

# Acoustic Guitar Chords

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...to Richard Pierce, my nephew, my correspondent, and my inspiration

## **introduction**

This chord study is so named because it is a guide to developing an extensive and serviceable vocabulary of chords for playing a steel string acoustic guitar, more commonly known as an acoustic guitar. Rock and jazz guitar music are normally played on an electric guitar, and employ somewhat different chord vocabularies than the one detailed in this study. Classical and flamenco guitar music are normally played on a classical (nylon string) guitar, and likewise employ somewhat different chord vocabularies. Country guitar music is normally played either on an acoustic guitar or on an electric guitar. Most other types of guitar music (especially folk, folk/rock, singer/songwriter, and traditional) are normally played on a steel string acoustic guitar. All three types of guitars are used for popular music, but since the steel string acoustic is the most adaptable of the three to a wide variety of musical styles and genres, it is used with the greatest frequency on recordings and in the performance of popular music. In fact, the steel string guitar can be used effectively to play virtually any type of guitar music, including jazz, rock, classical, and flamenco. Nevertheless, chords that are specific to these musical genres have for the most part not been included in this chord study.

My task in developing this chord study was to analyze, organize, and systematize the large vocabulary of chord fingerings used for the two catalogs of popular music for which I have developed song charts. The 144 songs in the Compatibility Catalog called for more than 450 different chord fingerings. The Popular Music Catalog, consisting of 120 songs based on steel string acoustic guitar, only called for about half as many chord fingerings. However, about 85 of the Popular Music Catalog fingerings were not used for the Compatibility Catalog, which brought the total number of chord fingerings used to play both catalogs to well over 500. By means of collating and analyzing these chord

fingerings, I determined that they could be reduced, at least for the most part, to a total of 21 different types of chords. I further determined that chords based on natural note roots (for example, C or G) were used with much greater frequency than those based on non-natural note roots (for example, Eb or G#), and were also generally much easier to play. These two determinations largely defined the shape and scope of this study.

Of the 21 chord types, 10 are Major related (Major, 7<sup>th</sup>, Major 7<sup>th</sup>, suspended, 7 suspended, 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, Major 9<sup>th</sup>, Augmented, and 7<sup>th</sup> with an Augmented 5<sup>th</sup>), 7 are minor related (minor, minor 7<sup>th</sup>, diminished, diminished 7<sup>th</sup>, minor 7<sup>th</sup> with a diminished 5<sup>th</sup>, minor 6<sup>th</sup>, and minor 9<sup>th</sup>), and 4 are by definition neither Major nor minor in character (modal chords, 5<sup>th</sup> chords, added note chords, and chords above a given bass note). These chord types are discussed at some length further along in this chord study. In the all-important chord fingering chapters that follow, specific chord fingerings, based on 6 of the 7 natural notes (A, C, D, E, F, and G), are given for 27 types of chords (including two types of added note chords, and six types of chords above a given bass note). Multiple chord fingerings are given for most chords, and special consideration is given to chord inversions (chord fingerings in which the lowest note, or bass note, is not the root of the chord). In addition, chord fingerings that are movable (can be moved intact up and down the fretboard), and chord fingerings that can be played above a barre (which is made by fretting multiple strings with the index finger laid flat across the fretboard), have been so noted.

It has been assumed in this chord study that the use of movable chord fingerings and barre chord forms is essentially how chords that are based on and named by non-natural note roots (and chords based on a B root) are fashioned. However, there are also numerous unique and useful fingerings for many such chords, a number of which are discussed in the corresponding

chord fingering chapters (for example, specific C# or Db fingerings are included in the C,c fingerings chapter, and so on). All of the more than 900 chord fingerings contained in this study (including about 350 movable chords and about 120 barre chord forms) are given in the same table format used for the chord docs for the two aforementioned catalogs. My preference in both instances would have been chord diagrams in addition to the table format, but as I am unable to produce chord diagrams other than by hand, the table format will have to suffice. If you are more comfortable working with chord diagrams (specifically, if you find that chord diagrams make it easier for you to visualize and learn to play chord fingerings), you should construct your own chord diagrams. You can do so by printing and making use of the chord diagram worksheet provided in the appendix, which is identical to a blank sheet of guitar TAB, and consists of staves (groupings) of six parallel lines.

As you work through the six chord fingering chapters, making use of chord diagram worksheets to diagram specific chords that you are most interested in learning, and to which you are most attracted, is an excellent way to obtain the maximum benefit from this chord study. It is also important to consider that the extensive and very detailed descriptions in the chord fingering chapters of the various chord fingerings presented in table format are not essential to making use of this chord study. In other words, it is also possible to skip the verbal portions of the chord fingering chapters entirely, and instead concentrate solely on the chord fingerings. One final note of importance regarding obtaining the maximum benefit from this chord study is the fact that, apart from the obvious benefit of working through this chord study in its entirety, this chord study is designed for use as a reference source that can be used to research and evaluate alternative fingerings for specific chords. This essential feature is facilitated by the page links provided in the table of contents to the three sections of each of the six chord fingering chapters.