

Sam Goffen Guitar

# Understanding Triads

All The Basics You Need to Know

## You Will Learn:

- The 3 Most Important Notes in a Chord
- To Make Better Note Selections When Playing Solos
- An Increased Variety in Chord Voicings
- Root, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Inversions
- To Be Able to Play Chords All Over the Neck
- To Make More Appropriate Chord Selections
- Increased Understanding of Note Relationships
- An Improved Ability to Play Along with Others



The Diagrams and Exercises throughout will Help You Get Where You Want to Be!



Part of the Guitar Foundation Masterclass Lessons

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For The Complete Triad Lesson Click:

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## Understanding Triads

### Benefits of This Lesson:

- A Better Understanding of the 3 Most Important Notes in Each Chord
- Better Note Selection When Playing Solos
- Increased Variety in Chord Voicings
- Being Able to Play Chords All Over the Neck
- More Appropriate Chord Selection
- Increased Understanding of Note Relationships
- An Improved Ability to Play Along with Others

These lessons cover all the basics of Triads. It is a vast topic, so I've provided explanations and exercises to then consolidate your learning. To get the **most** out of these lessons, you should **do all** the exercises. These are the sections that have the most value and where you should spend most of your time.

### Sections:

- Introduction
- Analysis
- Learning Triads and Inversions
- Practical Uses
- Triads
- Using Triad Inversions in Our Playing
- Next Steps

## Introduction

You may have heard of **Triads** before as they come up quite a lot, but maybe you aren't quite sure of what they are or how powerful a musical tool they can be.

Triads are the most basic form of a full chord, and are the basis of much of what we hear musically.

And luckily, you will most likely already know some triads, even if you don't know you do!

This is because most basic chords you'll know and those we've been looking at in this Foundation Course – See the [Understanding Chords](#) lesson - are actually all triads, or at least made from triads, as a triad is simply a chord made from 3 notes. Apart from a power-chord (a 5 chord), the triad is the simplest chord there is.

## Analysis

A major triad is made from just the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> notes of a major scale, and for the minor triad we just need to flatten that 3<sup>rd</sup> note – remember this just means move it back one fret.

### **You may be thinking:**

Hang On A Second! – The chords I normally play have more than three notes in them!

### **Exercises:**

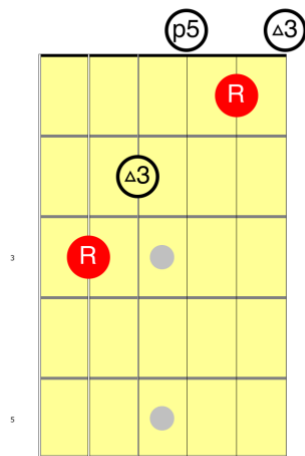
- What Notes are in a C chord, are any of the notes **repeated**?
- If so, how many **different** notes are there in the chord?
- Look at an E chord, is the **same true** for this one?

If you struggled with this exercise, or don't know the notes for these chords, you should work through the [Understanding Chords](#) lesson.

Let's go through this together below:

Let's take a look at a C chord and work out what's going on.

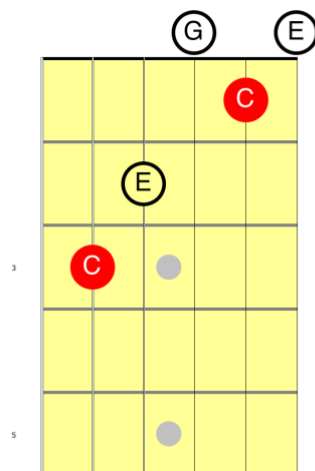
Here's the chord with the notes marked with their intervallic number:



R = Root or the 1<sup>st</sup> note  
Δ 3 = Major 3<sup>rd</sup>  
p5 = Perfect 5<sup>th</sup>

We can see that although we are playing 5 notes, they are still all either the 1<sup>st</sup> (R), the 3<sup>rd</sup> or the 5<sup>th</sup>. So we are only playing 3 different notes here.

Let's check that by looking at the chord with the notes marked:



We can see the chord only uses C (the root), E (the major 3<sup>rd</sup>) and G (the 5<sup>th</sup>).

## Conclusion:

- Major and minor chords are actually made from triads.
- These triads are often stacked to make chords that use these 3 notes more than once.

## Learning Triads and Inversions

As this is where the hard work starts, it might be a good idea to read the first page again remind yourself of all the **benefits** you will gain.

