The First Open Chords: E, Em, A, Am, C, G and D

Seven chord boxes, read string by string: the notes each shape sounds and the chord tones they spell.

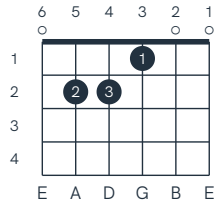
1 · READ THE BOX

Standard tuning, strings 6→1: **E2 · A2 · D3 · G3 · B3 · E4**. Each box shows the neck standing up: the thick line at the top is the nut, string 6 is at the left, and fret numbers run down the left side. × = do not play that string; ○ = play it open; a dot = press there, with the finger shown: 1 index, 2 middle, 3 ring. The octave number shows pitch: C4 is middle C.

These are common fingerings; others exist. G here is 320003 with fingers 2, 1 and 3; it is also often played with fingers 3, 2 and 4.

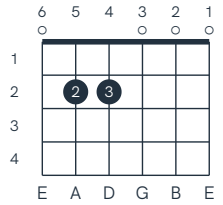
2 · SEVEN SHAPES

E



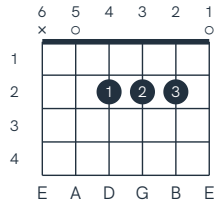
Frets 022100 · strum 6→1
E2 B2 E3 G♯3 B3 E4
Tones: E root · G♯ 3rd · B 5th

Em



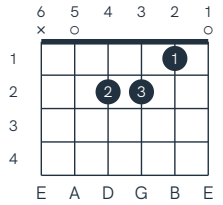
Frets 022000 · strum 6→1
E2 B2 E3 G3 B3 E4
Tones: E root · G 3rd · B 5th

A



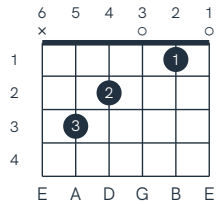
Frets x02220 · strum 5→1
A2 E3 A3 C♯4 E4
Tones: A root · C♯ 3rd · E 5th

Am



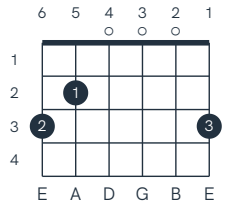
Frets x02210 · strum 5→1
A2 E3 A3 C4 E4
Tones: A root · C 3rd · E 5th

C



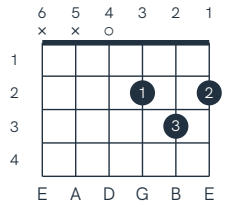
Frets x32010 · strum 5→1
C3 E3 G3 C4 E4
Tones: C root · E 3rd · G 5th

G



Frets 320003 · strum 6→1
G2 B2 D3 G3 B3 G4
Tones: G root · B 3rd · D 5th

D



Frets xx0232 · strum 4→1
D3 A3 D4 F♯4
Tones: D root · F♯ 3rd · A 5th

Where to start

String 6: E, Em, G

String 5: A, Am, C

String 4: D

Strings marked × stay silent.

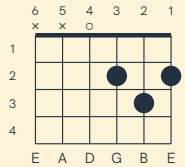
In all seven shapes the lowest string you play sounds the root.

3 · SHAPES THAT SHARE FINGERS

Change	What stays	What moves
Em → E	Fingers 2 and 3 stay down.	Add finger 1 on string 3, fret 1: G3 becomes G♯3, the 3rd.
E → Am	The same three-finger shape, same frets.	Move all three fingers one string toward string 1; strum from string 5.
Am → C	Fingers 1 and 2 stay down.	Finger 3 moves from string 3, fret 2 to string 5, fret 3.
A → Am	No finger stays: the fingers change places.	Only string 2 changes: fret 2 → fret 1, C♯4 becomes C4, the 3rd.

Major or minor: in E/Em and A/Am one string changes, and that string sounds the 3rd. The minor 3rd is a half step lower.

Try it



Which of the seven chords is this box? Work it out string by string before you look back at section 2. Then name the string that sounds the 3rd.

Listen · quarter = 60 · 1–7: each chord's strings one at a time, low to high, then all together.
Synthesized piano pitches and timing, not guitar tone.
Audio after publication: tissimo.co/worksheets/guitar-first-open-chords

Check (rotate sheet): D (xx0232): D3 A3 D4 F♯4; the 3rd, F♯4, is on string 1.

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