

# The chords of major scale

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## Triads from each note of the major scale

Use the C major scale notes : C - D - E - F - G - A - B - C

### Build a triad chord starting from each note of the major scale

- Take each note of the scale
- Skip one note, take the next
- Skip one note take the next

### Example: forming a triad from the C note

Form a triad chord from C by choosing notes from the scale:

1. Start from C
2. skip D
3. take E
4. skip F
5. take G

We get the notes **C E G** which forms the C major chord.

Similarly, start from D, take the alternate notes to get a triad based on the notes of the major scale with root as D

1. Take D note
2. Skip E
3. Take F
4. Skip G
5. Take A

DFA forms the D minor chord and is a chord made of notes within the C major scale only and no extra notes.

Similarly starting with each note of the C major scale, we get chords using notes of the C major scale.

These chords are called **diatonic chords**. Diatonic means 'within the scale'.

## Diatonic chords of the C major scale

I C-E-G  
1-3-5 Cmaj

ii D-F-A  
1-b3-5 Dmin

iii E-G-B  
1-b3-5 Emin

IV F-A-C  
1-3-5 Fmaj

V G-B-D  
1-3-5 Gmaj

vi A-C-E  
1-b3-5 Amin

vii B-D-F  
1-b3-b5 Bdim

## The kind of chords – the sequence

From above we see that the chord from the first note of a major scale is a Major chord.

The chord from the second note is a minor chord. And so on...

We right it below with the number corresponding to the note position in the scale (first or second or third note of the scale) and the kind of chord we get for each note position:

1. Major
2. Minor
3. Minor
4. Major
5. Major
6. Minor

7. Diminished
8. Major (8<sup>th</sup> note is same as the first note, an octave higher. The corresponding chord is the exact same chord as that of the first note.)

## 7<sup>th</sup> chord instead of the diminished

**B diminished chord notes: B D F**

**G7<sup>th</sup> chord notes: G B D F**

Notice that G7<sup>th</sup> has the same notes as B diminished chord and then one more (the root note G)

The B dim chord with the notes B D F and can be used over melodies that have B D or F note prominent, or phrases that have all or two of the notes B D F.

Since G7<sup>th</sup> has all the notes of the B diminished chord, we can use G7 instead of the diminished chord.

### Why G7 instead of B dim

#### 1. G7<sup>th</sup> is the fifth chord of C.

The chord based on the fifth note from the root note, is given special importance in harmony because the **fifth major chord to root chord** motion is very pleasant to listen to. It is called the 'perfect cadence', which consists of an excellent tension before it resolves to the stable root chord.

G7<sup>th</sup> is not only a major chord from the fifth note, but it also has F, the minor 7<sup>th</sup> note that makes it a dominant chord.

Resolution from the dominant seventh chord based on the 5<sup>th</sup> position is the considered the best and strongest resolution.

#### 2. 7<sup>th</sup> is a fuller chord than dim

The 7<sup>th</sup> chord has 4 notes, including all the three notes of the dim chord substitute. As mentioned above, it is a very welcome member of the harmony. So, if you have the option to use it, you could, even it is not followed immediately by a resolution.

Finally it is up to you, if you want to use the dim chord or the 7<sup>th</sup> chord substitute. That is the freedom you have as a musician – arranger, composer, performer or player.

# How to play chords for most songs

## The safe chords - the diatonic chords

Diatonic means 'within the scale'; chords formed by notes from the scale.

Using chords formed entirely of notes from the scale naturally makes sure that the sound of the chord against the scale won't be wrong.

### Why are diatonic chords useful?

For example when singing a song in C major, and the main melody note for which you want to play chord be E:

1. The E note is present in C major, E minor and A minor chords.
2. You have three chord choices, none of which will be 'wrong' while you can choose which one you want.
3. If you are playing C for the bar before this change to E note, try Em or Am and decide which sound you want.

Being able to restrict choices based on the diatonic chords saved you from having to consider the vast number of possible chords which had E in it.

Even if you play a chord which does not have the melody note, if you are playing a safe triad chord, chances are you can bail yourself out because the triad chord + melody note will form a four note chord from within the scale.

