

Chords

How to Make Chords in Your DAW Reference Guide

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This guide will show you how to make chords in your DAW, and what they'll look like in your piano roll editor.

There are loads of different types of chord, but below are the 13 you're most likely to use, and how to make them in ANY key. To hear how they sound, you can download the accompanying audio [here](#).

If you want to really save time, you're probably most likely to use numbers 1, 2, 5, 8 and 9, so skip to them. We'll use "C" as the root note in all of them for ease, but you can work out the equivalent chord in any key by counting the intervals between the notes (to see what keys there are and which notes are in them, check out [this page](#) on my blog).

Quick Reference:

The 13 most useful chords (5 most common in red):

C Major: C + E + G

C Minor: C + E \flat + G

C Augmented: C + E + G \sharp

C Diminished: C + E \flat + G \flat

C Suspended Fourth: C + F + G

C Major Sixth: C + E + G + A

C Minor Sixth: C + E \flat + G + A

C Major Seventh: C + E + G + B

C Minor Seventh: C + E \flat + G + B \flat

C Dominant Seventh: C + E + G + B \flat

C Major Ninth: C + E + G + B + D

C Minor Ninth: C + E \flat + G + B \flat + D

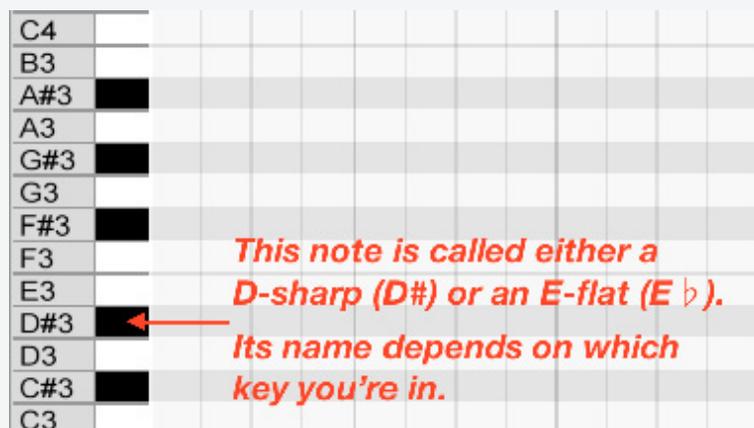
C Dominant Ninth: C + E + G + B \flat + D

Bonus: C Major 1st Inversion: E + G + C

How to read the diagrams:

A sharp ("#") means to play one half-step ABOVE the written note, and a flat ("b"), one half-step BELOW (e.g. if you see a C \sharp written, it means play the black note directly above C, and if you see an E \flat written it means play the black note directly below E).

N.B. Your DAW will only display the black notes with a "#" symbol, and never with a "b" symbol, because a) your DAW doesn't know which key you're writing in and b) the "#" symbol is native to software, whereas "b" is not.



