

I, IV, and V

YOU CAN PLAY THOUSANDS OF SONGS WITH JUST THREE CHORDS. In this chapter, we'll examine these chords in the easy guitar keys, and later in all keys. Familiarity with playing the three main chords in all keys is a major step in getting comfortable with chords.

Musicians often refer to chords by numbers rather than by their letter names. You may hear someone say, "It goes one, four, one, five." The person is referring to the relationship of the chords to the key of the song. The "one" chord in the key of C is C major; the "one" chord in the key of D is D major.

These numbers are often written in Roman numerals. "One, four, five" would be written I, IV, V. Music-theory students often refer to them as *tonic*, *subdominant*, and *dominant*.

The most common chords in any key are the I, IV, and V chords—the chords built on the first, fourth, and fifth notes of that key's major scale. In the key of C major, C is the first note of the scale, F is the fourth, and G is the fifth. That means that the C, F, and G major chords are the ones you are most likely to see in the key of C. If you're comfortable with these chords, you can easily play many songs in the key of C.

The most common chords in any key are the I, IV, and V chords—the chords built on the first, fourth, and fifth notes of that key's major scale.



The key of C: The most important chords in this key are C, F, and G.

To find the most common chords in other keys, find the first, fourth, and fifth notes of that major scale. For instance, in the key of D, the first, fourth, and fifth notes are D, G, and A. The most common chords in the key of D, therefore, are D major, G major, and A major.



The key of D: The most important chords in this key are D, G, and A.

When you count up a scale, you must take into account any sharps or flats in that key. In the key of F, the fourth note is a B \flat . The most common chords in the key of F are F, B \flat , and C. In the key of B, the fifth note is an F \sharp . The most common chords in the key of B are B, E, and F \sharp .

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The key of F: The most important chords are F, B \flat , and C.



The key of B: The most important chords are B, E, and F \sharp .

This doesn't mean that you must use the I, IV, and V chords in a song you write. You can use any chords you wish. However, these are the most commonly heard ones. Thousands of folk songs, country songs, and the blues use only the I, IV, and V chords. Analyze some folk songs to see whether they use these chords. You'll see that they occur quite frequently, in many variations.

The chord built on the fifth of the scale can be played as a dominant 7th chord. The V7 chord in the key of C is G7. In the following examples, try switching between V and V7 and listening for the difference.

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The easiest keys on the guitar are probably C, D, E, G, and A. If you play with trumpets or saxophones, you'll find yourself playing in F, B \flat , E \flat , and A \flat frequently. Whatever keys you focus on, practice changing between the I, IV, and V chords in different orders. Those are the chord changes you're most likely to come across in any key.

Table 2.1 shows the progressions in the keys that are easiest on the guitar. Later in this book, after I introduce bar chords, I'll explain keys in more detail and give you exercises in all 12 keys.

Table 2.1 I, IV, and V in the Easy Guitar Keys

Key	I	IV	V
C	C	F	G
D	D	G	A
E	E	A	B
G	G	C	D
A	A	D	E

Exercises with I, IV, and V Major Chords

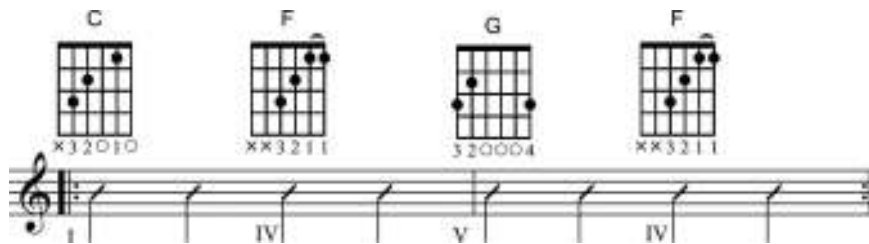
Thousands of songs use just the I, IV, and V chords. Play them in a different order, with a different number of beats and in different styles, and you may recognize some familiar songs.

I-IV-V-IV

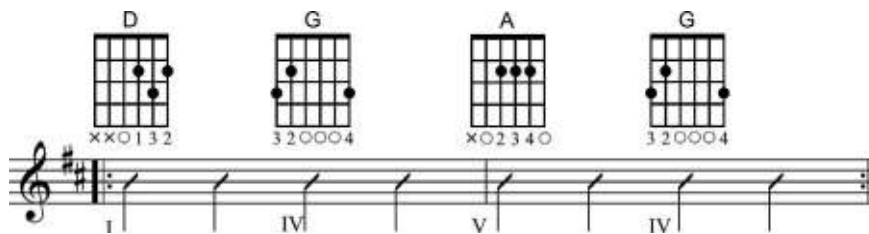
The progression is used in many old rock tunes. Change the beat, and you'll hear "Louie, Louie" or "Wild Thing."



