

# First Steps in Keyboard

## Part 2 - Chords in the Key of C Major

These materials are part of the Chordmaps.com series of instructional ebooks, encouraging students to explore songwriting and creative musical expression on a variety of instruments.



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## Concepts to Know First

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## Concept - The Purpose of This Book

Chords are similar to words. They can be used to create “musical sentences.” Using this analogy, we can say that you have a “chord vocabulary.”

It’s easier to write songs and play music if your chord vocabulary is filled with interesting chords and variations.

The purpose of this book is to help you gain a working knowledge of some of the chords that can be used when you are playing or writing in the key of C major.

C major is the place where many students begin. After you become familiar with chords and progressions in the key of C, you will find it easier to branch out into other keys.

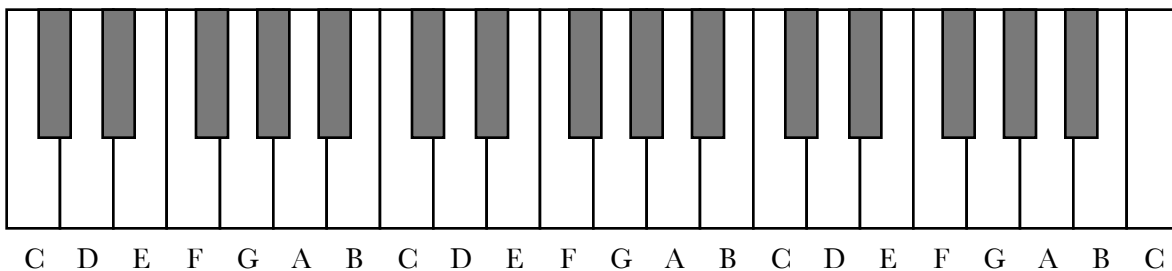
(One more note before we begin. There is a musical symbol called flat. It is shaped somewhat similar to, though not exactly like, a lower case b. In this book we are using the lower case b as the symbol for flat.)

Okay, let’s get started.

## Concept - The Key of C Major

In a previous book in this series (First Steps in Keyboard - Part 1), we talked about naming the notes on the keyboard.

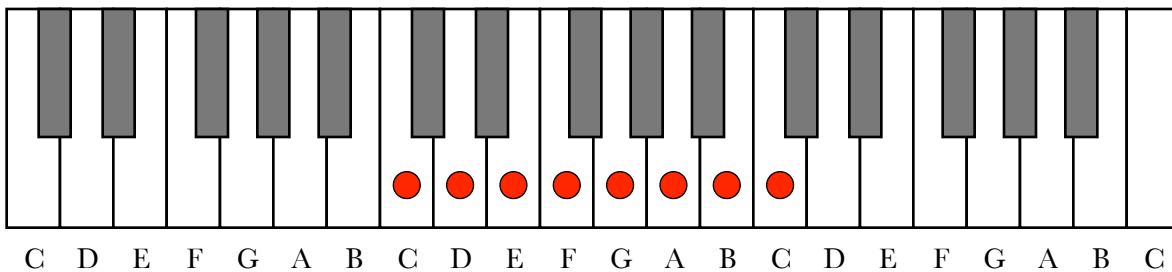
The white notes are named using the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.



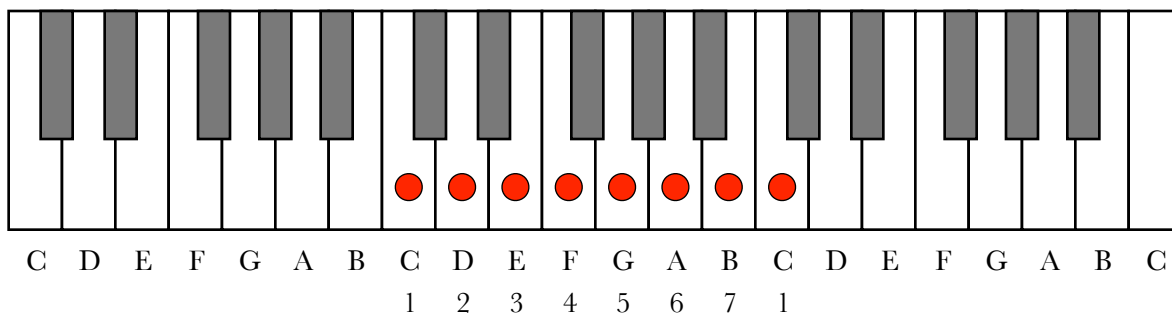
Let's choose one of the notes, the note C, and make it the starting point for a scale.

There are many kinds of scales, but the scale we're particularly interested in right now is called the Major Scale.

