

Guitar Pedagogy

Is there a “right time” to introduce music theory to your guitar students?

There are “three pillars of guitar teaching” (theory, technique and repertoire) upon which most successful teaching practices are built. This document looks at Music Theory and in particular outlines a way in which it may be effectively introduced to a student at a time when they will be able to make the most practical use of it.

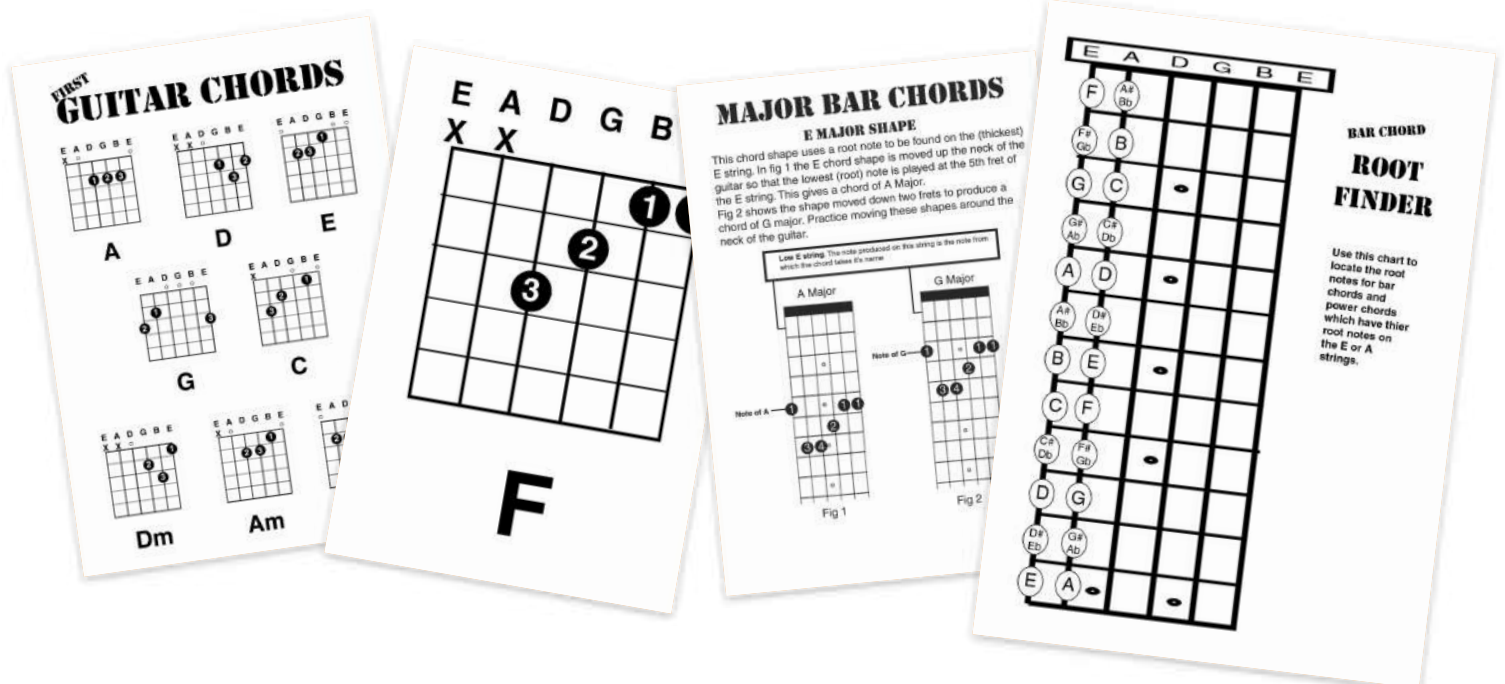
Before embarking upon a study of music theory a student should be able to.....

