

Building a chord

A chord is notes stacked in thirds. Take a scale note, skip one, take the next, skip one, take the next – three notes, and you have a triad. Which thirds you stack decides how it sounds.

THE FOUR TRIAD QUALITIES

Major

G

E

C

MAJOR 3RD +
MINOR 3RD

Bright, settled.
The chord of the
major key.

Minor

E

C

A

MINOR 3RD +
MAJOR 3RD

Darker but just as
stable – the thirds
simply swap.

Diminished

F

D

B

MINOR 3RD +
MINOR 3RD

Tense, unfinished.
The outer notes
make a tritone.

Augmented

G#

E

C

MAJOR 3RD +
MAJOR 3RD

Restless, floating.
Rare, and always
going somewhere.

Read each stack from the gold root upwards. The interval from root to top is a perfect 5th in the first two, a diminished 5th in the third, an augmented 5th in the fourth.

COUNTING THE RECIPE IN SEMITONES

QUALITY	SYMBOL	ROOT→3RD	3RD→5TH	ROOT→5TH	ON C
Major	C, Cmaj, CM	4	3	7	C E G
Minor	Cm, Cmin, C-	3	4	7	C E $\flat$ G
Diminished	Cdim, C $^{\circ}$	3	3	6	C E $\flat$ G $\flat$
Augmented	Caug, C+	4	4	8	C E G#

A TRIAD ON EVERY DEGREE OF C MAJOR

I

C E G

Tonic

ii

D F A

Supertonic

iii

E G B

Mediant

IV

F A C

Subdominant

V

G B D

Dominant

vi

A C E

Submediant

vii $^{\circ}$

B D F

Leading note

Capitals are major, lower case minor, the ring means diminished. Every major key follows this same order: **I ii iii IV V vi vii $^{\circ}$** – only the letter names change.

NAMING A CHORD YOU HAVE FOUND

Stack the notes in thirds until they sit in a neat snowman. The bottom note names the chord; count the semitones up to the middle note to find the quality.

IN A MINOR KEY

The natural minor gives **i ii $^{\circ}$ III iv v VI VII**. Raise the 7th, as most music does, and chord V turns major – which is why minor keys still cadence brightly.