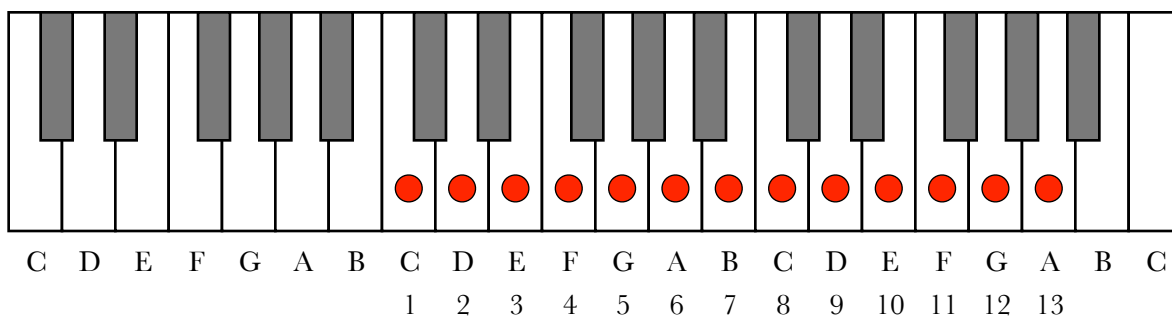
If you start by playing the note C, then D, then E, F, G, A, B, C, you will have played the major scale in the key of C.



Next we're going to give numbers to these notes. Because C is the first note in this scale, we'll call it 1. D will be 2, E will be 3, and so on. When we get to note 8, the higher of the two C's, we will sometimes call it 8, but it's actually another note 1 played at a different place on the keyboard.



Later on, when it comes time to name some of the more complex chords, we will number the notes all the way up to 13...



...but for now we'll start with numbers 1 to 7.

So, at this point in the discussion, we are working with the following:

- Note C will be called note 1.
- Note D will be called note 2.
- Note E will be called note 3.
- Note F will be called note 4.
- Note G will be called note 5.
- Note A will be called note 6.
- Note B will be called note 7.

(And the next note, C, may sometimes be called note 8, but at other times we may call it another note 1.)

## Concept - A Word About Other Keys

Although in this book our attention is focused on playing in the key of C, there are times when it will be helpful to discuss briefly one of the other keys. This page is here if you would like to refer to it when a different key is mentioned.

Key	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>C</b>	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
<b>Db</b>	Db	Eb	F	Gb	Ab	Bb	C	Db
<b>D</b>	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
<b>Eb</b>	Eb	F	G	Ab	Bb	C	D	Eb
<b>E</b>	E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E
<b>F</b>	F	G	A	Bb	C	D	E	F
<b>Gb</b>	Gb	Ab	Bb	Cb	Db	Eb	F	Gb
<b>G</b>	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
<b>Ab</b>	Ab	Bb	C	Db	Eb	F	G	Ab
<b>A</b>	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
<b>Bb</b>	Bb	C	D	Eb	F	G	A	Bb
<b>B</b>	B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B



## The Basic Triads and Inversions

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Each of the seven notes in the scale can be the root, or starting point, for building a triad. A triad is a three-note chord with a root, a third, and a fifth. The third is two scale steps higher than the root. The fifth is two scale steps higher than the third. For example, if scale note 1 is the root, the third will be note 3, and the fifth will be note 5. If scale note 2 is the root, the third will be note 4, and the fifth will be note 6. (It may sound a little odd at first to call note 4 of the scale the third of a particular chord, but that's how it works. Continuing on to the next scale step, if the root is note 3, the third will be note 5, and the fifth will be note 7.)

The chords created this way, by allowing each of the seven notes to have a chance to be the root, are called the diatonic chords.

