Circle of Fifths for Guitar.

Every key's major chord and its relative minor as guitar chord boxes, around the circle of fifths.

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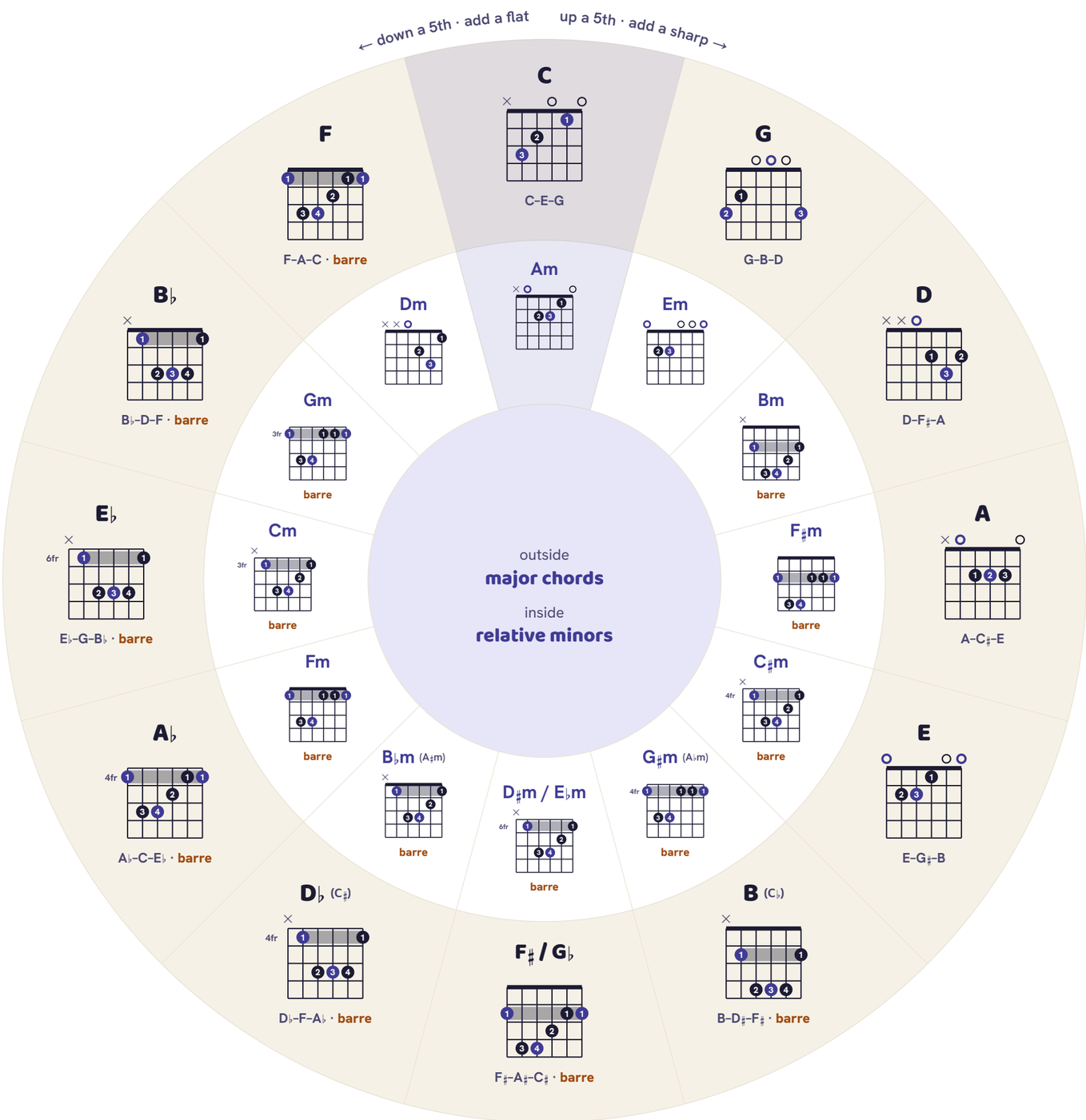
SCALES & KEYS

Circle of Fifths for Guitar

Every key's chord around the circle of fifths: the major chord outside, its relative minor inside. Open shapes where there is one; further round, barre shapes.



