

Tutorial: When Chords Just Don't "Feel" Right

If you've ever watched closely at the videos I provide you might find that I tend to finger a variety of chords differently than you would expect. At times this is due to me being a 'self-taught' musician, where I had to decide for myself how I should finger a given chord. However, after years and years of chord practice I've also investigated many of these chords to form a short-hand version of the more difficult or confusing 'standard' chord finger arrangements. My goal in this quick tutorial is to show you how you can give your fretting hand a break and decide on how to rearrange your fingers so that a given chord can be a little easier to play.

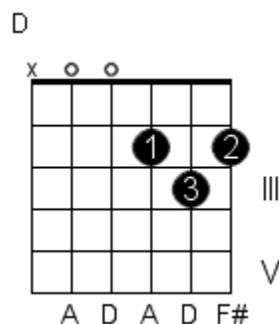
After all, my teachings are not about 'classical' approaches to playing the guitar. I'm all about 'practical.' We're here to learn to strum and sing along to songs while making us more well-rounded musicians. In turn, we have to remove some of the common notions that come along with the essence of musicianship.

Deciding Which Chords To "Fake"

The word 'fake' immediately makes us feel that we are doing something wrong, but really it's a misnomer. In the terms of a chord, or a triad, we ONLY need three notes in theory to ring a chord. That's all there really is to it. But we're not even really all that concerned about that. Most of us (by now) realize the basic chords and are probably able to play them. That doesn't matter either, because the concern here is not about the notes required to play a chord (though that is important) and more so how to take chords we are already familiar with and make them even easier.

The D Major Chord

Often you've seen the D Major chord fingered as this:



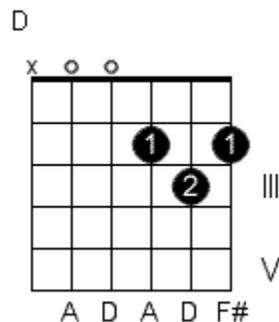
This is the 'standard' that most musicians play. I don't think I've ever played the D Major this way. Why? I'm not real sure other than I learned to play guitar without the

luxury of having a finger placement guide that showed me exactly where to place my fingers.

When I learned a D Major chord, I always saw this:

e -----2-----
b -----3-----
g -----2-----
d -----0-----
a -----
E -----

In this case I needed to experiment for myself, so I just assumed (or at least decided to go with how I felt) to apply it like this:



It works in every possible aspect, but DOES tend to create a few issues when creating hammer-ons or pull-offs as well as creating open notes within this given chord, as my 1st finger anchored all of the second frets of the G, B, and High E strings.

So why learn the alternate fingerings for this chord if it only creates possible issues as we move out of basic strumming and into more complex usage?

You don't have to. Just like with any other examination or investigation that we conduct daily there are always choices. However, I've personally found that you can STILL use the alternate fingerings a majority of the time. When you find a serious need to work with techniques such as hammers and pulls you'll probably find that the actual chord shape is no longer *really* there anyway.

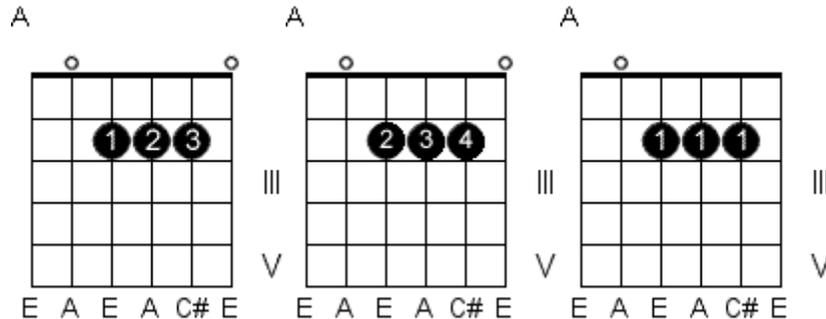
When a D Major chord is played using the alternate fingerings I have applied, the notes will ring the same and thus the chord will sound the same. This fingering system is really focused more on the beginner guitarist that has trouble with the standard fingering. Of course D Major is a basic chord, but basic doesn't mean easy in the

realm of guitar, as I'm sure you've come to realize. Instead basic really means fundamental or foundational.

I could go into great detail about the times that this new finger arrangement will or will not work, but instead I want you to TRY the arrangement yourself and see what you think. That is – IF you have trouble with this chord. If you breeze right through a D Major chord without thinking twice then by all **means don't stray from what you already know. My goal is not to change a chord fingering position that has become second nature for you.**

The A Major Chord

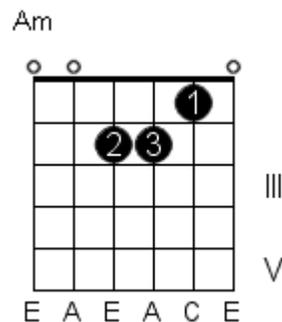
I actually learned a variety of fingerings for this chord, as I'm sure you have too by now. Here is a series of possible finger solutions to the A Major chord.



