Inversions & Chord Progressions

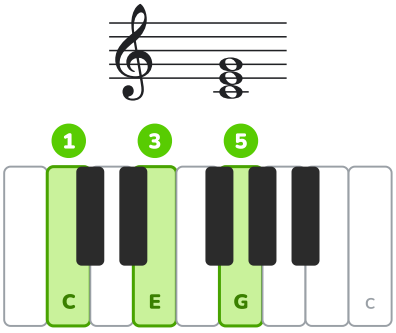
Same chord, different order – and the most important accompaniment patterns

1 The three positions of a chord

The bottom note moves to the top – the chord is still C major.

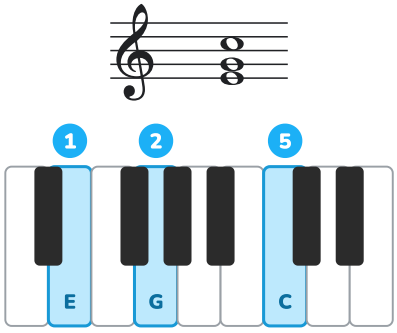
C Root position

C at the bottom · third + third



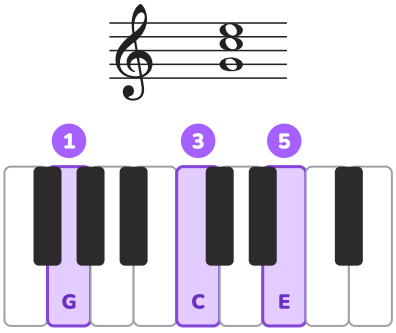
C/E 1st inversion

E at the bottom · C moves to the top



C/G 2nd inversion

G at the bottom · E moves up too

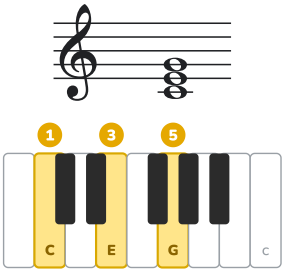


2 Short moves: I – IV – V – I

With inversions your hand stays almost in one place. That makes accompaniment sound smooth.

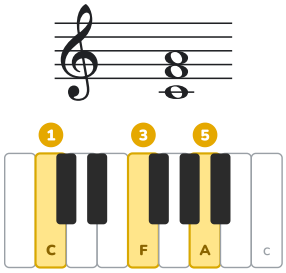
C C major

Root position



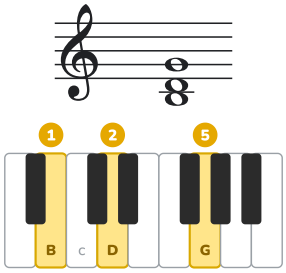
C C major

2nd inversion



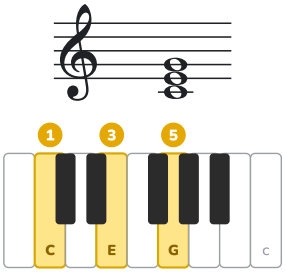
B B major

1st inversion



C C major

Root position



How to recognize the position: Are all notes a third apart (every other white key)? → root position. Is there a fourth (bigger gap) at the top? → 1st inversion. Is the gap at the bottom? → 2nd inversion.

3 The main chords of every major key

I, IV and V are major, vi is minor. With these four chords you can accompany countless songs.

Key	I	IV	V	vi
C major	C	F	G	Am
G major	G	C	D	Em
D major	D	G	A	Bm
A major	A	D	E	F♯m
E major	E	A	B	C♯m
B major	B	E	F♯	G♯m
F major	F	B♭	C	Dm
B♭ major	B♭	E♭	F	Gm
E♭ major	E♭	A♭	B♭	Cm
A♭ major	A♭	D♭	E♭	Fm
D♭ major	D♭	G♭	A♭	B♭m
G♭ major	G♭	C♭	D♭	E♭m

I – IV – V – I
C – F – G – C
Children's songs, folk songs, the basis of blues

I – V – vi – IV
C – G – Am – F
The “pop progression” – in countless hits

vi – IV – I – V
Am – F – C – G
Same chords, a more thoughtful start

Your exercises

- [ ] Play C major in all three positions, up and down.
- [ ] Play I – IV – V – I with short moves in C, then in G and F.
- [ ] Accompany the pop progression: left hand root, right hand chord.