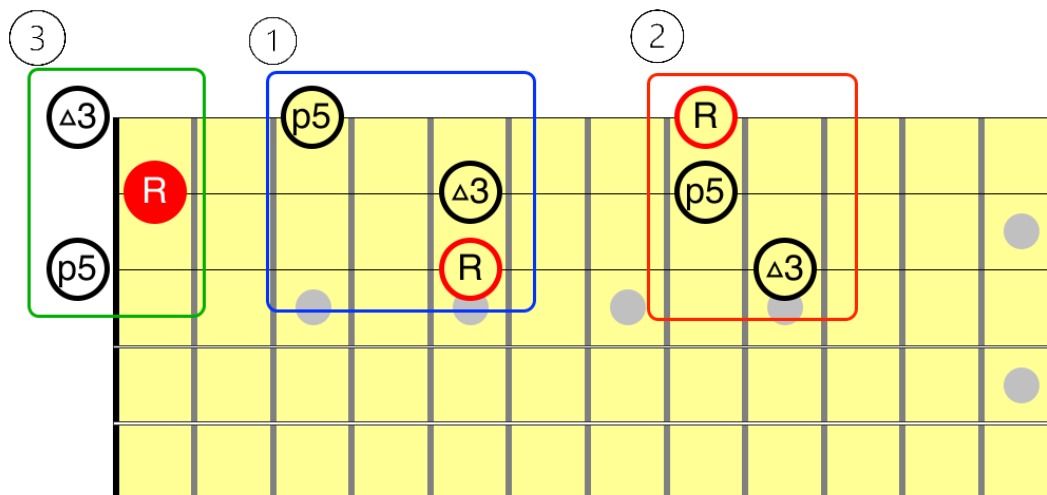
Knowing triads really opens up the fretboard, giving you many options of where to play chords, and also when soloing and improvising you'll know all the best notes to land on all over the neck.

Now, let's start learning them. Here are the triads running along strings 1, 2 and 3 - the 3 high strings - which is the most useful place to start learning them.

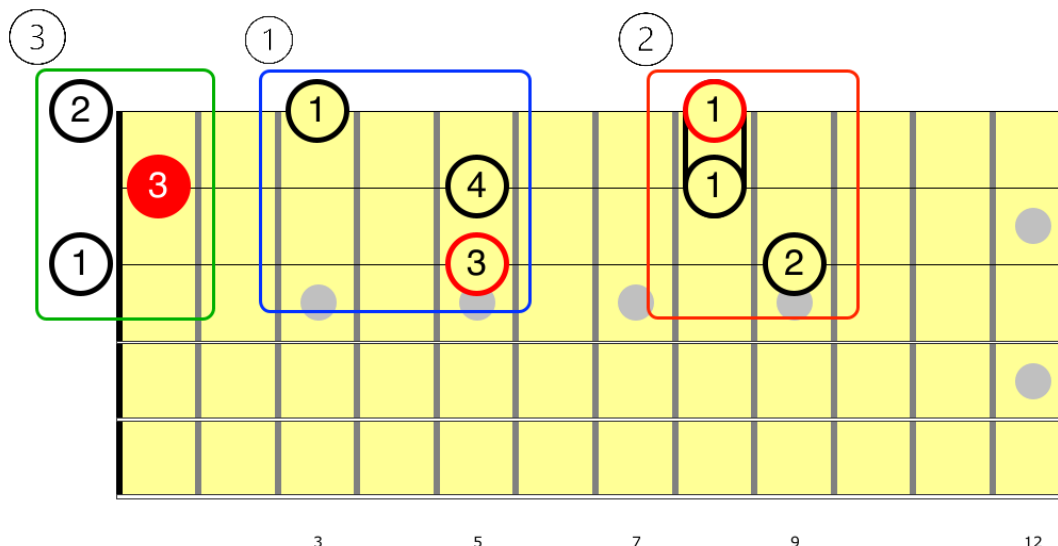
I suggest you take this one step at a time and don't try to learn everything at once as it's a lot to take in at first.

### C Major Triads on Strings 1, 2, 3.

Here are the 3 triads to play through:



And here's the same diagram with the **fingerings** marked:



## Inversions:

- When the root note is the **lowest note** in the triad – the bass note – the triad is said to be in the **Root** position – shape 1 above.
- When the **3<sup>rd</sup>** note is the bass note, this is known as the **1<sup>st</sup> Inversion** – shape 2 above.
- When the **5<sup>th</sup>** note is the bass note, this is the **2<sup>nd</sup> Inversion** – shape 3 above.

