WEEKS 1 AND 2 · KEY OF C · 15 MINUTES A DAY

Four chords, three shapes

Most pop songs are built from a handful of chords. These four, played in this order, carry a huge share of them. Each one can be played in three shapes, and choosing the right shape keeps your hand almost still. By the end of week two you will play them in time with a track, without looking at your hands.

C	G	Am	F
I	V	vi	IV

ROOT POSITION

One shape, four chords

Put fingers 1, 3 and 5 on every other white key, starting on the note that names the chord. Move that same shape and you have all four chords. They are easy to find this way, but your hand has to jump.

C



C E G · fingers 1 3 5

G



G B D · fingers 1 3 5

Am



A C E · fingers 1 3 5

F



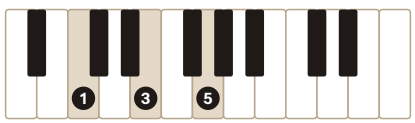
F A C · fingers 1 3 5

INVERSIONS

Three shapes for one chord

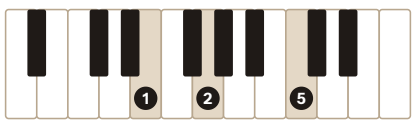
A chord is three notes, and any of the three can sit at the bottom. The chord keeps its name and its sound. Only the shape under your hand changes.

C — root position



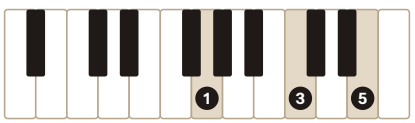
C E G · fingers 1 3 5

C — first inversion



E G C · fingers 1 2 5

C — second inversion



G C E · fingers 1 3 5

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POSITION 1

The four chords, close together

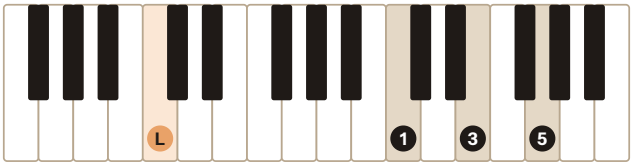
Now pick one shape for each chord so the hand barely moves. This is how pianists really play them.

● Right hand, numbers are fingers (thumb = 1) ● Left hand, the root

C

I · root position

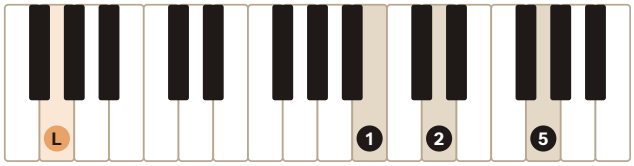
● **RH** C E G · fingers 1 3 5
● **LH** C (any finger, the 5th is best)



G

V · first inversion

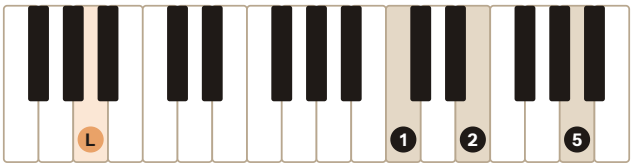
● **RH** B D G · fingers 1 2 5
● **LH** G (any finger, the 5th is best)



Am

vi · first inversion

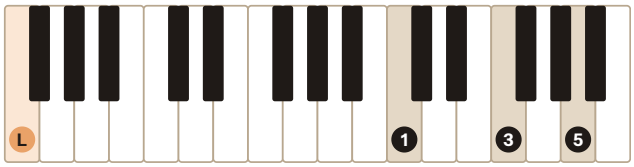
● **RH** C E A · fingers 1 2 5
● **LH** A (any finger, the 5th is best)



F

IV · second inversion

● **RH** C F A · fingers 1 3 5
● **LH** F (any finger, the 5th is best)



The trick that makes this easy: your right thumb stays on middle C for C, Am and F. Only G moves it, one key down to B. Your hand barely travels, so your ears and eyes stay on the music.

The left hand always plays the root, the note that names the chord, whatever shape the right hand uses. That is what keeps the chord sounding like itself.

