Tissimo

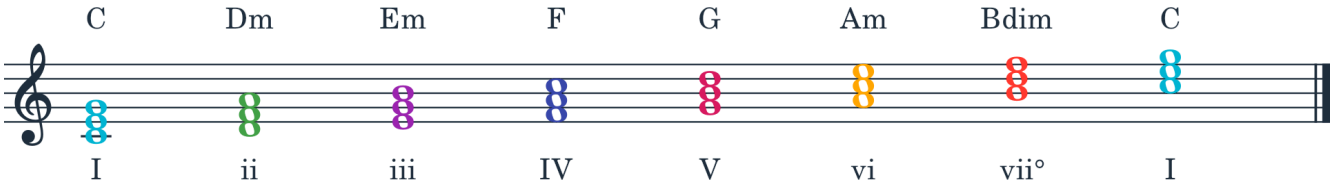
LISTEN
Scan to hear every example
tissimo.co/worksheets/chords-of-a-key

The chords of a key

Build a triad on every note of a major scale and you get the **seven chords of the key**. Three are major, three are minor and one is diminished, always in the same order.

A CHORD ON EVERY STEP

Start on each note of the C major scale and stack two more notes in thirds, using only notes of the scale (Handout 01). In C that means white keys only. The **roman numeral** is the step the chord is built on, and each chord wears that step's color.



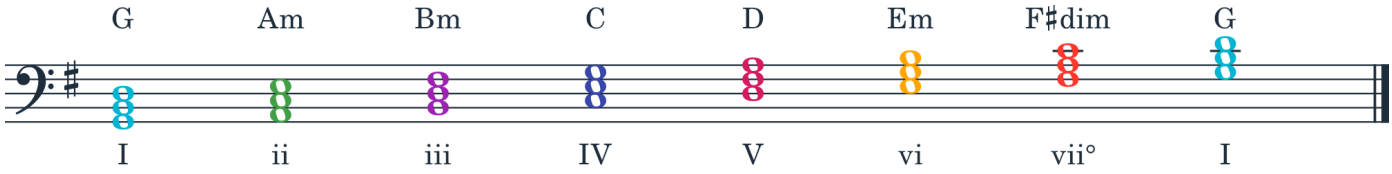
THE NUMERAL TELLS THE QUALITY

A **capital** numeral means a major chord: I, IV, V. A **small** one means minor: ii, iii, vi. Small with a circle means **diminished**: vii°, written B° or Bdim (Handout 209).

Why the mix? The scale's two half steps (Handout 09) make some thirds smaller, and the third decides major or minor.

	I maj	ii min	iii min	IV maj	V maj	vi min	vii° dim
C major no sharps or flats	C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	B°
G major one sharp	G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F♯°
F major one flat	F	Gm	Am	B♭	C	Dm	E°
D major two sharps	D	Em	F♯m	G	A	Bm	C♯°

New key, new letters, same recipe: G major in the bass clef · the F♯ in D and F♯° comes from the key signature



Add a 7th on top and the same steps give Imaj7, ii7, iii7, IVmaj7, V7, vi7 and viiø7 (Handouts 223, 224, 212, 211).

Minor keys have a recipe of their own: i, ii°, III, iv, v, VI, VII; raising the 7th turns v into a major V (Handouts 24, 25, 394).

THREE JOBS: HOME, AWAY, TENSION

Each chord usually does one of three jobs. A stand-in **shares two notes** with its job's main chord, so it can take its place.

Home



A-C-E · C-E-G · E-G-B

I is home base. vi keeps I's C and E, so **V → vi** lands as a surprise: the deceptive cadence (Handout 104).

Away



D-F-A · F-A-C

They lead away from home. Both hold **F and A**, so ii can take IV's place.

Tension



G-B-D · B-D-F

Both hold **B and D**. B leans up into C: both pull you home.

Try it Play the C chord scale up and down, **naming each chord out loud**: C, D minor, E minor… Then play the G major chords in the bass clef. Last, loop **C–Am–F–G** (I–vi–IV–V), then swap F for Dm: I–vi–ii–V. Hear how little changes?

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