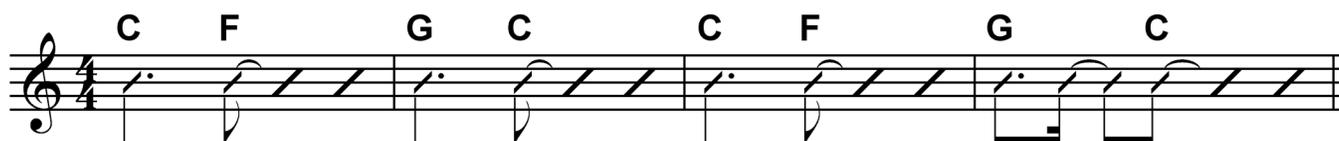
Triad Chord Progressions

Now, that you've learned the forms on the neck let's start combining them to form common chord movements that you will see in songs.

Here is the I-IV-V-I pattern in the key of C.

Practice Challenge 1: Try to play in all 6 inversion positions – 3 inversions using the 1st-3rd strings and 3 for strings 2nd-4th.

Practice Challenge 2: Strum as chords then play as arpeggios.



Here is a different progression in F. Try to play in a variety of positions and string sets using strums and arpeggios.



Finally, here is one last familiar chord progression in Bm to the song "Hotel California" by the Eagles.

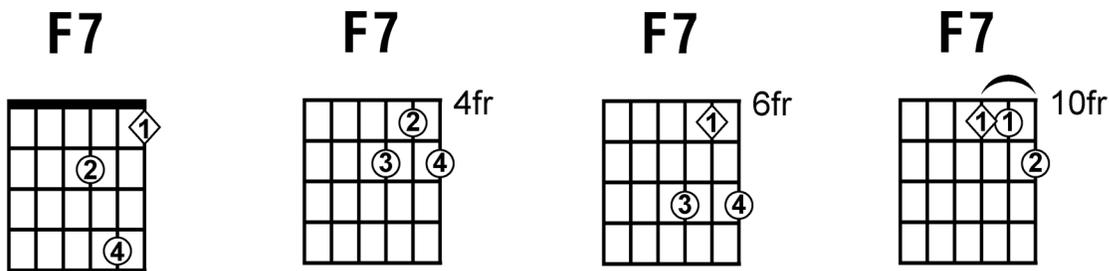
Try to play in a variety of positions and string sets using strums and arpeggios. Try to move to the next chord using the closest possible form – it could be either above or beneath the current chord.



Seventh Chord Triad Forms (1st - 3rd Strings)

Seventh chords triads consist of the **ROOT, THIRD, FIFTH & FLATTED SEVENTH** of the major scale.

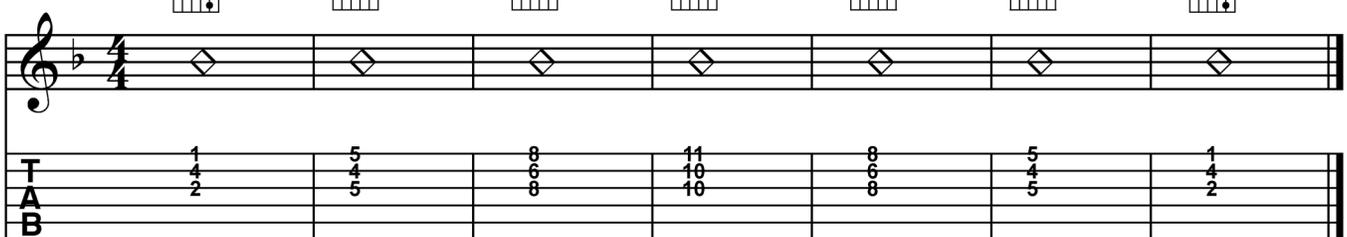
Here are the four closed voicing seventh chord triad shapes in the key of F using the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd strings. One of the tones (Root, Third or Fifth) is dropped when creating a three-note triad.



Let's Learn: Memorize these forms and where the root is located in each form.

