CHAPTER 2 - HOW TO USE A CUT CAPO

If you've been playing guitar for a while and have made a capo part of your regular arsenal, you may want to up your game a bit by becoming familiar with a cut capo and how it works. The cut capo really is one of those tools that can be a bit of a secret weapon in your setup and once you get a grasp on how they work it will become a tool that you use almost every time you play guitar and lead worship.

The most significant difference between a capo and a cut capo is the number of strings which are pressed down to the fretboard when the capo is applied. With a regular capo, all six strings are pressed down as though you're doing a barre chord. This results in the pitch of every string being raised one semitone for each fret where the capo is applied.



With a cut capo, the arm of the capo is cut – this might be a modified regular capo where the rubber is cut away or it might be like this cut capo that I use from Kyser which actually has a shortened upper arm.

See how the arm of the capo is only pressing down three of the six strings and leaving the low E, B and high E strings open?

What's the result? Instead of having all six strings raised by two semitones with this cut capo placed on the second fret, only the A, D and G strings are raised by two semitones leaving the low E, B and high E strings at their original pitch.

Original tuning:
E A D G B E
Cut capo tuning:
E B E A B E

If you are a guitar tuning freak and like to play with alternate tunings, you might recognize this as a variation of the very popular DADGAD tuning modified up a full tone. DADGAD is really useful in folk, singer/songwriter and Celtic music but can also be used in pop, rock or worship music in a way that adds lots of character to the chord voicings.

So you see that the cut capo just by default lends itself really well to songs which are played in E and can give you some alternate chord voicings to take advantage of this new tuning on your guitar.
A few cut capo chords in the key of E, relative to the capo on the 2nd fret:

E – 000200 or 004200
A – 320000 or 020000
B – x02200
C#m – x20200

Once you get familiar with these you will see that there are all kinds of inversions and beautiful harmonies that happen within these simple chord shapes. Even having that low E, B, E on the first three strings gives your guitar a really nice drone while you are able to play different melodic ideas on the higher strings.

But the cut capo can be used for songs in other keys, obviously. One of my favorite uses of the cut capo is to use it in songs in the key of A. I place the cut capo on the second fret just like before which allows me to use very finger-friendly chords like G, C9, Dsus and Em7 as I play. The beauty of the cut capo is that when I play the Dsus chord (actually sounding like an Esus chord thanks to the capo) I now have the option to let that low E string ring open, giving the chord the sound of a drop D tuning.

Cut capo chords in the key of A with the cut capo on the second fret:
A – 320033 or 3×0000
D – x32033
E – 000232
Esus – 000233
F#m – x22033

This may seem like a simple change and an idea that won't bring much impact to your playing but once you hear the way songs take on a new life when you play, you will see how useful a cut capo can be as a guitar player.

In the next chapter we'll look at some *next level ideas* for the capo and actually how you can use a regular capo and cut capo together at the same time to open up a whole new world of possibilities with your guitar.