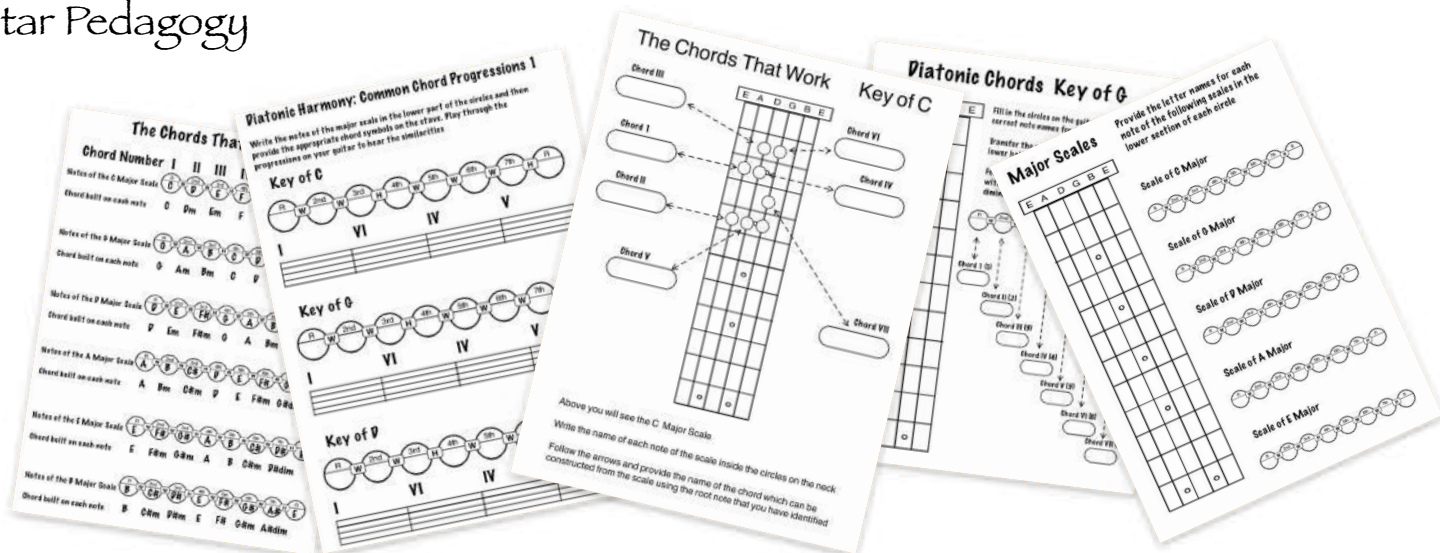
Move in time between the eight chords that a beginner should learn first

Be able to play the F Chord shape and be capable of moving to and from it using other chords

Be familiar with basic major and minor bar chords with root notes on the E and A strings

Below you can see some of the <https://teachwombat.com> resources designed to get students to this point





Introducing Music Theory using chords rather than relying almost exclusively on scales can be a lot more “relevant” to your students because it builds directly upon the foundations of what they have (if they are doing it right) been working on up until this point

Unless you are a guitar teacher who creates “unemployable monsters” (you know, the ones who can fly around the neck noodling and shredding away but who have not the faintest notion of what they are doing and who can not convincingly hold down a simple chord part, in which case please stop making them!) then at some stage the dreaded “music theory” will rear its ugly head.

A very effective way to introduce music theory is at the point where when guitar players have learned to get around the first eight easy open chords (C A G E D Am Em and Dm) and then moved on to play the (dreaded) F chord as well as being able to handle basic major and minor bar chords.

