

A Fingerboard Harmony Primer

On any set of three adjacent strings we can find three triad shapes: root position, first inversion, and second inversion. These should be studied and memorized to facilitate an understanding of the guitar fingerboard, which will aid sight-reading, memorization, and increase overall security on the instrument. (Fingerings are not given as they will vary according to context.)

Triad Shapes on ①②③

Open

Major: Minor:

Diminished: Augmented:

Moveable

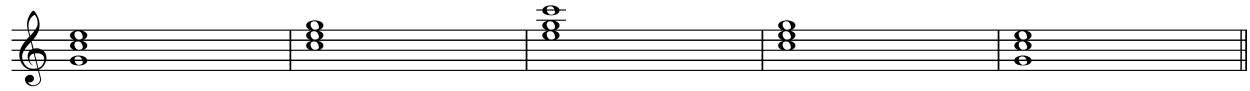
Moving these shapes up the neck of the guitar and re-fingering them results in the following triad shapes:

Major: Minor:

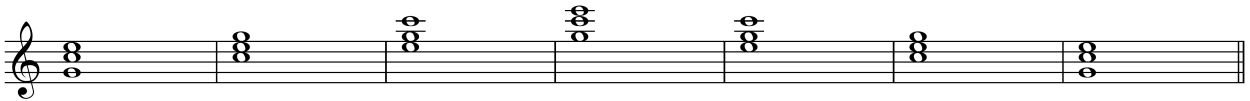
Diminished: Augmented:

Triad Cycles

A chord dictionary is of limited value unless one has a way to practice the material in a musically meaningful way. To that end, work out and practice triad cycles for all major, minor, diminished, and augmented triads, as in the following example in C major:



Begin with the lowest available inversion for each triad and locate all forms of that triad. If you begin in open position, you may be able to extend the triad cycle past the twelfth fret:



Scales in Triads

Practice scales in triads. Rather than mindlessly marching the same inversion up the neck of the guitar, use a mixture of inversions. Begin with the lowest form of the triad (root, first, or second inversion) and continue up the neck until you can find a lower shape for the next triad. Continue until you end on a different inversion of the tonic and begin again from there.

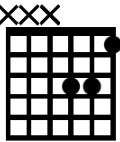
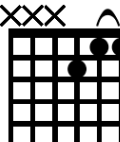
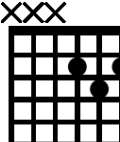
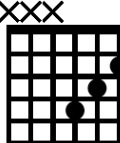
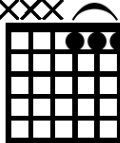
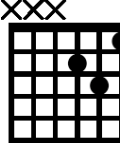
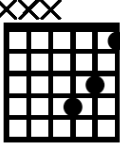
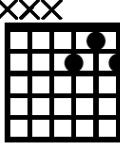
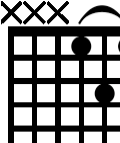
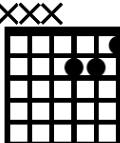
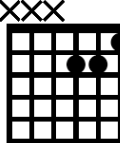
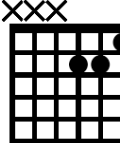
Here's an example in C major:

I_4^6 ii_4^6 iii_6^6 IV_6^6 V_6^6 vi vii I
 I ii iii_4^6 IV_4^6 V_4^6 vi_6^6 vii_6^6 I_6^6
 I_6^6 ii_6^6 iii IV V vi_4^6 vii_4^6 I_4^6

It will be helpful to say (or think) either the scale degree and figured bass numbers or the chord name and inversion as you play. Work these out for all keys.

