

THE JAZZ CHORD BASE

A LOGICAL SYSTEM TO LEARN JAZZ CHORDS
ON THE GUITAR

BY

STEFAN MENS

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INTRODUCTION:

In this course, you will learn to **accompany jazz-songs** on the guitar with an easy, understandable system. Instead of learning hundreds of chords by heart, you will learn to **build the chords** in a logical manner. The theory behind the chords will be explained and **numerous exercises** will support the training of each group of chords.

We guitarists have a problem when learning the instrument. The orientation on the fretboard is rather difficult. Where is the C# on the G-string? Where is the B on the D-string? Facing chord symbols such as Bb7/9/b13 does not make life easier, does it?

How are the pros able to figure out where to play a chord? How can they connect one chord so elegantly with the next one?

These are situations that a guitarist must face on a daily base. Wait! On a daily base? No! Every minute? Not even that: Almost **every second** one has to decide on a chord. This requires a **fast orientation** on the fretboard.

Once you understand the **simple structure of this system** you are free to create your own way of accompanying. There are no limits to it...

The aim of this course is to inspire you to **become a versatile, creative and smooth accompanist** so that the sound of your music and your combo becomes even more transparent and nice to listen to.

But maybe you just want to accompany a soloist or a singer alone, which is exactly what you are going to do in the first few segments.

So grab your guitar and let's get started!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK?

Please make sure to read all roman text (non-italic) in order to learn this chord system.



Nerd-Alert! Italic text with the symbol of the thinking guitarist (see left) contains additional information explaining the theory behind it. These sections are optional and provide in-depth knowledge.



This symbol indicates that there are sound files available on the website www.jazzchordbase.com/the-bootcamp. You will need a password to access the page. It is printed on the next page.

BEER-TIME!

Text in a colored box contains funny anecdotes from the life as a guitarist.

GOAL OF THE COURSE AND REQUIREMENTS

This course teaches the **accompaniment of jazz songs**. The chords are not simply displayed as in a chord table. You are taught to **develop the chords** based on a logical system. This course should enable you to become a great accompanist of an ensemble or a soloist.

Requirements

- You need a **guitar** for this course. It is (with very few exceptions) strummed with a pick.
- You should be somewhat interested in **harmony teaching**.
- **Being able to read music is not necessary** – but reading chord symbols is crucial.
- If you can play normal **open guitar chords**, then you should also be good enough to learn the demonstrated chords of this course.
- To play the audiofiles and the video of the website you need a **computer** or a **tablet** with **internet connection** and **sound**.
- **RECOMMENDED!** Get the App **iRealPro** (www.irealpro.com) – this App accompanies the exercises of this course with a piano, bass and drums. Almost all the exercises can be trained with iRealPro. The downloadable iRealPro-files of the exercises can be imported into the App. To install the exercises into iRealPro please read the following instructions.

iREALPRO

is available at the AppStore (Mac, iPhone, iPad) or at Google Play (Android). It runs on iPhone, iPad, a Mac or on an Android Smartphone. If you have a windows computer, you can get information on how to install iRealPro on your machine by navigating to this webpage: <http://www.irealpro.com/windows/>

After you've installed the App, go to www.jazzchordbase.com/the-bootcamp (password is on the next page). Click on "The Jazz Chord Base Exercises.html". Now a new webpage opens and on top of it there is a blue link called "The Jazz Chord Base Exercises".

Click on it and after the download of the file the exercises will be installed on your device (you must download the file onto the device that has iRealPro installed).

Go to "Playlists" in iRealPro now and you should find an entry called "**The Jazz Chord Base Exercises**". In this playlist you will find the exercises listed with their title and number.

Training with iRealPro is great because you can adjust your own tempo. And it's more fun to play with this virtual band than just playing along with a metronome!

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

This course is divided into 6 sections:

Section A: The basic principle and common knowledge

This section explains the basic structure of this system. It also gives information on basic knowledge on how to read chord symbols. In the second part the tones on the low E-string and on the A-string are explained. An advanced guitarist can skip this chapter.