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1. C Major

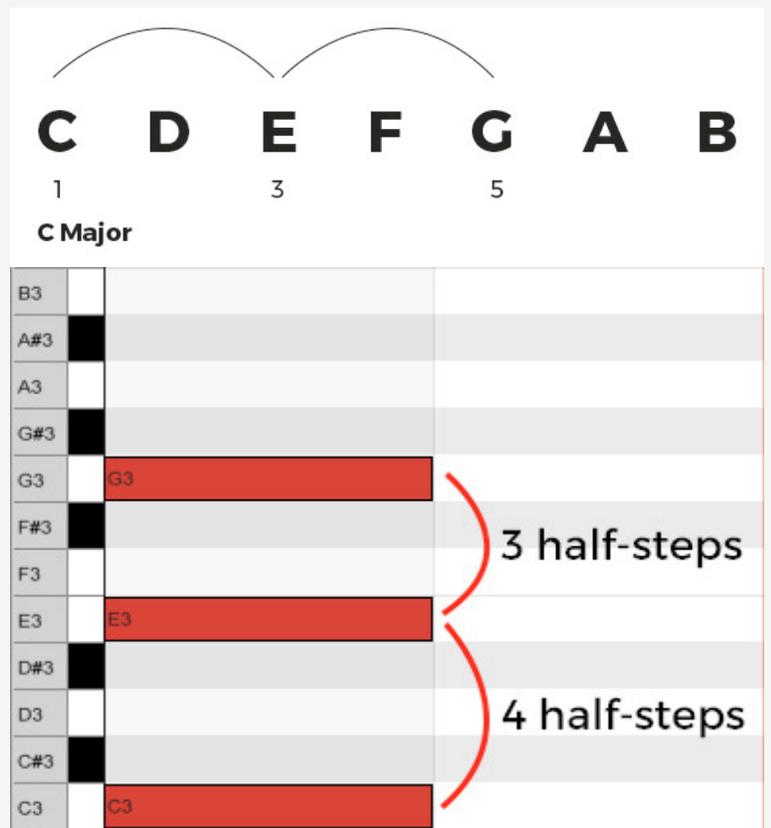
Sounds: Happy and simple

Notes: C + E + G

Half-step intervals: Root/4/3

The most common type of chord is called a "triad". A triad is made up of a root, a third, and a fifth ("root", "third" and "fifth" refer to the note position within the scale), therefore, a C Major chord will use C, E and G, and look something like this in your piano-roll editor:

To make a major triad in ANY key, simply count 4 half-steps up from the root note for your "third", and 3 half-steps up from your third for your "fifth".



The diagram illustrates the C Major scale and its triad. At the top, the scale notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B are shown with their respective scale degrees 1, 3, and 5. Curved lines connect C to E and E to G. Below this, a piano-roll editor shows the notes C3, E3, and G3 highlighted in red. A bracket indicates a 3 half-step interval between E3 and G3, and another bracket indicates a 4 half-step interval between C3 and E3.

2. C Minor

Sounds: Sad

Notes: C + E \flat + G

Half-step intervals: Root/3/4

The second most common (and simple) chord, is a minor. Very similar to the major chord, except the third is dropped one half-step, which gives it a "sad" quality.

To make a minor triad in any key, simply count 3 half-steps up from the root for your third, and 4 half-steps up from your third for your fifth.

OK, now we've got the most basic two chord-types covered, here are the other 11 most common types:



The diagram illustrates the C Minor scale and its triad. At the top, the scale notes C, D, E \flat , F, G, A, B are shown with their respective scale degrees 1, 3, and 5. Curved lines connect C to E \flat and E \flat to G. Below this, a piano-roll editor shows the notes C3, E \flat 3, and G3 highlighted in red. A bracket indicates a 4 half-step interval between E \flat 3 and G3, and another bracket indicates a 3 half-step interval between C3 and E \flat 3.

3. C Augmented

Sounds: Suspenseful

Notes: C + E + G#

Half-step intervals: Root/4/4

The diagram shows the C Augmented chord structure with notes C, D, E, F, G#, A, B. The notes C, E, and G# are marked with scale degrees 1, 3, and 5 respectively. Below this, a piano keyboard diagram shows the notes C3, E3, and G#3 highlighted in red. Brackets indicate the intervals between C3 and E3 (4 half-steps) and between E3 and G#3 (4 half-steps).

B3	
A#3	
A3	
G#3	G#3
G3	
F#3	
F3	
E3	E3
D#3	
D3	
C#3	
C3	C3

4. C Diminished

Sounds: Scary

Notes: C + E \flat + G \flat

Half-step intervals: Root/3/3

The diagram shows the C Diminished chord structure with notes C, D, E \flat , F, G \flat , A, B. The notes C, E \flat , and G \flat are marked with scale degrees 1, 3, and 5 respectively. Below this, a piano keyboard diagram shows the notes C3, E \flat 3, and G \flat 3 highlighted in red. Brackets indicate the intervals between C3 and E \flat 3 (3 half-steps) and between E \flat 3 and G \flat 3 (3 half-steps).

B3	
A#3	
A3	
G#3	
G3	
F#3	F#3
F3	
E3	
D#3	D#3
D3	
C#3	
C3	C3

5. C Suspended Fourth

Sounds: Proud

Notes: C + F + G

Half-step intervals: Root/5/2

The diagram illustrates the C Suspended Fourth chord. At the top, the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B are shown. A bracket spans from C to F, and another from F to G. Below the notes, the numbers 1, 4, and 5 are placed under C, F, and G respectively. The title "C Suspended Fourth" is centered below the notes.