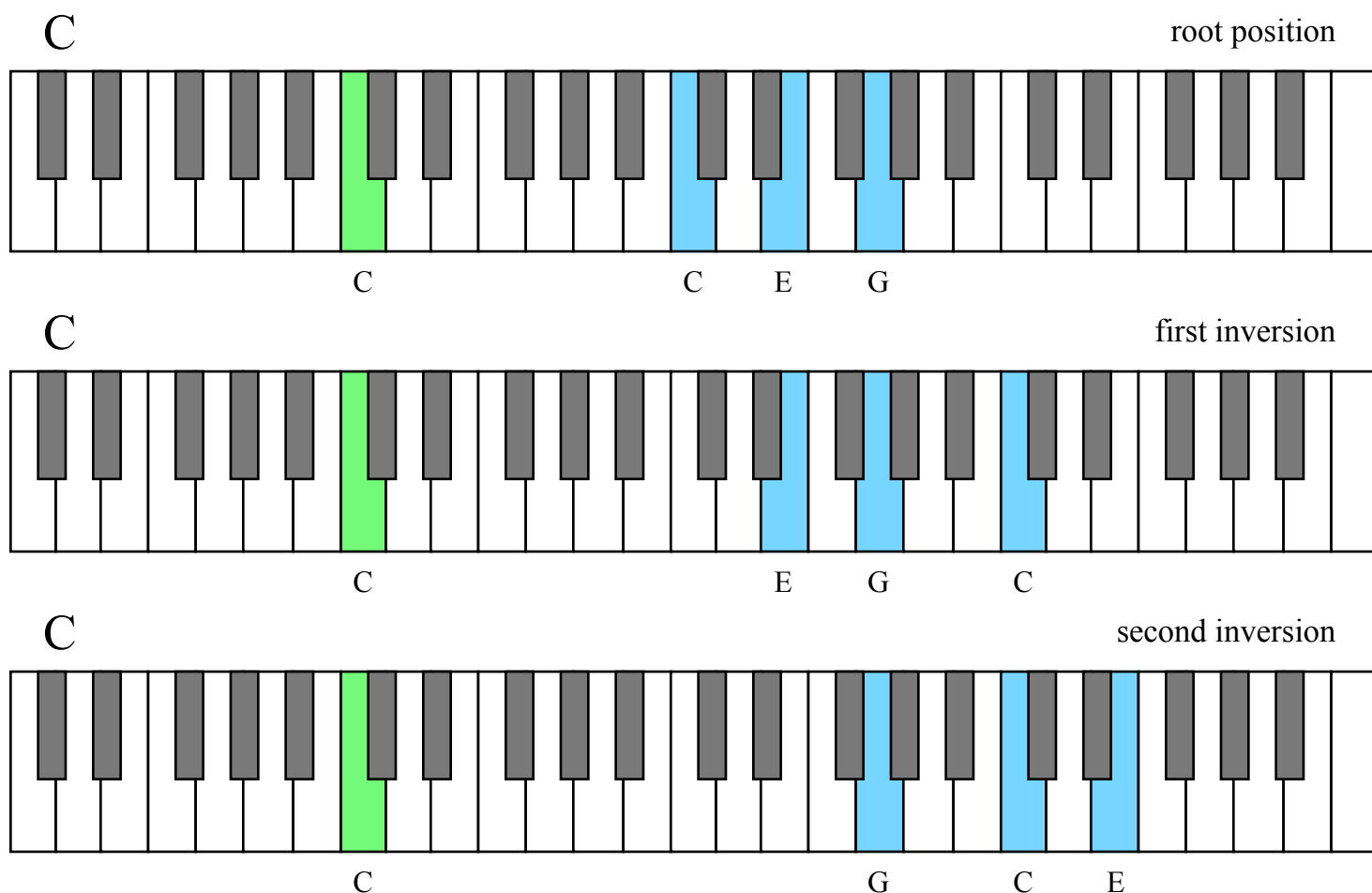
Each of these diatonic chords can be played in more than one way. We start by learning three different ways of playing each chord. We call these three positions “root position,” “first inversion,” and “second inversion.”

If you would like to play keyboards and write music in the key of C Major, these 21 chords are the place to begin. They are illustrated on the next seven pages.

Note: In the illustrations, your left hand plays the notes colored green, either as a single note, or as an octave if desired. Octaves are played by stretching your hand to reach two notes of the same name. Usually you would do this with the thumb and little finger of your left hand. Playing the bass note as an octave produces a stronger sound.

Your right hand plays the notes colored blue. For the right hand, we suggest the following fingering: thumb-middle-little—unless you are playing the first inversion. In that case, the suggested fingering is thumb-index-little.

# The C Major Chord



## Explanation:

The C major chord is constructed using the notes C, E, and G. These are notes 1, 3, and 5 of the C major scale.

The root of this chord is C. The third is E. The fifth is G. (This is true regardless of which inversion you are playing.)

In the key of C major, this chord can be called the I chord. (Note the use of the roman numeral I to represent the chord built on note 1 of the scale.) “I” is capitalized to indicate that the chord is a major chord. The chord is major because the third of the chord, E, is a major third (four half steps) above the root, C. (A half step is the distance from any note to its nearest neighbor.)

