Fingerstyle Guitar *In a Flash:* Module 1 – The Basics

The "Crab Pinch" Method

It's exactly what it sounds like. You'll learn how to pinch a variety of strings (just like a crab) using your thumb (T) and 1st (1) finger. You can actually get through most any basic song using the *crab pinch method* - and I use it any and every time I possibly can. It's a slight step up from just using your thumb, but it's actually quite simple.

This is where fingerstyle starts looking, sounding and feeling more like real fingerstyle. In the previous installments I discussed how to use your thumb as well as how to apply your 1st finger to the mix without stacking any additional notes. Recall that we focused on the 1 and 5 notes in our thumb/1st finger run. Now we are ready to put those notes into action using stacked tones.

We're also going to alter this concept ever-so-slightly so that we can achieve a true chordal tone. We'll still be using just our thumb and 1st finger to "Crab Pinch" our stacked tones. Once we reach the "Crab and Bird Pinch" method we will incorporate all 3 (or more) of these tones in a full-fledged fingerstyle passage.

Now that we are ready to stack tones together, I'd like to introduce an additional tone in the overall mix. This tone is going to be what sets a specific chord up to fully sound like the intended chord.

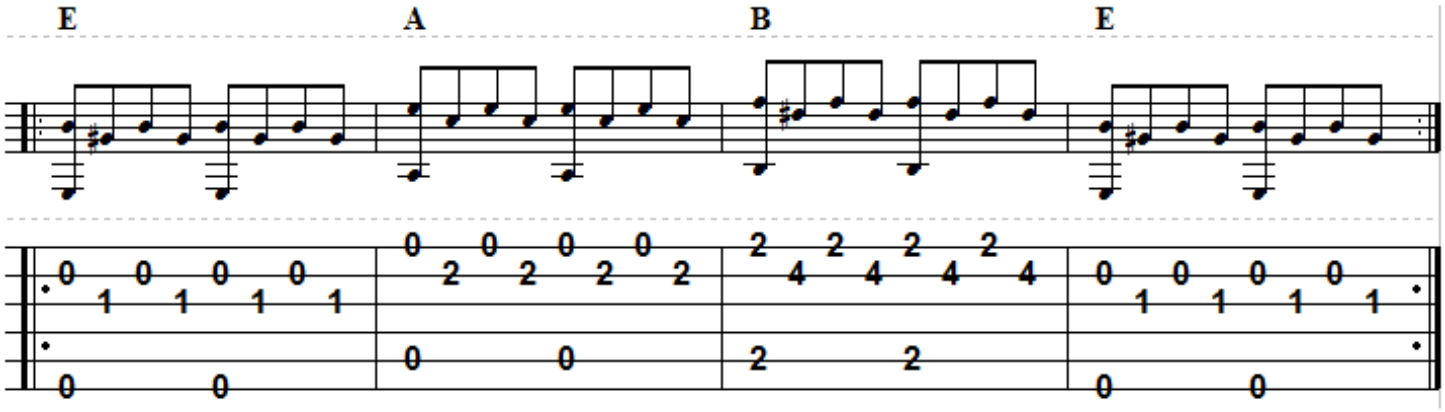
Thus, we will be using 1 more note out of the basic chord spectrum. Here's what we'll be working with at first:

#1 → The standard Major chord uses 1 – **3** – 5 (such as E Major: E – **G#** - B)
#2 → The standard minor chord uses 1 – **b3** – 5 (such as E minor: E – **G** – B)

In order for an E Major to sound like an E Major, it must include, *at some point*, the overall tone of G#, which is the "3" in the Major chord construction formula. If I wanted it to sound like an Em instead of an E Major, I'd use the "b3" in the Em chord, which is a G note.

I'll start out with the same progressions from earlier, which all used power chords (E5, A5, etc.) and only focus on the standards using the Major and minors.

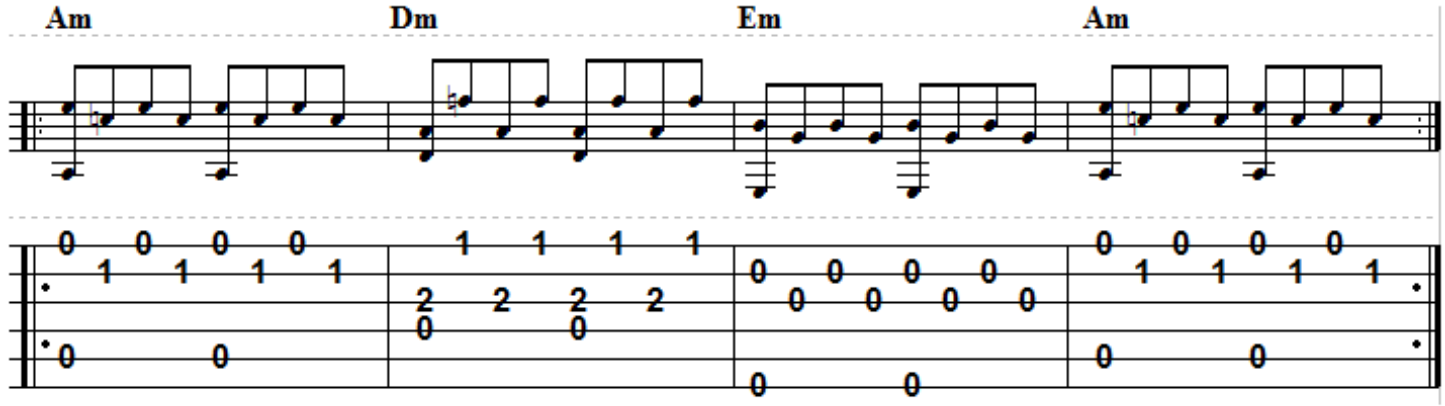
Here's the E5 – A5 – B5 – E5 converted to a full chord run:



Notice that we are now stacking the 1 and the 5 together. Those are all played using the crab pinch, which is detailed in the video. We then immediately follow up with the “3” in every one of these chords.

There are plenty of other ways to get your point across in a fingerstyle passage, but this one works every single time. What you do here is start with a generic tone of just 1 and 5. You then follow up with the 3 in the chords, giving the listener (and you) a true indication of what type of chord it is. In this case, I've set the arrangement for every chord to follow the following note format: 1/5 – 3 – 5 – 3 | 1/5 – 3 – 5 – 3 ← repeated throughout. This will absolutely give you a chance to stay consistent.

The chords above are full chords now, so I've removed the power chord name. What about the minors?

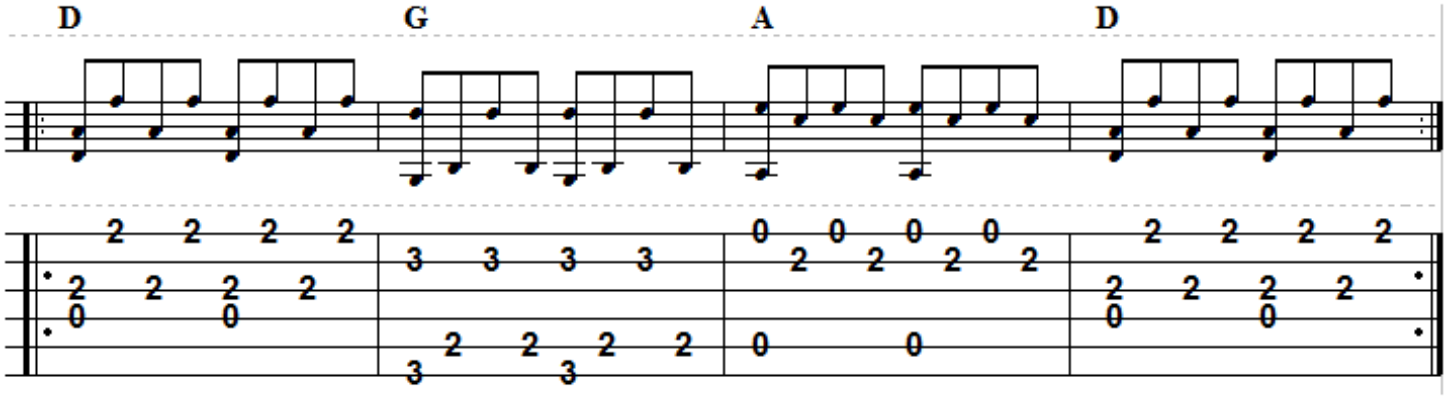


It's the exact same idea. This time we're stacking the 1/5 together and following up with a b3.