Below the notes is a piano keyboard diagram. The keys are labeled from B3 at the top to C3 at the bottom. The keys C3, F3, and G3 are highlighted in red. A red bracket on the right side of the keyboard indicates a 2 half-steps interval between F3 and G3. Another red bracket indicates a 5 half-steps interval between C3 and F3.

B3			
A#3	■		
A3			
G#3	■		
G3		G3	
F#3	■		
F3		F3	
E3			
D#3	■		
D3			
C#3	■		
C3		C3	

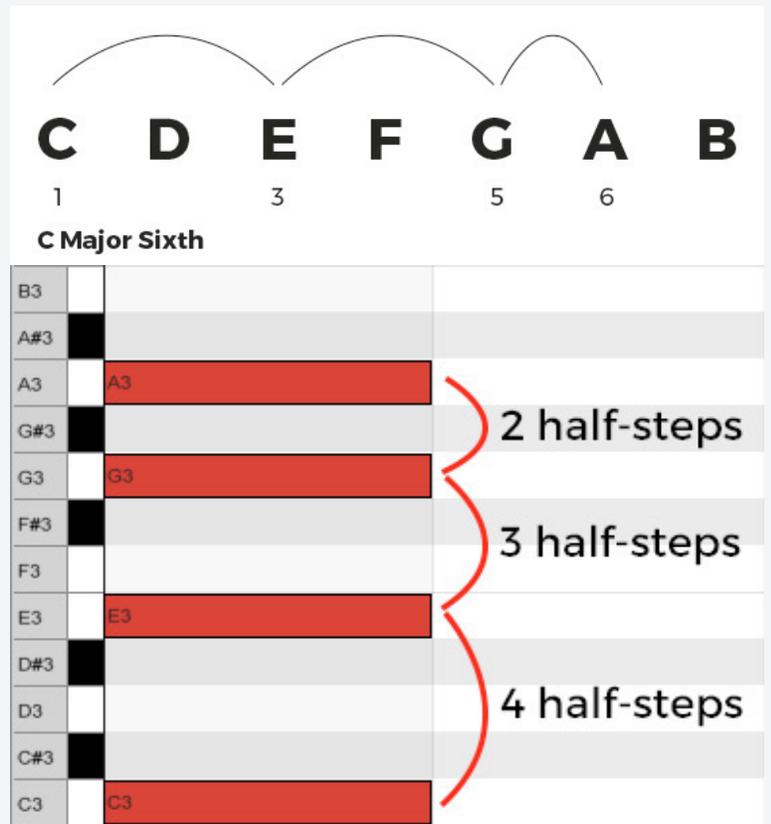
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6. C Major Sixth