## The D Minor Chord

**Dm** root position

D                      D    F    A

**Dm** first inversion

D                      F    A    D

**Dm** second inversion

D                      A    D    F

### Explanation:

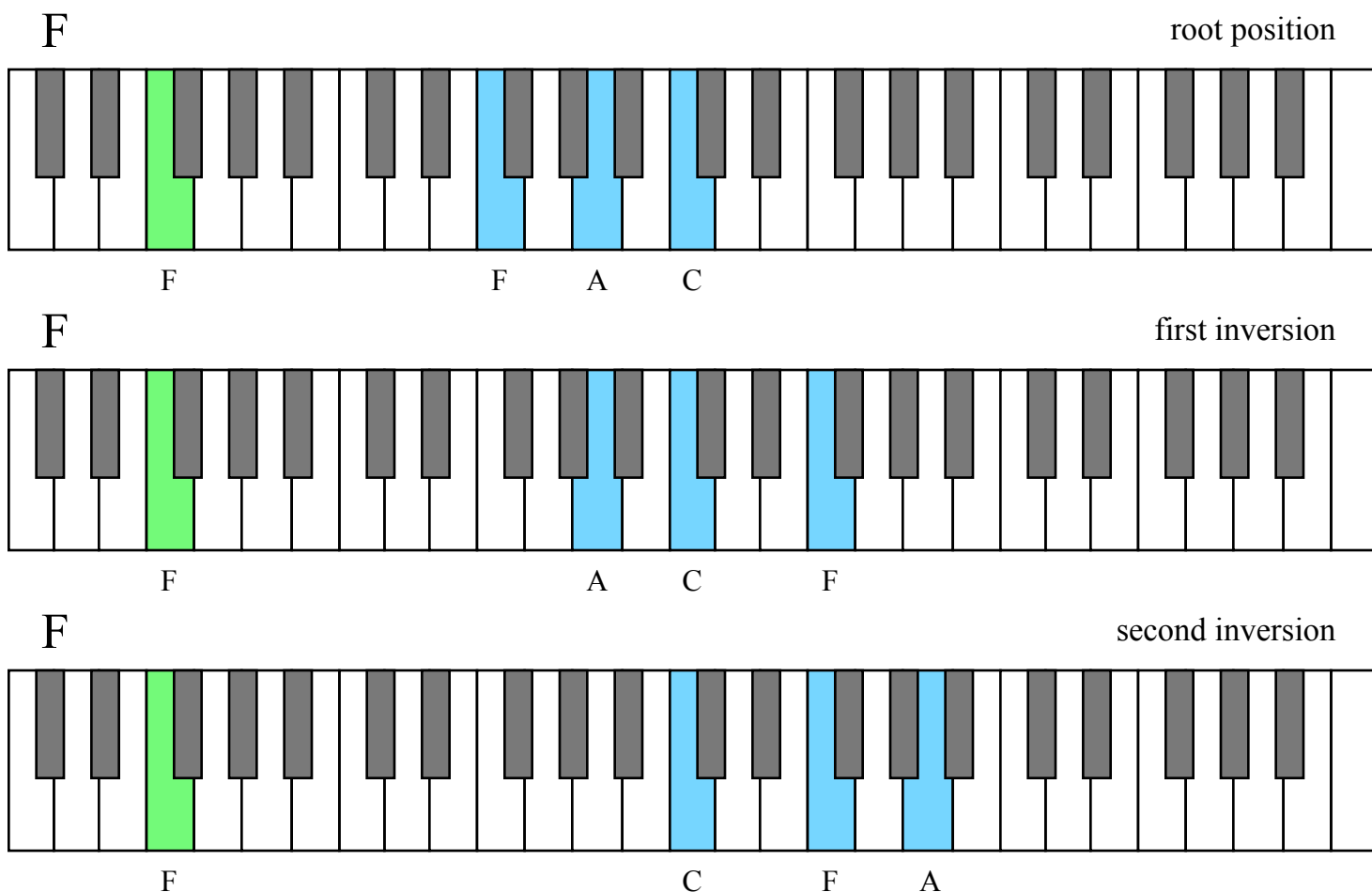
The D minor chord is constructed using the notes D, F, and A. These are notes 2, 4, and 6 of the C major scale.

The root of this chord is D. The third is F. The fifth is A.

In the key of C major, this chord can be called the ii chord, because it is built on note 2 of the scale. “ii” is written in lower case to indicate that the chord is a minor chord. The chord is minor because the third of the chord, F, is a minor third (three half steps) above the root, D.