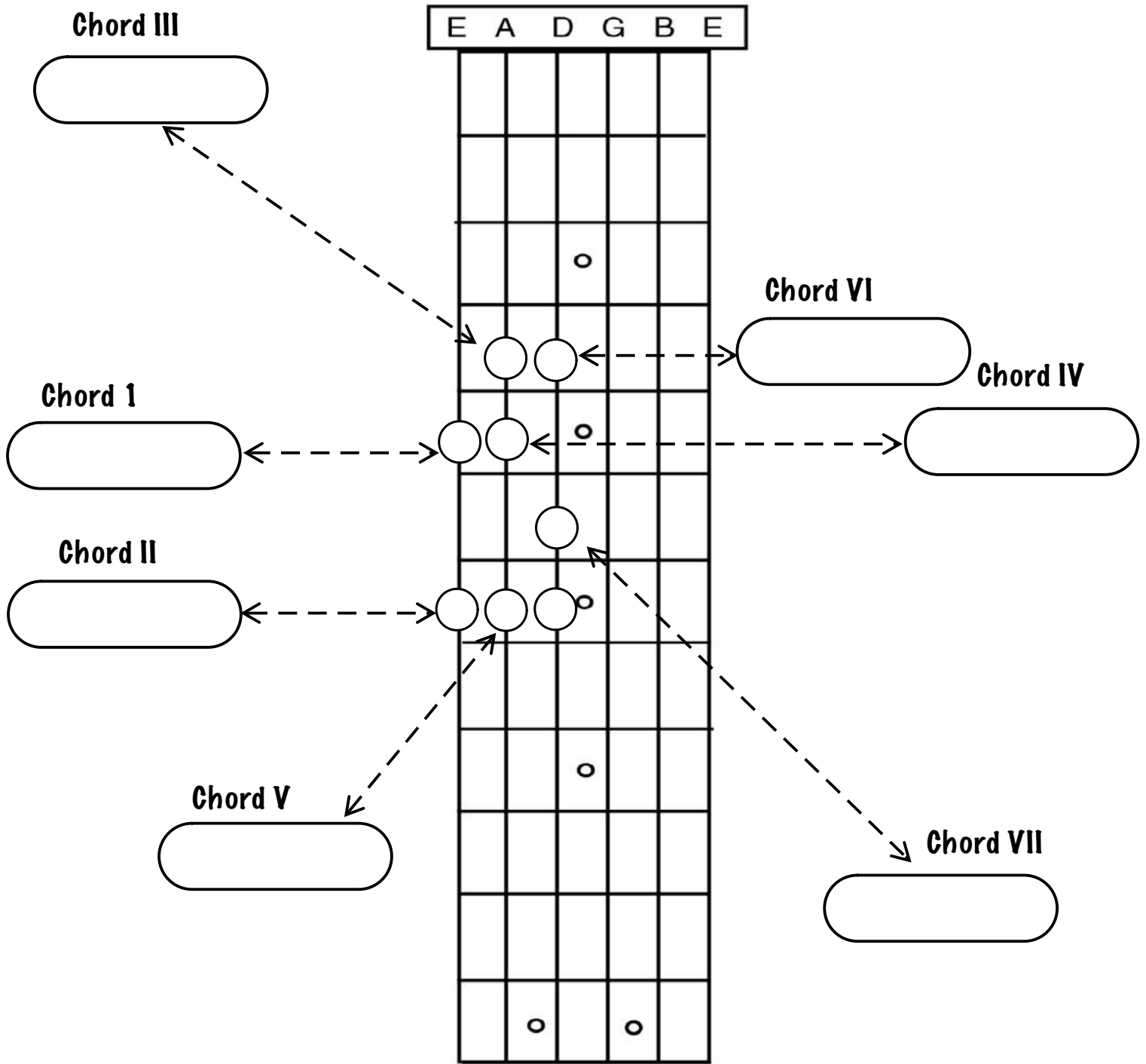
At this point they may also be playing simple single note rock and blues based stuff that is likely derived from the pentatonic minor scale without really having much of an understanding of the theory that lies behind what they do

This is the ideal time to introduce music theory because it will help your student to understand what they are already playing when they work on a cover version and (more importantly!) it will allow them to come up with chord sequences for their own original songs using their brains (rather than only their fingers)

Remember! (and make sure that you let your students know) You don't have to be a great guitarist (yet) to write a great song