We use the b3 because that is what makes these chords actually sound minor. If you check out the previous A Major chord, you'll notice that the overall picking arrangement has not changed at all. The only change is how the 2nd fret B string note in A Major switches to the 1st fret B string note in Am. [A Major = A, **C#**, E (1, **3**, 5) vs. Am = A, **C**, E (1, **b3**, 5)]

Again, the above progression is no longer A5 – D5 – E5 – A5 since we've made use of the full chord spectrum.

Here's another one:



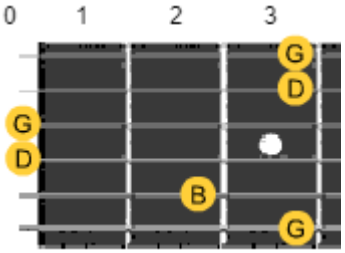
IMPORTANT → Blueprint Deviation: G Major

Ok, this is when things get wonky. Take a look at the G Major chord. In order to get the 3 tones we need in the G Major chord, we must deviate from the overall idea. Remember that I mentioned how the G Major (and C Major) open chords are somewhat grouped into their own little world, right?

This is due to the fact that both of these open chords use fretted notes as their root.
This is also due to the fact that both of these open chords have practically unmanageable open chord counterparts.

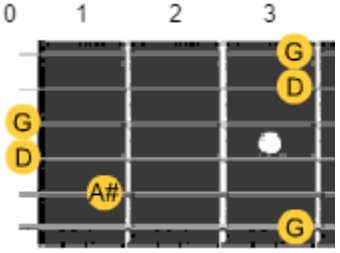
Recall the following:

The open G Major is easy. However, an open Gm is not.



This is the open G Major. In this chord, you'll find that the 3rd interval (the "3" in 1 – 3 – 5 for the chord name) is on the 2nd fret A string. It's a B note.

In order to (attempt) to play the open Gm chord, you'll have to do what is shown in the following diagram to maintain consistency in the picked out fingerstyle progression.



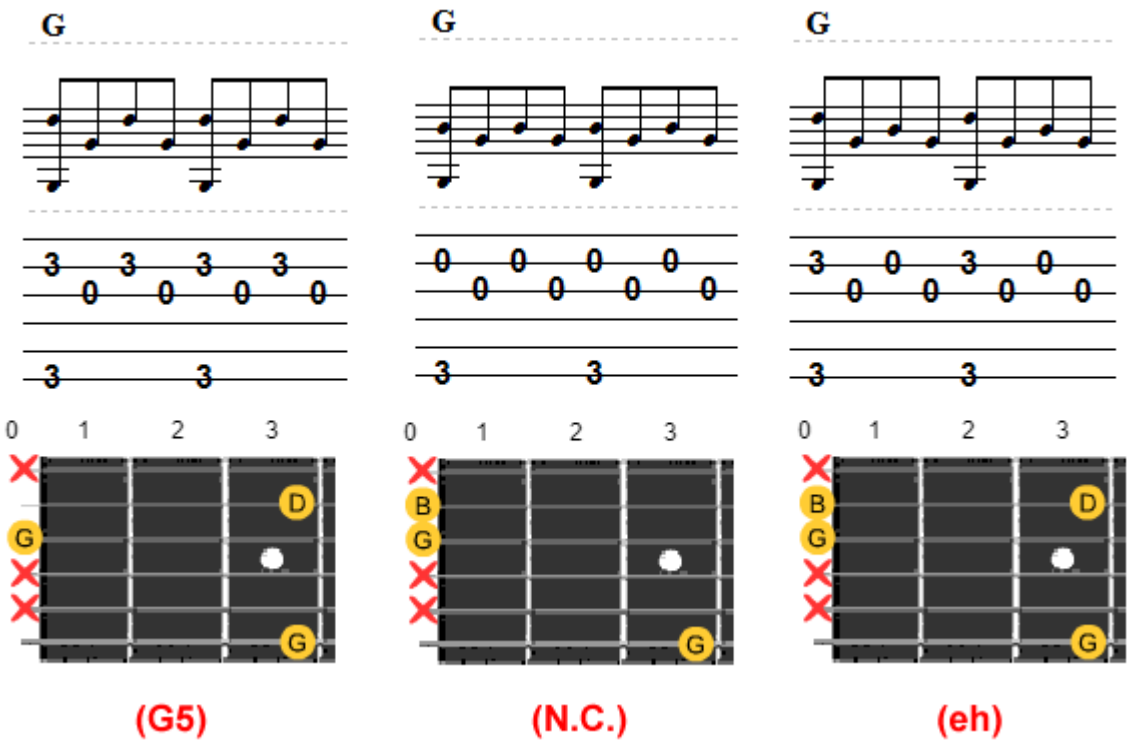
This is the open Gm. In this chord, you'll find that the "b3" (the flattened 3rd interval in 1 – b3 – 5 for the chord name) is also on the A string, this time on the 1st fret. We get an A# tone there.

While this Gm chord IS possible to play (especially through fingerstyle as you might not need every note in the formation) it's still not real logical.

So, the whole G Major (and Gm chord) in open position makes everything deviate just a bit. Simply put, while the open G Major (and open Gm) fall somewhat along the lines of the E group of chords, the other E group of chords don't make use of the fretted low E string. G Major and Gm, in open position, DO. Thus, they throw everything out of whack. This also means we must use a slightly different blueprint when we play the G Major in open position.

That is, at least in theory. You *can* just randomly pick out any old notes using the open G Major and it'll be fine. However, that's not a consistent approach. Since G Major is such a common chord, I'd rather you start out with a "mostly" consistent idea.

To further explain why there is a deviation in the blueprint, I've labeled a variety of "sort of" open G Major chords in a row below:



All three of these tabs follow the overall "E Group" method of playing fingerstyle. They are listed under the E group because they DO feature a root on the E string. But again – the roots in G Major are *fretted.*

The first tab only gives you a G5.
Thus, there is no indication of a G Major or a Gm.

The second tab results in N.C. ← no chord.
We definitely don't want that.

The third tab DOES use all 3 notes.

This is indicated by the 3rd fret B string note being fretted (D) and then played open (B) to basically give you all 3 notes you need.

But....it's not going to sound very good.

