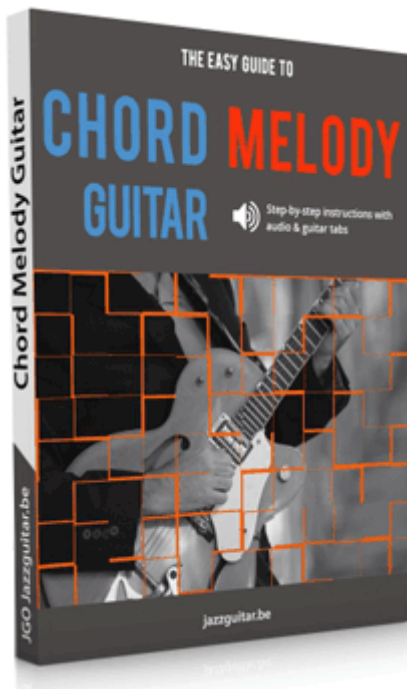


20 WAYS TO PLAY II V I VI PROGRESSIONS



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In this lesson you will learn 20 ways to play through both major and minor II-V-I-VI chord progressions. The voicings I have chosen are what I call the “in between” voicings, fingerings that are in between the common beginner chords found in jazz chord books, and the advanced “way out” chords heard in the playing of guitarists like Allan Holdsworth, Ben Monder and John Stowell.

These chords are designed to **create a sense of tension** and release while simultaneously outlining each chord within the progression.

Some of the **techniques** that will be applied:

- Melody and bass line voice leading
- Diatonic and modal substitutions
- Middle voice movement.

So, grab your guitar and let’s learn 20 ways to comp through major and minor **ii V I vi** chord progressions.

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 1

The first example is built out of three note voicings that highlight an **ascending melody line**: G-Ab-A-Bb. This progression contains a moving line in both the inner and outer voices:

- The **middle voice** moves from F down to E over the course of the progression.
- The **lower voice** moves from C down to B, before finishing on a C#, the third of A7b9.

Also note that the first three voicings contain the **3rd and 7th** of each chord. The A7b9 contains the 3rd (C#), while the 5th (E) has replaced the 7th for the purposes of voice leading.

[Click here to play example 1](#)

The image displays a musical progression in 4/4 time, consisting of four chords: Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, and A7(b9). The notation is presented in two staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a 4/4 time signature, showing the chord voicings. The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with strings T, A, and B labeled on the left. The fret numbers for each chord are as follows:

Chord	T (Treble)	A (Middle)	B (Bass)
Dm7	8	10	10
G7	9	10	9
Cmaj7	10	9	9
A7(b9)	11	9	11

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 2

The next example contains the same ascending melody line (G-Ab-A-Bb), though this time the line is harmonized in **four note voicings**.

The Dm7 chord is built out of a IV (Fadd9) chord (F-A-C-G), which is a **common diatonic substitute** for a iim7 chord.

Fadd9	F	A	C	G
Played as Dm7	b3	5	b7	11

The G7 chord contains a 13 (E) as well as b9 (Ab), providing an element of tension which resolves to the Imaj7 chord in bar three.

The VI7 chord also **contains a b9**, which provides a tension that is resolved when the progression returns to the Dm7 chord in bar one.

[Click here to play example 2](#)

The image shows a musical score for a four-measure progression in 4/8 time. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The chords and their fingerings are as follows:

Measure	Chord	Fingering (T, A, B)
1	Dm7 (Dm11)	3, 1, 3
2	G7 (G7b9)	4, 5, 3
3	Cmaj7 (Cmaj9)	5, 3, 2
4	A7(b9)	6, 5, 5

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 3

The third example is also built around an **ascending melodic line**, though this time it begins a tone higher: A-B \flat -B-C. As in the previous example, the Dm7 chord is being substituted by an Fmaj7 chord (F-C-E-A). The V7 chord contains two tension notes, the \flat 13 (E \flat) and the #9 (B \flat).

Over the Imaj7 chord a Gmaj7 voicing is being used, which has been “borrowed” from the **C Lydian mode**, where Gmaj7 is the Vmaj7 chord in that mode. This a common substitution for a Imaj7 chord as it provides an F# (#11), which is commonly heard on a tonic chord within a jazz context.

The VI7 chord also contains two tension notes, the **\flat 13 (F) and the #9 (C)**, the same two tensions used on the V7 chord, and these are resolved back to the Dm7 chord in bar one of the progression, as was the case in the previous example.