The Chords That Work

Key of A

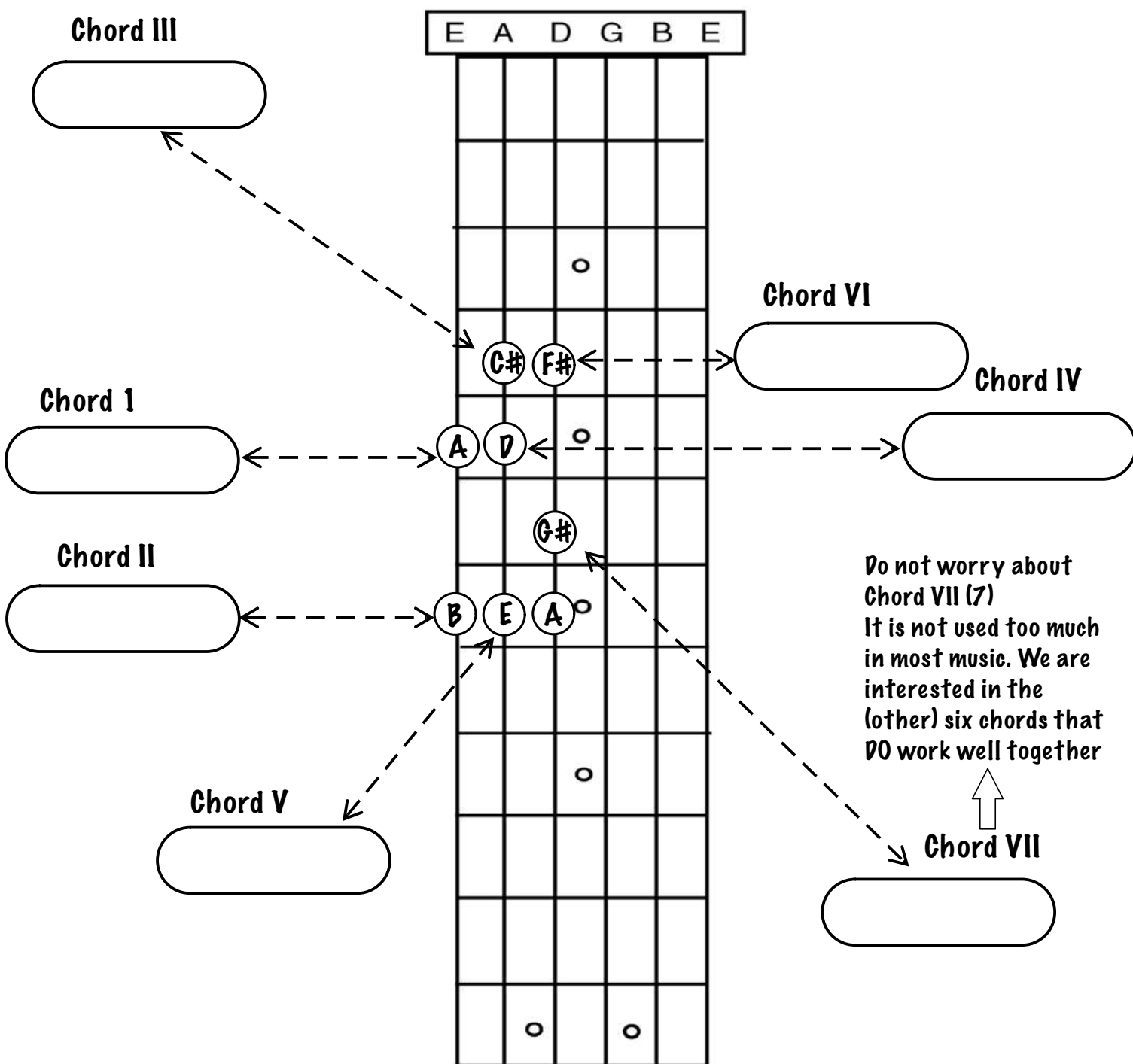


Above you will see the A Major Scale

Write the name of each note of the scale inside the circles on the neck

Follow the arrows and provide the name of the chord which can be constructed from the scale using the root note that you have identified

How to use the handout.



Above you can see the notes of the A Major Scale (A, B, C#, D, E, F# and G#) identified inside the circles on the guitar neck

The Rules (which apply to all Major Scales)....

