

In Support of Learning Chords

First Purpose

To provide a method that will enable the reader to spell chord voicings inversions of specific types.

The types of chord voicings are known as Drop Chord voicings.

For this first purpose and to keep this as brief as possible it is not important to understand what Drop Chord voicings are or where they came from.

For now, let's see if the following method provides a simple way to spell the chords properly. We won't even consider the guitar at this point.

Drop Chord Inversion Voicings

There are 3 different types of 4 note Drop chords that we will consider.

For now, they will be defined by an interval formula that should be easy to memorize.

We will use a major 6th chord as our example.

That chord is built from the 1-3-5-6 chord formula.

The 3 types of Drop voicings can be built with any of the 4 notes in the bass voice.

These are known as inversions of the voicing.

The voicing spelling is the sequence of the degrees from low to high.

Chord Circle

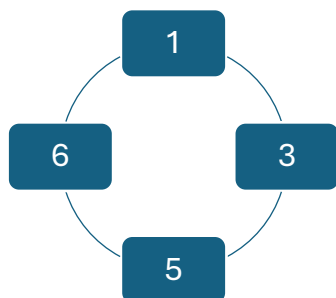
The chord circle has 4 points representing the 4 notes in the chord.

We use a circle to help imagine the next note in the spelling from where we currently are.

That is supported by imagining movement within the circle.

We can move three ways:

- Clockwise or forward denoted by (f)
- Counterclockwise or backward denoted by (b)
- Across denoted by (x)



Voicing Formulas

Each voicing will contain 4 notes and 3 movements from one note to the next.

The voices will be considered the Bass, Tenor, Alto, and Soprano voices.

The formulas assume that we are at the Bass and are moving to the other voices.

They are noted as a sequence of 3 circle moves.

Drop 2: xfx

Drop 2 and 4: xbx

Drop 3: bxf

Formula Applications

The formula applications show the voice spellings with the movement type inserted.

The goal is to be able to produce these voicings from memory using the formulas and the circle.

Drop 2	Drop 2 and 4	Drop 3
1 (x) 5 (f) 6 (x) 3	1 (x) 5 (b) 3 (x) 6	1 (b) 6 (x) 3 (f) 5
3 (x) 6 (f) 1 (x) 5	3 (x) 6 (b) 5 (x) 1	3 (b) 1 (x) 5 (f) 6
5 (x) 1 (f) 3 (x) 6	5 (x) 1 (b) 6 (x) 3	5 (b) 3 (x) 6 (f) 1
6 (x) 3 (f) 5 (x) 1	6 (x) 3 (b) 1 (x) 5	6 (b) 5 (x) 1 (f) 3

These voicings can be applied to the guitar, piano, or any horn as arpeggios.

The drop chords voicings can be applied to most fundamental chords.

More on that later.

One can get by very well without knowing all of them.

Second Purpose

The next purpose is to use these voicings to help learn how to play chords on the guitar and to provide a structure that can be used to test our key and degree knowledge.

How they lie on the neck

Drop 2 chords will occur on 4 adjacent strings.

The Drop 2 formulas can be applied where the bass is on the 6th or 5th or 4th strings.

That gives us 3 sets of 4 voicings.

Drop 3 chords will occur on 5 strings where we play the bass, skip a string, and then play three adjacent strings. In that they cover 5 strings, the bass can be placed on the 6th or 5th string. That gives us 2 sets of 4 voicings.

Drop 2 and 4 chords will occur on 5 strings where we play bass, tenor, skip a string, alto, soprano. The bass can be placed on the 6th or 5th string. That gives us 2 sets of 4 voicings.

Formula Applications with string skips

Drop 2	Drop 2 and 4	Drop 3
1 (x) 5 (f) 6 (x) 3	1 (x) 5 (b) (skip) 3 (x) 6	1 (b) (skip) 6 (x) 3 (f) 5
3 (x) 6 (f) 1 (x) 5	3 (x) 6 (b) (skip) 5 (x) 1	3 (b) (skip) 1 (x) 5 (f) 6
5 (x) 1 (f) 3 (x) 6	5 (x) 1 (b) (skip) 6 (x) 3	5 (b) (skip) 3 (x) 6 (f) 1
6 (x) 3 (f) 5 (x) 1	6 (x) 3 (b) (skip) 1 (x) 5	6 (b) (skip) 5 (x) 1 (f) 3

Note: The back circle movement will always call for a string skip in these drop chords.
Forward and cross will not.

I think it is valuable to have these voicings available to you, first in the ability to say them, and then gradually put them on the guitar.

Here we spelled out 12 voicings of a major 6th chord.

Given multiple string sets, we have 28 chords to represent the major 6th.

Any of the basic 4 note chords would provide the same number of opportunities.

We would just change the degrees in the circle and apply the voicing formulas in the same way.

Small Chords

Smaller voicings are very powerful to know and use.

Everything we did before can be applied to 3 note voicings that are derived from the circle.

The follow chords are called low shell and high shell chords.

Both are played on 3 adjacent strings.

In each case 1 note from the circle will not be included.

The formulas start at the lowest note and consist of two circle moves.

Low Shell: fx

High Shell: xf

Low Shell	High Shell
1 (f) 3 (x) 6	1 (x) 5 (f) 6
3 (f) 5 (x) 1	3 (x) 6 (f) 1
5 (f) 6 (x) 3	5 (x) 1 (f) 3
6 (f) 1 (x) 5	6 (x) 3 (f) 5