Section B: 7th chords as triads, including the root

You will learn the basic structure of chords. Only the most important notes of the chords will be played: The root, the third and the seventh.

Section C: 7th chords with four voices, including the root

Based on the structure of chords from section B you complete your chords now with cool tension notes. After completing this section, you are able to accompany soloists on your own.

Section D: 7th chords with two voices, without root

As a pre-stage to accompanying without root it is helpful to learn the basic structure of the chords without root and without tension notes. The biggest challenge here is the orientation on the fretboard.

Section E: 7th chords as triads or as chords with four voices, without root note

Dropping the root results in a better sound of your band because you will not double the bass or the left hand of the pianist. On top of it, you can use more tension notes or improve the voicing of the chords.

Section F: The guitarist as arranger

This section covers many different philosophical aspects of being an accompanist. Playing in an ensemble or an orchestra is different than playing in a duo.

THE AUDIO FILES

While practicing you should listen to the soundfiles from the website mentioned below. These files can be played directly in your browser. First you will hear a performance of the exercise followed by one or two choruses without guitar for you to play along.

On the website you can also find a link to download the exercises for import into iRealPro (see box on the previous page).

Let's head to www.jazzchordbase.com/the-bootcamp. To access this page you will need a password. It is:

XXXXXX

THE ONLINE COURSE

Would you like to see how the exercises are played? Then the online course is for you. The online version of the Jazz Chord Base demonstrates all the exercises and the theoretical background is explained in the videos.

You can find the online course at www.udemy.com/the-jazz-chord-base. (Access to the online course is not included in the purchase of the standard version of this book).

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SECTION A: THE BASIC PRINCIPLE AND COMMON KNOWLEDGE

THE BASIC PRINCIPLE

Actually, it is not that difficult to find your way in the jungle of all these chords.

You only need to know two things:

WHERE is the root note? And **WHAT** do I have to play at the position of that root note?

WHERE IS THE ROOT NOTE?

You only need to know the names of the notes on the E- and the A-string.

Therefore, you need to memorize **two versions** of each chord:

- Chord shapes with the root on the **E**-string (**E-shape**)
- Chord shapes with the root on the **A**-string (**A-shape**)

If you are not very familiar with the names of the notes or if you don't know their positions on the fretboard, then a precise study of the next chapter: "Basic Knowledge: The Names of the Notes" is highly recommended.

It would be sufficient to learn only the E-shapes because you can find all the root notes on the E-string. This, however, would force you to move your left hand up and down the neck to the appropriate places a lot. This has two major disadvantages:

1. Changing positions of the left hand is demanding. In such a case you would have to perform big movements, which not only requires a lot of energy, but also increases the risk of hitting wrong notes.
2. Shifting chords in parallel will sound weak. An elegant voice leading sounds much better.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO PLAY AT THE POSITION OF THE ROOT NOTE??

The most used three chord classes are:

- The 7-chord (i.e. C7)
- The Major7-chord (i.e. Fmaj7)
- The Minor7-chord (i.e. Dm7)

Because each of these chords can be played with two different shapes (**E-shape**, root on E-string and **A-shape**, root on A-string) you only have to memorize **six** different shapes for the time being.

Of course, the rarer chords will be described in this course later on, but let's focus on the three most common chords first.

Conclusion: You only need to know two basic things to play chords in jazz.

- **Where?** How are the notes on the E- and the A-string called and where are they on the fretboard?
- **What?** How do these six shapes look like?

That's it! With this basic knowledge you will be able to play **90% of all chords** that appear in jazz tunes. Isn't this fantastic? See you at the jam session joint next week.

LESSON 1: THE THEORY BEHIND IT



In jazz we use mainly **four note chords**. Each of these notes fulfills a particular function within a chord:

The Root: This note determines the **pitch** of a chord.

The Third: This note determines the **mode** of the chord (Major or Minor mode).