[Click here to play example 3](#)

The image shows a musical score for a four-measure chord progression in 4/4 time. The first staff is in treble clef, and the second staff is in bass clef. The progression consists of four measures:

- Measure 1: Dm7 (Dm9) in treble clef, with notes D, F, A, C. Bass clef shows fingering 3, 2, 1, 3.
- Measure 2: G7 (G7(#9,b13)) in treble clef, with notes G, B \flat , D, F \flat . Bass clef shows fingering 6, 4, 3, 5.
- Measure 3: Cmaj7 (Cmaj7#11) in treble clef, with notes C, E, G, B \sharp . Bass clef shows fingering 7, 7, 5.
- Measure 4: A7(b9) (A7(#9,b13)) in treble clef, with notes A, C, E, G \flat . Bass clef shows fingering 8, 6, 5.

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 4

The next example starts in a similar fashion to example 3 because the **Dm7 chord is being substituted by an Fma7 chord**. Though in this progression, the V7 chord only contains one tension note, the b9 (Ab), which resolves to the Cmaj7 chord in bar three, which is being voiced in stacked fourth intervals.

For the VI7 chord, an Edim7 voicing is being used to sound the A7b9 chord.

A dim7 chord played on the b9, 3, 5 or 7th of a dominant chord is a common substitution, as it provides the 3rd (C#), 5th (E), 7th (G) and b9 (Bb) chord tones.

This is **especially effective on guitar** because all inversions of dim7 chords are fingered the same on the same string sets.

So in this example (A7b9), you can **play the Edim7**, slide up to Gdim7, then to Bbdim7 and finally C#dim7 without changing fingerings.

Edim7	E	G	Bb	Db
Played over A7	5	b7	b9	3

[Click here to play example 4](#)

The image shows a musical score for a Major II V I VI Chord Progression 4. The top staff is in 4/4 time and shows four chords: Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, and A7(b9). The bottom staff shows guitar fingerings for each chord. The Dm7 chord is fingered 2-3-2-1-2-3. The G7 chord is fingered 3-2-3-4-3-2. The Cmaj7 chord is fingered 3-2-1-3-2-1. The A7(b9) chord is fingered 2-3-2-1-2-3.

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 5

The Dm7 chord at the start of this example is built out of the [So What](#) voicings made famous by Bill Evans on the Miles Davis recording *Kind of Blue*.

These kind of voicings are built by **stacking fourth intervals** (D-G-C-F), which produces a Dm11 sound (more about this here: [Quartal Voicings](#)). Though this voicing uses four notes, Evans would also add a 3rd interval on top of the F (A), during his *So What* voicing's to produce a thicker, larger chord.

The G7 chord is also built out of the *So What* voicings and is played by **simply shifting the Dm7 chord up a minor third** to Fm11 (F-Bb-Eb-Ab). This produces three tension notes over G7, which all resolve down by half step to the Cmaj7 chord in bar three:

Fm11	F	Bb	Eb	Ab
Played over G7	b7	#9	b13	b9

The tonic chord is again built from the *So What* voicings, by playing stacked fourths beginning on the 3rd (E) of the chord (E-A-D-G). This allows us to play **all three chords with only one voicing**, stacked 4ths, while creating a modern sounding progression that contains both tension and release within itself.

The A7b9 chord is built from an Edim7 chord, though with the added maj7 (Eb), which comes from the E diminished scale. These voicing's (dimMaj7), can be heard in the music of **Ed Bickert** and especially [Jim Hall](#). Try taking this chord and sliding it up to the next chord tone, G, and back again without lifting your fingers and you'll immediately remind yourself of **every Jim Hall chord solo** he has recorded.