Sounds: Triumphant

Notes: C + E + G + A

Half-step intervals: Root/4/3/2

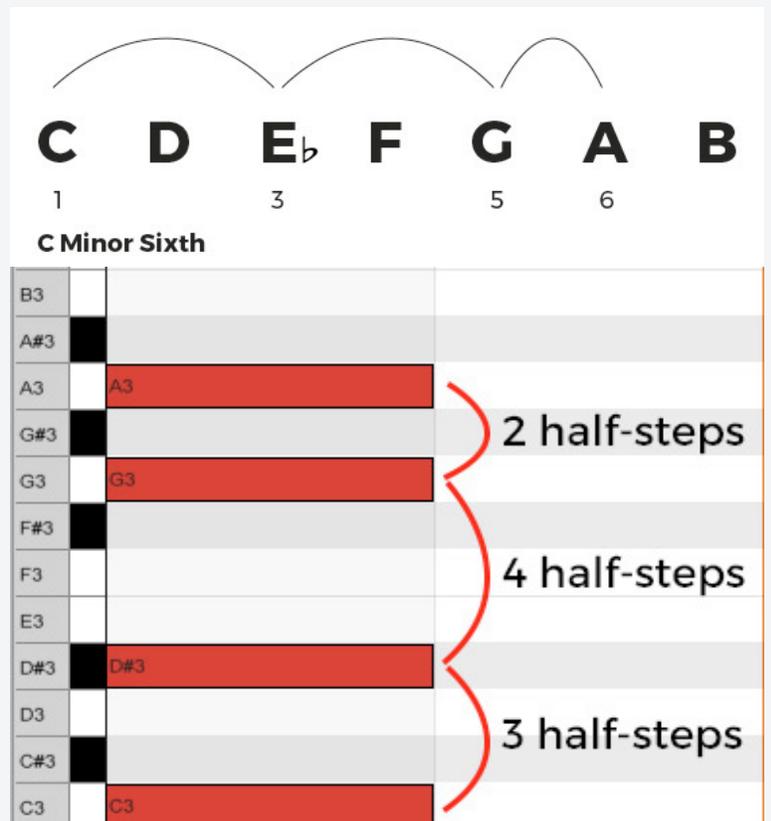


7. C Minor Sixth

Sounds: Sorrowful

Notes: C + E \flat + G + A

Half-step intervals: Root/3/4/2

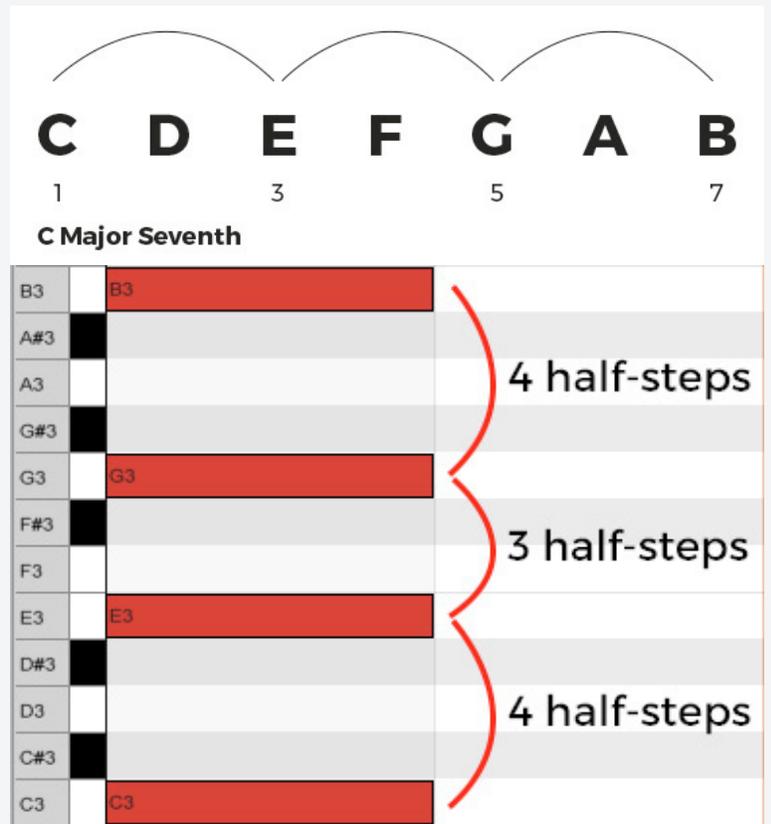


8. C Major Seventh

Sounds: Nostalgic

Notes: C + E + G + B

Half-step intervals: Root/4/3/4

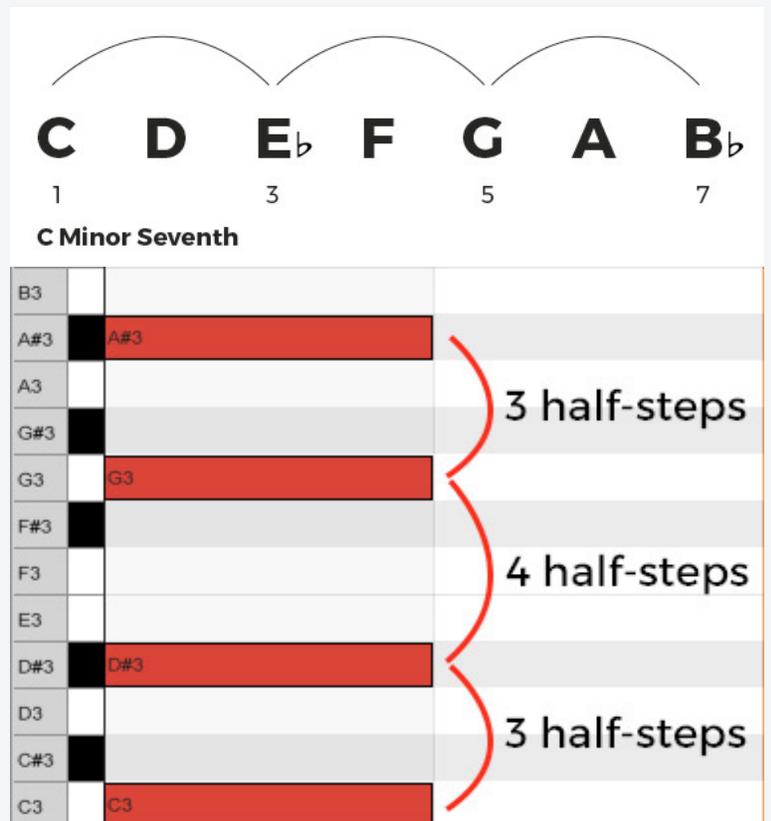


9. C Minor Seventh

Sounds: Melancholic

Notes: C + E \flat + G + B \flat

Half-step intervals: Root/3/4/3

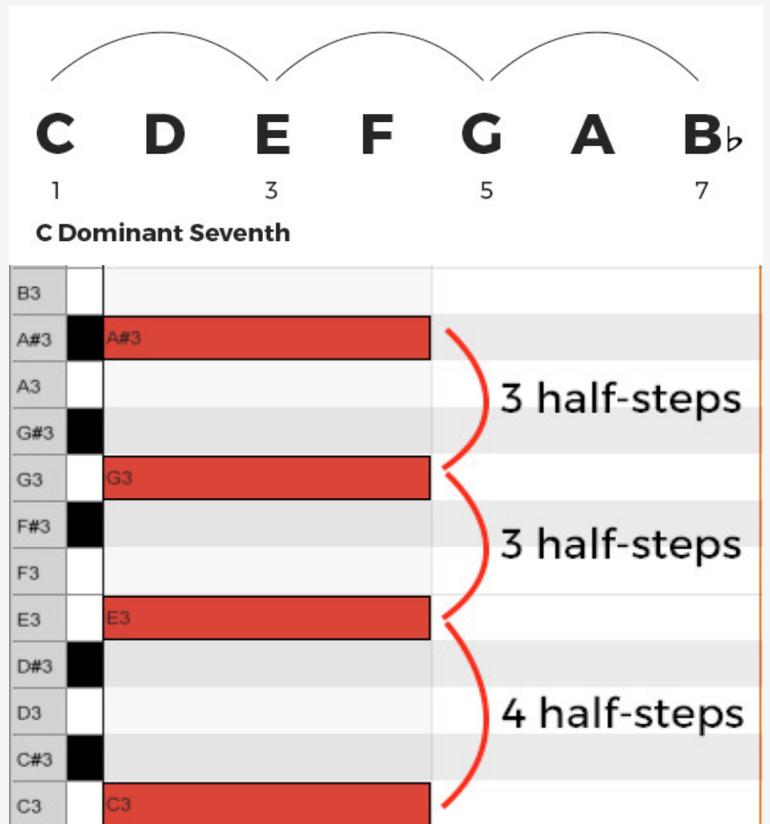


10. C Dominant Seventh

Sounds: Expectant

Notes: C + E + G + B \flat

Half-step intervals: Root/4/3/3