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WEEK 1 EXERCISES 1 AND 2

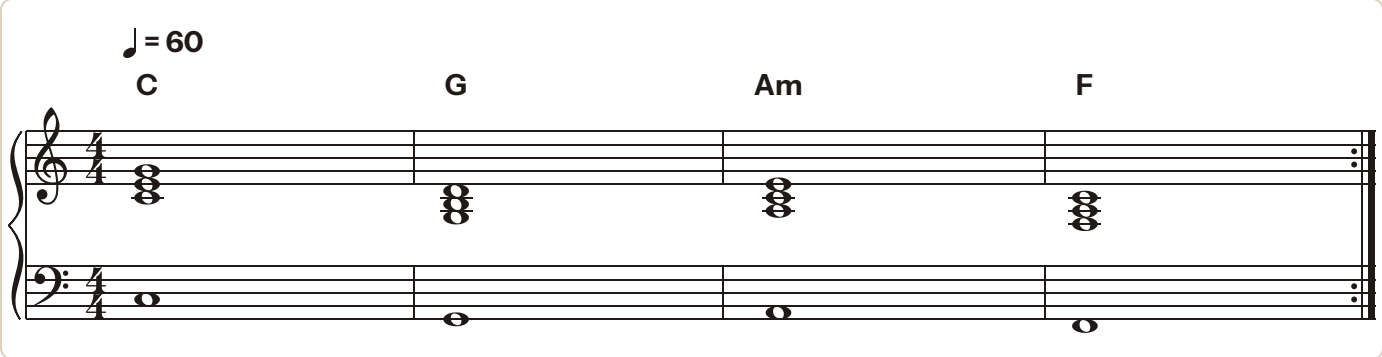
Find the shapes

Use a metronome at the speed shown. Say each chord name out loud as you play it.

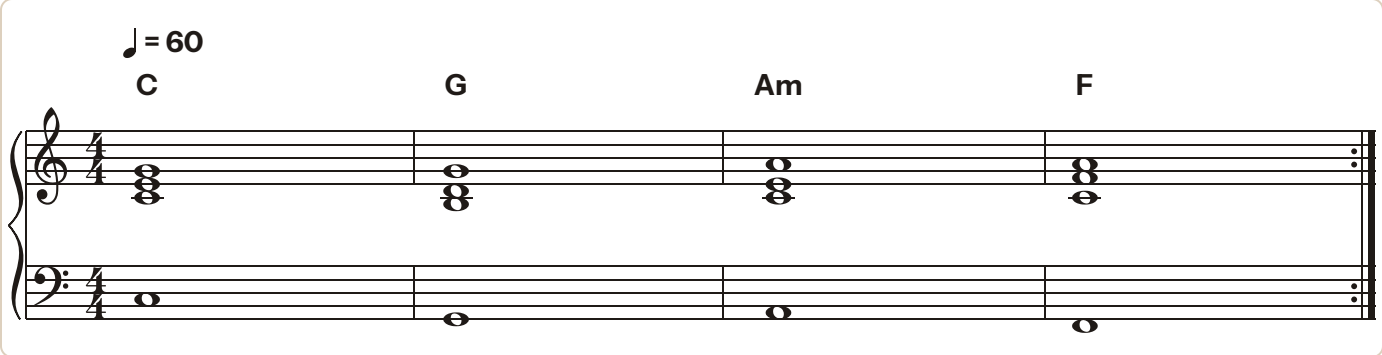
1 Jump, then stay close

Goal: play the four chords in root position, then the same four in Position 1. Hear that it is the same music, and feel how much less your hand moves.