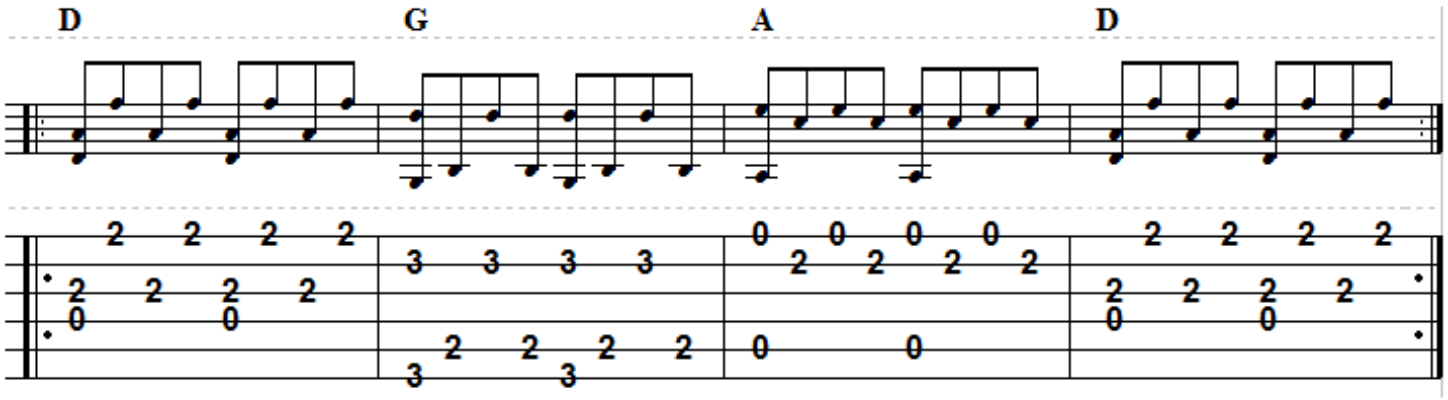
So, the E group blueprint doesn't work well for the open G Major chord. Again, this is built upon 2 reasons:

1. The G note is fretted on the low E string, unlike every other open chord in the E group. Those all use OPEN notes.
2. The G Major chord can be played in open position, but Gm is hard. To make use of the proper tones, you must alter it.

That's why your G Major chord is played in the way I provide it.

If this confuses you, don't worry. The open G Major and the open C Major are pretty much the ONLY chords that have this issue. Plus, when we get to the moveable chords you will LOVE how those fingerstyle blueprints don't change at all.

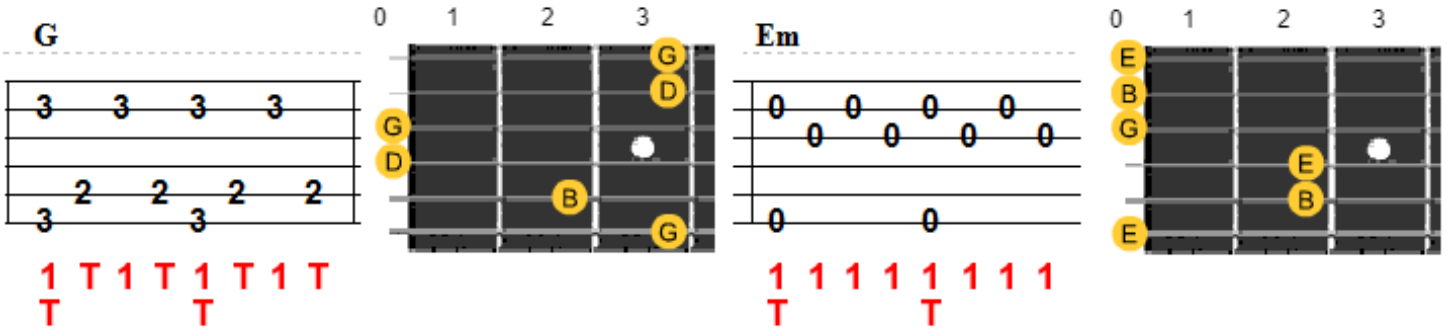
Before we go any further, here's that same tab I just provided again for reference.



Again, this G Major obviously looks very different than the other formations. We make use of the lower “B” note here, which is the 3 in the G Major chord. As you can expect, your thumb will have you covered there – and fingerings will be included in a moment.

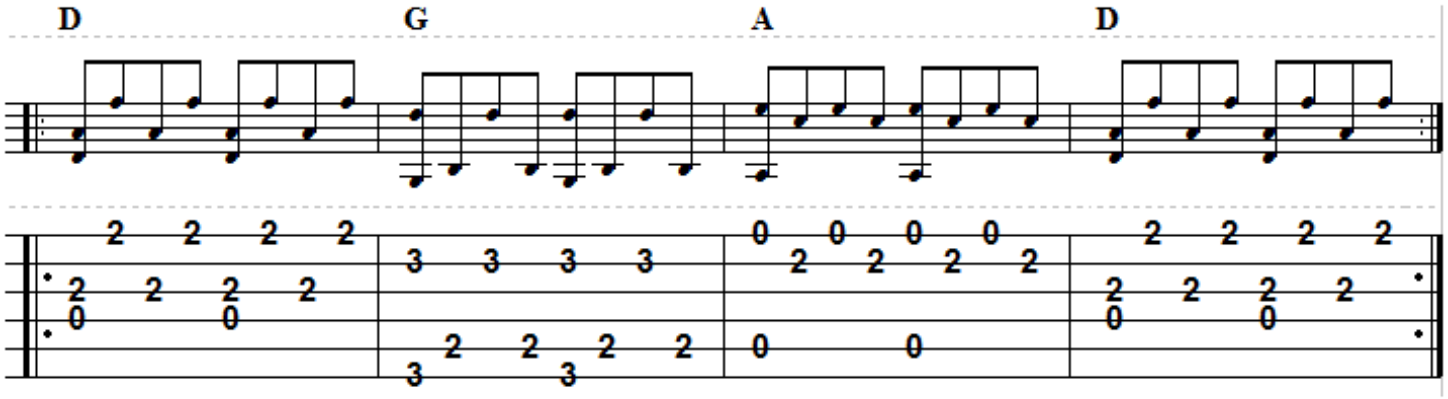
Just remember that it's currently all about getting the 1, 3, and 5 here to make sure the listener knows the full chord spectrum. Because I sure wouldn't play an open Gm or Cm, I must assume that you won't. If you DO decide to do it – awesome. It's just a bit challenging for no real good reason. You'll be able to use a different method for those that is MUCH easier.

The deviation in pattern for G Major is shown below for reference. I am using an Em chord relation here, but it could be an E Major chord just the same.



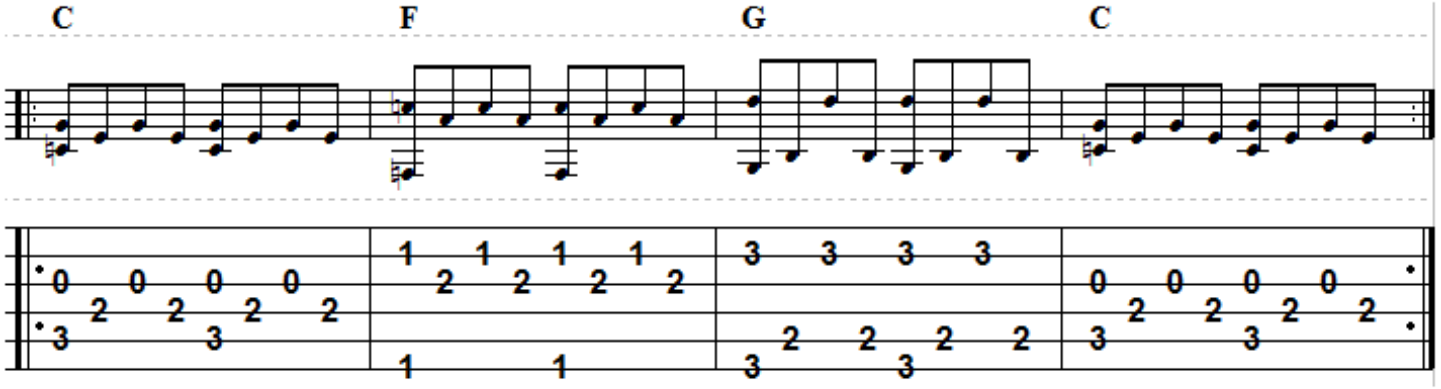
All that happens here is your thumb comes into play to grab that B note on the A string. It's physically simple to play, but there IS a deviation in the pattern.