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11. C Major Ninth

Sounds: Nostalgic

Notes: C + E + G + B + D

Half-step intervals: Root/4/3/4/3

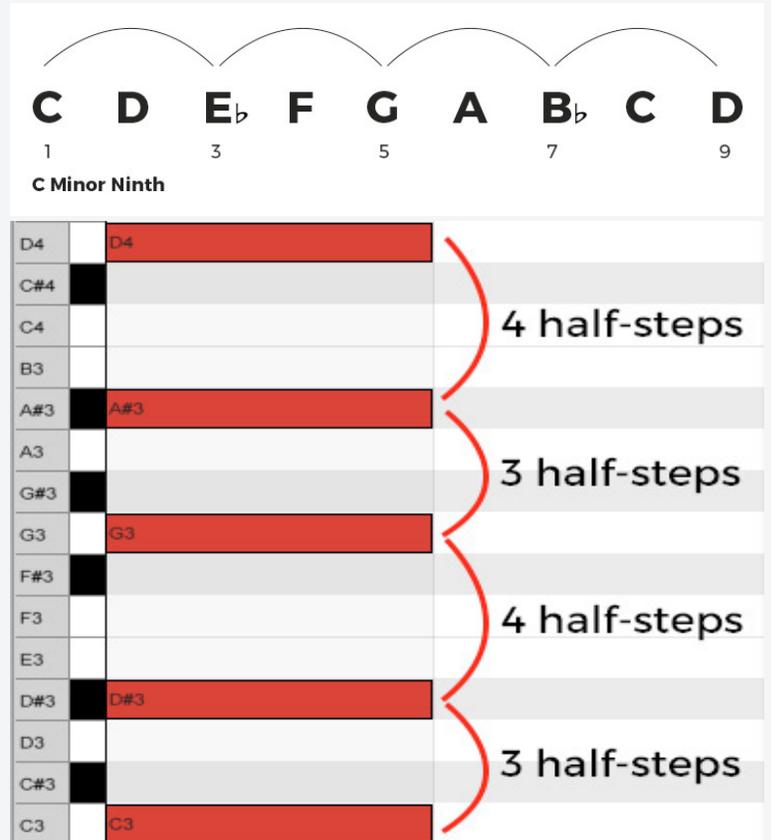


12. C Minor Ninth

Sounds: Melancholic

Notes: C + E \flat + G + B \flat + D

Half-step intervals: Root/3/4/3/4



13. C Dominant Ninth

Sounds: Expectant

Notes: C + E + G + B \flat + D

Half-step intervals: Root/4/3/3/4

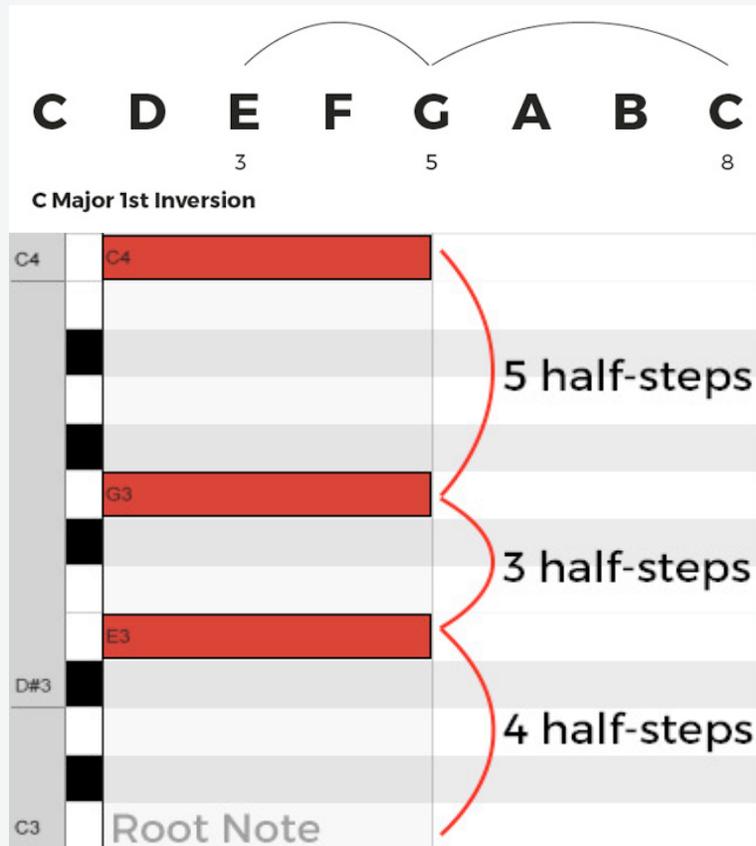


Bonus: C Major, 1st Inversion:

Notes: E + G + C

Half-step intervals: 4/3/5

Great! So you now know all the chord types you will pretty much ever use! If you want to shake things up a bit, you can use difference "inversions" of each chord. This basically means you swap their order, e.g. a C Major 1st inversion will have E as the root note instead of C, so it would look like this:



So there you have it! Experiment with different inversions and creating different chords in different keys, and have a go at putting them together. We'll cover how to sequence them together effectively in another ebook.

I hope you've enjoyed this guide. Feel free to share it with anyone you think might find it useful.

If anything is unclear, or if you have feedback and suggestions, please email [**support@edmtips.com**](mailto:support@edmtips.com).

Thanks, and happy producing!

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