The Fifth: This note has **no influence** on the character of a chord. Therefore, this note is often dropped.

Exceptions: chords that don't use a perfect fifth (i.e. half-diminished, diminished or augmented chords).

The Seventh: This note determines if a chord is a 7 or Major7 chord.

Conclusion: Each chord must contain three important notes: **Root, Third und Seventh**.

Good to know: Each chord may be played in different inversions (different notes as bass notes). In common jazz harmony teaching these inversions are numbered (1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th inversion) or they may be named after their top notes ("Third-", "Fifth-", "Seventh-" or "Eight-position") depending on which note is the top note of the chord.

The inversions are no subject of this course. This course handles a concept that will help you to find a better orientation on the fretboard and locate suitable chords.

If you are an advanced player and if you already know the names of the notes and their positions on the E- and the A-string, you may skip the next chapter and proceed directly to
"SECTION B: 7TH CHORDS AS TRIADS, INCLUDING THE ROOT".

BASIC KNOWLEDGE: THE NAMES OF THE NOTES

This chapter covers the question: **WHERE** on the fretboard is the root of a chord?

LESSON 2: THE SCALE

You need to know the scale. It is built like the alphabet:

C - D - E - F - G - A - B

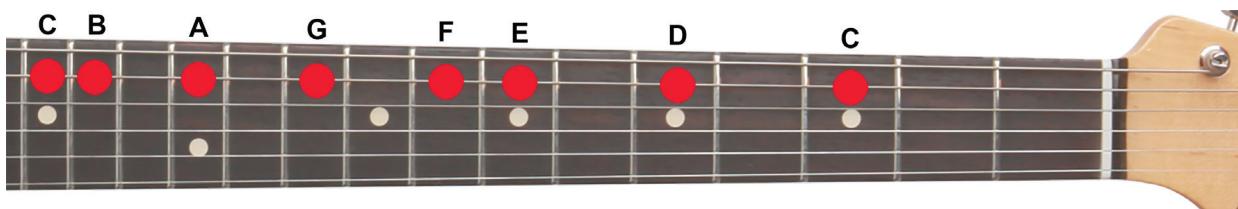


Wait – does the alphabet not start with "A-B-C"? Why is this scale starting with C?

A scale A-B-C-D-E-F-G is a minor scale. C-D-E-F-G-A-B is a major scale. Music teaching starts with major scales and chords and that's why the initial description of the scale is usually taught by starting with C.

The names of the notes of the C-major scale are:

Almost all of these notes are one whole note (*a major second*) apart, which means two frets on the guitar. If you want to play this scale on the guitar, you need to hit the following positions:



As you can see: Two intervals of these notes are only one fret apart. This distance is called a semitone (*a small second*). You can see the difference of the intervals even better on the fretboard (see picture above) than in written music.

Important: The semitones are between **E – F** and **B – C**.

Unfortunately, this does not cover all notes there are. How are the missing notes (the ones that are between the ones with the red dots in the picture above) called?

This is where the **accidentals** come into play.

THE FLAT ♭

The flat lowers a note by a semitone. An E with a flat becomes an E-flat (Eb or E♭).

It is played one fret lower on the fretboard.

A scale including all notes (including semitones) with flats looks as follows:

C D-flat D E-flat E F-flat F G G-flat G A-flat A B-flat B C-flat C

E and Fb sound the same, so do B and Cb.

THE SHARP

The #(sharp) augments the tone by a semitone. An F with a # becomes an F# (in words: F-sharp). It is played one fret higher on the fretboard than the note without the #.

A scale including all notes (including semitones) with sharps looks as follows:

C C-sharp D D-sharp E E-sharp F F-sharp G G-sharp A A-sharp B B-sharp C

E# and F sound the same, so do B# and C.

BEER-TIME!

TWITTER APPEARS IN MUSIC LESSONS:

A teacher explains the accidentals to his student.

“A flat in front of a note means that this note is played a semitone lower” he says.

The student nods.

Teacher: “A sharp in front of a note augments the pitch by a semitone.”