Here's a bit more information about that tab:



Take a look at the D Major chord. You had a Dm chord in the previous tab. There's no change in the picking other than the 1st fret high E string note in Dm has now moved up to the 2nd fret high E string note for the D Major. Consistent for sure. This was previously a D5 – G5 – A5 – D5 run, which is now a full Major chord run.

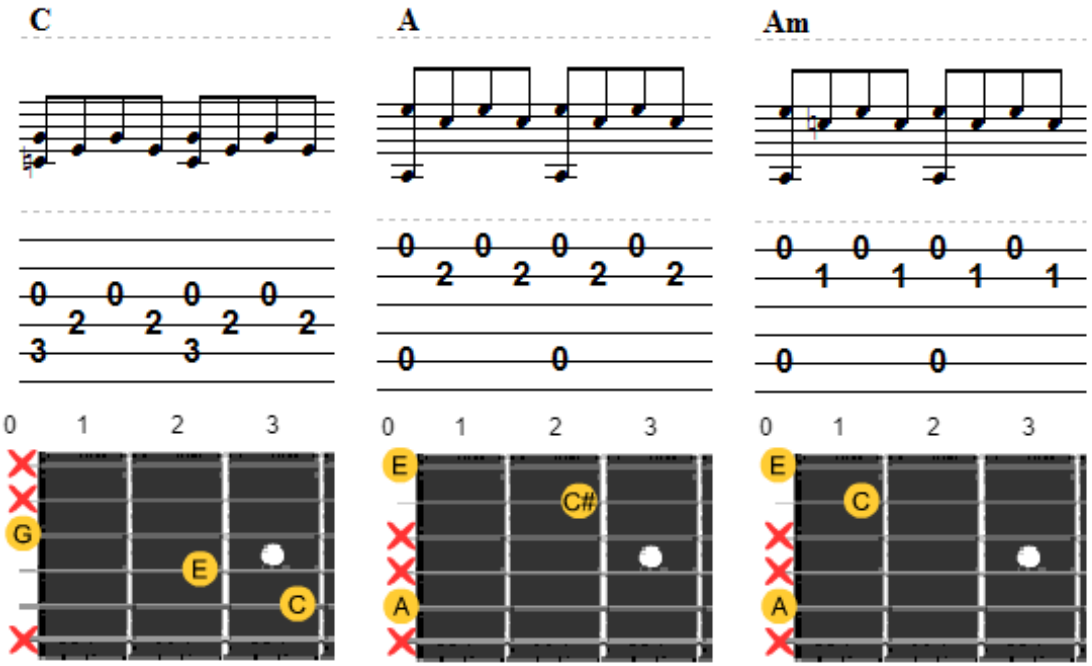
Here's our next tab, which includes....dun dun duhhhhh – an open C Major chord.



Recall that an open C Major is easy, but an open Cm is not. I won't beat you to death with this, as the same overall concept applies here in the way it did with the open G Major. Since the open C Major chord uses a fretted note on the 3rd fret of the A string, it should be grouped (somewhat) into being an A group chord.

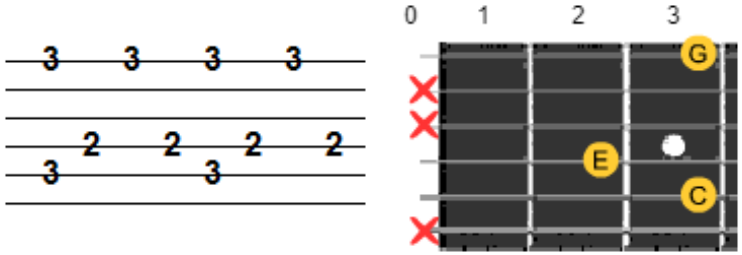
But – of course, it's a fretted note. Thus, it doesn't work in the same way that the A group chords would.

Here is a side-by-side comparison of the C Major, A Major – and Am for additional reflection:



I'm purposely including JUST the plucked notes here. When you look at the open C Major chord, you'll get all 3 notes you need – and it'll only work “mostly” consistently in the format I provided in the tab. While the C Major looks rather different than the A Major and Am (which are the same fingerpicking pattern) at first, it's still got the same flow. You're just forced to use three strings all squished together. Now, is there another solution? Yes – but it's going to require some dexterity that most of us won't want to tackle.

Here's an alternative example of using the C Major to still get all 3 tones using the same overall order of: 1/5 – 3 – 5 – 3



Is that a C Major chord? Absolutely. It sure doesn't look like one though, right? Well, it's also not technically an “open” chord, either. This particular method makes use of a basic alteration of the C Major chord, where the high E string comes into play and provides us with the 5 in the C Major chord. This isn't a problem, but again – using this idea is even MORE inconsistent than the other method. Furthermore, the sheer look of it might confuse things because at first glance it might look like a G Major.

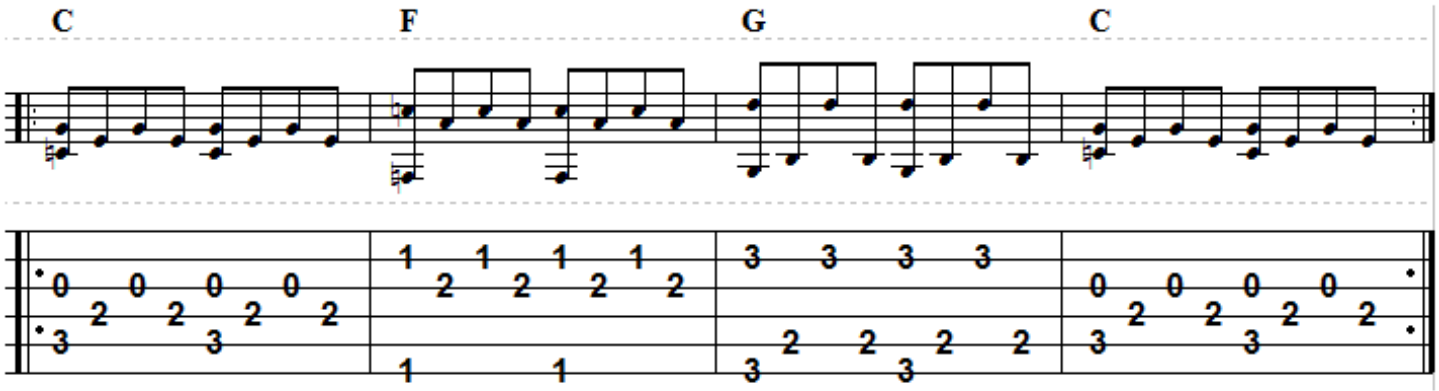
So, the other C Major run at least includes a mostly consistent concept in lines with where the open C Major technically falls into as far as groupings. It will be grouped as an A group chord, but that's only because the root note is on the A string. Since it is fretted, the fingerstyle picking arrangement cannot be the same in order to achieve all 3 tones.

Do You REALLY Need All Three Tones?

Short answer is yet. Long answer is, well, not necessarily. Once you start getting bigger fingerstyle arrangements you'll notice that some of these 3 (or more) notes can be implied through embellishments. That's where everything changes. That's ALSO when your flavor comes into the equation. Assuming you aren't ready to do that, I must touch base on those two chords when they appear the first time and explain the reasoning.

Just remember: the open G Major and the open C Major chords are the only 2 chords that somewhat deviate from the E group (G Major) and the A group (C Major) because they use fretted root notes.