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# The F Major Chord



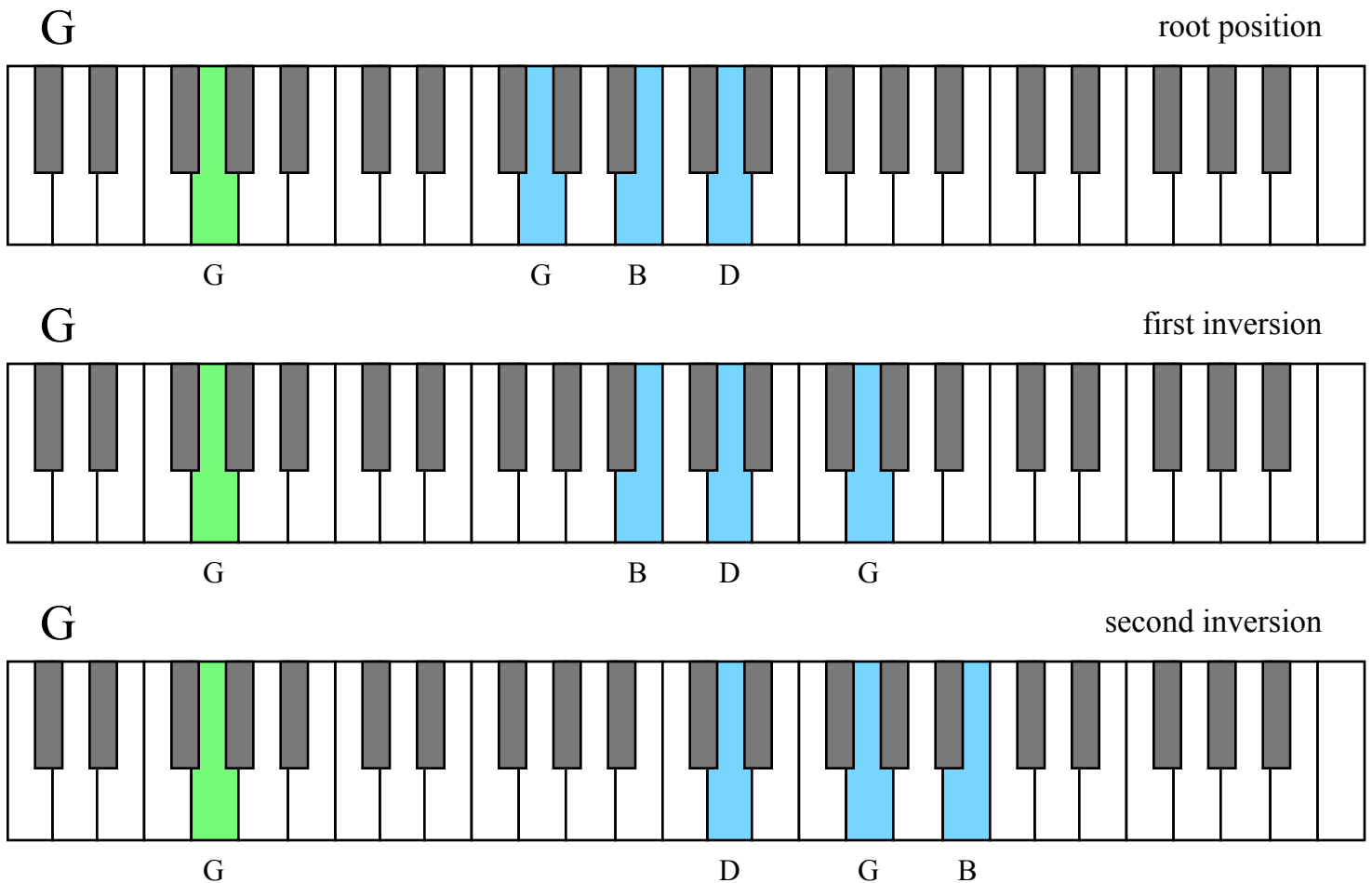
## Explanation:

The F major chord is constructed using the notes F, A, and C. These are notes 4, 6, and 1 of the C major scale.

The root of this chord is F. The third is A. The fifth is C.

In the key of C major, this chord can be called the IV chord, because it is built on note 4 of the scale. “IV” is capitalized to indicate that the chord is a major chord. The chord is major because the third of the chord, A, is a major third (four half steps) above the root, F.

# The G Major Chord



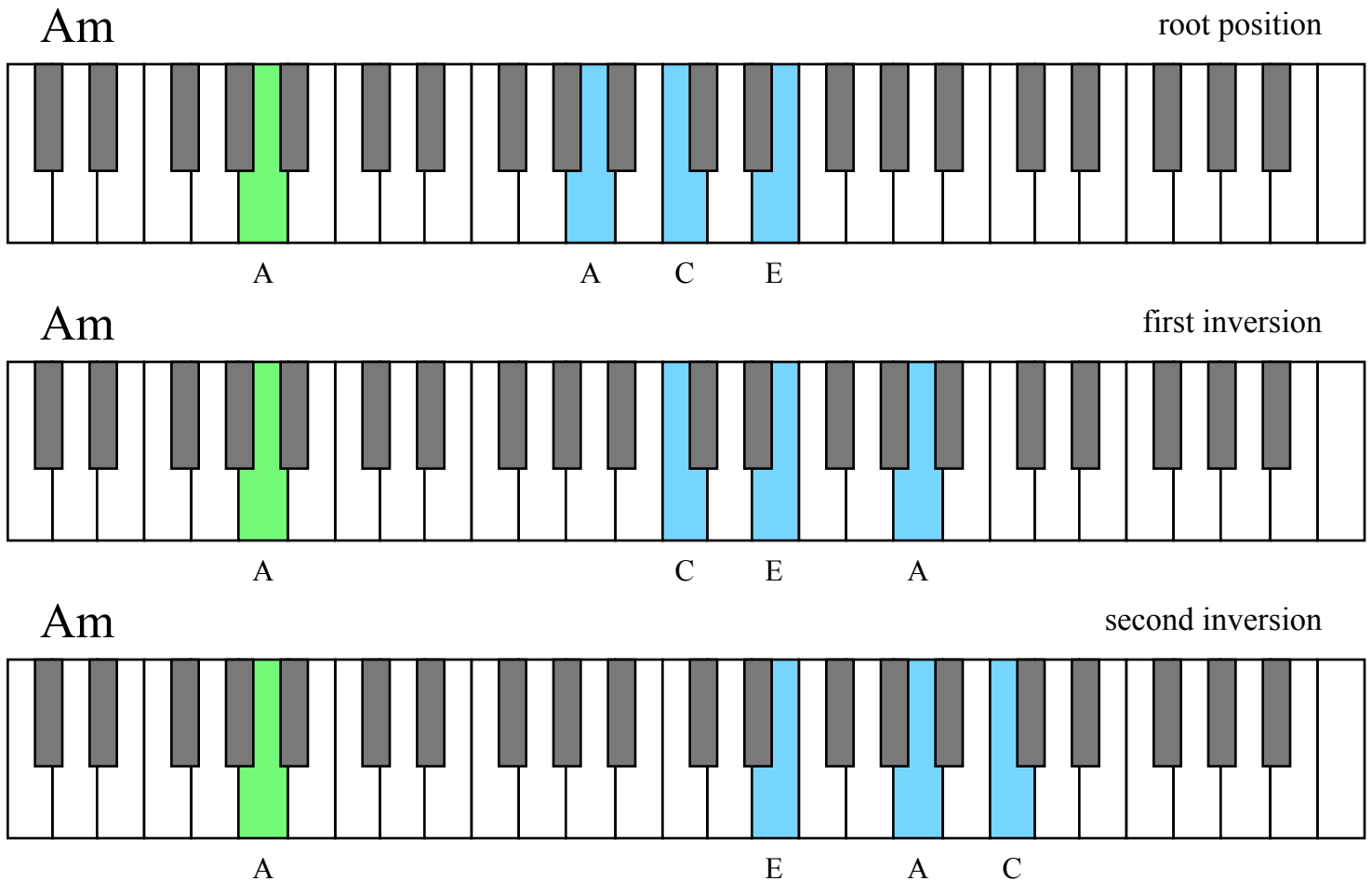
## Explanation:

The G major chord is constructed using the notes G, B, and D. These are notes 5, 7, and 2 of the C major scale.

The root of this chord is G. The third is B. The fifth is D.

In the key of C major, this chord can be called the V chord, because it is built on note 5 of the scale. "V" is capitalized to indicate that the chord is a major chord. The chord is major because the third of the chord, B, is a major third (four half steps) above the root, G.

## The A Minor Chord



### Explanation:

The A minor chord is constructed using the notes A, C, and E. These are notes 6, 1, and 3 of the C major scale.

The root of this chord is A. The third is C. The fifth is E.

In the key of C major, this chord can be called the vi chord, because it is built on note 6 of the scale. “vi” is written in lower case to indicate that the chord is a minor chord. The chord is minor because the third of the chord, C, is a minor third (three half steps) above the root, A.

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# Chord Variations

Although you can write a lot of music using the basic chords found in the previous section, there is a lot more you can do when you learn to play chord variations.

The chord variations illustrated here are useful when playing in the key of C.

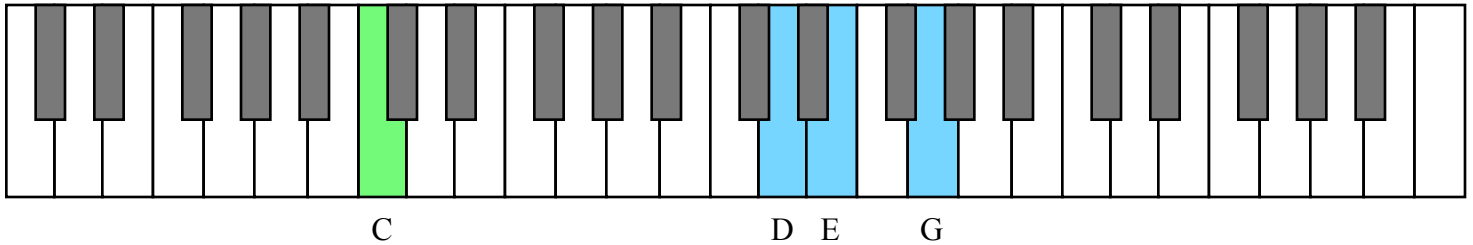
When you study these chords, I suggest reading the explanations at the bottom of each page so you will understand how each chord gets its name.

One more note about fingering: play each right hand chord in a way that feels relaxed and comfortable to your hand. In most cases, your thumb and little finger will be on the outside edges of the chord, and your index, middle, and ring fingers will fill in as needed.

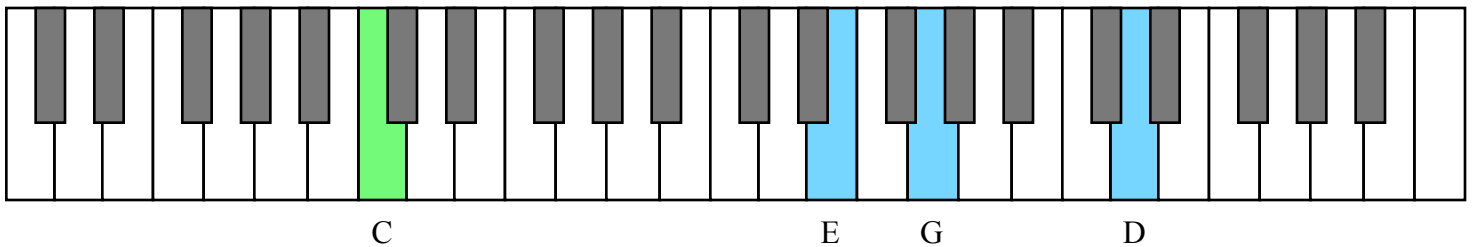
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# The Cadd2 Chord

