

Chords and Scales

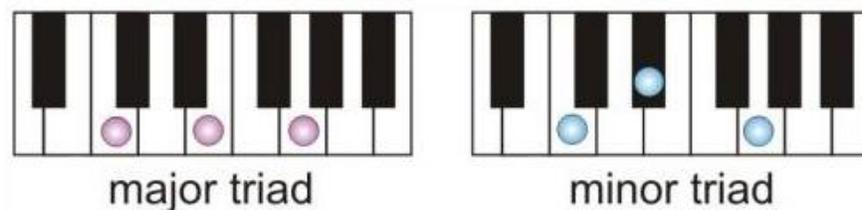
The majors and the minors of it all...

Did you know that:

- Chords are comprised of three or more tones played together.
 - A tonal triad require a Root, 3rd, and 5th finger grouping.
 - Major Chords consist of a (4) four half-step and (3) three half-step interval combination.
 - Lowering the 3rd finger position down one-half step changes a major chord to a minor chord.
 - A diatonic scale consists of eight (8) notes.
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How to Build Musical Chords on the Piano

There are two types of chords which form the fundamental building blocks of harmonic music. These are the major triad and the minor triad. You start with a *root note*, the lowest note of the chord, then stack notes on top in intervals to make the type of chord you want, whether that's the popular major and minor chords or the less common augmented, diminished, and suspended chords.



Use fingers 1, 3, and 5 to play most chords – certainly major and minor chords. If you're playing left-hand chords, start with the pinky finger of your left hand on the root note. For right-hand chords, play the root note with your thumb.

Starting out with major chords

Major chords are perhaps the most frequently used, most familiar, and easiest chords to play. It's a good bet that most folk and popular songs you know have one or two major chords.

You make major chords with the notes and intervals of a major scale. You build a major chord by starting out with a root note and then adding other notes from the desired chord's scale. For example, if you want to build a G major chord, you play the root note G, and add the third and fifth notes (or third and fifth intervals) from the G major scale on top of the root note.

Major chords are so common that musicians treat them as almost the norm. These chords are named with just the name of the root, and musicians rarely say "major." Instead, they just say the name of the chord and use a chord symbol written above the staff to indicate the name of the chord.

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The majors and the minors of it all...

Minor...but not insignificant chords

Like the major chord, a *minor chord* is a triad comprised of a root note, a third interval, and a fifth interval. Written as a chord symbol, minor chords get the suffix *m*, or sometimes *min*.

Don't be fooled by the name "minor." These chords are no smaller or any less important than major chords. They're simply built on minor scales, rather than on major scales. Minor chords are to major chords as shadow is to light, the yang to the yin. You can make a minor chord two different ways:

- **Play the root note, and add the third and fifth notes of the minor scale on top.** For example, play A as the root note, and add the third note (C) and fifth note (E) of the A minor scale.
- **Play a major chord and lower the middle note, or third interval, by one half-step.** For example, a C major chord has the notes C-E-G. To play a C minor chord, lower the E to E-flat.

Types of Musical Scales

The word "diatonic" comes from the Greek diatonikos meaning "progressing through tones." In music theory, a **diatonic scale** is an eight-note musical scale composed of seven pitches and a repeated octave at the top. The diatonic scale (*left image*) includes five whole steps and two half steps for each octave, in which the two half steps are separated from each other by either two or three whole steps, depending on their position in the scale.



The word "chromatic" comes from the Greek word chroma meaning "color." The **chromatic scale** consists of 12 notes each a half step apart. It is from the chromatic scale that every other scale or chord in most Western music is derived (*right image*). On the piano/keyboard when you play all the black and white keys of an octave in an ascending or descending order you are playing a chromatic scale.