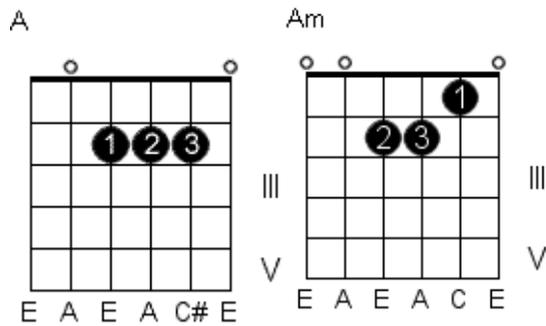
Option 1 is often the standard arrangement. Option 2 is the arrangement I almost always use. Option 3 is an A Major that can be played as a quick-change chord.

Why I don't like Option 1: For the purpose of strumming it's not a bad arrangement at all, but as a songwriter I don't use this arrangement because I tend to enjoy the tone that comes from Major to minor. (A – Am)

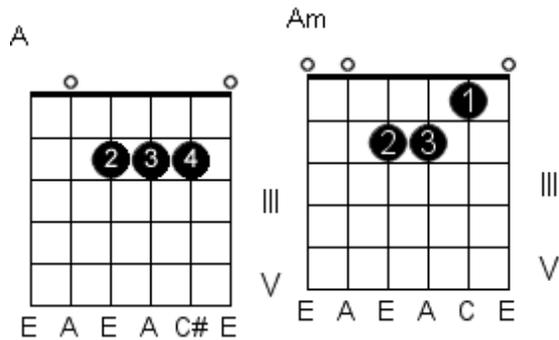
Now, there's really no other logical way to play an Am chord other than this:



If you chose Option 1, take a look at the transformation from Major to minor:

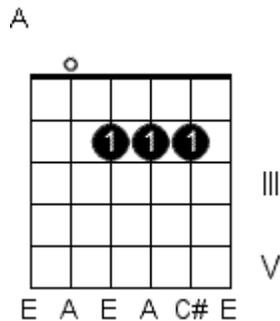


For me that's a bit confusing, even though I am quick to change to these chords using the standard format. Now take a look at the optional finger arrangement:



Hmmm....you'll see that only one finger has changed. Simply removing your 4th finger from the A Major chord and adding your 1st finger to create the Am chord makes it SUPER easy to change. This doesn't just apply to Majors and minors, because it works with suspended chords as well, but I think you get the picture.

The third option is what I call the 'quick-change' A Major:



This can be tricky to understand at first, but bear with me. Remember earlier that I mentioned we JUST need the triad to contain the three notes for said chord? In other words we need E, A, and C#(Db). Looking at the quick-change chord here we have

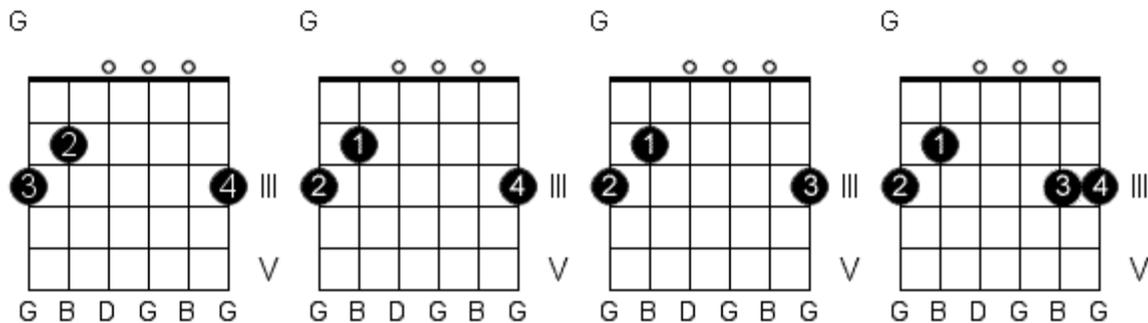
those, but in order to play this option we must barre (or anchor) our 1st finger on the D, G, and B strings at the second fret.

The problem is that by doing so we inadvertently anchor our 1st finger on the second fret of the High E string as well. When doing this, we now have an A6 chord.

Unless we are looking for that chord, there's the problem. The only way you'll be able to play this A Major chord correctly is to simply avoid playing the High E string. It's a little tricky, but since I only use this version as a quick-change chord, depending on the tempo the odds are you won't actually 'make it' to that string. In other words, the change will come so fast that your pick (or finger) won't have the appropriate 'strum time' to get to the High E string.

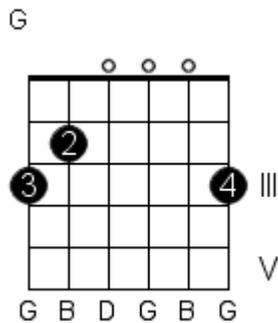
The G Major Chord

The G Major chord is always funny to work with. I've played it so many different ways, and I'm sure you have too. Here are just a FEW examples:

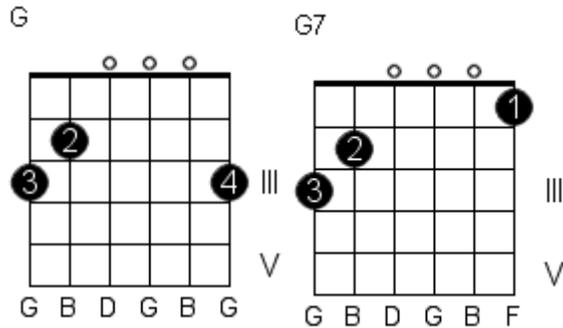


It's one of those 'basic' chords again, and while it's rather easy to play, there is a ton of argument over which method is the best.

