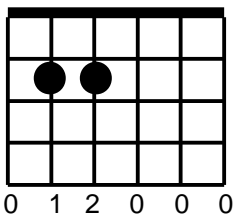


## **OPEN POSITION CHORD CHANGING TECHNIQUES AND PRINCIPLES** -written by David Taub

**NOTE:** Practice the following when working with chords and chord changes:

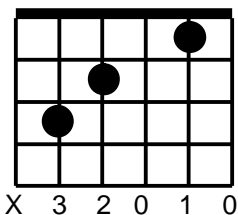
1. Push down hard on the strings with the fleshy part of your fingertips. You will build calluses on your fingertips over time so it will get easier and easier the more you practice. Many times the notes will not ring true because you are not pressing down hard enough.
2. Playing slow and clean is ALWAYS better than fast and sloppy.
3. Do not get discouraged – it may take a little bit to get the fingerings down and for these chords to start sounding very clean – that is normal – it takes time for your finger tendons and wrist to get adjusted to these new positions. Keep positive and it will come with time.
4. Play the chords one note at a time before strumming to ensure they ring clean. Each note should ring true with no clicks, pops, dead strings, or overtones from other strings.
5. Make sure you are not bending any strings as you finger the chord or the chord will ring out of tune. Sight down the strings making sure they are straight and not bent.
6. Also check that your fingers are not touching any of the other strings, (except if you are muting strings on purpose). If part of one finger blocks another or is hitting an errant string then try arching your fingers more by bringing your wrist further under the fret board.
7. Try to play in time by counting out the measure or tapping your foot.
8. Focus on moving fingers only slightly off the fret board when changing chords.
9. Keep proper hand and wrist position with fingers staying close to the fret board at all times. It is acceptable for these open position chords for your thumb to come up higher on the back of the neck for extra leverage, support, and to mute the low E and A strings as needed.
10. Remember - pick the strings one at a time and listen that each note rings true, then strum all strings at the same time. Do this for all the chords as you learn them as listed below.
11. These open position chords form the foundation for hundreds and hundreds of songs. Commit them to memory and you can start playing many of your favorite tunes. Be creative – put them together in your own unique combinations and rhythms.
12. Always remember to HAVE FUN – practice does not have to be drudgery!

### **Em**



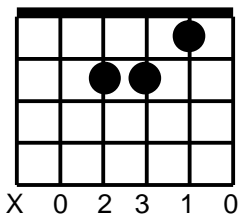
**E minor** – E (root), G (b3rd), B (5<sup>th</sup>). This open position E minor chord has four open strings. Notice the E root note appears in the chord three times. As you strum let all the individual notes ring out. You can also finger this chord with the second and third fingers as an alternate fingering. Practice both fingerings as you will find both come in very handy depending on what chord you are going to next in a given progression.

### **C**



**C major** – C (root), E (3<sup>rd</sup>), G (5<sup>th</sup>). This open position C major chord has two open strings. The low E string is not played and needs to be muted so it does not muddy the chord. Let the very tip of your third finger “spill” over the A string and slightly touch the low E string thus muting it so it will not be heard when strumming the chord. Or you can also mute the low E string with your thumb by having it come slightly over the top of the neck and just touch the low E to deaden it.

### **Am**



**A minor** – A (root), C (b3<sup>rd</sup>), E (5<sup>th</sup>). This Am chord has two open strings. Mute the low E string much like with the C major chord above. Remember this fingering and chord shape, as it will be exactly the same fingering, or voicing, for the E major chord that is explained later in this lesson.

## **OPEN POSITION CHORD CHANGING TECHNIQUES AND PRINCIPLES** -written by David Taub

When first learning to switch chords a good practice method is to fret a chord and practice lifting your fingers off the fret board slightly while keeping them in the same chord shape. Then place your fingers back on the fret board in the same chord position. Pick all the notes of the chord individually and then strum the chord to check all the notes still ring clean and your fingers have not shifted. When you are ready to change chords visualize the fingering in your mind of the next chord in the progression as you are about to change. After time this visualization process will become automatic and will really help you to move chords quickly and cleanly.

Good fret hand technique is an absolute must to get proficient at chord changing. Remember and practice the following fret hand technique:

1. wrist down
2. on your fingertips and fingers cupped
3. thumb anchored in the back of the neck about even with the first or second finger
4. fingers as close to the fret board as possible at all times – not flying out of position
5. pinky finger attached to the side of the third finger

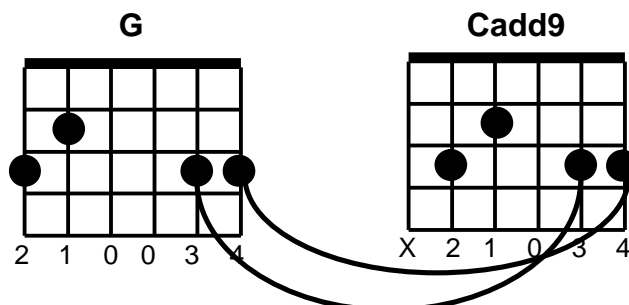
When changing chords you always want to utilize the following techniques.

