

Four chords, one hand shape

Most pop songs are built from a handful of chords. These four, played in this order, carry a huge share of them. By the end of week two you will play them in time with a track, without looking at your hands.

C I	G V	Am vi	F IV
--------	--------	----------	---------

THE SHAPES

Learn each chord with both hands

● Right hand, numbers are fingers (thumb = 1) ● Left hand, the root

C I, home

RH C E G · fingers 1 3 5

LH C (any finger, the 5th is best)

middle C

G V, tension

RH B D G · fingers 1 2 5

LH G (any finger, the 5th is best)

middle C

Am vi, the sad one

RH C E A · fingers 1 2 5

LH A (any finger, the 5th is best)

middle C

F IV, lift

RH C F A · fingers 1 3 5

LH F (any finger, the 5th is best)

middle C

The trick that makes this easy: your right thumb stays on middle C for C, Am and F. Only G moves it, one key down to B. Your hand barely travels, so your ears and eyes stay on the music.

EXERCISES

Three steps to playing in time

Each one loops the four chords. Start slow: on the screen, set the tempo to 60% and raise it when the changes feel easy.

1 Hold each chord

Goal: find the next shape before the bar ends. Count "1, 2, 3, 4" out loud.

♩ = 72

C G Am F

The musical notation shows a 4/4 time signature. The right hand (treble clef) plays four chords: C major (C4, E4, G4), G major (B3, D4, F#4), A minor (A3, C4, E4), and F major (F3, A3, C4). The left hand (bass clef) plays the root notes: C3, G2, A2, and F2. Each measure is 4 beats long and ends with a repeat sign.

2 Pulse on every beat

Goal: right hand plays four even chords per bar while the left hand holds the root.

♩ = 76

C G Am F

The musical notation shows a 4/4 time signature. The right hand (treble clef) plays four chords per measure: C major (C4, E4, G4), G major (B3, D4, F#4), A minor (A3, C4, E4), and F major (F3, A3, C4). The left hand (bass clef) holds the root notes: C3, G2, A2, and F2. Each measure is 4 beats long and ends with a repeat sign.

3 Pop ballad rhythm

Goal: the pattern "1, 2, 3-and, 4" in the right hand, left hand on beats 1 and 3. This is the groove behind countless ballads.

Tempo: ♩ = 76

Chords: C, G, Am, F

The notation shows a 4/4 time signature. The right hand (treble clef) plays a steady eighth-note pattern: C4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half). The left hand (bass clef) plays a simple bass line: C3 (half), G2 (half), F2 (half), E2 (half), D2 (half), C2 (half).

PLAY-ALONG

Your first song

An original melody over the same four chords. Your job is the chords; the track plays the tune.

Valley Road

80 bpm · 9 bars · melody by your teacher

Tempo: ♩ = 80

Chords: C, G, Am, F, C

The notation shows a 4/4 time signature. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melody: C4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half). The left hand (bass clef) plays a simple bass line: C3 (half), G2 (half), F2 (half), E2 (half), D2 (half), C2 (half).

1. Listen once with **Hear it** and follow the chord names above the staff.
2. Switch to **Your turn**. Play each chord once, on beat 1, with the left-hand root.
3. When that works, use the Exercise 3 rhythm instead.
4. Last bar: hold the C chord and let it ring.

The audio track and tempo control are on the online version of this lesson:

startwithchords.com/sample-lesson

PRACTICE PLAN

Fifteen minutes a day

DAYS	FOCUS	TEMPO
1 to 3	Chord shapes one at a time, then Exercise 1. Say each chord name as you play it.	Free, no track
4 to 7	Exercise 1 with the track, then Exercise 2.	60% to 80%
8 to 10	Exercise 2 at full speed, then Exercise 3 slowly.	60% to 100%
11 to 14	Valley Road: Hear it, then Your turn. Finish with Exercise 3.	80% to 100%

Ready for weeks 3 and 4 when you can:

☐ Play all four chords with your eyes closed, starting from any of them.

☐ Loop Exercise 2 at 100% four times without stopping.

☐ Play Exercise 3 at 80% or faster with the track.

☐ Play the chords to Valley Road on "Your turn" from start to finish.

Start With Chords, Level 1, weeks 1 and 2 of 52. Prepared by Eric Imhauser.

All exercises and the Valley Road melody are original to this course.