

CAGED SYSTEM BASICS

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Because of the layout of strings and frets on the guitar, we can move chords, notes, and patterns up and down in pitch by moving them up and down neck at different frets.

We can see this concept in the following example:

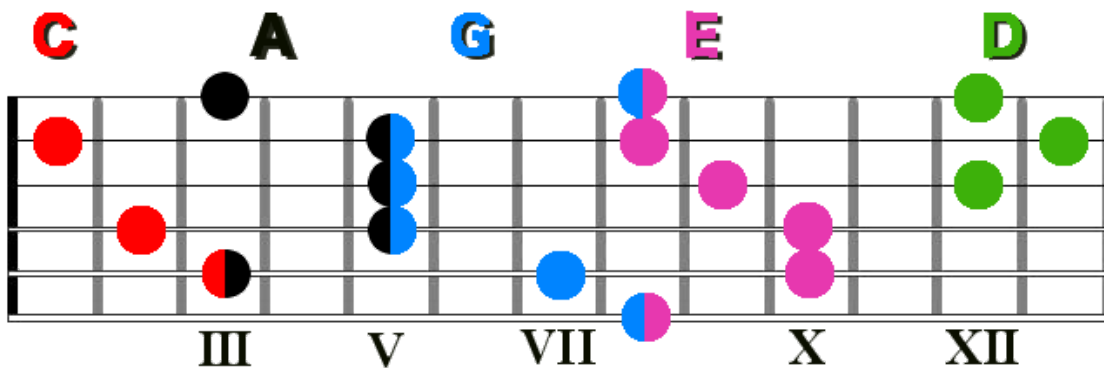
Electric Guitar

G⁵ B^b F⁵

5 5 5 5 8 8 8 8 3 3 3 3
3 3 3 3 6 6 6 6 1 1 1 1

By moving our power chord shape up and down the neck, we can use the same shape for each chord, even though each chord has completely different notes.

We can further this concept by using the CAGED system. The CAGED system is simply a sequence in which chord shapes can be found up and down the neck. We can use it to find chord shapes, arpeggios, and chord tones for any chord or chord quality.

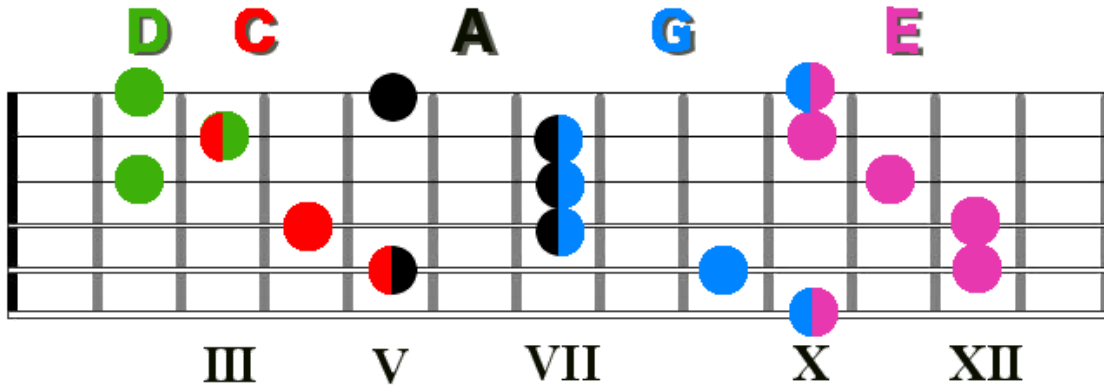


In the CAGED diagram, you can see our C chord (in red) in its normal root position. Let's say we're jamming with another guitarist playing the root C, and we wanted to find a C chord higher up the neck to play.

We could use the E chord shape at the 8th fret (in purple). We could also play the D chord shape at the 12th fret (in green). Even though it's the E and D shapes, the actual notes being played are the notes of the C chord (remember the power chord example at the beginning?)

But what if we wanted to find a chord other than C? Or G? Or any other chord? In these situations, we just start our sequence at our target chord.

For example, if we wanted to find *D Chords* up the neck, **CAGED** becomes **DCAGE**:



So let's say we are playing with another guitarist, and they are playing the root D chord (in green). We want to do a comping rhythm high enough that does not conflict with the root D chord, and we also want to keep it a smaller chord, with 3 or 4 notes.

