

40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Chord Systems

*Sound and
Structure*

For Guitar

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Acknowledgments

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Preface

This book was first written in 1978 and published by Professional Music Products with the subtitle “Structure and Application.” Several years later the original book was broken up into three volumes and a massive 288 page dictionary (Chord Systems Volumes One through Four).

I’ve decided to take advantage of all the great new technology for printing and publishing and re-release all that material as a single volume. More than that, however, I’ve clarified it substantially. The majority of topics in the original editions are included here along with most of the examples. However, the explanation and order of presentation have been revised to make the book easier to use, and the dictionary is not included because of size limitations.

The explanations continue to show

- how chords are *played*.
- how the chords are *learned*, and
- how the chords *relate to each other*.

There are now several different ways to use the book:

- Front to Back
- By Level
- By Musical Style
- By areas of interest. The table of contents is very detailed to help you find what you’re interested in.

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to provide a consistent and cohesive method for learning about chords. The approach is intended to *cross levels, topics, and musical styles*. My goal is to show you a map of how all chords relate to each other - by sound, fingering, harmony, fingerboard location, and musical style. And then, to help you navigate through what interests you.

What has been lacking for many players is the discussion of the most fundamental musical components that should guide a player in learning chords. Two of these components are the sounds chords can provide, and the functional structure of chords, musically, and physically.

There are different paths through the book, so don’t be afraid to make your own trail. You can work front to back, or jump into a topic. As you do you’ll begin to see new connections that accelerate your learning.

Overview of the Book

Essential ideas include chord families, stringsets, overlapping and related chords, passing tones, and right hand technique.

Chords can be thought to have three basic families of chord sounds:

- Major
- Minor
- Dominant

That is a good outline of all the thousands of sounds chords can make. Each of these three “chord families” contains a large group of chords that basically sound and function in similar ways.

Using a categorization like this allows us to break the seemingly massive topic of chords into smaller bites. Techniques discuss methods to finger and sound chords to get the most out of your music, and to show you what benefits a particular technique can provide.

One technique might help in one situation, while another fingering or technique might help play the same chord in a different situation.

Techniques for learning include mental and physical models that guitar players can use to learn, remember, and play chords. Recognizing similar visual shapes and their corresponding sounds is another way to remember chords. I've also tried to include all of those types of techniques. Some are specific to the type of guitar being played, and I've noted that where necessary.

Following is a graphic showing the various concepts together, and how they're delivered in the book.

As you'll see there are essential themes that travel through all sections of the book:

- The chords are organized from six string fingerings to four string and three string chords.
- The complexity starts with familiar diatonic sounds and progresses to more chromatic sounds.
- The techniques move from basic strumming to advanced right hand techniques.
- The musical application moves from basic accompaniment to solo guitar playing.

The "high leverage" ideas include

1. Using chord families to help learn sounds
2. Using the stringset idea to organize inversions, voicings, and right hand playing style
3. The application of basic harmony to link chords, fingerings, progressions and notes together in a simple manner.

The book is divided into six sections (including a reference section). The topics for each section are outlined below: The fundamental tools are shown *across* the sections.

Introduction					
Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Section 5	Section 6
OPEN POSITIONS	Four Note Chords	Four Note Chords in Action	Triads Five Types	Chord Substitution	REFERENCES
Six String Chords	Four <i>String</i> Chords	Inversion Scales	Triads on Adjacent Strings	Common Tone Chord Substitution	Technique
Five String Chords	The Stringset	-Top Voice	Diatonic Triads	Chromatic Common Tone Substitution	Chord Names
Movable Open chords	Systematic Inversions	-Bass Voice (Walking Bass)	Crossing Stringsets	Cycles In Progressions for Substitution	Chord Spelling
BARRE CHORDS	Diatonic Seventh Chords	Advanced Comping			Major Scales
Advanced Barre Chords	Diatonic and Chromatic Chords				Other Stringsets
	Chord Streams				External References
		Musical Sounds (and Styles)			
		Harmonic Structures			
		Physical Structures and Techniques			

Getting Started

Where Musical Styles Can Be Found In This Book

The listing below is a general idea of where you can find chords for a certain style of music. I think any chord can be used in any style, but the more commonly heard sounds have been identified to help point out items of initial interest. Don't hold me to it . . .

Traditional, Campfire, Worship, School Songs, "Beginner" music - **Beginning Chords:**

Section 1 - Open and then Barre Chords

Rock, Blues, Pop, Country, Bluegrass, Celtic, Spanish and Flamenco - **Beginning and Intermediate:**

Section 1 - Barre Chords

Pop, Country - **Intermediate:**

Section 1 - Advanced Open Chords

Section 1 - Advanced Barre Chords

Rock, Blues, Pop, Smooth Jazz, Euro Dance - **Intermediate, and Advanced:**

Section 2 - Four Note Chords on the 4321 Stringset

Big Band and Standards Comping - **Intermediate Jazz:**

Section 2 - Four Note Chords on the 6432 Stringset

Section 2 - Strummable Chromatic Chords

Jazz - **Intermediate and Advanced:**

Section 2 - Four Note Chords on the 6432, 5432, 4321, and 5321 Stringsets

Section 3 - Four Note Chords in Action

Rock, Pop, Country, Blues and - **Advanced:**

Section 4 - Triads

Chord Substitution, Re-harmonization, Preparing for Solo Chord Melody - **Advanced Harmony:**

Section 5 - Chord Substitution

References on Scale and Chord Spelling, Chord Names, and Keys

Section 6 - References

NOTE: Classical guitar instruction typically integrates music notation, chords, harmony, and performance into a single stepped method. Chords are not studied separately, and only classical music styles are part of the focus. As guitarist Ted Greene has demonstrated, even classical music can be included in a "popular" teaching method, but classical harmony as such, is not specifically identified within this book. The conventional classical guitar, with its wider and flat fingerboard will also require some adjustments to some of the more advanced chords because some techniques are not easily used on that instrument (double stops being the most obvious). That being said, classical guitarists will find lots of opportunities for learning within the book.