



What is a Chord?

A chord is three or more notes played together

When you play a single note it is a melody note. When you play several notes at the same time you create a chord. Chords give music its colour, emotion and sense of home.

How a basic chord is made

Start with a scale. Take the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes and play them together. That is a triad — the simplest and most common type of chord.

C major scale · the notes we pick for a C major chord are highlighted

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The same notes stacked (as you would play them)

G	5
E	3
C	1

C major
1 3 5

G	5
E $\flat$	b3
C	1

C minor
1 b3 5

Major and minor — the two basic flavours

The only difference between a major and a minor triad is the middle note (the 3rd). Lowering the 3rd by one semitone turns major into minor.

Major Chord

1 + 3 + 5

Often feels bright, happy or open

C major = C E G

Minor Chord

1 + b3 + 5

Often feels darker, sad or thoughtful

C minor = C E $\flat$ G

Three useful things to remember

1. The bottom note is usually the root (the name of the chord).
2. Most basic chords are built by stacking notes in thirds (skipping every other note of the scale).
3. Once you know the formula (for example 1 3 5), the same shape works in every key.

Once you understand that a chord is simply a group of scale degrees played together, the Chord Interval Chart and the Number System sheet become much easier to use.