## Example diatonic chords of the major scale

We know that the diatonic triad chords of the C major scale are: **C Dm Em F G Am Bdim** (Dm = D minor. Bdim= B diminished)

Diatonic triads of the D major scale are: **D Em F#m G A Bm C#dim**

Similarly you can [transpose](#) and find the diatonic chords for each of the root or pitch.

One more example: The diatonic chords from the root E: **E F#m G#m A B C#m D#dim**

## Each diatonic chord can be used on 3 different notes

### e.g. The C major chord

#### C major chord notes: C E G

If you have a phrase that emphasizes the root note C, C major chord is an obvious choice. But since E and G are also present in the C major chord, you can try the **C major chord over melody lines which emphasize the E or G note also.**

Similarly the chord Dm (notes: D F A) can be used over melody notes D F or A. The Dm chord can be used on any melody phrase that emphasizes any of the notes D F or A, or it could be a phrase that has all the three notes or any of the two notes.

Similarly try Em, F, G, Am and Bdim chords over melody phrases that contain the chord notes of the corresponding chord.

Try the following chords over each of the three notes corresponding to that chord, listen how it sounds. If you want to play chords for a song or phrase in C pitch, identify the note on each important part of the phrase, look at the chart below and try all the chords which has that note. Listen to the result and choose what you like.

I Cmaj C-E-G

ii Dmin D-F-A

iii Emin E-G-B

IV Fmaj F-A-C

V Gmaj G-B-D

vi Amin A-C-E

vii Bmin B-D-F

## All possible chords for each note – the other way round

### Chords for the note E

From the table in the previous section, we can find out the chords which has the note E in it.

**Em chord notes: E G B**

**Am chord notes: A C E**

**C major chord notes: C E G**

Each of the chords above has the E note in it, making them possible options to be tried over parts of the melody where E is emphasized.

In the section above we saw which note each chord has. Understand the chord options possible for each note also. We found all the possible E chords. Similarly find which all chords are possible for each note.

### 3 possible chords for each note of the scale

Note	Chord options
C	C maj, F maj, A min
D	D min, G maj, B dim
E	E min, A min, C maj
F	F maj, B dim, D min
G	G maj, C maj, E min
A	A min, D min, F maj
B	B dim, E min, G maj

### Practice

Find the swara that make each of the diatonic chords of the C major scale. For example, find the notes in the Dm chord (D F A) and find the corresponding swaras (Ri Ma Dha).

Now group them to show all the possible chords for each of the swaras.

## Chords for Songs, Scales, Indian Raga

Knowing what swaras are present in each of the chords and knowing all the diatonic chord options for each swara, gives you three choices of chords for each of the swaras of Shankarabharanam, freeing up the field for you to vary and improvise.

Try using the diatonic chords of the C major scale over phrases of C Shankarabharanam.

Each of the chords above have E swara in it, making them candidates to be tried over parts of the melody where E is emphasized.

In the section above we saw which swaras each chord has. Understand the chords from the swara perspective also, like we did in this section. We found all the possible E chords. Similarly find which all chords are possible for each swara.

## Diatonic chords of the minor scale

The A natural minor will have the same set of diatonic chords as the C major scale since both of them have the same notes in them.

A natural minor scale: A B C D E F G A

C major scale: C D E F G A B C

As you can see, the notes in the A minor scale are same as that in the C major scale.

A natural minor is **the relative minor** of the C major scale. Relative minor is the term for the minor scale which has the same notes of the major scale, starting from a different position.

Find out the chords of the A minor scale using the same method as we found triads of the C major scale:

- Start with A
- Skip B
- Choose C
- Skip D
- Choose E

The chord starting from the note A, using the notes of the A natural minor scale has the notes: A C E, which is the Aminor chord.

Similarly find out the notes of the chords starting from each note of the A minor scale.

Since the notes and sequence of notes in A minor scale is exactly the same as that of the C major scale (they just start from two different notes, but the sequence is the same), and since we are using the same method of choosing alternate notes, the **chords of the A natural minor scale will be same as that of the C major scale.**

**The relative natural minor of a major scale will have the same chords as the major scale.**

Therefore, the chords of C major scale can be used to harmonize phrases and songs in A natural minor scale.

