

How to Learn Jazz Chords

Learning jazz chords can be intimidating. Here are some approaches to help you get started.

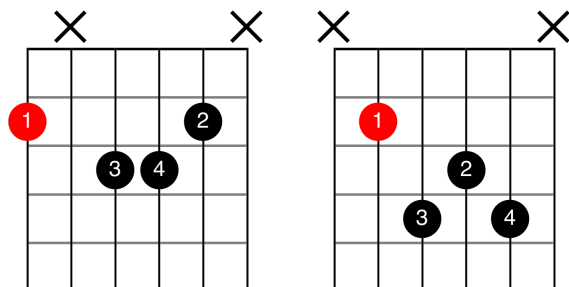
Click here for the free video lesson on jazz chords:

<https://youtu.be/Sn5joAZ3zOw>

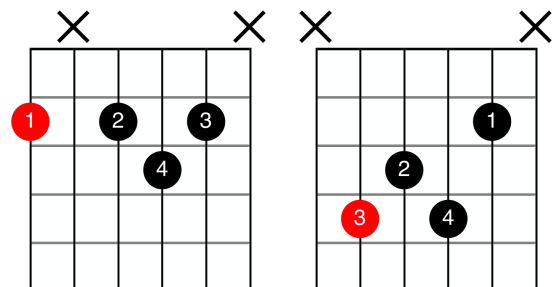
Starter Jazz Chord Set

You didn't learn open guitar chords all at once. You don't have to learn jazz chords all at once, either. Start with these chord shapes, and then learn more as needed.

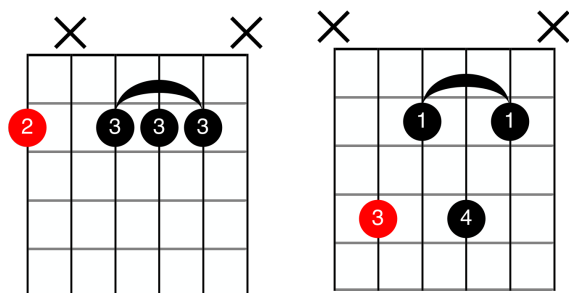
Major 7 Chords (Maj7)



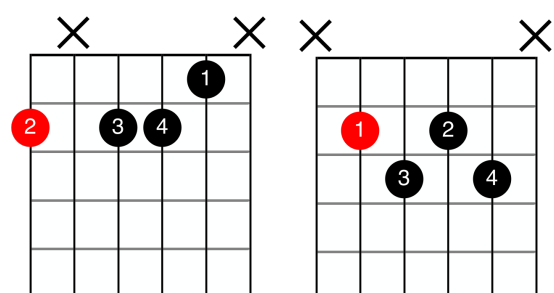
Dominant 7 Chords (7)



Minor 7 Chords (Min7)



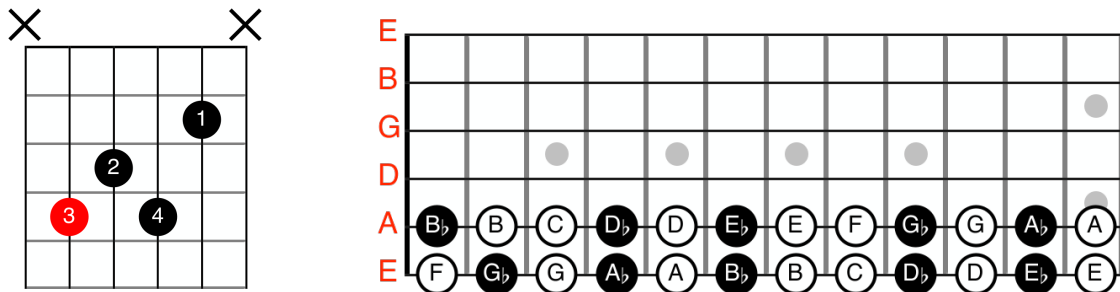
Minor 7b5 Chords (Min7b5)



Learn the Fretboard

When you learned open chords, you learned several chord shapes at the end of the fretboard. When you learn jazz guitar chords, you'll start off with just a handful of shapes, but you need to know the notes on the fretboard (including sharps and flats), so you know where to place each chord.