## Exercises:

- **Play each triad** following the fingerings marked
- **Extend this** above the 12<sup>th</sup> fret, remember notes on the 12<sup>th</sup> fret are the same as the open strings
- Work out and play the **minor** triads for the **root triad** and the **inversions** – as we know we just move the 3<sup>rd</sup> back one fret.

This is all very good, but **what does it all mean?** How do triads improve **my** playing?

Good questions – let's take a look at some real world practical uses of Triads.

## Triads - Using Them in a Practical Way

We've now:

- Understood what makes a chord major or minor (the major or minor 3<sup>rd</sup>)
- Realised that our common major and minor chords are actually all based on triads
- Learnt where the Root, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Inversion Triads are on Strings 1, 2 and 3 in both Major and Minor forms
- Played through these all over the neck, including past the 12<sup>th</sup> fret
- Played these using the correct fingerings

And in the **Understanding Chords** lesson we:

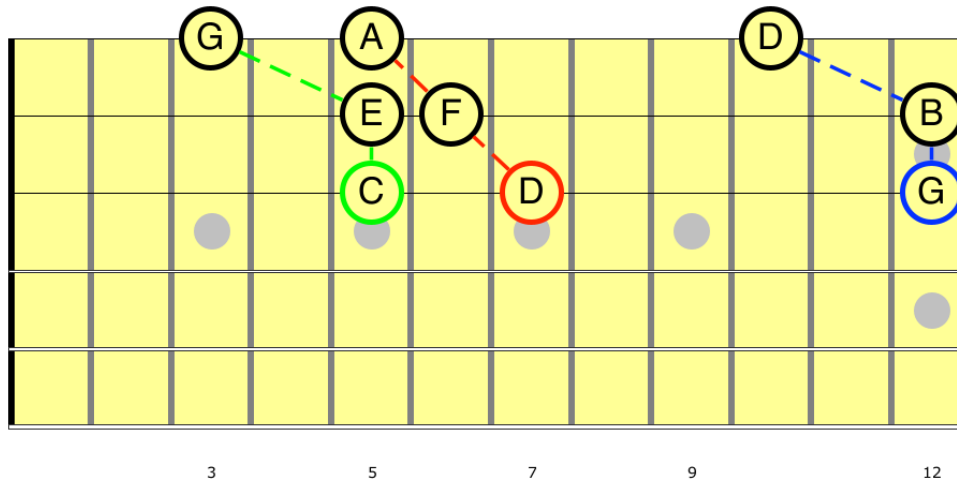
- Worked out all the chords in the key of C using the C major scale to help
- Understood if they should be major or minor and why
- Practised playing different common chord progressions
- Created our own chord progressions and noted those we liked

We're now going use triads based off the three high strings (G, B, E) in a **practical** way.

First, **in the key of C** play through the **I ii V I chord progression** using your normal open chords. You should have played the chords – C, D minor, G and then C again.

If you are unsure about terms like I ii V I then please check out the [Understanding Chords](#) lesson.

Now, just using the **Root** triad position, let's work out where we can play those same chords as 3 note triads on the highest three strings.



The notes in coloured circles are the root notes:

Green = C      Red = D      Blue = G

## Exercises

- **Record** the chord progression of I, ii, V, I using your normal open chords – just use your phone for this
- **Play over** this using the triads outlined above

This is a very simple, yet effective way to organise a second guitar part. As it's higher, the notes stand out and don't clash with the original guitar part. It gives you a great deal of freedom to be able to play chords wherever you like allowing you to add your own rhythmic variations, personality and style into a piece of music without competing with the other guitar.

## Extension

- Work out the I IV V I progression using only the **1<sup>st</sup> inversion** triads
- Work out the I vi IV V progression using only the **2<sup>nd</sup> inversion** triads

## Using Inversions in Our Playing

We've moved one triad shape around the neck to play the I ii V I progression, we're now going to look at how we could play it using different inversions to keep around the same frets. This gives a more natural sounding progression as the chords are all closer together in tone and we don't have the big jump up to the G.

Head To [www.patreon.com/samgoffen](https://www.patreon.com/samgoffen) for the full lesson where we move onto Using Inversions, Triads Grouped on the Other Strings and Tips for Practising them, with diagrams and other learning tools to help.

You'll also find other lessons, tabs, backing tracks and more.

Also check out other free stuff at [www.samgoffenguitar.com](https://www.samgoffenguitar.com) and thanks for checking out the lesson.