[Click here to play example 5](#)

Dm⁷ **G⁷** **C^{maj7}** **A⁷(b⁹)**
 Dm11 Fm11 Em11 EbdimMaj7
 T 6 9 8 8
 A 5 8 7 8
 B 4 7 7 7

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 6

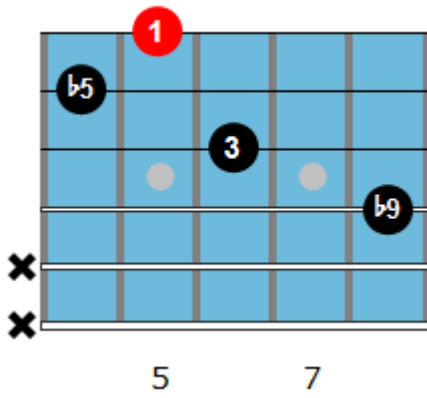
Example six is built out of **closed position** and **clustered chord voicings**. The Dm7 chord is being substituted by a Imaj7sus4 chord, C-F-G-B, in closed position. This is a common diatonic substitution:

Cmaj7sus4	C	F	G	B
Played over Dm7	b7	3	11	6

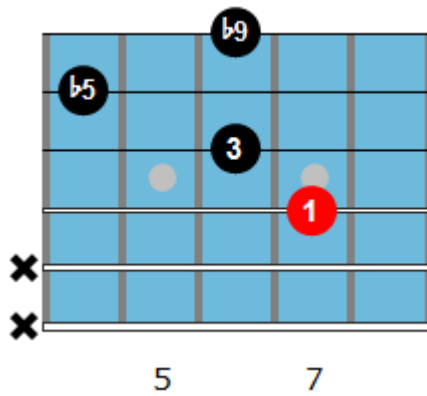
The G7 chord is built by stacking a cluster (F-A^b-B^b) over top of the third of the chord (B). This creates both b9 (A^b) and #9 (B^b) tension tones that are resolved into the Imaj7 chord in bar three.

The **tonic chord is built** by playing a 7th (B) below an Am triad, which contains the R (C), 3rd (E) and 6th (A) of the tonic chord.

The VI7 chord contains both the b9 (B^b) and b5 (E^b) tensions which are **resolved when returned to the Dm7 chord** in bar one:



This voicing may be a bit of a stretch for some of us. If so, you can play the A in the bass and the Bb in the melody, which eliminates the **tricky stretch**:



[Click here to play example 6](#)

Dm7 G7 Cmaj7 A7(b9)

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 7

For the next example we will return to **using three note voicings**, as was the case in the first example. Again, here we are using an F chord (F-A-C) in place of the Dm7 chord. The G7 chord contains the tri-tone (F-B), with a b9 (Ab) stuck in the middle to create tension.

This tension is then released into an Em triad which is being played in place of the Imaj7 chord. This triad is **commonly used in place of a Imaj7 chord** as it contains all the tones of the chord minus the root, which would be played by the bass player anyway.

The A7b9 chord is also built off of an E note, with the C# being the **only note different** than the previous bar.

[Click here to play example 7](#)

The image shows a musical score for a four-measure chord progression in 4/4 time. The notation is as follows:

Measure	Chord	Triad	Fingerings (T, A, B)
1	Dm7	F	1, 2, 3
2	G7		0, 1, 3
3	Cmaj7	Em	0, 0, 2
4	A7(b9)	Edim	2, 0, 2

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 8

The next example is an extension of the previous one, where the chords are very similar with **one upper note being added** to the three note chords from example 7.

- In the first bar the 9th (E) is being added to form an Fmaj7 chord.
- A b13 (Eb) is added to create more tension over the V7 chord.
- The one chord adds an F# (#11), which provides a **Lydian quality to the chord**.
- The VI chord adds the b13 (F) to the chord, which is resolved down by half-step to the E in bar one.

[Click here to play example 8](#)

The image displays a musical progression for guitar in 4/4 time. The top staff shows four chords: Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, and A7(b9). Below the staff, the string sets for each chord are provided: Dm9 (5-7-8), G7(b9,b13) (4-4-8), Cmaj7#11 (7-5-7), and A7b13 (6-9-7). The string sets are written in a vertical orientation on the left side of the staff.

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 9

The next example uses **spread voicings** to outline each chord in the progression. These chords are often referred to as “**Drop 2 and 4**” voicings or by their string sets, **5421 voicings**.

- Again the Dm7 chord is **substituted by an Fmaj7 chord**.
- The G7 contains a natural 9 (A) and a b13 (Eb) that resolves down to the 9th (D) of the Cmaj7 chord in the next bar.

- The A7b9 chord is again built off of an Edim7 chord, though this time fingered in a spread voicing.

