

# Triads and Triad Inversions

A chord is a set of 3 or more notes played together at the same time. The triad is a three note chord. Each triad can be played both harmonically (strummed or plucked all at the same time), or melodically (each note plucked one at a time in order) then it is called an arpeggio. Both approaches are worth exploring as you take these ideas further in your guitar practice. The major triad is third intervals moving up from a root note which is like as tonic of a scale. So a major triad would be made up of a tonic, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>. The 3<sup>rd</sup> is a major 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> is a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>. In a number system they are referred to as the 1, 3, and 5.

Triad Fingerings for Guitar are three-note chords that have five different qualities, Major, Minor, Diminished, Augmented, and Suspended Fourth. We will learn all of them plus some of their inversions.

## Triads

Let us begin by spelling a triad out in the key of C using first three string sets. C is the root or tonic, E is the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and G is the 5<sup>th</sup>. Now we are going to build all the other chord qualities from the major triad.

To make the triad minor we would flatten the 3<sup>rd</sup> a half step giving us C, Eb, and G. This is true on all chords on a guitar, flat 3<sup>rd</sup> gives us a minor sound or chord.

A suspended 4<sup>th</sup> chord is made by making the 3<sup>rd</sup> note sharp or raising it a half step. You often hear this called sus4 chord for short. Thus the sus4 triad would be spelled out C, F, and G.

To make a diminished triad you must flatten a half step both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> degree of the root.

Raise or sharpen a half step of the 5<sup>th</sup> degree builds an augmented chord.

This is triads in the key of C & G, C on strings 1-3, and G on strings 2-4.

(Tab Audio – “Triads”)

## Triads

Keys of C & G

Standard tuning

$\text{♩} = 100$

E-Gt

*mf*

1 C	2 Cm	3 Csus4	4 Cdim
			
			

5 Caug	6 G	7 Gm	8 Gsus4
			
			

9 Gdim	10 Gaug
	
	

## Exercise 1

Here is an exercise at 90 bpm. The object here is to get familiar with triads.

(Tab Audio – “Exercise 1”)

**Triads Exercise 1**

Standard tuning

$\text{♩} = 90$

E-Gt

*mf*

1 C Cm Csus4 C 3 C Caug Cdim C

5 G Gm Gsus4 G G Gaug Gdim G 3x

TAB

The image shows a guitar exercise titled "Triads Exercise 1". At the top, there are ten chord diagrams for C, Cm, Csus4, Caug, Cdim, G, Gm, Gsus4, Gaug, and Gdim. Below these is the standard tuning and a tempo marking of 90 bpm. The exercise is written for E-Guitar in 4/4 time. The first system contains measures 1-4 with chords C, Cm, Csus4, C, C, Caug, Cdim, and C. The second system contains measures 5-8 with chords G, Gm, Gsus4, G, G, Gaug, Gdim, and G, followed by a 3x repeat sign. The guitar tab is provided below the staff notation.

## Inversions

Have you ever seen a great guitarist playing chords and it looked as though he was playing a million different chords? There are a lot of chords on a guitar but a lot of them are just chord inversions. The root note does not always have to be the first or lowest note played in a chord. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> can be the lowest or first note in a triad. This is called inversions. Inversions are a little more complicated on guitar because of reoccurring notes up and down the neck. Knowing inversions gives you the ability to play any chord virtually up and down the neck. Here we will learn the major and minor triad inversions on the strings 1-3 and 2-5.

### Up and Down, Across the Neck

Inversions can be made up and down the neck as well as across. Up and down the neck is moving from lower frets to the higher ones. Across the neck is moving from higher or 1<sup>st</sup> string to the lower or 6<sup>th</sup> string. Here we will be working on inversions up and down the neck in C on strings 1-3, and G on strings 2-4. A triad will have two inversions. The first inversion up the neck is when you move the third degree

to the top of the chord. For example in the key of C, the notes that make up the triad C, are C-E-G. The first inversion would be E-G-C. The second inversion the 5<sup>th</sup> degree would move to the top of the triad spelling G-C-E. You will often see these chord written like C/E for 1<sup>st</sup> inversion and C/G for 2<sup>nd</sup> inversion. The first letter being the chord and second being the bass or low note.

Exercise 2

(Tab Audio – “Exercise 2”)

## Triads Exercise 2

Inversions Up the Neck Strings 1-3 in C






Standard tuning

$\text{♩} = 100$

E-Gt

4/4

C



C/E



C/G



C/E



*mf* Inversion

	1st	2nd	1st
T	3	8	8
A	5	13	8
B		12	9



T

A

B

5

7

6

5

Here we will work inversions on strings 2-4 in the key of G. The G triad is spelled G-B-D.

### Exercise 3

Here we will work inversions on strings 2-4 in the key of G. The G triad is spelled G-B-D.

(Tab Audio – “Exercise 3”)

## Triads Exercise 3

Inversions Up the Neck Strings 2-4 in G

G



--321-

G/B



--312-

G/D



--111-

Standard tuning

♩ = 100

E-Gt

	1 G	2 G/B	3 G/D	4 G/B
<i>mf</i> Inversions		1st	2nd	1st
T	3	8	12	8
A	4	7	12	7
B	5	9	12	9

	5 G
T	3
A	4
B	5

## Exercise 4

We will not get into triads on strings 3-5 and 4-6 heavily because later lesson we will learn bar, drop 2 & 3 chords. Here in major triad inversions on strings 3-5 in C.