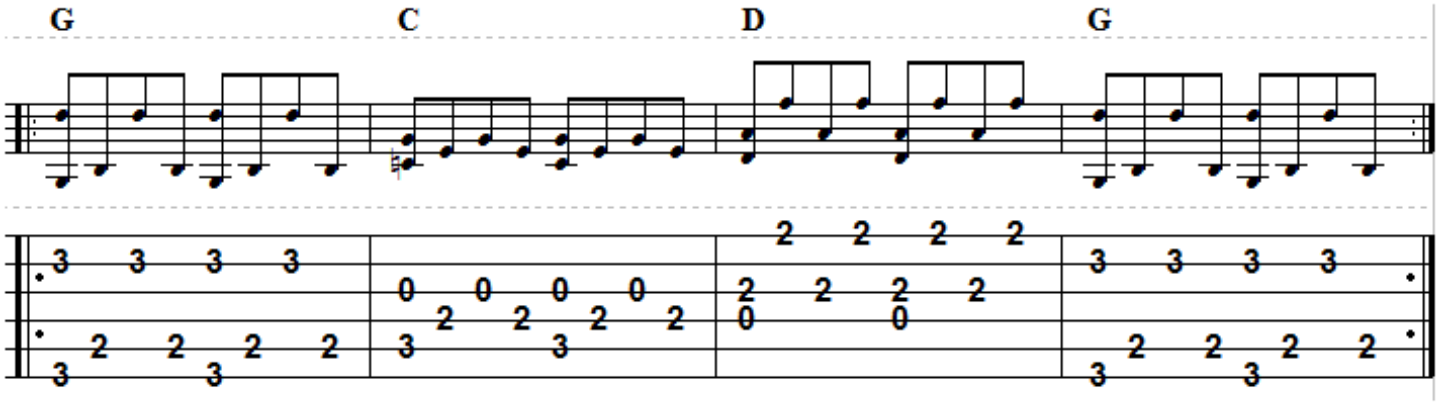
Here's the tab again for reference:



C5 – F5 – G5 – C5 becomes C – F – G – C by including the “3” in each of these Major chords. You'll quickly notice how the F Major and G Major chords are mostly the same, with the only exception being the 2nd fret A string in G Major.

We need that B note in there (which is the 3) but we can't really use it logically (as of right now) on the G string because it's not playable.

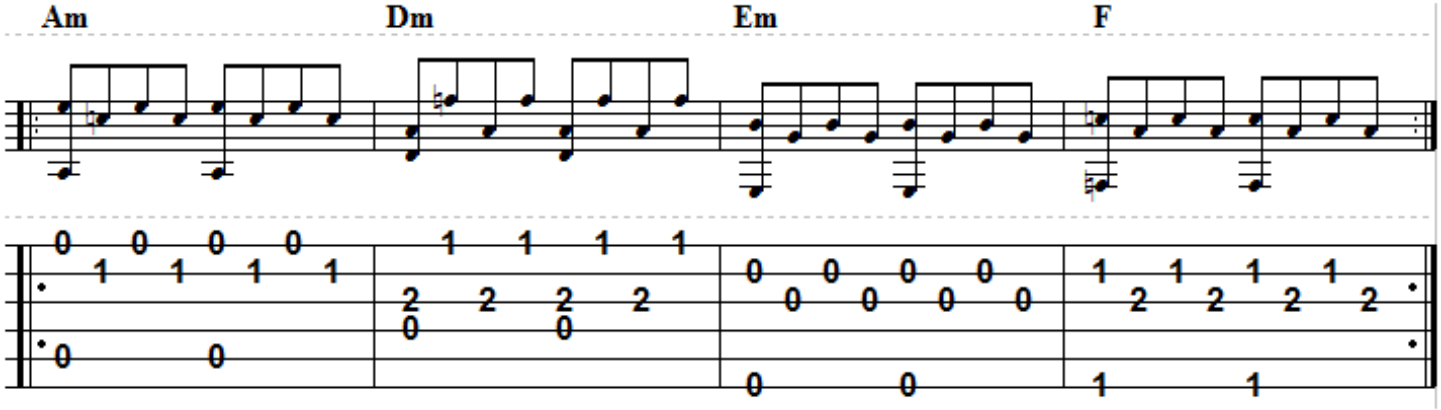
Finally we have one more progression. As you can expect, the same rules apply. We start with 1/5 and then use the 3 in each case.



As a quick recap, every pattern we've used so far is either:

Major = 1/5 – 3 – 5 – 3 | 1/5 – 3 – 5 – 3 (etc.) || Minor = 1/5 – b3 – 5 – b3 | 1/5 – b3 – 5 – b3 (etc.)

While I didn't mix any Major and minor chords together, it would be the exact same idea. If we wanted to play a progression of, say, Am – Dm – Em – F we could do this:

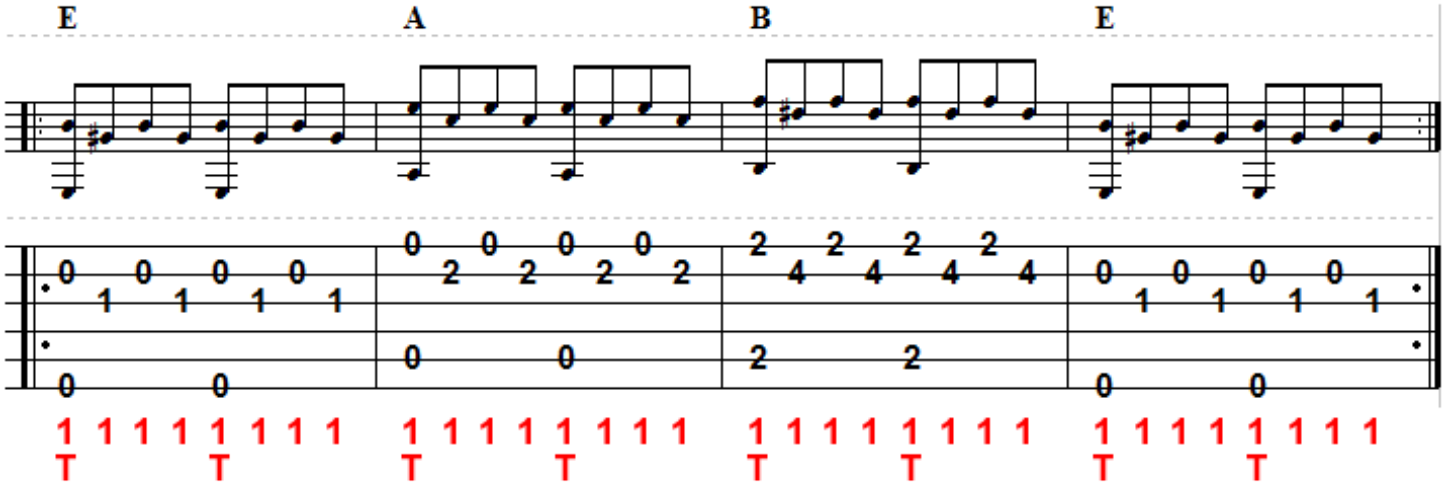


This uses a STRING run of A string (for Am) – D string (for Dm) – E string (for Em) – E string (for F Major)

Notice I said string run. That's important. Take a look at the last chord, which is an F Major chord. The note you hear on the low E string is an F note. However, the F Major (barre) chord shown here *IS* going to use the exact same finger pattern for your picking hand with both the E Major open chord and the Em open chord. Why? Because the F Major is a barre chord, which means it has been moved from an open position. We'll get into this later, but long story short – F Major is just a shifted E Major. Thus, the picking hand won't change from the open E Major chord. Sweeeeeet. At this point you have learned the following:

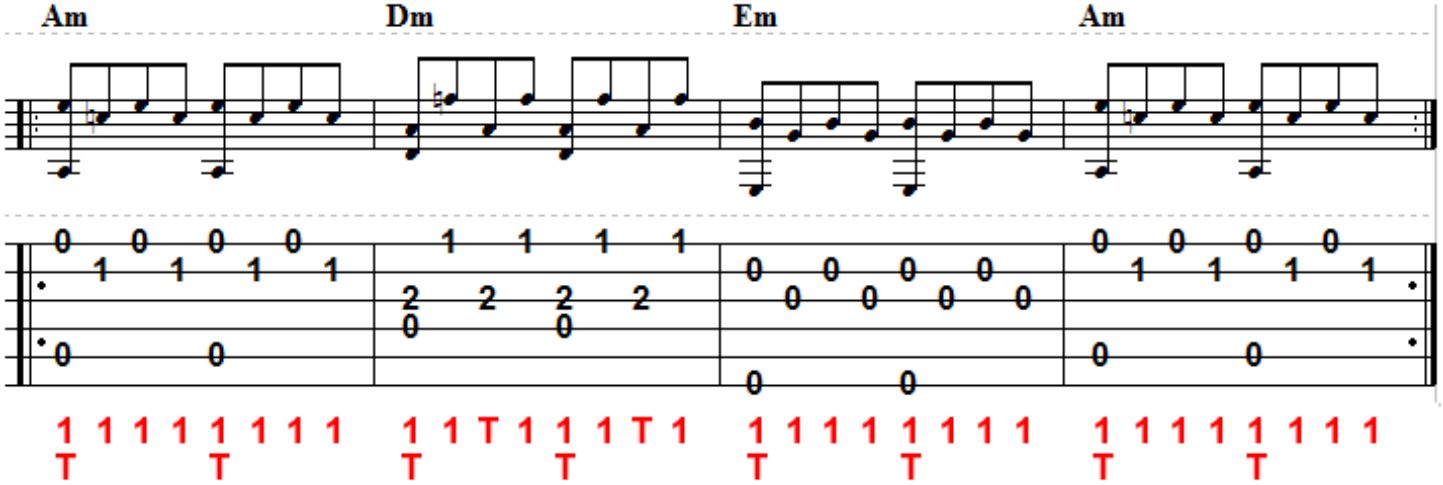
1. We can take any chord and start with the 1 and the 5. Those two notes will be in every chord you play.
2. Once we establish the 1 and the 5, we follow up with whatever note is needed to make it sound like a true chord.
    - So far we've covered the essentials, such as the Major and minor.
        - The Major uses a "3" (such as 1 – 3 – 5, or E – G# - B in E Major)
        - The minor uses a "b3" (such as 1 – b3 – 5, or E – G - B in Em)
    - We will be covering a few other ones next.
3. We have learned that our picking patterns won't change based on chord groups – our fretting hand will
    - Exception 1: The open G Major chord is grouped as an E group, but it's fretted. Thus, the pattern changes slightly.
    - Exception 2: The open C Major chord is grouped as an A group, but it's fretted. Thus, the pattern changes slightly.
4. We can use the "Crab Pinch" method to stack two tones together

Now comes the time where I plot out all the picking hand fingerings for you. I don't think any of these will be any different than your thoughts on the picking pattern quite yet.



I suspect you are going to agree with me 100% here. It's your only real logical method of picking. While it might be slightly difficult at first, just remember that your thumb is playing the bass and your 1st finger is just alternating between two parallel strings. In this passage you are only dealing with the E and A group in terms of chords, so that makes it pretty easy.

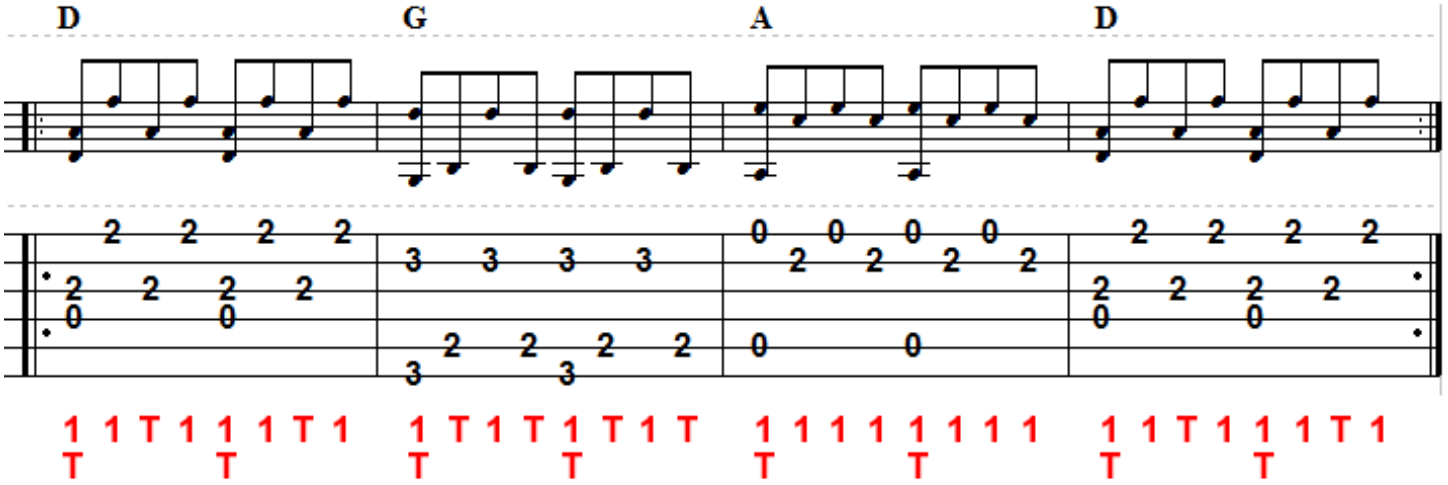
Here's the next passage:



First, recognize that the *only* picking change here is within the Dm chord. I've indicated that with a “T” in the tab. Since we are using the 2nd fret on the G string here, we're best off playing this with our thumb simply because our 1st finger would need to skip up pretty high to catch that note. So, it's pure logics and based mostly off just bringing your thumb to the higher string.

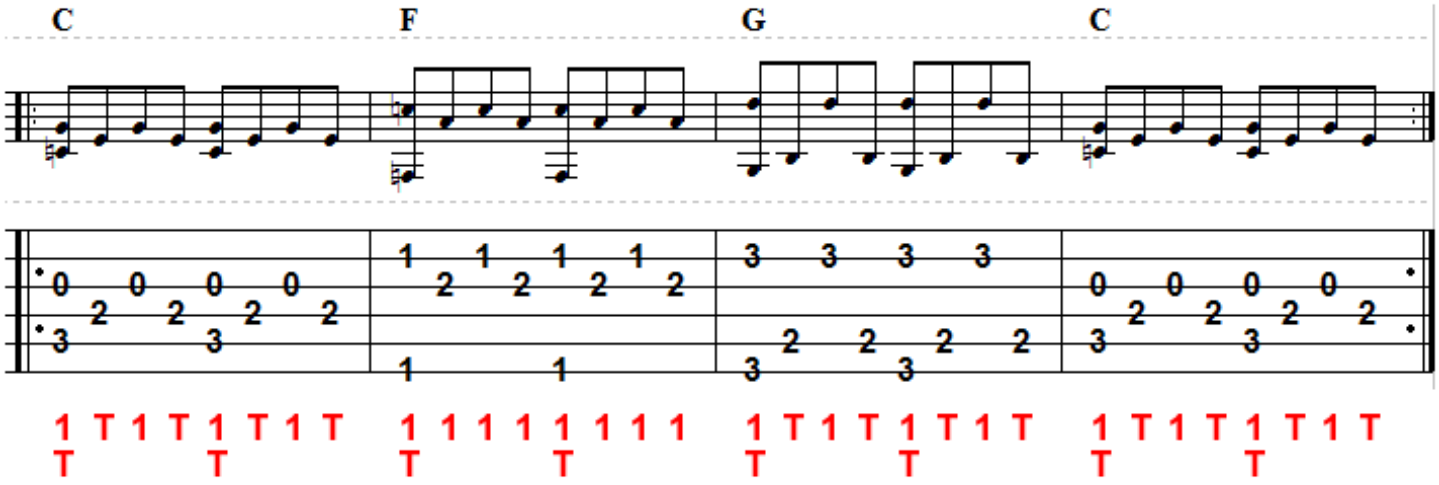
While it does (slightly) alter the basic arrangement since you started off using your 1st finger on the G string and then switched to your thumb, you'll likely not find a more comfortable manner of playing this using any other digit.