[Click here to play example 9](#)

Dm⁷
 Treble clef: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4
 Label: Dm9
 Fretboard: 12 (T), 10 (A), 8 (B)

G⁷
 Treble clef: Bb4, E4, G4, Bb4, D5, F5
 Label: G9b13
 Fretboard: 11 (T), 10 (A), 9 (B)

Cmaj⁷
 Treble clef: C4, E4, G4, Bb4, C5, E5
 Label: Cmaj6/9
 Fretboard: 10 (T), 10 (A), 9 (B)

A7(b⁹)
 Treble clef: C#4, E4, G4, Bb4, C#5, E5
 Label: A7(b9)
 Fretboard: 9 (T), 8 (A), 7 (B)

Major II V I VI Chord Progression 10

The last major key example is built out of **closed voicings**, where each chord is built with the smallest interval possible being used between chord tones.

- The Dm7 is built from a Dm triad being stacked on top of the 9th (E) of the chord.
- The G7 is being substituted by an Ebmaj7#5 chord, which comes from the C [melodic minor scale](#), where G7b13 is the fifth mode.

Ebmaj7#5	Eb	G	B	D
Played over G7	b13	1	3	5

- The C chord contains both the sixth and the ninth. The VI chord is built by playing the #9 (C) on top of a **C# diminished triad**.

[Click here to play example 10](#)

Dm⁷ **G⁷** **Cmaj⁷** **A7(b⁹)**
 Dm⁹ G7b¹³ Cmaj^{6/9} A7#⁹
 T: 10 10 8 8
 A: 10 12 10 9
 B: 14 13 12 11

Minor II V I VI Chord Progression 1

We will now take a look at ten minor ii-V chord progressions by starting with a technique that is similar to that seen in example five. The Dm7b5 voicing in bar one is then **played a minor third higher** in bar two as an Fm7b5 chord:

Fm7b5	F	A^b	C^b	E^b
Played over G7	b7	b9	3	b13

This same fingering is then played a major third higher on A, over the tonic chord in bar three.

Am7b5	A	C	E^b	G
Played over Cm	6	1	b3	5

For the last bar an Eb7 chord (bII of Dm7b5), is being **used to turn the progression back around** to the iim7b5 chord in bar one. This voicing is built by playing a GdimMaj7 which produces an Eb7#9 sound:

Gdim/maj7	G	Bb	Db	F#
Played over Eb7	3	5	b7	#9

[Click here to play example 11](#)

The image shows musical notation for four bars. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb) and a 4/4 time signature. The bottom staff is guitar tablature with strings labeled T, A, B from top to bottom.

- Bar 1:** Chord: Dm7(b5). Tablature: 6, 5, 5.
- Bar 2:** Chord: G7 ALT. (G7(b9, b13)). Tablature: 9, 8, 8.
- Bar 3:** Chord: Cm7 (Cm6). Tablature: 13, 12, 12.
- Bar 4:** Chord: Eb7 (Eb7#9). Tablature: 11, 10.

Minor II V I VI Chord Progressions 2

The next example begins with the same two chords heard in the last progression, though **instead of continuing upwards**, it resolves down to the tonic chord, being substituted by an Ebmaj7#5 chord, in bar three:

Ebmaj7#5	Eb	G	B	D
Played over Cm	b3	5	7	9

The tonic chord contains both the major 7th and 9th chord tones, and the augmented fifth interval between the Eb and B **gives this voicing a dark quality** that helps define the tonic minor sound.

The Eb7 chord in this progression is built off of a dimMaj7 chord as in the previous example, except it is now built off of the b9 (E), note which produces an Eb7b9 sound.

Edim/maj7	E	G	Bb	D#
Played over Eb7	b9	3	5	1

[Click here to play example 12](#)

Dm7(b5) G7 ALT. Cm7 Eb7
 Dm11b5 G7(b9,b13) CmMaj9 Eb7b9
 TAB 6 5 5 9 8 8 8 7 6 8 8 7

Minor II V I VI Chord Progression 3

Here we have the same technique, **moving up by minor then major thirds**, but the voicing has changed to contain the 11th (G) of Dm7b5. G7 contains the #9 (Bb) and Cm7 contains the 9 (D).

This D then moves down by a tone to the C (3rd) of the Am7b5 chord in bar four, which provides a nice sense of voice leading between these two chords. The Am7b5 (vim7b5) chord is **commonly used in the fourth bar** of a minor ii-V-i-vi progression as it resolves by fourth to the Dm7b5 chord in bar one, and comes from the tonic (C) minor key center.

