# The Primary Chords in C Major
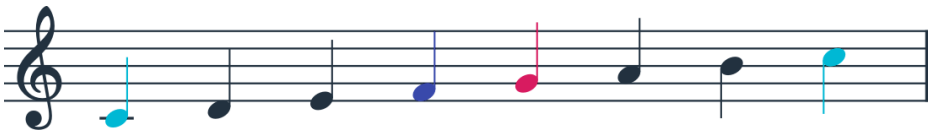
the three chords that can harmonize almost anything — I, IV & V

LISTEN
Scan to hear every example

**Three chords can harmonize almost anything.** Build a chord on degrees 1, 4 and 5 of the C major scale and you get the **primary chords**: **C, F** and **G**. Everything below is in root position; each chord wears its function color:

● 1 · tonic — home ● 4 · subdominant — gentle away ● 5 · dominant — tense away

## DEGREES 1 · 4 · 5

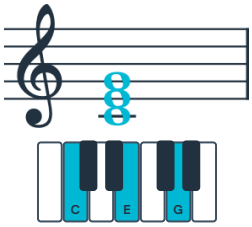


the C major scale with its three anchors colored

## THE THREE-CHORD FAMILY

### I — tonic

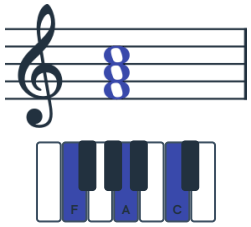
C: C · E · G




settled — where songs start and end

### IV — subdominant

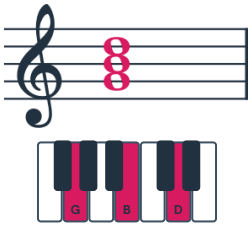
F: F · A · C




a warm step outdoors — no hurry back

### V — dominant

G: G · B · D




leaning hard toward home

## HOW SONGS USE THEM




Home → gentle away → tense away → home. That little journey — **I–IV–V–I** — powers folk songs, hymns, blues and plenty of pop hits. **Three chords are enough to harmonize thousands of songs.**

## THE SAME CHORDS — SMOOTH SHAPES




Root position means jumping. Pianists smooth the jumps out: keep **C** where it is and let every other voice slide to its **nearest chord tone**. IV becomes C · F · A and V tucks in underneath as B · D · G — the same three chords, and your hand barely moves.

**Try it** Loop C → F → G → C slowly with your left hand. Feel how IV **relaxes** where V **leans**. Then play just F → C — the "A-men" ending of many hymns. Play the loop again with the smooth shapes above and feel how little your hand moves.



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