

The (Nashville) Number System

What is the (Nashville) Number System?

Numbering chords in a key based of the notes in the major scale.

How does it work?

Example in the Key of C

<i>Write out the major scale</i>	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
<i>Assign number values to each</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1(8)
<i>Form a triad from each note using notes in major scale</i>	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E
	G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
<i>See chord quality of triads</i>	M	m	m	M	M	m	Dim	M

This is the same basic pattern for every major scale. Simply put, in the key of C, to refer to the “4 Chord” means to play an F Major chord. To refer to the “6 minor chord” or simply the “6 chord” is to play an A Minor chord.

Common alterations

The $\flat 7$ (“flat 7”)

Note that in the basic major scale the chord formed from the 7th note creates a diminished triad. Often in modern worship songs, songwriters will use the $\flat 7$ by simply lowering the 7th note by a half step. In the key of C, this creates a triad of B \flat D F, which is a major chord.

The 2 Major Chord

It’s not uncommon for the 2 chord to be played periodically as a major chord by raising the 4th note a half step. In the key of C, this would create a D F \sharp A triad.

The 6 Major Chord

By raising the tonic a half step, the 6 chord can be played as Major, which is often used as a brief departure from major scale or as a pivot chord a whole step key change. In the key of C, this makes the 6 chord a Major triad A C \sharp E, which would transition well up to the key of D Major (The theory behind this is that A Major is the 5 chord of the new key of D you’re changing to).

Inversions / “Slash Chords”

Without changing the notes in the scale or the chord, you can create different inversions of each chord by changing the root note. The quality of the chord remains, but this gives it a different feel and texture. For example:

The 1 chord is made up of notes 1 3 5 (C E G)

The 1/3 chord (1st inversion) would be 3 5 1 (E G C)

The 1/5 chord (2nd inversion) would be 5 1 3 (G C E)

Why is this numbering system important and how is it helpful?

- It will make you a better musician!
- Connects playing our instruments with basic music theory
- Learn new songs without being too dependent on chord charts
- Trains our ears to recognize chords and chord qualities in a scale
- Anticipate where chord changes are going in a given melody
- Communicate clearly and concisely in a band setting
- Transpose songs and chord progressions quickly and on the spot
- If people are capo’d differently you can still communicate clearly
- You can change your capo around and still know what to play
- Aids music memorization

Tips/Tricks

- The 1, 4, & 5 chords can help to serve as posts in the ground to work from.
 - Start by getting really familiar with the 1, 4, & 5 chords.
 - Then find other chords in relation to these.
- Learn common chord progressions in every key, such as 1 – 5 – 6 – 4 or 1 – 4 – 5 – 6
- Practice, practice, practice. Learn to recognize chords when you hear it. This only happens by repetition.
- Can be Roman numerals (uppercase = major, lowercase = minor, lowercase with ° = dim)
 - 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 becomes I – ii – iii – IV – V – vi – vii°

Quick Exercises

1. In the Key of C, what is the 5 chord? _____
2. In the Key of F, what is the 2 chord? _____
3. In the Key of G, what is the 6 chord? _____
4. In the Key of D, what is the 1 chord? _____
5. In the Key of E \flat , what is the 4 chord? _____
6. In the Key of B, what is the 7 chord? _____
7. In the Key of C, what is the 3 chord? _____
8. In the Key of A, what is the 1/3 chord? _____
9. In the Key of G, what is the 5/7 chord? _____
10. In the Key of B \flat , what is the 6M chord? _____

