

Chord spelling & inversions drill

A chord is three or four letter names stacked in thirds, then rearranged. Spell it in order first, see which note is at the bottom second, and the name and the figures both fall out.

SPELLING A TRIAD

EVERY OTHER LETTER

Take every second letter. Start on the root and skip one each time: D – F – A. Do that before you think about accidentals, and the three letters are already right.

Then set the quality. Add the accidentals the key or the chord's quality asks for. The letters give the shape; the accidentals give the sound.

THE FIVE CHORDS TO KNOW

MEASURED FROM THE ROOT

CHORD	FROM THE ROOT	ON C	BEHAVIOUR
Major triad	major 3rd, perfect 5th	C E G	Settled, bright
Minor triad	minor 3rd, perfect 5th	C E $\flat$ G	Settled, shadowed
Diminished triad	minor 3rd, diminished 5th	C E $\flat$ G $\flat$	Unstable – must move
Augmented triad	major 3rd, augmented 5th	C E G $\sharp$	Unstable, weightless
Dominant seventh	major 3rd, perfect 5th, minor 7th	C E G B $\flat$	Pulls hard to the key a 4th up

INVERSIONS AND THEIR FIGURES

THE BASS NOTE DECIDES EVERYTHING

POSITION	IN THE BASS	FIGURES	LETTER	AS WRITTEN
Root position	The root	5/3	a	C E G
First inversion	The 3rd	6	b	E G C
Second inversion	The 5th	6/4	c	G C E
Seventh, root position	The root	7	a	C E G B $\flat$
Seventh, first inversion	The 3rd	6/5	b	E G B $\flat$ C
Seventh, second inversion	The 5th	4/3	c	G B $\flat$ C E
Seventh, third inversion	The 7th	4/2	d	B $\flat$ C E G

NAMING A CHORD YOU ARE LOOKING AT

THREE STEPS

- 1 Write the letters out in thirds, lowest to highest, however they appear on the page. C – E – G in some order is always a C chord.
- 2 The letter you had to start from is the root, and it names the chord – not the lowest note printed.
- 3 Look at the lowest note. Root, third, fifth or seventh in the bass gives you a, b, c or d, and the figures with it.

The trap. A chord is not named after its lowest note. E G C is a C chord in first inversion, not an E chord – and in C major that chord is **Ib**. Find the root first, then the position, never the other way round.

Chord spelling & inversions drill

Answers overleaf

NAME _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____

A · SPELL THE CHORD

ROOT UPWARDS · LETTER NAMES

- | | | | |
|--------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|
| 1 D major | _____ | 7 B diminished | _____ |
| 2 B $\flat$ major | _____ | 8 G augmented | _____ |
| 3 F minor | _____ | 9 E $\flat$ major | _____ |
| 4 E major | _____ | 10 F $\sharp$ minor | _____ |
| 5 C $\sharp$ minor | _____ | 11 D minor | _____ |
| 6 A $\flat$ major | _____ | 12 Dominant 7th on G | _____ |

B · NAME THE CHORD

ROOT, QUALITY AND POSITION

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|
| 13 C E G | _____ | 18 C E $\flat$ A $\flat$ | _____ |
| 14 E G C | _____ | 19 D F A $\flat$ | _____ |
| 15 G C E | _____ | 20 C E G B $\flat$ | _____ |
| 16 A C $\sharp$ E | _____ | 21 E G B $\flat$ C | _____ |
| 17 F $\sharp$ A D | _____ | 22 B $\flat$ C E G | _____ |

C · GIVE THE FIGURES

FIGURED BASS AND THE LETTER

- | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|
| 23 Triad, root position | _____ | 27 Seventh, 1st inversion | _____ |
| 24 Triad, 1st inversion | _____ | 28 Seventh, 2nd inversion | _____ |
| 25 Triad, 2nd inversion | _____ | 29 Seventh, 3rd inversion | _____ |
| 26 Seventh, root position | _____ | | |

D · BUILD IT ON THE STAVE

THE BASS NOTE IS PRINTED FOR YOU

Add the remaining notes above each printed bass so the chord is in the position named. Letters mark the position: **a** root, **b** first inversion, **c** second, **d** third.

C major · a	F major · b	G major · c	D minor · a	G $\flat$ · d	A minor · b
30	31	32	33	34	35

E · ROMAN NUMERALS

NUMERAL AND LETTER · C MAJOR UNLESS MARKED

- | | | | |
|----------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|
| 36 F A C | _____ | 39 G B D F | _____ |
| 37 B D G | _____ | 40 E G C | _____ |
| 38 A C E | _____ | 41 D F $\sharp$ A · G major | _____ |

Answer key

One point a question · forty-one in all

A · SPELL THE CHORD

1 D F# A · 2 Bb D F · 3 F Ab C · 4 E G# B · 5 C# E G# · 6 Ab C Eb.

7 B D F · 8 G B D# · 9 Eb G Bb · 10 F# A C# · 11 D F A · 12 G B D F.

8 must be D# and not Eb — an augmented fifth above G still has to be a kind of D.

B · NAME THE CHORD

13 C major, root position · 14 C major, first inversion · 15 C major, second inversion · 16 A major, root position · 17 D major, first inversion.

18 Ab major, first inversion · 19 D diminished, root position · 20 C dominant 7th, root position · 21 C dominant 7th, first inversion · 22 C dominant 7th, third inversion.

13 to 15 are the same three letters three ways — the root stays C every time. In 18 the root is Ab, so the bass C is the third: first inversion. In 22 the seventh, Bb, is the lowest note, which is what makes it third inversion.

C · THE FIGURES

23 5/3, often left unfigured — a · 24 6, in full 6/3 — b · 25 6/4 — c · 26 7 — a.

27 6/5 — b · 28 4/3 — c · 29 4/2, sometimes just 2 — d.

D · ON THE STAVE

The printed basses are C3, A2, D3, D3, F3, C3.

30 **C major, a** — add E and G above C. 31 **F major, b** — the bass A is the third, so add C and F. 32 **G major, c** — the bass D is the fifth, so add G and B.

33 **D minor, a** — add F and A above D. 34 **G7, d** — the bass F is the seventh, so add G, B and D. 35 **A minor, b** — the bass C is the third, so add E and A.

Any octave arrangement of the upper notes is correct, so long as the printed bass stays the lowest note.

E · ROMAN NUMERALS

36 IV (IVa) · 37 Vb · 38 vi (via) · 39 V7 (V7a) · 40 Ib · 41 V (Va).

37 and 40 both have a third in the bass, so both take b.

38 is a minor chord inside a major key and gets a lower-case numeral.

MARKING GUIDE

WHERE THE MARKS ARE LOST

SCORE OUT OF 41	WHAT TO DO NEXT
37 – 41	Secure. Take it into four parts — the harmonising a bass and melody worksheet is the next step.
29 – 36	Spelling is sound and the positions are slipping. Redo sections B and D with the inversion table beside you.
18 – 28	Practise section A alone until every triad comes out without counting, then return to the rest.
Under 18	Work through page one at a keyboard, playing each chord in all three positions before writing anything.

Two habits worth the marks. Always rewrite a chord in thirds on scrap paper before naming it — the root becomes obvious and the guessing stops. And write the accidental from the interval, not from the sound: an augmented fifth is a raised fifth, so the letter cannot change.