[Click here to play example 13](#)

Dm7(b5) G7 ALT. Cm7 Am7(b5)
 Dm11b5 G7(#9,b13) Cm6 Am7(b5)
 TAB 8 5 5 11 8 8 13 13 12 13 13 12

Minor II V I VI Chord Progression 4

With the next example we will move away from the **parallel movement** found in the previous three progressions.

- The first chord is a simple Drop 2 Dm7b5 voicing with the root on top.
- The G7 chord **is being substituted** by a Db7 Drop 2 voicing, which is the [tri-tone substitution](#) of G.
- The Cm7 chord contains both the 11th (F) and the major 7th (B) intervals which resolve downwards to the root (A) and fifth (Eb) chord tones on the Am11b5 chord in bar four.

[Click here to play example 14](#)

Minor II V I VI Chord Progression 5

The next progression begins with the same [drop 2 voicing](#) being used for the Dm7b5 chord in bar one. Though instead of a Db7 chord in bar two, the G7 chord is now **substituted by a Db9 chord**, where the 9th (Eb) of Db becomes the b13 over the G7 chord.

The Cm7 chord still contains the F and B from the previous example, though it is **now in a different voicing**, one that is built out of an Eb#5add9 chord shape.

The Am7b5 chord is second inversion Drop 2 voicing with no added notes.

[Click here to play example 15](#)

Diagram illustrating a four-measure chord progression in 4/4 time, showing chord voicings and guitar TAB notation.

Chords and voicings shown:

- Measure 1: $Dm7(b5)$ (Notes: Bb, Eb, Ab, Gb)
- Measure 2: $G7(ALT.)$ (Notes: Bb, Eb, Ab, Gb) with $G7(b9, b13)$ written below.
- Measure 3: $Cm7$ (Notes: Bb, Eb, Ab, Gb) with $CmMaj11$ written below.
- Measure 4: $Am7(b5)$ (Notes: Bb, Eb, Ab, Gb)

Guitar TAB notation (T, A, B strings):

- Measure 1: 10, 9, 10, 10
- Measure 2: 11, 9, 10, 9
- Measure 3: 13, 12, 13, 13
- Measure 4: 11, 10, 12, 10

Minor II V I VI Chord Progression 6

In this example the $bVI7$ chord ($Ab7$) is being substituted for the $Dm7b5$ chord in bar one. This is a **common substitution**, as the $Ab7$ is a tri-tone away from $Dm7b5$, and it resolves by half-step down to the $G7$ in bar two.

The $G7$ chord is being substituted by an **Fm11b5 chord**, which contains the $b13$ (Eb) and $\#9$ (Bb) tension tones.

The $Cm7$ chord uses an **Ebmaj7 Drop 3 voicing**, while the $Eb7$ chord contains the $\#11$ (A) tension tone.

Notice how now, with the $Ab7$ chord in bar one, the $Eb7$ chord becomes the **V/bVI** and resolves by fourth back to the first bar.

[Click here to play example 16](#)

Ab7 G7 ALT. Cm7 Eb7

Ab13 G7(#9,b13) Cm9 Eb7#11

TAB

Minor II V I VI Chord Progression 7

In the next progression the Ab13 chord in bar one moves down by half-step to a G7b9b5 chord in bar two.

This then moves down to the Ebmaj7 chord **being substituted over the Cm7** chord in bar three before that Ebmaj7 chord lowers its 7th from D to Db and fifth (Bb-A), to produce the Eb7#11 chord in bar four.

[Click here to play example 17](#)

Ab7 G7 ALT. Cm7 Eb7

Ab13 G7(b9,b5) Cm9 Eb7#11

TAB

Minor II V I VI Chord Progression 8

The following example uses closed position voicings to outline each chord in the progression.

The Ab7 chord contains the **3 (C), 13 (F), 7 (Gb) and 9 (Bb)**, which is then voice led into the G7#9 chord in bar two.

The Cm7 chord is being substituted by a B7#5 chord, which produces a CmMaj7(6) sound:

B7#5	B	D#	F##	A
Played over Cm	7	b3	5	6

This leads into the Eb7#11 chord, with the #11(A) in the bass, in bar four.