Student: “Sharp? That’s no sharp! It’s a hashtag!”

#teacher #has #no #response #to #that #and #declares: F-sharp becomes now F-hashtag, C-sharp is C-hashtag! Great!

THE NATURAL SIGN

A natural sign (\natural) resets a note with an accidental to its pitch without the accidental. It is valid for the whole bar in which it is written. Check these examples:



The image shows three staves of musical notation. Staff 1 starts with a treble clef, two sharps, and a common time signature. It contains notes D, F-sharp, F, F, F, and F-sharp. Staff 2 starts with a treble clef, one flat, and a common time signature. It contains notes C, E-flat, E, E, E, and E-flat. Staff 3 starts with a treble clef, two sharps, and a common time signature. It contains notes D, F-sharp, F, F-sharp, F, C, E-flat, E, E-flat, and E. Below each staff, note numbers 1 through 12 are placed under each note.

Explanations:

Bar 1: It's an F#, because the accidentals at the beginning of the stave say: All F's are now F#'s.

Bar 2: It's an F, because it has a \natural .

The last note in bar 3: It's an F, because the \natural is valid for one bar.

The last note in bar 4: It's an F#, because it has a $\#$. It must have this $\#$, otherwise the \natural would still be in effect.

The same rules apply for the 2nd staff where \flat 's are used.

Bar 10: The first note is an F#, because the previous \natural is only valid for the bar in which it is written.

This note is in a new bar.

Bar 12: This is the same case as in bar 10. The first note would not need the accidental. But good notations show it for better readability.

Now you know the names of all the notes. But how can I find them on the fretboard?

LESSON 3: WHERE ARE THESE NOTES ON THE GUITAR STRINGS?

In your first guitar lesson, you probably learned the names of the strings. Their names are (starting from the lowest string):

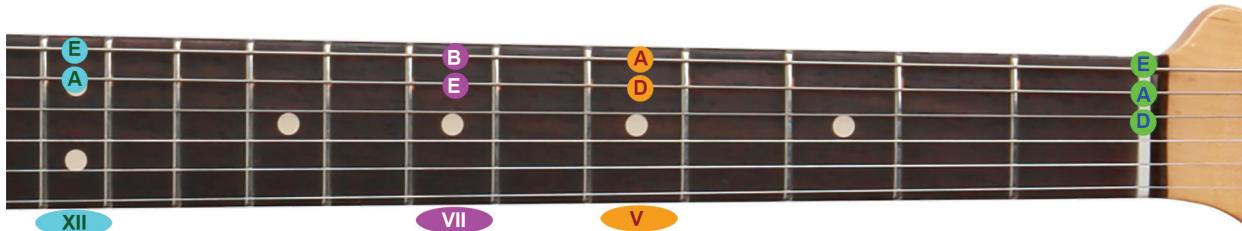
E - A - D - G - B - E

We are only interested in the **lowest two strings** for now: The E- and the A-string. You must know the notes on both of these strings to be able to accompany songs.

Now that you know the order of the notes and the names of the strings, you could, theoretically, simply count each note from the name of its string. However, this would require a lot of time and would prevent you from accompanying a piece in reasonable time.

A way to circumvent this issue is to memorize the **three most important places** on your fretboard:

- Fret XII:** The Octave (Eight). The note on the XIIth fret is called **exactly the same as the open string.** (For example: The note at fret XII on the A-string is an A.)
- Fret V:** This note is called the same as the **neighboring higher open string.** (The note on fret V on the E-string is an A because the next higher string to the E-string is the A-string).
- Fret VII:** This note is called the same as the **neighboring lower string.** (The note on fret VII on the A-string is an E because the next lower string to the A-string is the E-string.)



If you search for a note, then don't count from the open string. **Count** from its **nearest, most important place.**

An example: Search the F on the A-string: As you know, it is one semitone higher than the E. The E is on fret VII on the A-string. Therefore, the F is one fret higher. The F on the A-string is on fret VIII.

