Tissimo

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tissimo.co/worksheets/triads-and-inversions

Triads & their inversions

A **triad** is a chord of three notes stacked in thirds — a **root**, a **third**, and a **fifth**. Every chord you play begins here.

BUILD IT IN THIRDS

Start on any note and stack every other letter of the scale on top — line, line, line or space, space, space on the staff. On C, that gives you **C · E · G**: the C major triad.





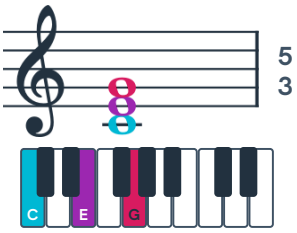
- **Root** — the note the chord is named after.
- **Third** — two letters up; decides major or minor.
- **Fifth** — four letters up; rounds out the chord.

TURN IT OVER — THE INVERSIONS

Any of the three notes can sit on the bottom. The **bass note** — not the order of the notes above it — names the position. Same chord, three shapes:

Root position

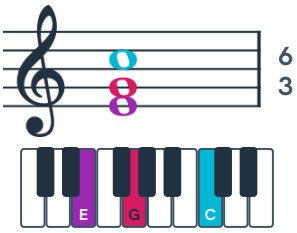
root in the bass



C · E · G — stacked thirds, snowman-style. Figured bass: $^{5}_{3}$ (Handout 388)

First inversion

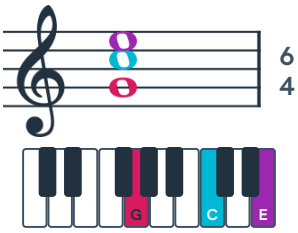
third in the bass



E · G · C — the root moves up an octave. Figured bass: $^{6}_{3}$

Second inversion

fifth in the bass



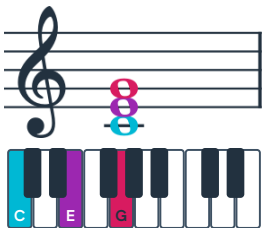
G · C · E — the fifth takes the floor. Figured bass: $^{6}_{4}$ (its jobs: Handout 383)

MAJOR OR MINOR? IT'S THE THIRD

Only the middle note moves. **Lower the third a half step** and the whole color of the chord turns from bright to dark — the root and fifth never budge.

C major

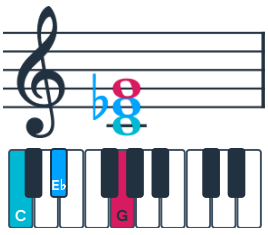
major 3rd + minor 3rd



→ lower the third a half step

C minor

minor 3rd + major 3rd



Try it Play C–E–G, then slide the E down to E♭. That single half step is the entire difference between major and minor. Now keep the same three notes and put E or G on the bottom — you're playing inversions.

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