[Click here to play example 18](#)

The musical notation shows a four-bar progression in 4/4 time. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The chords and their voicings are as follows:

- Bar 1: Ab7 chord (Ab13) with notes Bb, C, Eb, F, Gb, Ab. Bass voicing: 6 (finger 1), 7 (finger 2), 10 (finger 3).
- Bar 2: G7 ALT. chord (G7#9) with notes Ab, Bb, C, D, Eb, F. Bass voicing: 6 (finger 1), 8 (finger 2), 10 (finger 3), 9 (finger 4).
- Bar 3: Cm7 chord (CmMaj6) with notes Bb, C, D, Eb, F, G. Bass voicing: 5 (finger 1), 6 (finger 2), 7 (finger 3), 8 (finger 4), 9 (finger 5).
- Bar 4: Eb7 chord (Eb7#11) with notes Ab, Bb, C, D, Eb, F. Bass voicing: 6 (finger 1), 7 (finger 2), 8 (finger 3), 9 (finger 4).

Minor II V I VI Chord Progression 9

This progression begins with a Cm11b5 chord being substituted over the Ab7 chord, which produces an Ab13 sound.

This is then voice led down by half-step to a Bmaj7#11 chord, which is substituting the G7 chord **producing a G7#9b13 sound:**

Bmaj7#11	B	D#	F	A#
Played over G7	3	b13	b7	#9

The tonic chord is being substituted by a **Bbmaj7sus4 chord** which produces a Cm13 sound.

The Eb7 chord is being substituted by a Dbmaj7#11 chord which produces an Eb13 sound.

[Click here to play example 19](#)

The musical notation shows a 4/4 progression with four measures. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The bottom staff shows guitar fingerings for the Treble (T), Alto (A), and Bass (B) clefs.

Measure	Chord	Substitution	Fingering (T/A/B)
1	Ab7	Ab13	6/3/4/3
2	G7 ALT.	G7(#9,b13)	4/3/3/2
3	Cm7	Cm11	4/3/3/1
4	Eb7	Eb13	6/4/5/4

Minor II V I VI Chord Progression 10

The last example is built out of the **descending Ab-G line in the lower voice**. The Ab7 chord is voiced in a standard 1357 Drop 2 fingering. The G7 chord is built from an Abdim7 chord which produces a G7b9 chord with the b9 in the bass.

The Cm7 chord is built by **stacking fourths above the fifth** (G), to produce a Cm11 sound.

The Eb7 chord contains both the 9th (F) and the #11 (A), which is in the melody line.

[Click here to play example 20](#)

The image shows a musical score for a Minor II-V-I-VI chord progression in B-flat major. The progression is Ab7 - G7alt - Cm7 - Eb7. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 4/4 time signature. Above the staff, the chords are labeled: Ab7, G7ALT., Cm7, and Eb7. Below the staff, the corresponding guitar voicings are shown with fret numbers: Ab7 (8-7-8-6), G7ALT. (7-6-7-6), Cm7 (6-5-6-5), and Eb7 (5-5-5-5).

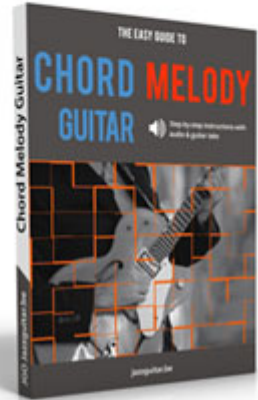
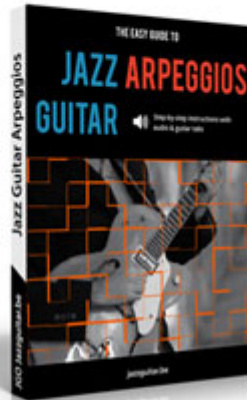
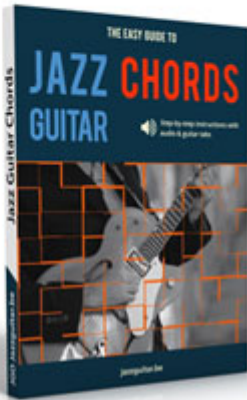
Now that we've explored these examples of II-V progression in major and minor keys, you can try to **build your own voicings** using the techniques explored above.

Try taking any II chord, in major and minor keys, and **voice lead it** up by moving the melody in half-steps, or try the same technique descending.

Or try **taking different chords** from different examples (the IIm7 chord from one, the V7 from another etc.), and mixing them together to form new progressions that you can call your own.

To learn more about jazz guitar chords, check out [The Easy Guide to Jazz Guitar Chords](#) and [The Easy Guide to Chord Melody](#), or buy them in [The Easy Guide 3 eBook Bundle](#).

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