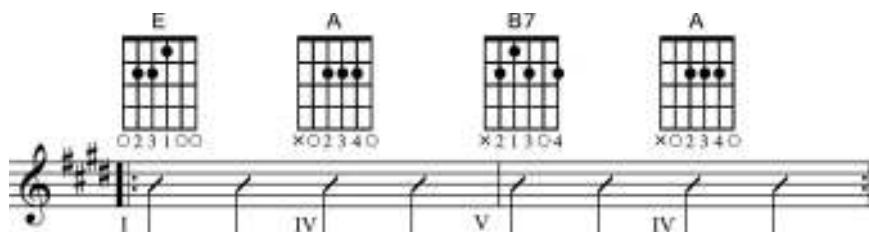
1. The key of C major:



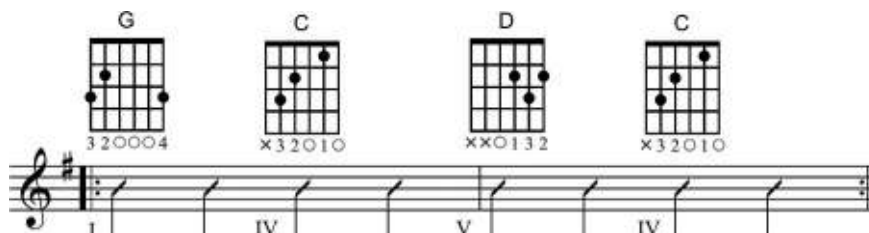
2. The key of D major:



3. The key of E major, using the V7 chord:



4. The key of G major:



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5. The key of A major:

Diagram illustrating the key of A major with four chords: A, D, E, and D. Each chord is shown with its fretboard diagram and guitar notation. The fretboard diagrams are labeled with their respective chord names and fingerings: A (X02340), D (XX0132), E (023100), and D (XX0132). The guitar notation shows the chords in a sequence: I, IV, V, IV.

I-IV-I-V

Here is another combination of I, IV, and V chords, in the same keys. Give the chords four beats each, and they fit part of Van Morrison's "Brown-Eyed Girl."

Diagram illustrating the key of A major with four chords: I, IV, I, and V. The guitar notation shows the chords in a sequence: I, IV, I, V.

1. The key of C major:

Diagram illustrating the key of C major with four chords: C, F, C, and G. Each chord is shown with its fretboard diagram and guitar notation. The fretboard diagrams are labeled with their respective chord names and fingerings: C (X32010), F (XX3211), C (X32010), and G (320004). The guitar notation shows the chords in a sequence: I, IV, I, V.

2. The key of D major:

Diagram illustrating the key of D major with four chords: D, G, D, and A. Each chord is shown with its fretboard diagram and guitar notation. The fretboard diagrams are labeled with their respective chord names and fingerings: D (XX0132), G (320004), D (XX0132), and A (X02340). The guitar notation shows the chords in a sequence: I, IV, I, V.

3. The key of E major:

Diagram illustrating the key of E major with four chords: E, A, E, and B7. Each chord is shown with its fretboard diagram and guitar notation. The fretboard diagrams are labeled with their respective chord names and fingerings: E (023100), A (X02340), E (023100), and B7 (X21304). The guitar notation shows the chords in a sequence: I, IV, I, V.

4. The key of G major:

5. The key of A major:

I-V-IV-V

You can hear the variation on I, IV, and V in the same keys in the song “Crimson and Clover.”

1. The key of C major:

2. The key of D major:

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3. The key of E major, using the V7 chord:

Diagram showing the guitar chord shapes for E, B7, A, and B7 in the key of E major. The chords are labeled with their names and fingerings: E (023100), B7 (x21304), A (x02340), and B7 (x21304). Below the chord diagrams is a musical staff in E major (one sharp) showing a progression of chords: I (E), V (B7), IV (A), and V7 (B7).

4. The key of G major:

Diagram showing the guitar chord shapes for G, D, C, and D in the key of G major. The chords are labeled with their names and fingerings: G (320004), D (xx0132), C (x32010), and D (xx0132). Below the chord diagrams is a musical staff in G major (two sharps) showing a progression of chords: I (G), V (D), IV (C), and V (D).

5. The key of A major:

Diagram showing the guitar chord shapes for A, E, D, and E in the key of A major. The chords are labeled with their names and fingerings: A (x02340), E (023100), D (xx0132), and E (023100). Below the chord diagrams is a musical staff in A major (three sharps) showing a progression of chords: I (A), V (E), IV (D), and V (E).

I, IV, and V in Minor

Following are the same progressions using all minor chords. The distance between chords is the same, but the minor chords give them quite a different sound.

Im-IVm-Vm-IVm

1. The key of C minor:

Diagram showing the guitar chord shapes for Cm, Fm, Gm, and Fm in the key of C minor. The chords are labeled with their names and fingerings: Cm (xx3421), Fm (xx3111), Gm (xx3111), and Fm (xx3111). Below the chord diagrams is a musical staff in C minor (three flats) showing a progression of chords: Im (Cm), IVm (Fm), Vm (Gm), and IVm (Fm). The Fm and Gm chords are marked with a 3fr. (3rd fret) indicator.