## Using major scale chords for minor scale songs

Finding the minor scale chords from the major scale chords makes the process easier.

It is a natural connection between the major scale chords and the chords of the relative minor. The A minor scale has the same chords as its relative C major. We don't have to learn the chords of the minor scale separately.

When we want the chords of a minor scale, we remember the relative major scale and write down the chords for the major scale.

### **The harmonic minor scale detail**

Most often, songs in the A minor scale will have the chord E major. This is the Vth chord with respect to the root A. The diatonic chord of A natural minor scale is E minor, and not E major, but the chord E major is used for harmonic importance.

The V to i motion is important for harmony. The fifth chord has to be a major (E major) and not a minor (E minor) for the 'perfect cadence' to work out, giving the beautiful tension that is an integral part of why music is enjoyable. Therefore, the G# note is introduced in the A minor scale notes to form the E major chord.

Em: E G B

E major: E G# B

Just remember that, when you are using the diatonic chords of a major scale on the relative minor scale, you may want to use the V major chord along with the others.



## Example D major scale and B minor scale chords

Diatonic chords of the D major scale: D Em F#m G A Bm C#dim

Diatonic chords for the B minor scale: Bm C#dim D Em F#m G A

When playing the chords for a song in B minor scale, you may want to use F#major as the fifth chord, in the V to i motion: F#m to B minor.

(more details on harmonic minor and V to i in another post)

## A major and F# minor scale chords

### Practice:

1. verify that D F A forms a minor chord. (check if the third note is a minor or a major 3rd)
2. verify that B D F is a diminished triad
3. write down the E major scale (first write down the sequence from E to E, write down the intervals associated with each note, see the interval formula for major scale, choose the notes based on the formula).
4. Find the diatonic triads of the E major scale by starting from each note, taking two more notes in the scale skipping one note in between.
5. Which major scale will have Em F#m and G as diatonic chords?
6. Which major scale will have Dm C B flat and Am as diatonic chords?

## Relative minor major relationship within chords of the major scale

Here are a few more things about diatonic chords: how we can use relative minor and major relationships to easily remember the safe chords of a song, and a bit about deriving minor scales from the major scale.

## Relative minors to help

The diatonic chords of the C major scale are: **C Dm Em F G Am Bdim**

Can you spot the 3 relative minor major pairs among the first 6 chords?

What is the relative minor of C major chord? The A minor chord.

Relative minor of F? D minor chord

Relative minor of G? E minor chord.

So, if we know that C F and G are chords within the C major scale, finding the minor chords is just about knowing the relative minors of the major.

C F and G are chords from the first, fourth and fifth notes of the major scale.

### How to find the relative pairs of a major scale?

This is the process:

1. Write down the first, fourth and fifth notes of the major scale we need the chords for.
2. the first, fourth and fifth chords are major chords (fact. remember it)
3. Find the relative minors of the major chords
4. now you have the 6 major minor pairs. 7th note will have a diminished chord.

### The relative minor pairs of C major scale:

C → Am, F → Dm, G → Em

### Practice

Find the relative minor major pairs in the D major scale diatonic chord set.

1. write or find on your instrument the first fourth and fifth notes
2. write or play major chords for each of those
3. find the relative minors for each of those major chords.

For a complete easy to grasp resource on understanding and using chords, see [The Chord Code](#)

## How to find relative minors fast

### Fifth + 2

Find the major 6th note of a major scale or chord. That is the note from which the relative minor for that scale or chord starts from.

The major 6th note is the fifth note + 2 notes on the note sequence. The second note after the fifth note gives us the major 6th note.

**Example 1**, if you have found out the D major chord, you will know that the fifth note is A.

The 6th note of the D major scale is a major 6th note, which is

- a tone away from the fifth
- two half steps away from the fifth
- two frets to the right of the fifth on a guitar
- two keys to the right of the fifth on a keyboard.

Two notes from A is B. relative minor of D is Bm

### Example 2. Relative minor of C# major

What is the 6th note in the C# major scale?