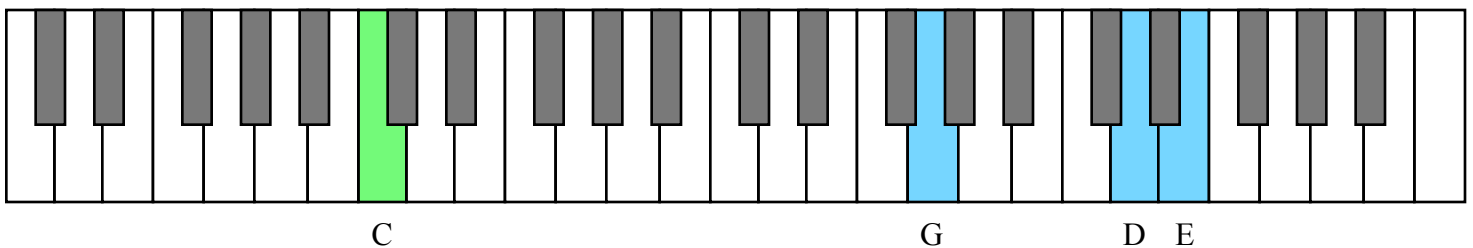
## Cadd2



## Cadd2



## Cadd2



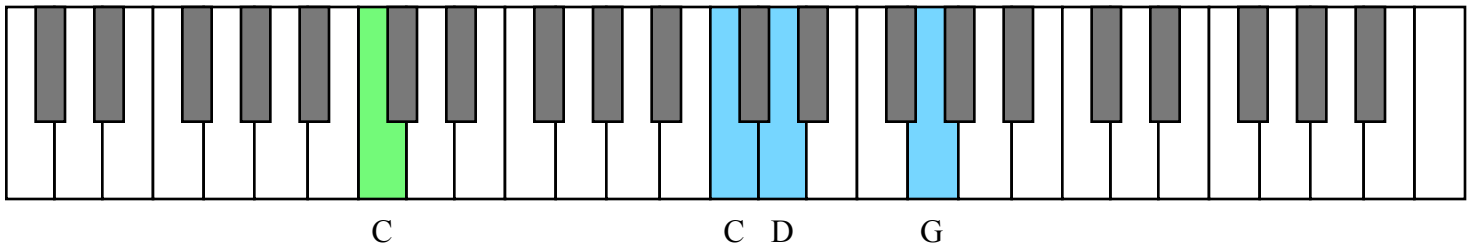
### Explanation:

The Cadd2 chord is constructed using the notes C, D, E, and G. These are notes 1, 2, 3, and 5 of the C major scale.

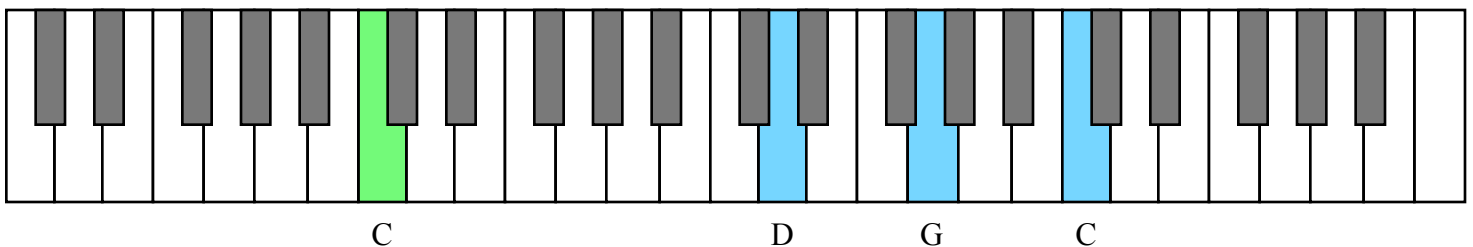
The note C can be added to the right hand if desired.