(Tab Audio – “Exercise 4”)

### Triads Exercise 4

Inversions Up the Neck Strings 3-5 in C

C: x0xx, 21---  
C/E: x5xx, .411--  
C/G: x9xx, .231--

Standard tuning  
♩ = 100

E-Gt

1	C	2	C/E	3	C/G	4	C/E
mf Inversion		1st		2nd		1st	
T	0	5	9	5	5	5	5
A	2	5	10	10	5	5	5
B	3	7	10	10	7	7	7

5	C
T	0
A	2
B	3

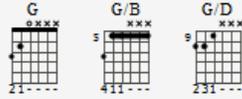
## Exercise 5

Here are major triad inversions on strings 4-6 in G.

(Tab Audio – “Exercise 5”)

# Triads Exercise 5

Inversions Up the Neck Strings 4-6 in G



Standard tuning

$\text{♩} = 100$

E-Gt

Musical notation for the first part of the exercise. It consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time and a guitar staff below it. The treble staff has four measures, each containing a chord symbol: 1 G, 2 G/B, 3 G/D, and 4 G/B. The guitar staff shows the corresponding fretting for each measure: Measure 1 (T: 0, A: 2, B: 3), Measure 2 (T: 5, A: 5, B: 7), Measure 3 (T: 9, A: 10, B: 10), and Measure 4 (T: 5, A: 5, B: 7). A dynamic marking of *mf* is placed under the first measure.

Musical notation for the second part of the exercise. It consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time and a guitar staff below it. The treble staff has one measure with a chord symbol: 5 G. The guitar staff shows the corresponding fretting: (T: 0, A: 2, B: 3).

## Exercise 6

In this exercise we will learn some inversions across the neck. We will play them as triads and then arpeggios. This exercise is in the Key of C.

(Tab Audio – “Exercise 6”)

### Triads Exercise 6

Inversions Across the Neck in C

Standard tuning  
♩ = 100

E-Gt

1 C  
mf Inversion  
TAB 3 0 0 0 2 3

2 C/G  
2nd  
TAB 0 0 0 0 2 3

3 C/E  
1st  
TAB 0 2 0 0 2 3

4 C  
TAB 0 2 0 2 3 3

5 C  
TAB 5 7 8

6 C/E  
1st  
TAB 5 0 0 2 3 3

7 C/G  
2nd  
TAB 0 0 0 0 2 3

8 C  
TAB 0 0 0 2 3 3

9  
TAB 8 7 5 7

10  
TAB 5 5 5 5

11  
TAB 5 5 5 3

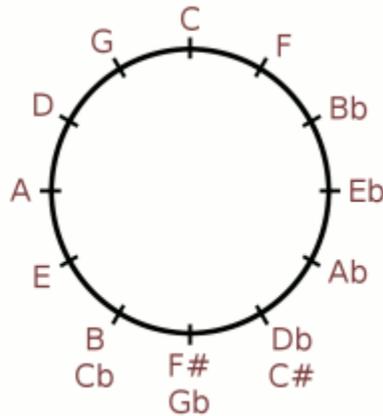
12  
TAB 3 5 5 5

13  
TAB 5 5 5

14  
TAB 7 5 7 8

## Circle of 4ths

In modern music chords and notes tend to move up in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals. Play a note then play an octave. It probably sounds the best because it is the same note just an octave higher or lower. Perfect 5<sup>th</sup> and a 4<sup>th</sup> sound really good to the ear also. The circle of 4ths or often called cycle 4 is a chart moving clockwise takes you through notes or chords in 4ths.



Anywhere you start on the chart, move clockwise the following note is a 4<sup>th</sup> interval. Start with C then move clockwise F is the 4<sup>th</sup>, E move clockwise and A is the 4<sup>th</sup>. If you move counter clockwise you will notice that the notes follow in 5<sup>ths</sup>. For now we are going to focus on moving triads in cycle 4. If you are a more advanced guitarist you will notice that the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> are the chords that group or sound good with a key. If you are playing in the key of C, F & G are the chords that sound best with C.



I believe chords to be one of the most important parts of music and especially on a guitar. When I improvise or solo, a lot of the time I will solo with in a chord shape. Keep practicing triads and the inversions until you get comfortable with them. I know triads seem simple and maybe not important but, most of the great music ever written is simple. I think at some point in our music in devours we forget that less is sometimes is more. Take for example two guitarist in the same band, one is playing a traditional G chord in open position low on the neck. The other guitar player may choose to play a simple triad higher on the neck to separate the sounds. Two guitarist strumming the same chord same pattern can sometimes be unpleasant to the ears. Another example playing with a Bassist or a Piano playing bass notes, you could choose to stay out of their way with bass notes. Later lessons we will study bar, drop 2, and drop 3 chords and their inversions. When you put them all together it opens up a whole new world. Keep on practicing!