Reference

Use this table for quick reference:

Triad Shapes on ①②③: moveable			
	Root Position	First Inversion	Second Inversion
Major			
Minor			
Diminished			
Augmented			

Triad Shapes on ②③④

Open

Major:

Minor:

Diminished:

Augmented:

Moveable

Major:

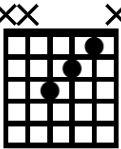
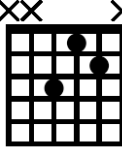
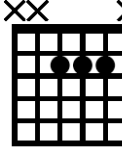
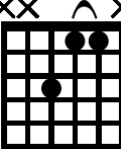
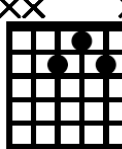
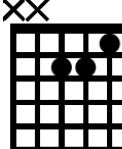
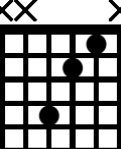
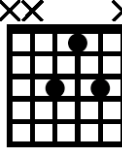
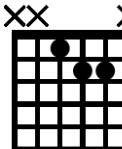
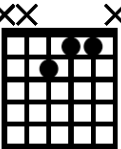
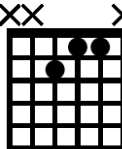
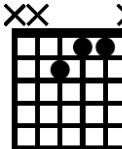
Minor:

Diminished:

Augmented:

Work out triad cycles and scales in triads for this set of three adjacent strings.

Reference

Triad Shapes ②③④: moveable			
	Root Position	First Inversion	Second Inversion
Major			
Minor			
Diminished			
Augmented			

Triad Shapes on ③④⑤

Open

Major:

Minor:

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is for a diminished triad, with notes G, B, and D. The bottom staff is for an augmented triad, with notes G, B, and D#. Both staves include guitar chord diagrams above each measure and fret numbers (6 and 4) below the notes.

Moveable

Major:

Minor:

Diminished:

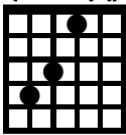
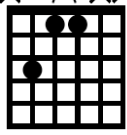
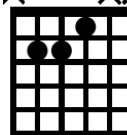
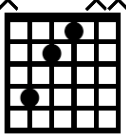
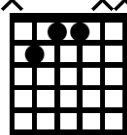
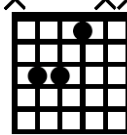
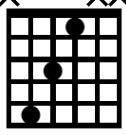
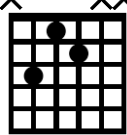
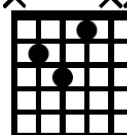
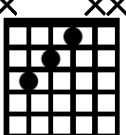
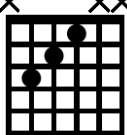
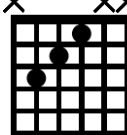
6 4 6

Augmented:

6 4 6

Work out triad cycles and scales in triads for this set of three adjacent strings.

Reference

Triad Shapes on ③④⑤: moveable			
	Root Position	First Inversion	Second Inversion
Major			
Minor			
Diminished			
Augmented			

Triad Shapes on ④⑤⑥

Note that these triad shapes are the same as those on ③④⑤.

Open

Major: Minor:

Diminished: Augmented:

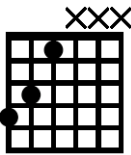
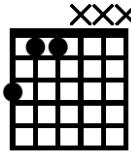
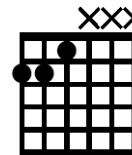
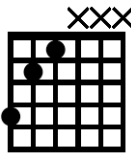
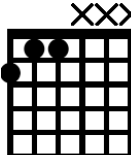
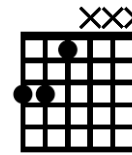
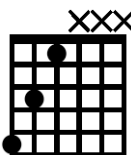
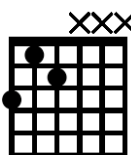
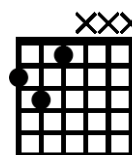
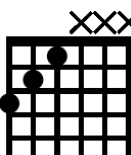
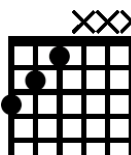
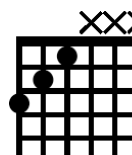
Moveable

Major: Minor:

Diminished: Augmented:

Work out triad cycles and scales in triads for this set of three adjacent strings.

