

# An Introduction to Understanding and Locating Basic Triads

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Understanding and locating triads is important for good guitar playing, be it rhythm or improvising. This lesson presents the basic major triad for a starting point. The basic major triad consists of the first, third, and fifth notes of the major scale (every other note starting with the root note). The same principles will apply to basic minor triads except they are based on the first, flatted third and fifth notes of the minor scale. We will work in the key of G Major for this handout. The student is encouraged to transpose to all keys and familiarize themselves.

## There are only three chord shapes to memorize – E, A and D.

In the key of G, the first major triad on the top three strings will start with B (the 3<sup>rd</sup>), D (the 5<sup>th</sup>), and G (the root) on strings 3,2 and 1. This is the E shape. We will ascend then ascend to the next triad by finding D on the third string, G on the second string and B on the first string. This is the D shape. Then we will ascend to G on the third string, B on the second string and D on the first string. This is the A shape. We will then ascend to repeat our first triad (the E shape) an octave higher. These are called inversions. In musical terminology the first inversion starts on the root (first) note of the scale, the second inversion starts on the third note of the scale, and the third inversion starts on the fifth note of the scale. In the following example we will start with the second inversion, then third, then first, and end with the second inversion an octave higher:

Musical notation for the first set of triads in G major. The notation consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time and a guitar tablature staff below it. The treble staff shows four measures of music with chord symbols 1, 2, 3, and 4 above the notes. The tablature staff shows the fret numbers for each string (T, A, B) for each measure.

Measure	1	2	3	4
Treble Staff	B <sup>3</sup> , D <sup>5</sup> , G <sup>1</sup>	D <sup>3</sup> , G <sup>2</sup> , B <sup>1</sup>	G <sup>3</sup> , B <sup>2</sup> , D <sup>1</sup>	B <sup>12</sup> , D <sup>13</sup> , G <sup>14</sup>
Tablature	3, 3, 4	7, 8, 7	10, 12, 12	15, 15, 16

Now... let's find the next grouping of inversions on the next string set. Locate the highest note in measure 1 (G) and find it on the D string. We will repeat this process for every measure and discover new combinations and shapes in descending registers:

Musical notation for the second set of triads in G major. The notation consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time and a guitar tablature staff below it. The treble staff shows four measures of music with chord symbols 1, 2, 3, and 4 above the notes. The tablature staff shows the fret numbers for each string (T, A, B) for each measure.

Measure	1	2	3	4
Treble Staff	B <sup>3</sup> , D <sup>5</sup> , G <sup>1</sup>	D <sup>3</sup> , G <sup>2</sup> , B <sup>1</sup>	G <sup>3</sup> , B <sup>2</sup> , D <sup>1</sup>	B <sup>12</sup> , D <sup>13</sup> , G <sup>14</sup>
Tablature	3, 4, 5	8, 7, 9	12, 12, 12	15, 16, 17

Voila! Now we have inversions 1,2,3 and 1 an octave higher on the D,G & B strings. Let's continue to the next two string sets. Now we will locate the top note of inversion 1 (the D or 5 note) on the A string and repeat the process for the remainder of the inversions:

Those were inversions 3, 1 and 2. We have one more set of inversions to go. NOTE: The triads above on the A, D & G strings tend to sound muddy due so be careful with these. They may be too muddy to use when

T				
A	4	7	12	16
B	5	9	12	17
B	5	10	14	17

playing rhythm with others, but they may fit on occasion. The triads on the E, A and D strings may sound “muddier” due to the low register and will fit on fewer occasions. However, all lower register triads will come in handy when improvising. Handy tools to have in the toolbox. On to our last string set:

T				
A	5	9	12	17
B	5	10	14	17
B	7	10	15	19

Take the time to incorporate these basic shapes into your playing. They will serve you well. The more you study these, the more you will begin to ‘see’ the fretboard. Once you understand this concept you can incorporate this methodology into locating and ‘seeing’ all kinds of chords. Other triads will include “sus”, augmented and diminished triads. When improvising this knowledge will often come in handy. Beautiful lines can be crafted by mixing triads, other arpeggios and scales.