For example, if I want to play an Eb7 with the root on the 5th string, I need to place the root of this chord shape on the note Eb: string 6, fret 6. To play an F7 with the same shape, I need to move that shape two frets higher so the root lands on the F, string 5, fret 8.



At the very least, you should know the notes on the 5th and 6th strings (including flats and sharps), but it's going to be VERY useful to know ALL the notes on the fretboard and some music theory.

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Links to my jazz chord books:

[Rhythm Guitar Book 3](#)

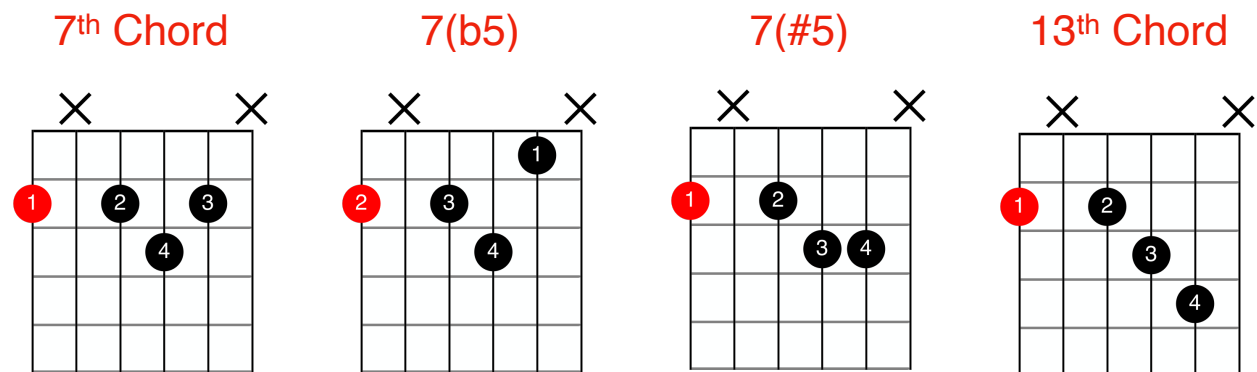
[Three-Note Jazz Guitar Chords](#)

Music Theory

It's not absolutely necessary to know music theory to play jazz chords. At the beginning, all you really need is to learn the notes on the 5th and 6th strings and to learn the chord shapes.

On the other hand, understanding music theory enables you to figure out chords on your own without having to look them up.

Here are four chord shapes: a 7th chord, 7(b5), 7(#5), and 13. You can learn these as four separate shapes, but understanding music theory helps you see that these are all **variations of the 7th chord shape**. In these shapes, the 5th of the chord is played on the 2nd string. To play the 7(b5), you lower the 5th of the chord one fret. To play the 7(#5), you raise the 5th of the chord one fret. To play the 13, you raise the 5th of the chord two frets.

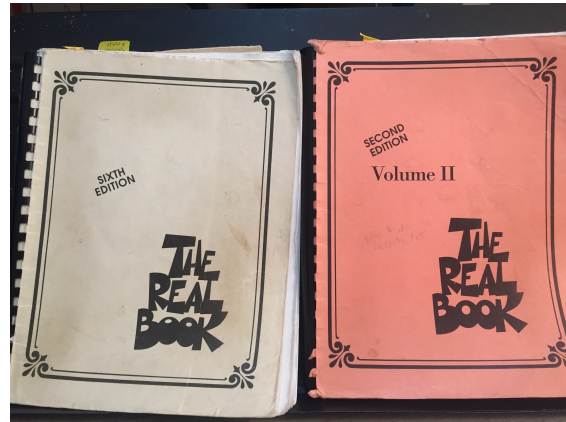


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Click here for my Guitar Theory Modules series:
<https://www.godfreyguitarlessons.com/guitar-theory-modules>

Play Through the Real Book

When I first began learning jazz guitar chords, I bought a copy of the Real Book Volumes 1 and 2 and worked my way through each book, page by page, playing a song a day. I played the melodies for sight-reading practice, and I played the chords.



In the beginning, I didn't know many jazz chords. I used my music theory knowledge to figure out how to play some of the chords, and if I couldn't figure a chord out on my own, I would look it up.

This took a while! I usually spent more time figuring out how to play chords than actually reading through the songs, but by the time I worked my way through those two volumes, I knew a LOT more chords than when I started.