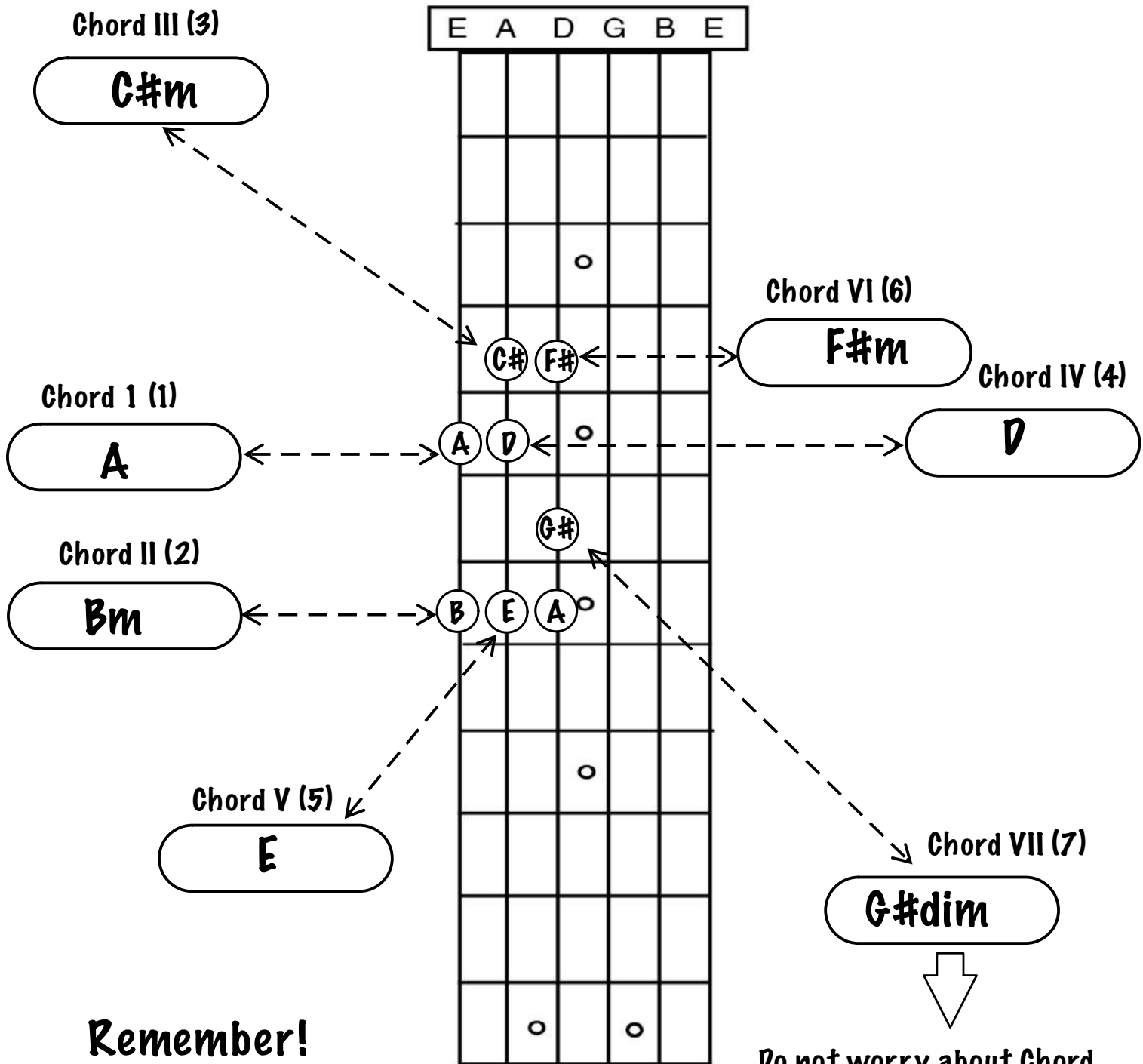
Apart from the root note (A) which appears at either end of the scale each letter name appears only once