Exercise to memorize the notes on the two lowest strings

- Search the A on the E-string (Tip: The A is at one of the three most important places.)
- Search the D on the E-string (Tip: The D is very close to E)
- Search the F on the E – String
- Search the C on the E – String (Tip: The C is only 3 frets away from one of the three most important places!)
- Search the E on the A – String (Tip: The E is on one of the three most important places!)
- Search the F on the A – String (You just looked for the E! Then the F must be very close!)
- Search the G on the A – String
- Search the C on the A – String

Let's make this exercise slightly more difficult. Now we add semitones.

Each note has two places. You can find each note either on the A- or the E-string.

Here's an example: First, play the A on the A-string and then on the E-string. Then proceed to C#, and so on.

- A, C#, D, G, Bb, F, E, F#, Gb - Which of these tones sound the same? And which ones are one octave apart?

Remember: Don't count from the open strings. Instead, use the three most important places.

Goal: You can find each note within one second.

If you can do that, then you are ready for the chords. If you can't, keep practicing.

You know now **WHERE** to find any note on the two lowest strings on the fretboard. That was not that hard, was it?

Let's focus on **WHAT** to play at these places: the chords. And within no time will you be able to accompany your first few songs.

SECTION 8: 7TH CHORDS AS TRIADS, INCLUDING THE ROOT

HOW TO READ CHORD SYMBOLS

In the history of Jazz many ways of writing down the chord symbols have changed or are influenced by local traditions, etc.

Chord symbols work as follows:

- **Root:** The first letter indicated the root of the chord (i.e.: C, E, G, F#, ...)
- **Mode:** The letter m or the symbol “-“ indicates that this chord is in the mode of Minor. If there is no m or “-“, then the chord is in the mode of Major. Chords with the abbreviation “sus4” (suspended fourth) do not have a third but a fourth instead.
- **Seventh:** In Jazz almost every chord is 4-voiced, so every chord has a 7(or a 6). If you see a chord without the “7”, then it’s just a simple triad.
- **Fifth:** If the fifth is not an open fifth, then this is indicated with either an accidental or the abbreviations “dim”, “aug” or other symbols (“o”).
- **Tensions:** Additional tensions notes are indicated by numbers following the chord symbol
- **Different Bass tone:** If the bass tone should differ from the root then it is written below the root letter or next to it with a slash (“/”).

Chord-Class	Spelling
Dominant 7 or 7	C7, C ⁷
Minor7	CM7, CM ⁷ , C-7
Major7	CMMA7, CM ^{MA7} , C ^j 7, CΔ ⁷
Suspended 4	C7sus4, C ^{7(sus4)}
Minor7 with diminished 5 th	CM7(b5), CM7 ^{b5} , C-7 ^{b5} , C ^ø 7
Diminished	CoIM7, C ^ø 7
Dominant 7 with augmented 5 th	C7 AUG, C ^{7#5} , C+

"Sixt – ajoutée", 6	$C6, C^6$
Minor with a major7	$Cm^{Maj7}, C^{-Maj7}, Cm^{\Delta7}, C^{-\Delta7}$
Tensions	$C7/9, C^{Maj7(411)}$
Different Bass tone	$C7/E, \overline{E}$

THE THREE BASIC CHORDS

In jazz songs, you will find mostly 7th-**Minor⁷** and **Major⁷**-chords. There are many songs that have only these kinds of chords. They are not that difficult. In this chapter, you'll get to know **six chord-shapes**: For each chord-type there are two shapes: The one with its root on the E-string and the one with the root on the A-string.

From Section A you now know the names of the tones on the lower two strings on the guitar. You will see: Very soon you will be able to accompany your first few songs.



As explained in the introduction: In jazz we always use 4-voice chords. We always add the seventh to any normal major or minor triad. Depending on the wish of the composer or the harmonic context, you have to add a major or minor seventh.