I was by no means a chord expert at this point, so I took myself through these volumes a second time...and a third time! By the third time through, I started to feel like I knew what I was doing.

I strongly recommend getting at least the first two volumes of the Real Book and working through them to practice and learn jazz chords.

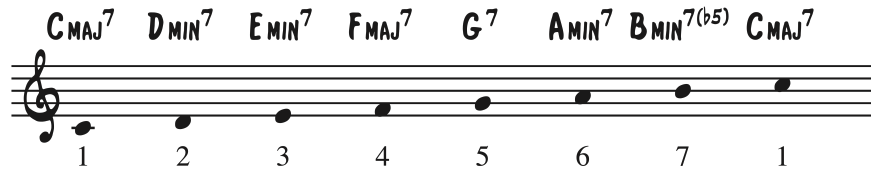
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Practice 2-5-1 Progressions

You'll remember your new jazz guitar chords more easily if you play them in context. Playing through the Real Book will certainly add context. You can also practice common chord progressions, especially the **2-5-1 progression**.

C Major Scale Chords



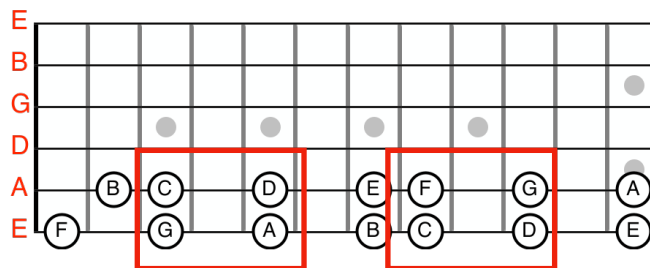
C Harmonic Minor Scale Chords



The 2-5-1 progression is based on the 2nd, 5th, and 1st notes of the scale. A 2-5-1 in C major could be played Dmin7 to G7 to Cmaj7. A 2-5-1 in C minor could be played Dmin7(b5) to G7 to Cmin7.

When you play 2-5-1 progressions, practice moving from one chord to the next as efficiently as possible. For example, if you play a 2-5-1 in the key of C major, first find a way to play the root notes as closely together as possible, and then play the appropriate chord shapes.

D, G and C root notes grouped near each other



2-5-1 Progressions (cont.)

Here are some common 2-5-1 progressions to try. Remember to keep the root notes together. The root notes will never be farther than two frets away from each other in a 2-5-1 progression.

C Major: Dmin7 – G7 – Cmaj7

F Major: Gmin7 – C7 – Fmaj7

B \flat Major: Cmin7 – F7 – B \flat maj7

A \flat Major: B \flat min7 – E \flat 7 – A \flat maj7

G Major: Amin7 – D7 – Gmaj7

D Major: Emin7 – A7 – Dmaj7

A Major: Bmin7 – E7 – Amaj7

C Minor: Dmin7 \flat 5 – G7 – Cmin7

F Minor: Gmin7 \flat 5 – C7 – Fmin7

B \flat Minor: Cmin7 \flat 5 – F7 – B \flat min7

E \flat Minor: Fmin7 \flat 5 – B \flat 7 – E \flat min7

G Minor: Amin7 \flat 5 – D7 – Gmin7

D Minor: Emin7 \flat 5 – A7 – Dmin7

A Minor: Bmin7 \flat 5 – E7 – Amin7

E Minor: F \sharp min7 \flat 5 – B7 – Emin7

B Minor: C \sharp min7 \flat 5 – F \sharp 7 – Bmin7

F \sharp Minor: G \sharp min7 \flat 5 – C \sharp 7 – F \sharp min7

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Jazz Starter Songs

You should learn some jazz songs so you can put all of this technical information to use. Fortunately, not every jazz song has a crazy amount of chords. Here is a list of good jazz starter songs.

- All Blues
- All of Me
- Autumn Leaves
- Black Orpheus
- Blue Bossa
- Charade
- Chitlins con Carne
- Comin' Home Baby
- Fly Me to the Moon
- Here's That Rainy Day
- I'm Beginning to See the Light
- Moon River
- My Funny Valentine
- Saint James Infirmary
- Softly, As in a Morning Sunrise
- Song for My Father
- St. Thomas
- Summertime
- Sway
- Watermelon Man

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