The letter names occur in strict alphabetic sequence (A-B-C-D etc)

The scale may contain either # (sharp) or b (flat) notes but not both

Each note of the scale is the root (name) note of the chord that is based on it

Important points for guitar teachers



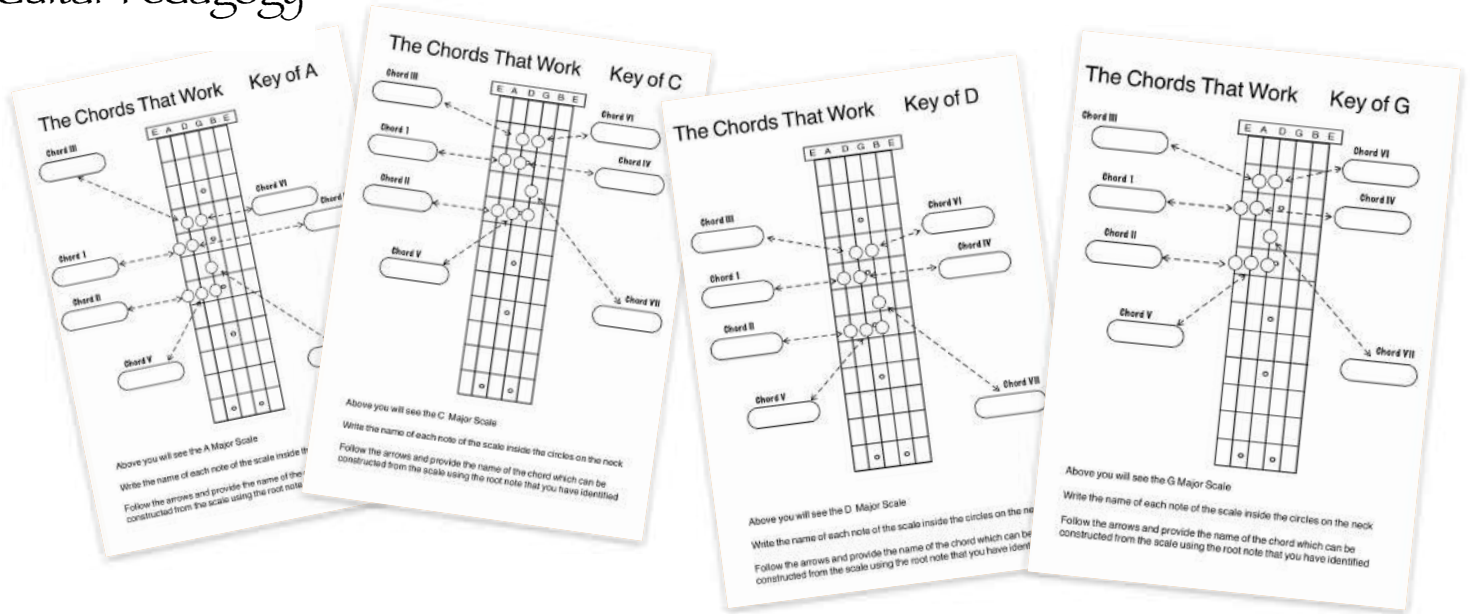
Remember!

- Chord I (1) is always a Major chord
- Chord II (2) is always a minor chord
- Chord III (3) is always a minor chord
- Chord IV (4) is always a Major chord
- Chord V (5) is always a Major chord
- Chord VI (6) is always a minor chord
- Chord VII (7) is always a diminished chord

Do not worry about Chord VII (7)