FIRST: ROOT POSITION

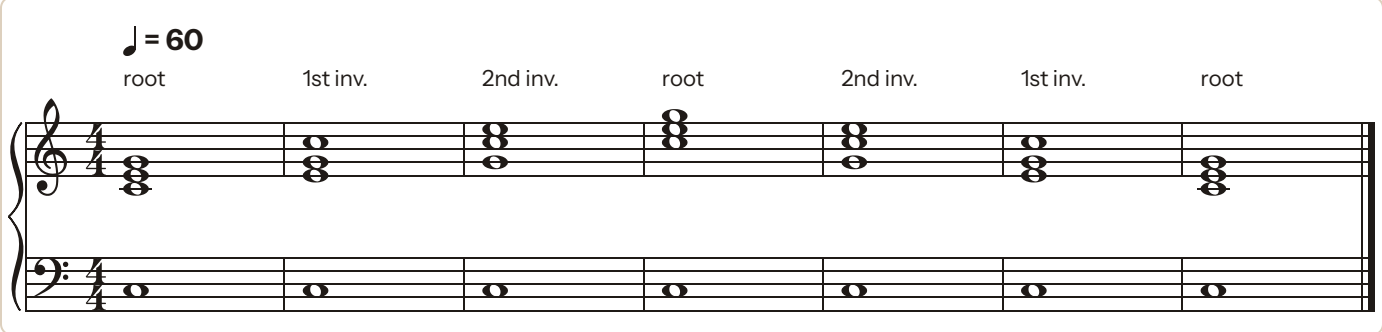


THEN: POSITION 1



2 C in three shapes

Goal: climb from root position to first inversion, second inversion, and root position one octave higher, then come back down. One shape per bar.



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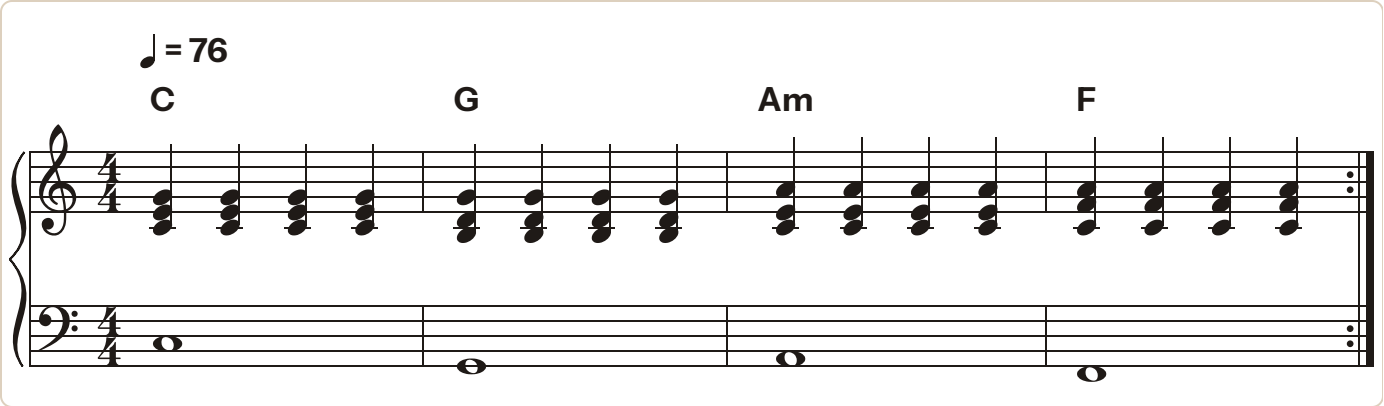
WEEK 2 EXERCISES 3 AND 4

Play in time

Both exercises loop the four chords in Position 1. Start slow: on the screen, set the tempo to 60% and raise it when the changes feel easy.
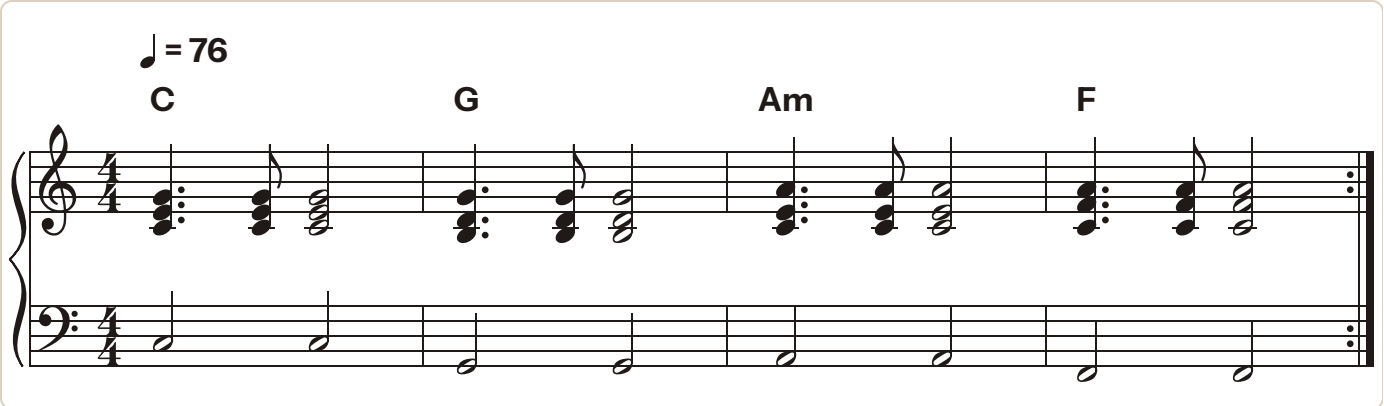
3 Pulse on every beat