Electric Guitar

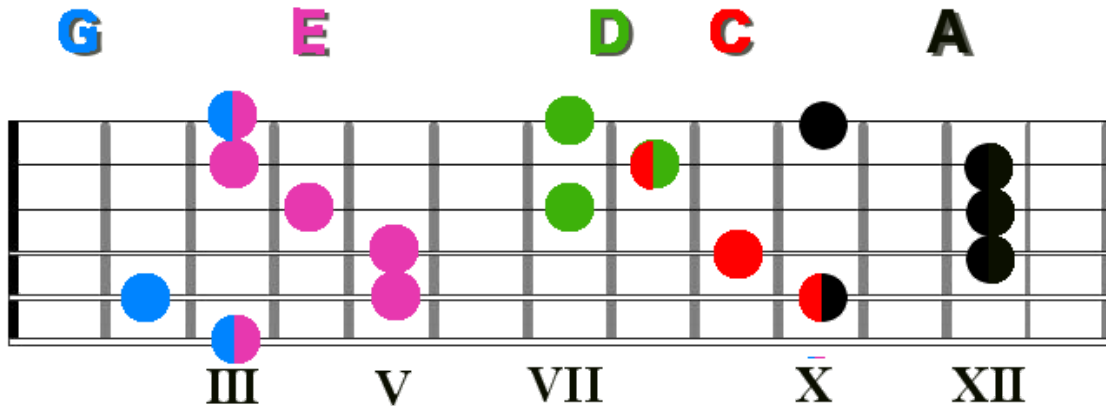
Let's take the A shape (in black) at the 5th fret. If we limit our chord to the top three strings, we can make a nice small, tight chord that is appropriate for some light comping.

Electric Guitar

If we want a D chord higher up the neck, we can jump up to the E shape (in purple) at the 10th fret.

Experiment with different chord shapes using the above diagrams! Start out with one "target chord," then use the diagram to move your shapes up and down the neck. It's important to remember, CAGED is just a sequence of *SHAPES*!

Let's look at one final "target" chord example, using G:



So if we take **CAGED** and reorder them with our "target chord" in the beginning of the sequence, we will have **GEDCA**.

As you can see, some of the notes overlap (the half and half dots on the diagram). We can use these overlapping sections to combine our chord shapes up the neck.

Electric Guitar

Here is a G chord on the 7th fret, using the D chord shape (green), and C shape (red). Can you identify which notes are from the D shape, which are from the C shape, and which are overlapping?

Electric Guitar

The same G chord, played as an arpeggio. These are just a few of the possibilities when using CAGED. It can be a jumping-off point to new ideas, and map out entire areas of the guitar neck previously unknown.

And now, for our recap...

As you can see, the CAGED system is just a sequence of chord *SHAPES*. Depending on your target chord, we could have these sequences as well:

AGEDC

GEDCA

EDCAG

DCAGE

But the order of the letters always stays the same, regardless of the start note (target chord.)

To illustrate this fact another way, If looking for an **A** chord above root position, the shape directly above **A** (*root shape*) will be the **G** shape, followed by the **E** shape, followed by the **D** shape, followed by the **C** shape, to be followed by the **A** shape 12 frets above root.

Another important consideration is not to box yourself in with the CAGED system. It doesn't mean you *HAVE* to play the entire chord shape fret to use this method correctly. Some of these shapes can be impractical if using the *ENTIRE* chord shape, particularly the A, C, and G shapes when played out of root position. In these instances, break up the shape into two, three, or four-string chords (like in the above examples).

Remembering the sequence (order), shapes, and overlapping sections are key to utilizing this concept. Talk to your instructor about using these shapes for arpeggio's, melodic lines, or patterns.

We have found that the CAGED system presents us with easily-found alternative voicings of chords up and down the neck, using a sequence of shapes. Once we have internalized these shapes across the fretboard, we will discuss using these patterns in altering chord qualities, reharmonizing, and for string-skipping melodic patterns and broken-voicings.

HOMEWORK/PRACTICE:

1. Learn the various positions for playing the following chords using CAGED:

Target chords - D, E, A

2. Pick out some shapes/combinations of shapes/stripped-down shapes (like our 3-string examples) in root position, mid-neck (fret 5-10, more or less), and near the octave (frets 10-14). An example would be:

Target chord - G

Shapes I like - D shape on 7th fret, A shape on 10th fret (both shapes only using G,B, and E strings)

3. Once you have your favorite shapes/combinations for each target chord, practice using them! Focus on one neck position at a time (root, mid, near-octave), and practice the following chord progressions using your new shapes. Your comping pattern is up to you, but do not pull focus away from the chords by using an overly complicated or difficult pattern or rhythm.

CHORD PROGRESSIONS:

Loop or Vamp the following progressions at root (first few frets), mid-neck (frets 5-9), and near-octave (frets 10-14) positions.

	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	etc
1.	A			D					
2.	E			E					
3.	E			D			A	A	
4.	D			E			A	A	
5.	A			A			D	E	

These are a few patterns to get you started. Once you have developed a few positions for each of the progressions above, try other chords! For now, stick to C, A, G, E, and D. We will discuss using the CAGED system for the other notes of the scale in another lesson.