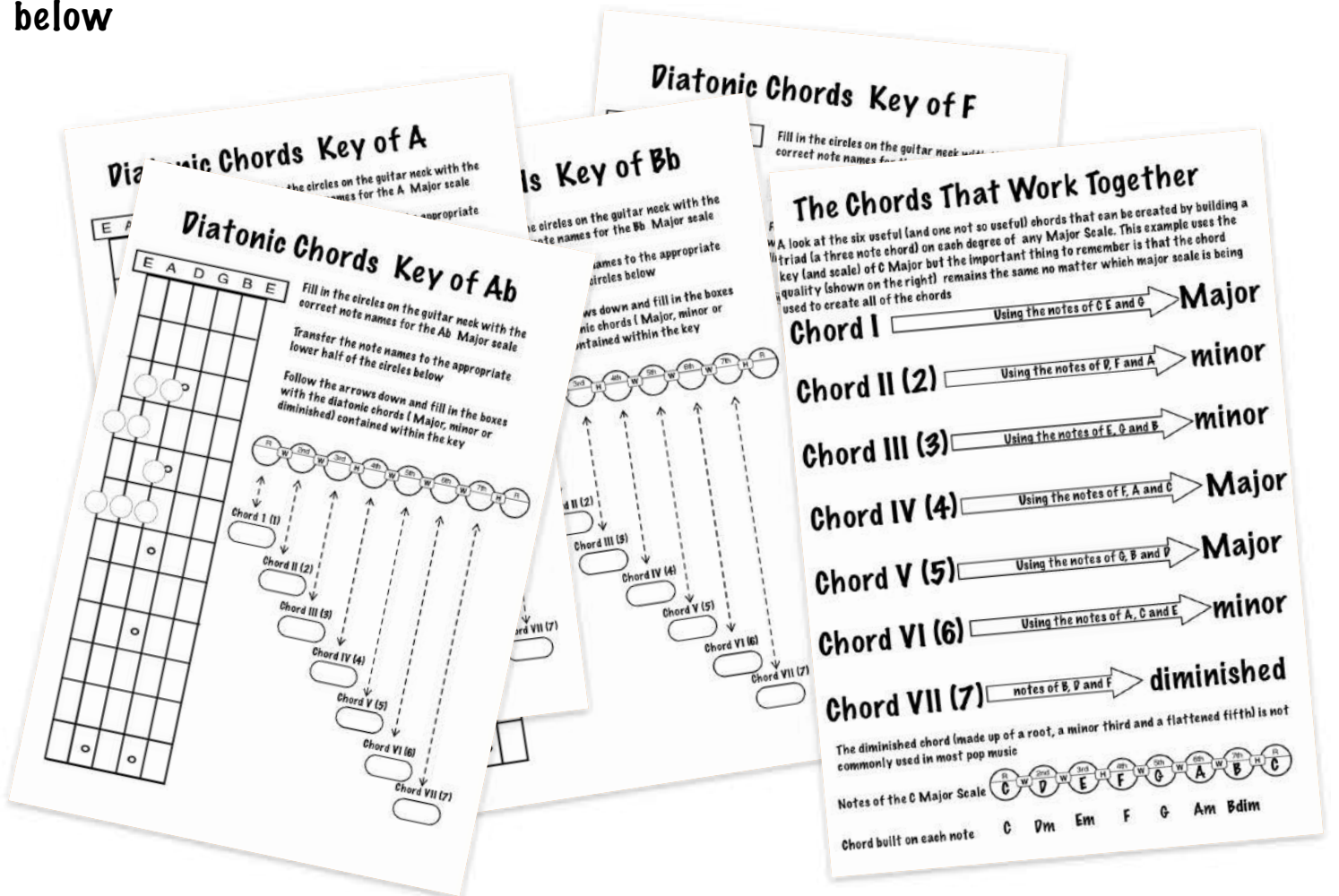
It is not used too much in most simple forms of music and particularly it does not tend to feature during the early stages of study We are interested in the (other) six chords that DO work well together

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There are four “chords that work” worksheets (shown above) in the guitar music theory update that makes up just part of our guitar teacher’s “Deluxe Download” presented in the “guitar friendly” keys of C A D and

Present this material to your students during a period of weeks and months and gradually work towards referring to it as “the diatonic system” and introduce less immediately “guitar friendly” keys using the handouts shown below



The Chords That Work Together

Look at the six useful (and one not so useful) chords that can be created by building a triad (a three note chord) on each degree of any Major Scale. This example uses the key (and scale) of C Major but the important thing to remember is that the chord quality (shown on the right) remains the same no matter which major scale is being used to create all of the chords

