Tonic & dominant: home and away

Every major scale has two anchor notes. Degree **1** is the **tonic** — the home note you already know. Degree **5** is the **dominant** — home's opposite pole. The push and pull between them powers almost all music.

MEET THE TWO POLES



The home note's grown-up name is the **tonic** — degree 1. Count five letters up (C D E F **G**) and you reach the **dominant** — degree 5, the scale's other anchor. Tonic is **home**; dominant is **away** — far enough to create pull, close enough to find the way back.

TWO CHORDS, TWO FEELINGS

The home chord — I

built on the tonic: C · E · G

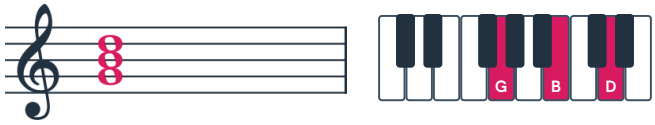
Stack a triad on the tonic and you get the **home chord**. It sounds settled, grounded, done. Musicians label it with a roman numeral: **I**.



The away chord — V

built on the dominant: G · B · D

Stack a triad on the dominant and you get the **away chord**, labeled **V**. Played alone it sounds fine — but after I, it leans. It **wants** to go home.



QUESTION → ANSWER: THE MUSICAL FULL STOP



V asks, I answers. That two-chord move — **away** → **home** — is music's full stop, and it closes a great many of the songs you know. Composers save it for the moments that need to feel **finished**.

Try it Play the home chord C-E-G. Now the away chord G-B-D — and **hang there**. Feel it lean? Land back on C-E-G. You just played one of the most common endings in music. Then sing a song you love and stop on its very last note — chances are you've landed on the tonic.

LISTEN
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