Here's another tab:



The D Major chords here are slightly squishy, but at the same time there isn't any serious finger movement going on here in terms of the picking hand. Just recognize that your thumb will move from the open D string note to the 2nd fret G string note. I think that is much easier than trying to play with your 1st finger. However, you can, if you want, try that same note with your 1st finger and see if you agree.

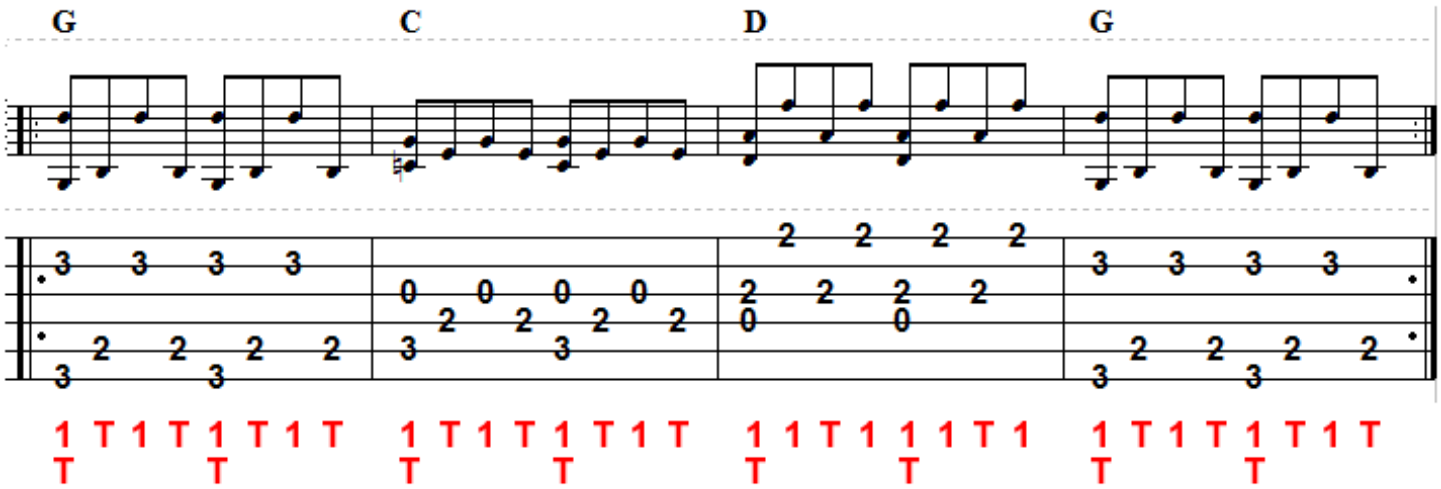
Now take a look at the A Major to the D Major. Your thumb only moves up one string from the open A note (open A string) to the open D note (open D string) so that's not too bad. It's somewhat more of a natural feel there. The video will show you what I mean.



This time you'll notice that I recommend using your thumb to play the 2nd fret D string note in the C Major chord instead of your 1st finger. Why? It's a squishy run. Granted, the C Major chord will fill out quite a bit when we reach the “crab and bird pinch” method, but as you see it right now – it's the most logical formation. Your thumb will (likely) gravitate toward the D string 2nd fret note as part of the whole beginner boom chuck concept.

This particular instance isn't so much about the chords in front of or behind the C Major chord as much as it is based on the precise arrangement I have personally asked that you play. You may not like this arrangement at all, but for now – we need to work with it until we incorporate a few more options.

How about one more?



These are all chords we have previously plotted, so there's no change here other than the progression. It's worth mentioning how the G and C chords here actually follow the same blueprint. This is somewhat important to remember as I've discussed that the G and C chords have roots on entirely different strings, are both fretted, cause somewhat of a kink in the fingerstyle template – and yet still use the same picking blueprint between themselves.

So, while G and C are standouts in their own grouping realm, they are consistent to each other. In other words, G Major is part of the E group, yet not picked the same way because it is fretted. C Major is part of the A group, yet not picked the same way because it is also fretted. These two standard chords might be classified with each other as their own little duo group.

At this point you have gained some insight into how to make use of the 1, 3 and 5 in the standard Major chord.
We used the following format: 1/5 – 3 – 5 – 3 | 1/5 – 3 – 5 – 3 (etc.)

We also learned how to make use of the 1, b3 and 5 in the minor chords.
We used the following format: 1/5 – b3 – 5 – 3 | 1/5 – b3 – 5 – b3 (etc.)

Between these there is only ONE slight change, and it's the "3" vs. the "b3" ← these make the chords sound M (3) or m (b3)

Before we move on to the next series, which will involve all these chords AND a few chords that use more than just 3 notes, I want to address the suspended chord concept. I'll start with the sus4 and briefly touch on the sus2 when it is logical.

Logical? Yes. The E group doesn't feature a logical suspended 2 (sus2) chord, but the A and D groups do.

Any suspended 4 (sus4) chord only has the 1 and the 5 (making it neither Major nor minor) – but it also has an entirely different note that replaces the 3 or the b3. It uses a 4. If we first think of the E group, we can relate what I just stated.

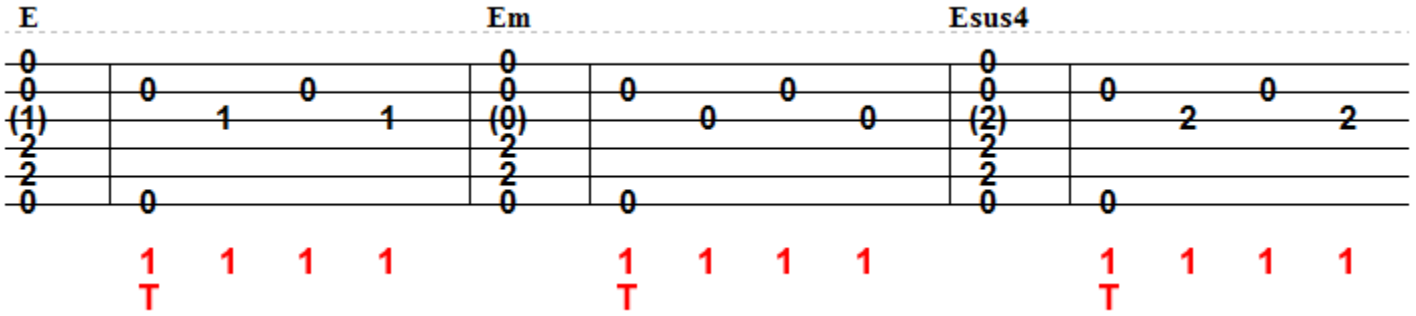
In the Esus4 chord, the "4" here is what makes the E*sus4* chord sound. It's quite literally <u>suspended</u>.

In other words, it's in purgatory. So, we should look at this chord FIRST because it won't actually add any note to what we've already learned.