- Chord I (1) Using the notes of C, E and G → Major
- Chord II (2) Using the notes of D, F and A → minor
- Chord III (3) Using the notes of E, G and B → minor
- Chord IV (4) Using the notes of F, A and C → Major
- Chord V (5) Using the notes of G, B and D → Major
- Chord VI (6) Using the notes of A, C and E → minor
- Chord VII (7) Using the notes of B, D and F → diminished

The diminished chord (made up of a root, a minor third and a flattened fifth) is not commonly used in most pop music

Notes of the C Major Scale: C D E F G A B C

Chord built on each note: C Dm Em F G Am Bdim

During the lessons covering this material you may like to...

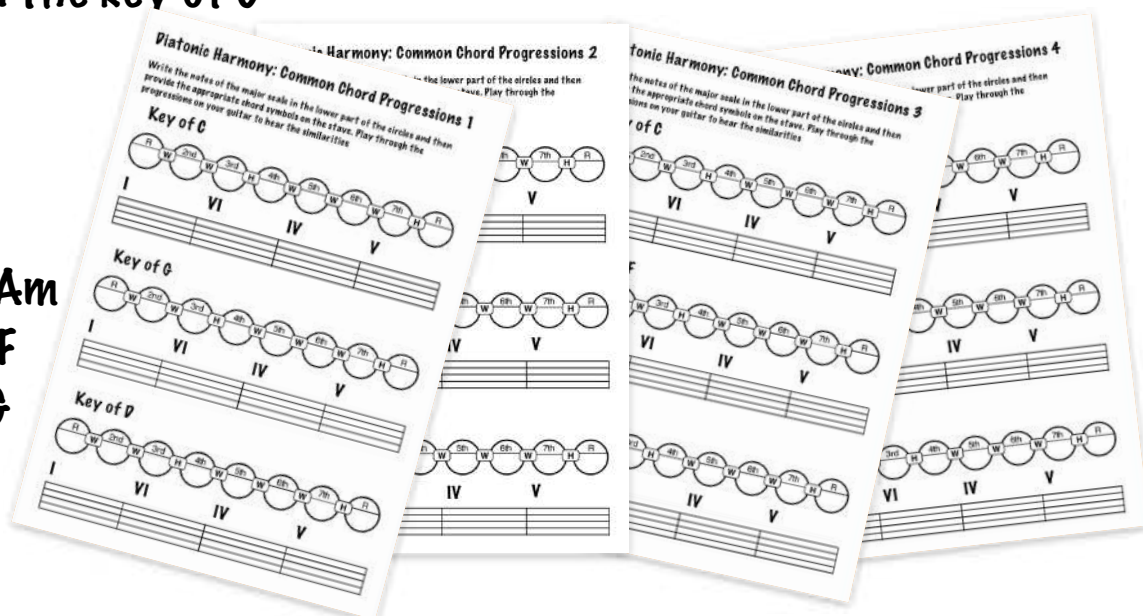
Play the notes of the C Major Scale (C D E F G A B C) and then immediately afterwards play the sequence of chords C-Dm-Em-F-G-Am-Bdim-C (strumming each chord once) so that they can hear the scale in the chords

Then play the notes of the A Major Scale A B C# D E F# G# and A followed closely by the chords A Bm C#m D E F#m G#dim and A

Help them to realise that the two chord progressions sound the same but they are in different keys

From there ask your student to work out the names of the following four chords in the key of C

- Chord I (1) C
- Chord VI (6) Am
- Chord IV (4) F
- Chord V (5) G



Play the chords in sequence and then use the handouts above to help your students to realise that the chords in that particular sequence are the basis of a whole load of "classic" songs (Stand By Me, Every Breath You Take, The River, Crocodile Rock, Simply The Best, Blue Moon and loads more that you can add yourself)

Help your student to move the progression into different keys in order to help them to realise that once you understand them all keys are the same and the chords within them function and behave in the same way

