

Playing in Different Keys

Some chords sound good when played in sequence, while others....just....don't. For example, the **C** and **G** chords are quite comfortable with each other, while the **C** and **E** chords just sort of stare each other in the face, blinking. Without getting too technical just yet, the chords that are the friendliest with each other, and would sound good together in a song, tend to belong to the *same musical key*.

As you know, there are 12 different notes in the Musical Alphabet. It turns out that *each of those 12 notes has a key named after it*. So, for example, there is the **Key of A**, the **Key of A-sharp** (or **B-flat**), the **Key of B**, and so forth. Each key contains a number of chords that group together naturally, under the leadership of *the chord that has the same name as the key*. So, in the **Key of A**, the **A** chord is the boss, but there are *secondary* chords that are centered around the **A** chord that play supporting roles.

But confusion arises because *keys overlap with each other to varying degrees*, and will have certain chords in common. For example, in the **Key of A**, the 3 most important chords are **A**, **D** and **E**. In the **Key of D**, they are **D**, **A** and **G**. The two keys share 2 out of their 3 most important chords. Turns out, *all chords take turns being primary chords in their own keys and secondary chords in certain other keys*.

So how do we organize this mess? First of all, let's restrict our discussion to just 5 keys, the **Keys of C, G, D, A and E**. These are the 5 most common keys on the guitar, and we'll use the word "**C-A-G-E-D**" to refer to them, since **C-G-D-A-E** is harder to say.

Let's get to the specifics, using the ever-popular **Key of G** as an example. If I am playing a song in the **Key of G**, the **G** chord assumes a commanding role in the **chord progression**. It will most likely be the *first* and *last* chord, and the song will often return to the **G** chord, because it will radiate a sense of stability and repose, a feeling of being at *home*.

In musical jargon, the **G** chord is called the **Tonic chord** in the **Key of G**.

Of course, the secondary chords will be used to make the song interesting, and it will sound good to visit these chords, like visiting friends and family, but eventually, it always feels good to come *home*.

So what about these secondary chords? How do we identify them for the **Key of G**, or for *any* key, for that matter? A simple procedure exists:

Lay out the 7 letters of the Musical Alphabet, starting with G,
and number them 1 through 7:

G	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	2	3	4	5	6	7