Goal: right hand plays four even chords per bar while the left hand holds the root.



4 Long, short, long

Goal: right hand plays on 1, on the "and" of 2, and on 3, then lets the chord ring. Count "1, 2-and, 3, 4". Left hand on beats 1 and 3.



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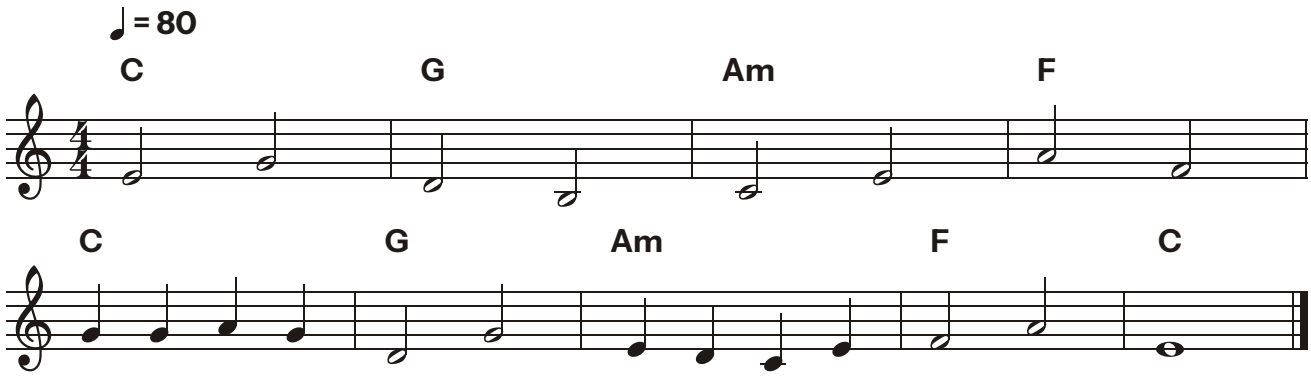
PLAY-ALONG

Your first song

An original melody over the same four chords. Your job is the chords, in Position 1. The track plays the tune.

Valley Road

80 bpm · 9 bars · melody by your teacher



1. Listen once with **Hear it** and follow the chord names above the staff.
2. Switch to **Your turn**. Play each chord once, on beat 1, with the left-hand root.
3. When that works, use the Exercise 4 rhythm instead.
4. Last bar: hold the C chord and let it ring.

The audio track and tempo control are on the online version of this lesson: startwithchords.com/sample-lesson

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PRACTICE PLAN

Fifteen minutes a day

DAYS	FOCUS	TEMPO
1 to 3	Exercise 1, saying each chord name out loud. Exercise 2 once a day.	**Free, no track**
4 to 7	Position 1 with the track, one chord per bar. Then Exercise 3.	**60% to 80%**
8 to 10	Exercise 3 at full speed, then Exercise 4 slowly. Exercise 2 once a day.	**60% to 100%**
11 to 14	Valley Road: Hear it, then Your turn. Finish with Exercise 4.	**80% to 100%**

Ready for Lesson 2 when you can:

- [ ] Play all four chords in Position 1 with your eyes closed, starting from any of them.
- [ ] Play C in its three shapes and name each one.
- [ ] Loop Exercise 3 at 100% four times without stopping.
- [ ] Play Exercise 4 at 80% or faster with the track.
- [ ] Play the chords to Valley Road on "Your turn" from start to finish.

NOTES FROM YOUR LESSON

Start With Chords, Level 1, Lesson 1 (weeks 1 and 2). Prepared by Eric Imhauser.
All exercises and the Valley Road melody are original to this course.

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