Low E string on the left. Numbers are fingers (1 = index). ○ play the open string, × don't play it. Colored dot: the root. "barre": lay your first finger across the shaded strip; 4fr means the box starts at the 4th fret.

SCALES & KEYS

Using the Circle on Guitar

Four things the circle tells a guitarist, shown here in G.

Find the chords of a key

A key and the keys either side are its 1, 4 and 5 chords; the three minor chords inside them are 2m, 6m and 3m.

4 C 1 G 5 D

2m Am 6m Em 3m Bm

Start with the open keys

C, G, D, A and E, at the top of the circle, have open major chords. The further round you go, the more barre chords a key needs.

C G D A E

Use a capo for the rest

A capo raises every shape. Capo at the 1st fret, the A, D and E shapes play B♭, E♭ and F: the 1, 4 and 5 of B♭.

Capo 1

A shape → B♭
D shape → E♭
E shape → F

Switch to the relative minor

The minor chord just inside shares the key signature, so a song in E minor uses the same chords as G.

G ↔ Em

FOUNDATIONS

How to Read a Chord Box

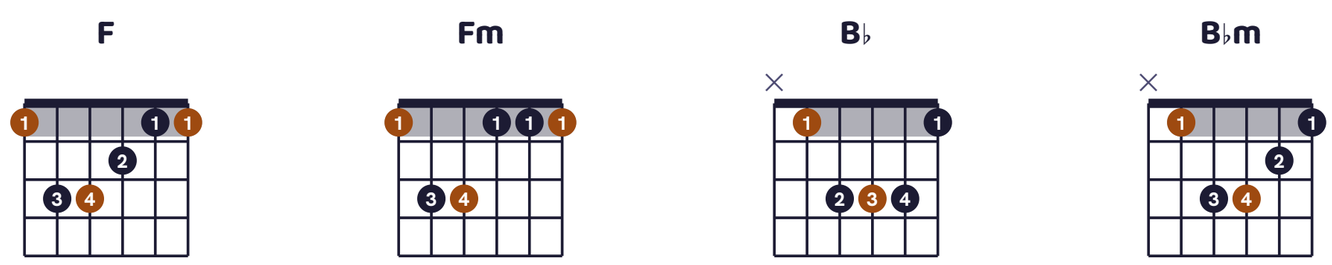
A chord box is a picture of the guitar neck, standing up, as you look at it.

Lines	Up and down: the six strings, low E on the left. Across: the frets.
Thick top line	The nut: the box starts at the first fret.
3fr	No nut: the box starts at the fret shown, here the 3rd.
1 2 3 4	Which finger: 1 index, 2 middle, 3 ring, 4 little.
○	Play the string open, with no finger on it.
×	Don't play this string.
Colored dot	The root: the note that names the chord.

CHORDS & HARMONY

Barre Chords

Two shapes play every major and minor chord: the open E and A chords, moved up the neck with your first finger as the nut.



The shaded strip is the barre: lay your first finger flat across those strings. Colored dot: the root, which names the chord.

Move it

E SHAPE: ROOT ON THE 6TH STRING	**F** fret 1	**G** fret 3	**A** fret 5	**B** fret 7	**C** fret 8	**D** fret 10
A SHAPE: ROOT ON THE 5TH STRING	**B♭** fret 1	**C** fret 3	**D** fret 5	**E** fret 7	**F** fret 8	**G** fret 10

Slide a shape up two frets to go up a whole step: F becomes G, B♭ becomes C. Minor shapes move the same way.

PRACTICE TIP

Practice slowly. Speed comes from playing it right, not from playing it fast.

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