

Lesson 15: Triads

Basic Music Theory for Guitar

What you will learn: how chords are built, and the 4 kinds of 3-note chords.

What is a triad?

A **chord** is 2 or more notes played together. A **triad** is a chord with **3 different notes**: the **root** (1), the **3rd** and the **5th**. Most chords you play on guitar are triads.

Triads are built by **stacking 3rds**. Take a scale, choose a note, skip one, take one, skip one, take one. From C: **C** d **E** f **G** = C E G.

The 4 kinds of triads

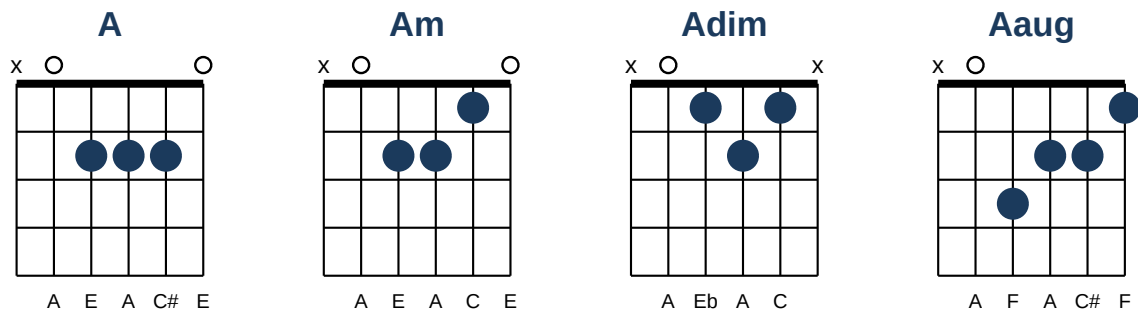
Use the intervals from Lesson 14. The **formula** tells you which notes to use:

Triad	Formula	Frets from root	Notes from C	Symbol	Sound
Major	1 3 5	0, 4, 7	C E G	C	happy, bright
Minor	1 b3 5	0, 3, 7	C Eb G	Cm	sad, dark
Diminished	1 b3 b5	0, 3, 6	C Eb Gb	Cdim or C°	tense, unstable
Augmented	1 3 #5	0, 4, 8	C E G#	Caug or C+	dreamy, strange

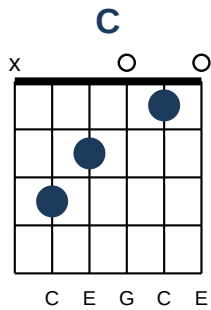
The **3rd** decides major or minor: **3** = major (happy), **b3** = minor (sad). The **5th** decides the other two: **b5** = diminished, **#5** = augmented.

Hear the difference: 4 A chords

These 4 open chords all have **A** as the root. Only one or two notes change (x = do not play, o = open string):



Guitar chords use the triad notes many times



The open **C** chord has 5 notes, but only 3 note names: **C E G**. The other two are the same notes, one octave higher. On guitar, a chord can use the triad notes **in any order** and **many times**. It is still a C major triad.

Your site's chord lessons

The chord lessons on the Training page use these formulas: **Major (1 3 5)**, **Minor (1 b3 5)**, **Augmented (1 3 #5)** and **Diminished**. In the chord book, augmented is written **+5** (like C+5) and a major chord with a b5 is written **-5** (like C-5).

Practice

1. Play the 4 A chords above: A, Am, Adim, Aaug. Listen to how each one feels.
2. Play A, then Am. Only one note changes (string 2: C# becomes C). That is the 3rd changing from 3 to b3!
3. Build these triads with the formulas: G major (G B D), E minor (E G B), D major (D F# A).
4. Play the open C chord. Say the note on each string: C E G C E.

Next lesson: Seventh Chords