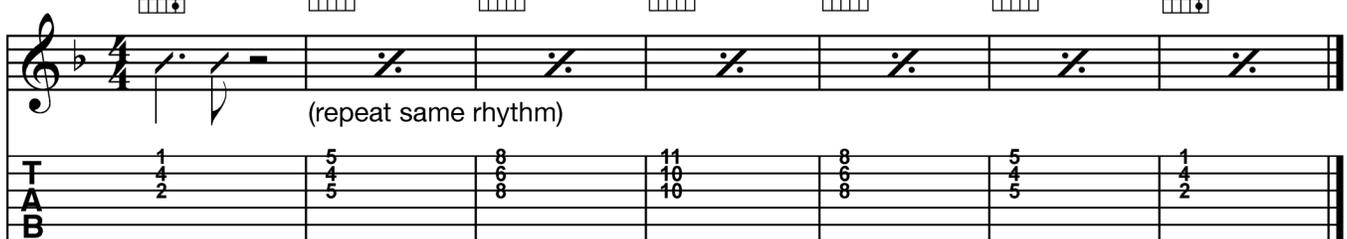
Play them up and down the neck in whole notes then add a dotted quarter to eighth rhythm.

	F7						
		4fr.	6fr.	10fr.	6fr.	4fr.	



T	1	5	8	11	8	5	1
A	4	4	6	10	6	4	4
B	2	5	8	10	8	5	2

	F7						
		4fr.	6fr.	10fr.	6fr.	4fr.	



(repeat same rhythm)

T	1	5	8	11	8	5	1
A	4	4	6	10	6	4	4
B	2	5	8	10	8	5	2

Now, play in G and practice sliding to each chord.

Diagram illustrating the G7 chord shapes and their positions on the fretboard:

- G7 3fr.
- G7 6fr.
- G7 8fr.
- G7 12fr.
- G7 8fr.
- G7 6fr.
- G7 3fr.

T	3	7	10	13	10	7	3
A	6	6	8	12	8	6	6
B	4	7	10	12	10	7	4

If we go up a half step to the next key of Ab, the highest form, which would be now above the 13th fret, can also be played an octave down at the 1st fret. Notice how the starting form is now the previously higher form.

Diagram illustrating the Ab7 chord shapes and their positions on the fretboard:

- Ab7 (highest form)
- Ab7 4fr.
- Ab7 7fr.
- Ab7 9fr.
- Ab7 7fr.
- Ab7 4fr.
- Ab7 (lowest form)

T	2	4	8	11	8	4	2
A	1	5	7	9	7	5	1
B	1	5	8	11	8	5	1

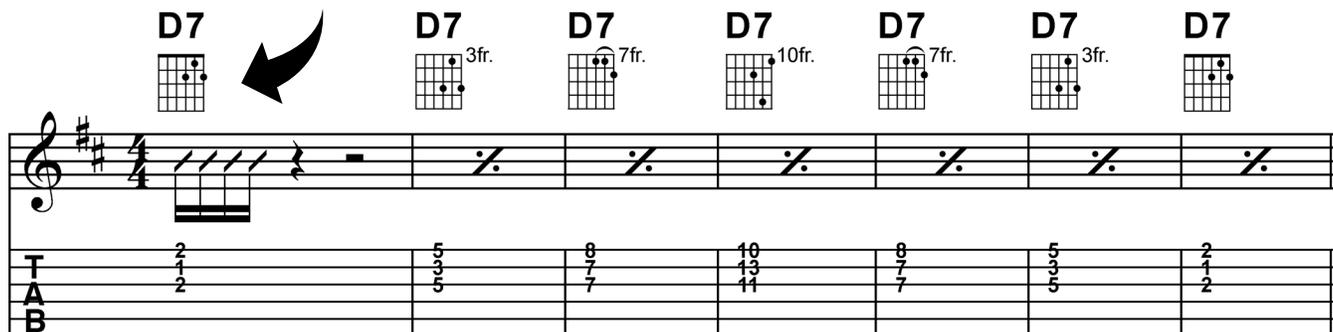
As we continue up through keys, the next octave flip occurs in the key of C.