A simple jazz-chord always consists of:

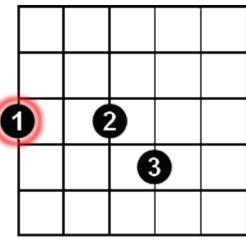
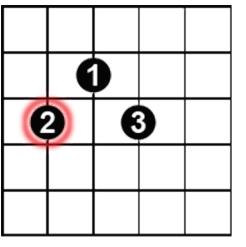
- **Root:** determines the pitch, i.e., C, G, F, Ab or D#, etc.
- **Third:** determines the mode (major or minor) of the chord
- **Fifth:** determines nothing if the basic chord contains a perfect fifth
- **Seventh:** determines if the chord is a dominant 7th or a major 7 chord

That's why we start with chords that only contain Root – Third – Seventh. With these three notes the character of the chord is defined.

LESSON 4: THE 7 (DOMINANT 7) CHORD

Spelling: C7, C⁷

Here are your first two shapes: The 7 chord.

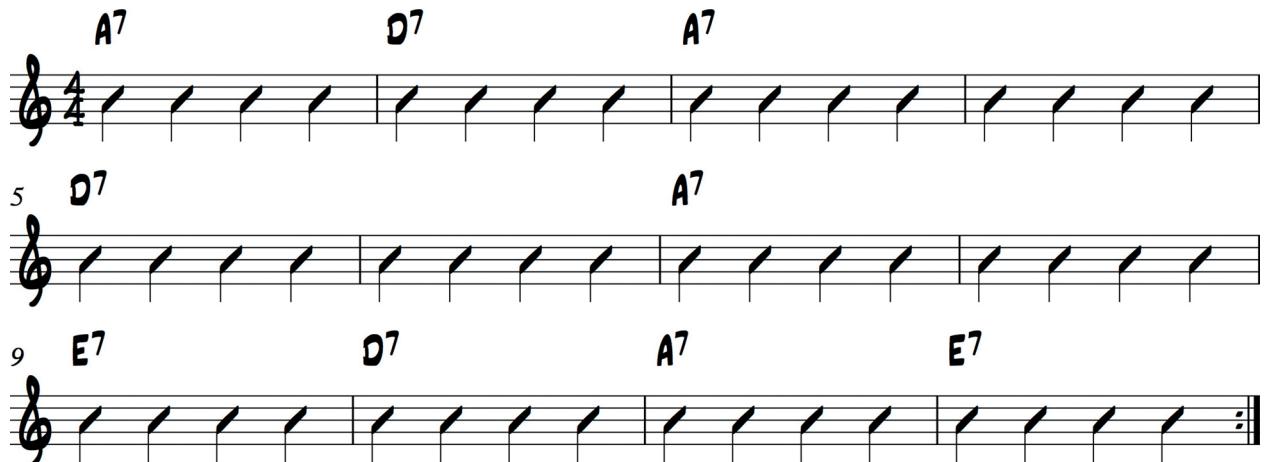
7 (E-shape)	7 (A-shape)
 	 

Playing technique:

It is very important that we only hear the notes that you press on the fretboard. That means you must damp all the open strings that are not pressed down. You can achieve this by holding the fingers of your left hand very flat. Those fingers must damp the open strings in a way that they are muted when you strum over all six strings. To damp the low E-string you can use the thumb of your left hand.

Exercise 1: 7 in a Blues in A

Play this blues with the new shapes:



Which shape did you use in the first bar? Was it the A-shape? Try the same thing, but use the other shape (E-shape) in the first bar.

You could play this blues by moving the same shape up and down the neck, which would result in a bad voice leading. Instead, try to **avoid big movements** of your left hand. Making small movements is easier in the long run and it helps reduce the risk of playing wrong notes.

Example: Changing from A7 to D7 sounds much better if you use E-shape (fret V) and then change to A-shape (fret V) instead of simply dragging the initial E-shape up to fret X.

Listen to both versions. The audiofiles are called:

 «Exercise 1 – 7 in a Blues in A with A-Shape»

 «Exercise 1 – 7 in a Blues in A with E-Shape»