1. you can count to get to the 6th of C# as A# (count notes through the sequence till major 6th)

OR

2. remember 6th of C is A, so 6th of C# should be A#

OR

3. use relationships as shown below :

a) What is the fifth of C : G

b) What is 6th of C : G + 2 notes : A

c) C# is C raised by one half step

d) Fifth of C# will be 6th of C, raised by one halfstep : raise A by a half step to get A #

Know a few fifths and 6ths and other relationships. Then you can extend them to their flats and sharps etc.

If the root moves by a minor 3rd, the 7th also moves by a minor 3rd. Move the root by a 4th, the 6th or 7th or 2nd also moves by the distance of a 4th.

## Cycle of fifths

Use the [circle of fifths](#) to get familiar with the 5th notes.

## Chords for songs in minor

Example: Want to play the chords of a song in Cm?

C minor scale and chord are the relative minors of Eb major scale and chord.

### What are the diatonic chords of the Eb major scale?

All major scale diatonic chords can be found out by writing down the scale notes of the major scale and remember the sequence of chords - major, minor, minor etc. - that each of the notes will form.

Use the diatonic sequence of the C major scale to remember which kind of chord - major minor or diminished - is formed from each of the notes as starting point.

### Here is the process of finding diatonic chords in detail:

1. What are the diatonic chords of the C major scale? C Dm Em F G Am Bdim C
2. So we see that the chord
  1. from the first note is a major chord
  2. from the second and third are minor chords
  3. the fourth and fifth are major chords
  4. the sixth note chord is a minor
  5. the seventh note chord is a diminished.
3. This is the sequence in which you get the minor major and diminished chords from the major scale: **Major, minor, minor, major, major, minor, diminished** (7 chords for each of the 7 notes of the scale)
4. Now write down the notes of the Eb major scale for which we need to find the diatonic chords for. Eb major scale: Eb F G Ab Bb C D Eb
5. Now use the sequence from (3) on the notes of Eb to get the chords of Eb major scale

**The diatonic chords of Eb major scale: Eb major, F minor, G minor, Ab major, Bb major, Cminor, D diminished.**

## Chords of C minor from Eb major chords

All the chords listed for Eb major can be used for Cm songs.

One extra note you may find when playing Cm songs is the G major chord.

The diatonic chords of Eb major has the G minor chord and not the G major chord. But for the G to Cm motion which is a perfect cadence, we need a G major chord and not a minor chord.

That will be one additional chord.

Whenever you use the major chord's diatonic chords to play songs in the relative minor scale, remember to include the major chord of the 5th chord. The 5th chord of the minor scale.

e.g. If you are playing a song based on the Cm chord, include the G major chord. If you are playing based on the the Am chord, include the E major chord.

### Practice

Take your favourite minor chord songs, find their relative major scale, find the diatonics of the relative major scale, see how you can use those chords over the minor song.

Even if you play a chord which does not have the melody note, if you are playing a safe triad chord, chances are you can bail yourself out because the triad chord + melody note will form a four note chord from within the scale.

### Melody note outside the safe chord

For example, the E minor chord (E G B) is part of the D major scale harmony.

If you play the E minor chord and the melody note happens to be D, then are playing an E minor seventh chord (E G B D).

If the melody not is C#, then you are playing the E minor 6th chord, which shares much of the notes and sound with the A7th chord which is the Vth chord of the D major scale, the most obvious choice when going back to the root, for a perfect cadence.

## Get familiar

Find out all the chords of the C major scale on your instrument. Find out all the chords on each pitch you sing.

Maybe you are comfortable singing with D as the pitch. Find out on your instrument, all the 7 chords associated with D major scale.

Then try the same chords for B minor scale songs – B minor and D major being relative minor and major to each other.

What is the 5<sup>th</sup> note of Bm? F#. F# major chord can be included in the B minor harmony, while F# major will not be present in D major harmony.

D major scale chord list will have F#minor chord and not F# major, but when playing chords for B minor scale, the relative minor scale of D major scale, F# major is included. In fact F#7<sup>th</sup> is an even stronger version of the F# major chord that can be used in B minor scale harmony, at the 5<sup>th</sup> position. All the other chords of the B minor scale harmony are same as that of the D major scale harmony.