Diagram illustrating the C7 chord shapes and their positions on the fretboard:

- C7 (lowest form)
- C7 5fr.
- C7 8fr.
- C7 11fr.
- C7 8fr.
- C7 5fr.
- C7 (highest form)

T	3	6	8	12	8	6	3
A	1	5	11	11	11	5	1
B	3	5	9	12	9	5	3

When we move to the key of D the highest voicing flips down again.



Let's Practice & Learn

Practice Challenge 1: Play through the seventh triad forms up and down the neck chromatically i.e. F-F#-G-G# etc. Remember, the octave switches occur at F, Ab, C & D.

Practice Challenge 2: Play through the seventh chord triad forms in a cycle of 4ths.

Triad Families (1st - 3rd Strings)

Before we get to some fun patterns, let's look at one more way of remembering all of these triad forms. Here they are grouped together as families within a key.

Diagram illustrating the triad families (F, Fm, F7) in the key of F, showing chord forms and fret positions (1st, 2nd, 3rd strings).

Seventh Chord Triad Patterns (1st - 3rd Strings)

Now, that you've learned the forms on the neck let's start combining them to form common chord movements that you will see in songs.

I-vim-IV-V7 Patterns

The four most common chords in any key are the I-vim-IV-V. Let's add the 7th form to the V chord creating a V7.

Here is the I-vim-IV-V7 chord progression in the key of F for all three triad inversions.

Diagram illustrating the I-vim-IV-V7 chord progression in the key of F, showing chord forms and fret positions (1st, 2nd, 3rd strings).

Now, let's switch inversions for each chord creating a more interesting progression.

F **F** **Dm** **Dm** **B \flat** **B \flat** **C7** **C7**

F **F** **Dm** **Dm** **B \flat** **B \flat** **C7** **C7**

Here is a fun dominant 7th pattern over an F7 and a Bbsus chord.

F7 **B \flat sus** **F7** **B \flat sus** **F7**

And, one final funky combination over an F7 and Bb9.

F7 **B \flat 9** **F7** **B \flat 9**

The first octave down shift from the high position occurs in the key of Bb.

Diagram illustrating the first octave down shift from the high position for the Bb7 chord. The fretboard shows positions at frets 3, 6, 7, 11, 7, 6, and 3. The musical notation shows a melodic line in Bb major, 4/4 time, with a guitar fretboard diagram below it.

The next octave down shift from the high position occurs on the C7 chord.

Diagram illustrating the next octave down shift from the high position for the C7 chord. The fretboard shows positions at frets 3, 8, 9, 8, 3, and 1. The musical notation shows a melodic line in C major, 4/4 time, with a guitar fretboard diagram below it.

The last octave down shift from the high position occurs on the E7 chord.

Diagram illustrating the last octave down shift from the high position for the E7 chord. The fretboard shows positions at frets 5, 7, 12, 7, 5, and 3. The musical notation shows a melodic line in E major, 4/4 time, with a guitar fretboard diagram below it.

Let's Practice & Learn

Practice Challenge 1: Play up and down through the seventh chord triads chromatically then in fourths.

Practice Challenge 2: Using a metronome or drum loop, play the seventh forms with various rhythms incorporating slides and other techniques.

Seventh Chord Triad Progressions

Now, that you've learned the forms on the neck let's start combining them to form common chord movements that you will see in songs.

Here are some great blues patterns using the I and IV chords in the key of F. Notice how some forms use a barre. Try adding a grace note hammering on to the third string from the barred forms.

Finally, here is one last familiar chord progression in F from the song "You Can Call Me Al" by Paul Simon.

Play with all down strums with a tight punchy attack.

Let's Practice & Learn

Final Practice Challenge: Play the I-vim-IV-V7 progression in all inversions on both strings sets. When moving to the next chord, use the closest possible inversion.

Learn the I-vim-IV-V7 progression first in the keys of C, A, G, E, D, then move to all the keys.

Goal: To play this progression in any key, in any inversion without hesitation.