Reference

Triad Shapes on ④⑤⑥: moveable			
	Root Position	First Inversion	Second Inversion
Major			
Minor			
Diminished			
Augmented			

All Open Triad Shapes

Triad Shapes: Open Position												
	Root Position				First Inversion				Second Inversion			
On:	①②③	②③④	③④⑤	④⑤⑥	①②③	②③④	③④⑤	④⑤⑥	①②③	②③④	③④⑤	④⑤⑥
Major												
Minor												
Diminished												
Augmented												

All Moveable Triad Shapes

Triad Shapes: moveable												
	Root Position				First Inversion				Second Inversion			
On:	①②③	②③④	③④⑤	④⑤⑥	①②③	②③④	③④⑤	④⑤⑥	①②③	②③④	③④⑤	④⑤⑥
Major												
Minor												
Diminished												
Augmented												

Triad Progressions

Practicing the following progressions. Some may not work in the lower positions. It will be helpful to say (or think) the triad name and inversion as you play.

I IV⁶₄ I V⁶ I

I vi⁶ iii⁶₄ V⁶ vii⁶ I

I⁶ IV I⁶ V⁶₄ I⁶

I⁶ vii⁶₄ I⁶ iii vi⁶₄ V⁶₄ I⁶

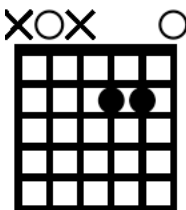
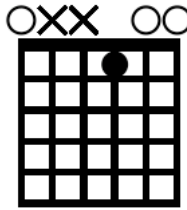
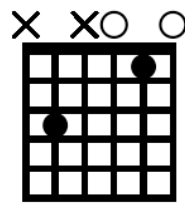
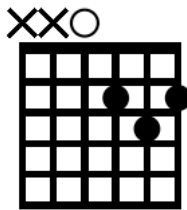
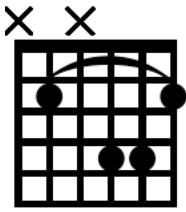
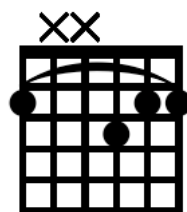
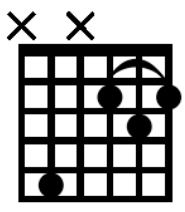
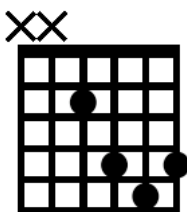
I⁶₄ IV⁶ I⁶₄ V I⁶₄

I⁶₄ iii⁶ vii⁶₄ I⁶₄ vi V I⁶₄

Four-Voice Chords

Derivation of four voice chord shapes: Major

We can find the common four voice chord shapes by adding a bass note to each of the triad shapes. On ①②③ this results in four, four-voice, root position shapes:

Root position, four-voice, major chord shapes: highest note on ①				
Root added to:	<i>root position triad</i>	<i>1st inversion triad</i>	<i>2nd inversion triad</i>	The transposed form of previous chord shape yields a new shape: tonic on open ④ or with 1
	yields			
	tonic on open ⑤ or with 1	tonic on open ⑥ or with 1; tonic on ④ with 3 (not shown)	tonic on ⑤ with 3 or 4	
Open:				
Moveable:				

Note: Although this chord: is fairly common in guitar music, it lacks a fifth and can be considered less desirable.

On ②③④ this results in three, four-voice, root position shapes:

Root position, four-voice, major chord shapes: highest note on ②				
Root added to:	<i>root position triad</i>	<i>1st inversion triad</i>	<i>2nd inversion triad</i>	The transposed form of previous chord shape yields a new shape: tonic on open ⑤ or with 1
	yields			
	tonic on open ⑥ or with 1	tonic on open ⑤ or with 4	form: tonic on ⑥ with 4	
Open:				
Moveable:				

On ③④⑤ this results in two, four-voice, root position shapes:

Root position, four-voice, major chord shapes: highest note on ③			
Root added to:	There are no roots available to add to the root position triad.	1st inversion triad	2nd inversion triad
		yields	
		tonic on ⑥ with 3 or 4	tonic on open ⑥ or with 1
Open:			
Moveable:			

Practice

Work out chord cycles for all four-voice chords on all sets of strings.