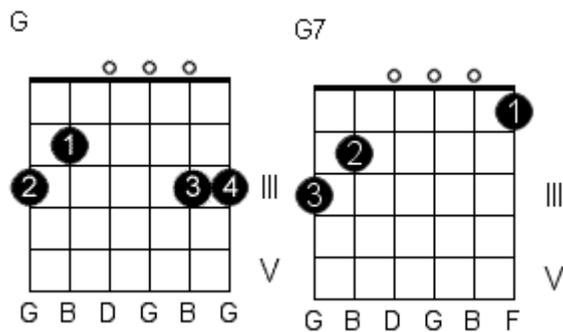
To be honest, there isn't a 'best' method here. Logically speaking, if you were to move from a G Major to a G7, the easiest method would be this (roughly speaking):



The notes played (or not played) on the B and High E string here are irrelevant. In order to play a G Major chord, you simply need the notes G, B, and D. We have them here. However, take a look at the comparison of G Major in the position below in comparison to the G7:



This is MUCH easier than the following:



However, I don't always follow this, but again I don't have issues with chord changes because I've played so many. If you find that you have trouble, always look outside of the box and realize that there are other doors in which you can open if you just experiment a little with it.

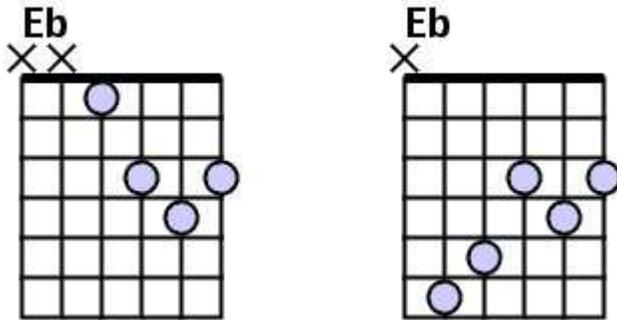
Other Chords

I'll be getting into barre chords and the usage of the thumb in another tutorial, but a quick glance at some additional chords is needed real quick.

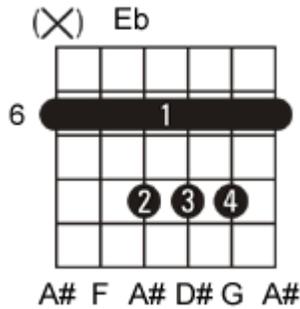
What about an Eb chord? Is there an easier way to finger this chord?

Yes there is, and believe it or not the Eb chord is rather common.

Here are a few 'standard' Eb chords:



Really? Why? I'll tell you very quickly that you'll never see me playing these awkward shapes. It's just not worth the hassle to me. Instead, I ALWAYS play an Eb like the one below:



I just lied to you a little. I don't even really play the Eb like that. Instead I just create a power chord out of it (I use power chord loosely). Instead, I really just play it like this:

e -----
 b -----
 g -----(8)---
 d ----8----
 a ----6----
 E -----

I included a parenthesis around the "8" on the G string because technically a power chord only contains the root and the fifth, but we're not concerned with all of that. You can still consider this an Eb5 for our purposes. This is still roughly the same concept as the barred version of Eb from the chord diagram. I've just removed the 'barre' concept and applied a simpler approach.

1. Will it sound a little 'tonally' different? Yes.
2. Will it feel awkward starting with an open chord and then playing this? Yes.
3. Will you need to move around on the fretboard more choosing this version? Yes.
4. Does it really matter? No. Not really.

There are as many advantages as there are disadvantages to using this version.

1. Will it be easier to play this version than the 'standard' version? Yes.
2. Will you retain better knowledge of the notes on the fretboard as well as where variations of the same chord shape will occur? Yes.
3. Will you FINALLY make it through an entire progression without getting tripped up? Yes.
4. Are there additional ways to play an Eb? Yes, but I doubt you'll find an easier way that allows the necessary notes to ring through. I sure haven't.

What Did You Learn?

There are a TON of chords that you can alter to reflect an easier fingering arrangement. I simply can't get into all of them. However, always remember a few key factors.

1. A triad is a chord, and triad means 'three' so you only need THREE notes to complete a given chord.
2. Just because a chord diagram shows fingerings (or not) doesn't mean that they MUST be played that way.
3. If you're into serious theory, many of these methods of 'faking' CAN cause issues down the road, but if you're just looking to strum chords and work with basic ideas odds are you'll never run into any issues. I've only had one or two small technical issues in the past, but the solution was quick and easy. If you run into the issue, always examine it and don't run from it. The answer will probably be much easier than you think.

Sincerely,
Nathan Wilson
EZ Strummer