## The Csus2 Chord

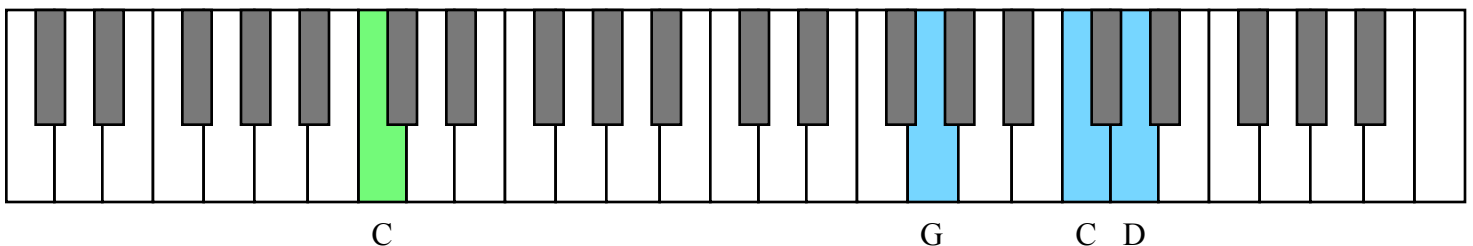
### Csus2



### Csus2



### Csus2



#### Explanation:

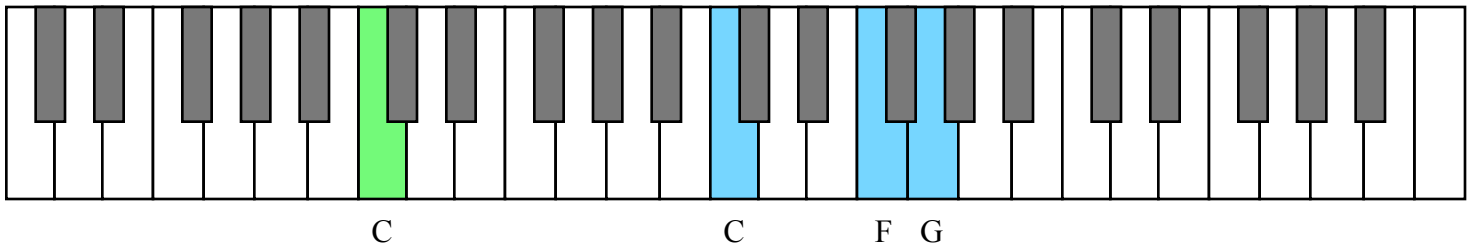
The Csus2 chord is constructed using the notes C, D, and G. These are notes 1, 2, and 5 of the C major scale.

Sus is a shortened form of the word “suspended.” It means the third of the chord, which would have been the note E, has been replaced with another note, in this case D, note 2. (The other option would have been note 4.)

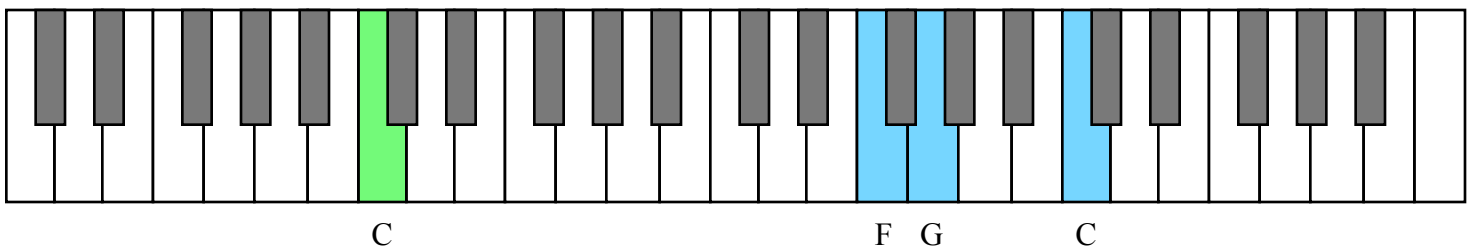
When the third is replaced by note 2 (or note 4), it is called a suspension. When note 2 (or note 4) is released and note 3 is played again, it is called a resolution.

## The Csus4 Chord

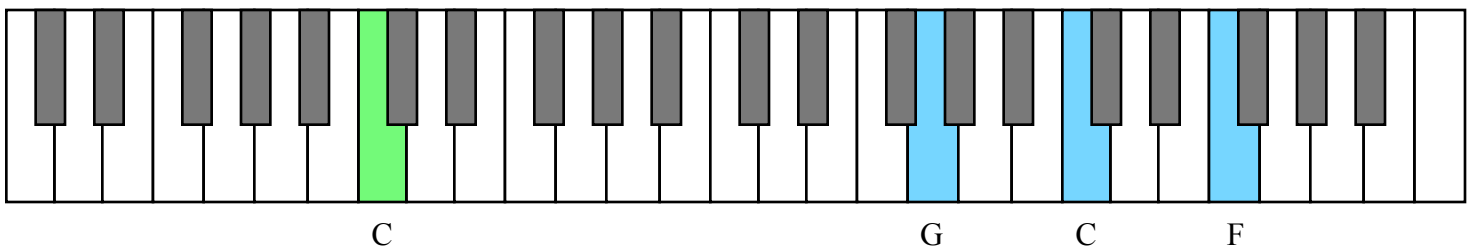
### Csus4



### Csus4



### Csus4



#### Explanation:

The Csus4 chord is constructed using the notes C, F, and G. These are notes 1, 4, and 5 of the C major scale.

Sus is a shortened form of the word “suspended.” It means the third of the chord, which would have been the note E, has been replaced with another note, in this case F, note 4. (The other option would have been note 2.)

When the third is replaced by note 4 (or note 2), it is called a suspension. When note 4 (or note 2) is released and note 3 is played again, it is called a resolution.

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