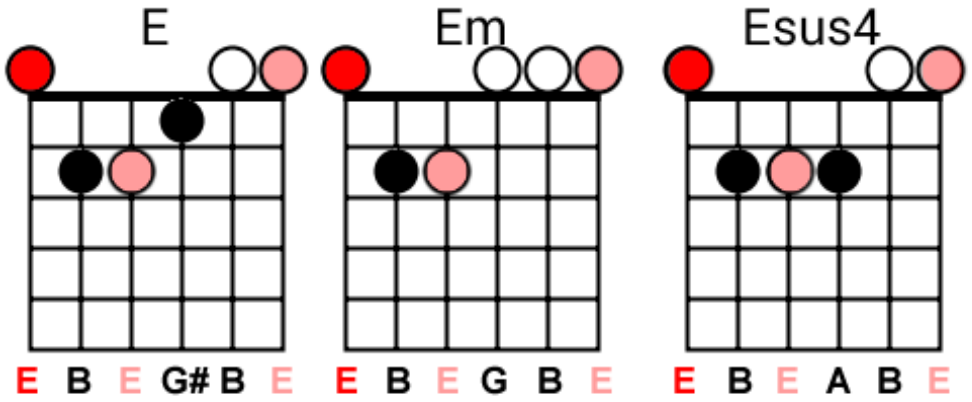
Since the Esus4 is in the E group of chords, we should take a look at what we can do to make sure we get the "4" tone in there at some point.

> Before I go too much further, you should also realize that while a suspended chord is used VERY frequently in music, it does have a slight dissonance to it. When we often see the word dissonance, we think it to be an overall tone or range of notes that don't fit.
>
> This can be true, but a suspended chord (even sus2, which I'll touch on later) is a <u>good</u> dissonance because it is often used to *substitute* any Major or minor chord. Simply stated, it will add a ton of dimension to your otherwise normal Major or minor chord when it is used as a replacement OR as a "filler" in a progression.

What makes a suspended 4 (sus4) chord so cool when being used in open position is this:



It can be played using the precise same fingerpicking pattern. I did abridge the pattern (shortened it) to help you see each note all spread out, notice that the E, Em and Esus4 can all use the same string layout. This is because the Esus4 is 100% part of the E group of chords. It will feature the same "E" root when compared to the E and Em chords:

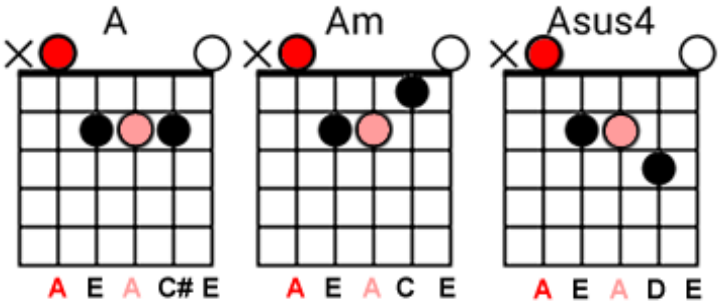


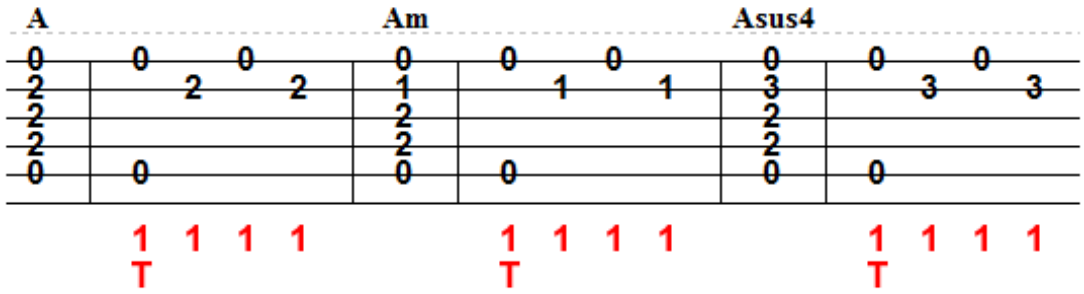
Notice here that you have 3 "E" roots across all of these slightly different shapes. All of the E roots are on the low E, D string, and high E strings. Thus, the only real change across all 3 of these chords is featured on the G string itself.

We don't care about that with our picking pattern, as I've designed it so that you will use the same string in the progression. Long story short – Esus4 is the same picking pattern as E or Em. The only difference? Your fretting hand goes to a different note on the G string. Bam.

What about Esus2? It's not logical to play, so I won't go into it. What I can say is that the Esus2 uses 1 – 2 – 5. That's what makes it sound like a sus2 instead of a sus4.

How about the A group? It's the same. You'll use the A group fingerpicking pattern for an Asus4. The only change in the arrangement is what happens with your fretting hand on the B string.

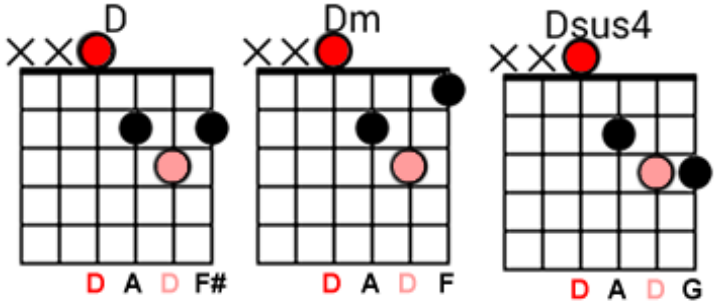


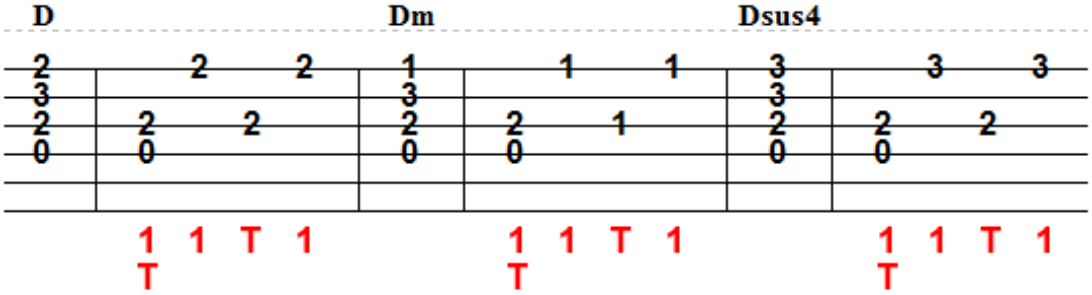


If you wanted to make an Asus2, you would just omit the "3" in the Asus4 and make it open. Thus, the picking won't change. The chord would result in: x-0-2-2-**0**-0 (x-A-E-A-**B**-E)

> Creepy Little Food-for-Thought: The Asus2 (A, B, E) uses the same notes as Esus4 (E, A, B) ← only the note arrangement and group is different here. I don't know that you would want to switch into a different group when playing these two "same" chords as they can be tricky to plot, but it's possible. However, since Esus4 is just as easy as Asus2, it might not be an issue.

How about the D group? It's also the same. You'll use the D group fingerpicking pattern for a Dsus4. The only change in the arrangement is what happens with your fretting hand on the high E string.





If you wanted to make a Dsus2, you would just omit the "3" on the high E string in the Dsus4 and make it open. Thus, the picking still won't change. The chord would result in: x-x-0-2-3-**0** (x-x-D-A-D-**E**) ….and guess what?

> Creepy Little Food-for-Thought: The Dsus2 (D, E, A) uses the same notes as Asus4 (A, D, E) ← only the note arrangement and group is different here.

While there's no need to go into detail on the Esus2 (because it's weird) I will go ahead and tell you that an Esus2 is the same thing (in terms of notes used) as a Bsus4. Neither of these “same thing” chords can be played in open position. So, you'll learn those once we reach Module 2.

In the next tutorial we'll see what happens with our E, A, and D groups when we use FOUR notes instead of just three.