

# eVirtuoso-Online Lessons

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## Chords Lesson 3

### Chord Progressions

Chord Progressions are very popular and a strong foundation for many instruments and songs. Any chords combined together in an intro, verse, chorus, bridge, etc. becomes a chord progression. This movement builds a foundation for a song's harmony and sometimes rhythm too. Some chord progressions derive from a scale, and the notes in that scale help build chords and chord progressions, just like the harmonized scales from the scale's section previously discussed.

For example, a Blues style song in the Key of A (A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#) has a variety of options constructing the chord progression. It could use a simple I-IV-V (A, D, E) chord progression, which is commonly used in 12-bar Blues. Dominant seventh chords are great chord substitutes in Blues chord progressions, turning I-IV-V into I7-IV7-V7 (A7, D7, E7). Blues progressions can be expanded to give a jazzier sound with a ii-V-I in the turnaround (Bm-E7-A). Minor chords can also be substituted, such as i-iv-V7 (Am, Dm, E7). A quick change Blues chord progression would use I-IV-I-I, IV-IV-I-I, V-IV-I-V. The following table 1 demonstrates these chord progression options.

Quick Change 12-Bar Blues in A							
A7	/	/	/	E7	/	/	/
D7	/	/	/	D7	/	/	/
E7	/	/	/	D7	/	/	/
A7	/	/	/	A7	/	/	/
A7	/	/	/	A7	/	/	/
A7	/	/	/	Bm	E7	A7	/

Table 1 - Quick change 12-bar blues chord progression

A common backdoor chord substitution replaces the V chord with the chord a minor third interval above it. So, an E chord (V) would be replaced with a G7 chord (bVII7).

Basic Jazz chord progressions are based on a ii-V-I progression. This progression also sounds great with dominant seventh chords, ii7-V7-I7 (Bm7-E7-A7). Here is another interesting chord progression, I-#Idim-ii-V7 (A-A#dim-Bm-E7), a diminished cliché progression. Figure 1 below demonstrates this progression.

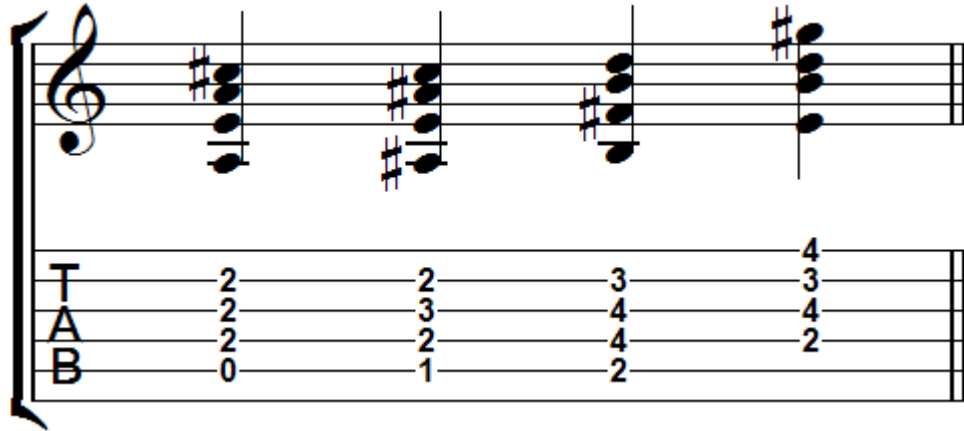


Figure 1 - A-A#dim-Bm-E7 diminished cliché progression

Chords are commonly combined to create ascending and descending chord progressions. An ascending progression example is iii-IV-V (C#m-D-E), and a descending progression is I-vii-vi (A-G#dim-F#m). A standard Rock n' Roll style song could use an ascending chord progression like this, I-IV-V (A, D, E). A great Flamenco style descending chord progression is i-bVII-bVI-V (Am, G, F, E). An ascending Flamenco chord progression example is i-bII-bIII (Am-Bb-C). Notice the direction of the step numbers to help determine if the chord progression is ascending or descending.

Motionless chord progressions can be enhanced using bass runs and Chromatic Embellishment of Static Harmony (CESH). For example, playing a D major chord for several measures is a motionless chord progression because there is no motion or change in the chord progression. Instead, try a D/C#-D/C-D/B-D/Bb descending bass run to add more variety and interest. CESH chord progressions have a half step chromatic movement in them. For example, try a chord progression like this, Cm-Cm(maj7)-Cm7-Cm6, a CESH descending chromatic movement. This CESH movement comes from the change in chord type, not in the chord's root note. This example's chromatic movement is C (min), B (maj7), Bb (m7), A (m6), which descends a half step with each chord change. Instead of just playing a C chord by itself, try a C ascending augmented progression, C-Caug-C6 (Am7)-C7. Notice in many of these examples the simple half step chromatic movements, changing one note in the chord progression at a time. These examples work great to add a degree of movement to the otherwise motionless chord progressions. Figure 2 demonstrates the Cm-Cm(maj7)-Cm7-Cm6 chord progression.

Cm      Cm(maj7)      Cm7      Cm6

T	4	4	4	4
A	5	4	3	2
B	5	5	5	5
	3	3	3	3

Figure 2 - Cm-Cm(maj7)-Cm7-Cm6 chord progression

Chord progressions can also utilize chromatic movements called Passing Chords. For example, in a V-IV chord progression using the C major scale, use the Gb chord as a passing chord between the G and F chord change. The passing chord is creating a chromatic movement from the G chord to the F chord.

Another chord progression example, called Pedal Point, uses a common note between all chords to create a sustained tone. For example, the C, Em, and Am chords share the E note. The E note is also the third note in the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B). The figure 3 example below shows these three chords with the E note as the highest pitch note. This common note creates a smooth chord transition between these three chords.

