

Chords & Keys

The seven chords of every key — and the two from outside it worth knowing

Every key has seven chords, in the same order and the same pattern of major and minor, every time. Learn the pattern once and you have learned all twelve keys.

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
Ab	Bbm	Cm	Db	Eb	Fm	Gdim
Eb	Fm	Gm	Ab	Bb	Cm	Ddim
Bb	Cm	Dm	Eb	F	Gm	Adim
F	Gm	Am	Bb	C	Dm	Edim
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim
G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F#dim
D	Em	F#m	G	A	Bm	C#dim
A	Bm	C#m	D	E	F#m	G#dim
E	F#m	G#m	A	B	C#m	D#dim
B	C#m	D#m	E	F#	G#m	A#dim
F#	G#m	A#m	B	C#	D#m	E#dim
C#	D#m	E#m	F#	G#	A#m	B#dim

Read down the rows and you are walking round the circle of fifths — each key's home chord is a fifth above the one above it, and C# at the bottom is Ab at the top again, spelled differently.

The seventh chord, and why I cross it out

The chord built on the seventh degree is diminished, and in rock, pop, folk and blues you will almost never play it. It does real work in classical music and in jazz. If you are learning to accompany songs it will not come up — treat the last column as information rather than homework. That leaves six chords a key, and most songs you know use four of them.

Two chords from outside the key that turn up constantly

The MAJOR version of chord ii

Chord ii is minor. Make it major and it points at chord V, so it is nearly always followed by V, or by IV on the way there. In C, that is D major instead of D minor:

| C | D | G | C | or | C | D | F | C |

Chord IV of chord IV

Take chord IV of your key and play ITS chord IV. Usually followed by the real chord IV, then home to I. In C, chord IV is F, and the IV of F is Bb:

| Bb | F | C |