T	0	0	0
A	1	0	1
B	0	0	2
	2	2	2
	3		0

Figure 3 - Pedal Point C, Em, Am Chord Example

Chord progressions are also used to close a song or a particular section with Cadences. Cadences most commonly resolve (brings a sense of closure) back to the tonic note or chord. Chord

resolution occurs because every chord has a different feeling of tension and release with the tonic chord.

The next few examples will use the major scale. The first cadence is the Authentic Cadence, a V-I chord change. With major scales, the fifth (V) step chord resolves to the first (I) step chord best because it contains the seventh step note, which is a leading note up to the root note. This creates a strong feeling of resolution. So, in the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B), the fifth step chord is G (G-B-D), and G has the leading note B. Substituting the G chord with G7 (G-B-D-F) also resolves very nicely to the root note because the seventh step note F leads to the root chord's third step, which is the E note in the C root chord (C-E-G). Since the leading note B resolves to the root note C, the B diminished (B-D-F) and B diminished seventh (B-D-F-G#) chords also resolve nicely to the C chord, although they are not authentic cadences. Figure 4 below shows these cadences.

	G	C	G7	C	Bdim	C	Bdim7	C
T	3	0	1	0	3	0	3	0
A	0	1	0	1	4	1	1	1
B	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0
E	0	2	0	2	3	2	3	2
	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3

Figure 4 - Authentic cadences

When the fourth (IV) step chord resolves to the root chord, it is called Plagal Cadence. This resolution feels like it should raise to the V chord, but instead resolves down to the I chord. A Double Plagal Cadence adds a flat seventh (bVII) step major chord before the IV chord. Using the C major scale, the chords would be Bb (bVII or IV of the IV), F (IV), and C (I). A Minor Plagal Cadence is a iv-I chord change, such as Fm to C. An example of a backdoor dominant chord substitution would be replacing the iv chord with a bVII7 chord, such as replacing Fm with Bb7 in the key of C. These examples are shown below with figure 5.

The image displays a musical progression for plagal cadences. The top staff is a treble clef with chords: F, C, Bb, F, C, Fm, C, Bb7, C. The bottom staff shows guitar fretting for strings T, A, B with fingerings: (1,1,3), (0,1,2), (3,3,1), (1,1,3), (0,1,2), (1,1,3), (0,1,2), (3,3,1), (1,1,3), (0,1,2).

Figure 5 - Plagal cadences

Some chords resolve nicely to the fifth step (V) chord. These are Half Cadences. The second step and fourth step chords can resolve to the fifth step chord. The ii-V-I leads us to our jazzy chord progression, and the I-IV-V leads us to our blues progression. Lastly, the vi chord (Am) resolves to the ii chord (Dm) because the vi chord is the dominant or fifth step of the ii chord (just like the ii step is the dominant of the V step).

Cadences are also often used in Turnarounds, repeating back to a section of music. For example, turnarounds are used at the end of 12-bar blues, the last two measures. This makes it easier on the listener's ear to hear when the song is going back to the beginning of a particular section. One popular turnaround is the Imaj7-vi7-ii7-V7 (Cmaj7-Am7-Dm7-G7). Often, the dominant seventh chord is substituted with a tritone, such as replacing G7 with Db7. This tritone substitution has two common notes between the two chords, B and F. This Db7 chord is also acting as a passing chord to the C chord. Figure 6 below demonstrates this turnaround.

Cmaj7   Am7   Dm7   G7

T	0	0	1	1
A	0	1	1	0
B	0	0	2	0
	2	2	0	0
	3	0		2
				3

Figure 6 - Cmaj7-Am7-Dm7-G7 turnaround

The previous examples used the major scale notes for all the chord progressions. Here are a few examples using some other common scales like the minor, harmonic minor, and melodic minor scales.

Try these chord progressions from the minor scale; (V - IV - I), (bVII - IV - I), (bVI - bVII - I), (IV - bVII - I), (bVI - V - I), (IV - V - I).

Minor Chord Progressions		
V / / /	IV / / /	I / / /
bVII / / /	IV / / /	I / / /
bVI / / /	bVII / / /	I / / /
IV / / /	bVII / / /	I / / /
bVI / / /	V / / /	I / / /
IV / / /	V / / /	I / / /

Table 2 - Minor chord progression examples

Try these chord progressions from the harmonic minor scale; (IV - V - I), (V - IV - I), (bVI - V - I), (V - bVI - I).

Harmonic Minor Chord Progressions		
IV / / /	V / / /	I / / /
V / / /	IV / / /	I / / /
bVI / / /	V / / /	I / / /
V / / /	bVI / / /	I / / /

Table 3 - Harmonic minor chord progression examples

Try these chord progressions for the Melodic Minor scale; (IV - V - I), (II - V - I), (bVII- IV – I).

Melodic Minor Chord Progressions												
IV	/	/	/	/	V	/	/	/	I	/	/	/
II	/	/	/	/	V	/	/	/	I	/	/	/
bVII	/	/	/	/	IV	/	/	/	I	/	/	/

Table 4 - Melodic minor chord progression examples

These chord progression examples all end with the root note chord to demonstrate various cadences. Remember, the purpose of cadences is to bring that sense of closure to the phrase, like the punctuation at the end of a sentence!

It is clear now that chord progressions are very important to understand and practice frequently. Practice creating unique and interesting chord progressions, and then practice different scales alongside those chord progressions. To become a better musician, study songs that use many of these chord progressions and cadences to hear how other musicians have used these techniques. Then, practice creative variations that can help develop an original style. Experiment with different rhythms and chord substitutions to insure that the chord progressions sound interesting and creative. This will help each musician develop their own unique sound and composing style!