1. practice the chord change mechanics at first by switching with only one strum per chord to get used to the finger movements and to check that all notes of both chords are ringing true. Go back and forth between the two chords till fluid.
2. move your fingers all at once, not one at a time.
3. keep your fingers close to the fretboard at all times – don't have your fingers flying out of position.
4. look for shared fingers and clusters as explained below.
5. keep that pinky finger attached to the side of the third finger.

Once you have the chord change mechanics down for a given chord change then you want to try it in time while strumming. When changing chords start off very slow and in time count and tap your foot in time counting quarter notes "One – Two – Three – Four" – then change – then repeat. Make the chord change right on the "ONE" beat. When you have the change in solid quarter notes then work it up to straight eighth notes or an eighth note strum pattern counting off, "One – and – Two – and – Three – and – Four - and - CHANGE – and – Two – and – Three – and – Four – And CHANGE - repeat". Take your time, speed will come, playing slow and clean is so much more important than fast and sloppy. We will practice changes two at a time and then start putting those together to make three and four chord changes and BAM – you are playing songs!

**1. THE SHARED FINGERS PRINCIPLE** - When changing chords you want to examine the fingerings for each chord to determine if there are any common fingered notes between each chord. If one or two fingers are to remain pressed on the same note, then leave them pressed as you move to the next chord while moving your other fingers around them. Don't take any fingers off the neck if you don't have to, especially if you are just going to put them right back in the same place with the next chord. Leave them down. This "SHARED FINGERS" principle will improve and quicken your chord changing abilities. Always analyze chord change fingerings in this fashion – so not to have any extra finger movements off the fret board. Keep all fingers of your fret hand as close to the fret board as possible at all times.

**G to Cadd9 change** - In the illustration below when changing from a G to Cadd9 leave your third and fourth fingers down on the B and high E strings. No reason to pick them up at all. Then just slide your first and second fingers straight down one fret each to go from the G to the Cadd9 chord. Slide your fingers right on the strings leaving them in the same cluster to perform this change fluidly. Try the change mechanics first, then with a quarter note strum and then with an eighth note strum – back and forth and try to tap your foot in time.



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**Cadd9 to D change** – When completing this change leave your third finger down on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret of the B string. That note is shared between both chords. Then at the same time move your first and 2<sup>nd</sup> fingers together picking them slightly off the fretboard to finger the D chord. Go back and forth between these two chords until fluid. Then try while strumming quarter and eighth notes.

**D to G change** – utilize the four-finger G chord that we learned in a previous lesson, as that will make this change easier. Utilize the **shared finger** principle and when executing this change leave your 3<sup>rd</sup> finger on the D note and all together move your first and second fingers up to finger the G chord. Also move your pinky onto the G note on the high E string. Keep practicing this movement and it will become very fluid over time.

**Now put all above together make a three-chord change in the vein of Green Day and Guns and Roses:**

**G to Cadd9 to D** - Put all three of the above changes back to back and you have the beginnings of many songs. Green Day uses this change in the song Good Riddance and Guns and Roses have a similar change in the verses of sweet child of mine. After the D chord go back to the G chord and keep rolling through the changes. In

### **MORE SHARED FINGERS CHORD CHANGES TO PRACTICE:**

**G to Em change** – When changing to the Em chord utilize **shared fingers** leaving your first finger on the B note, (2<sup>nd</sup> fret, A string). Then just take your second finger and slide it under your first finger on the E note, (2<sup>nd</sup> fret, D string). Go back and forth between the G to Em until fluid.

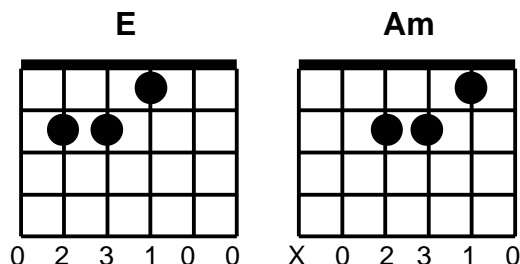
**Em to C change** - concentrate on the **shared finger**, leaving the 2<sup>nd</sup> finger on the E note on the D string and just move your 1st and 3rd fingers around that note. Think of it as a type of pivot maneuver – you are pivoting your first and third fingers in unison to form the C chord. At the same time move your 1st finger to the C note on the B string, (1<sup>st</sup> fret), and your 3rd finger to the C note on the A string, (3<sup>rd</sup> fret). Think of a pivot point for this change.

**C to Am change** - switching from C to Am only requires the movement of the 3<sup>rd</sup> finger to the A note on the G-string. Nudge your second finger over just a bit to make a little room. Notice the first and second fingers are shared between the two chords and don't have to be picked up off the fretboard. Leave the first and second fingers in place from the C chord as you move to the Am chord. Practice this change back and forth until its fluid.

**Dm to G change** - utilize the shared finger principle and leave your third finger on the D note, (3<sup>rd</sup> fret, B string) when changing to the G chord. Then move your first and second fingers up to the G chord position while leaving your third finger in the same place for both chords.

**2. THE CLUSTER PRINCIPLE** – Above we discussed how critical it is to analyze chord changes for shared fingers. You also want to analyze chord changes for finger clustering. This is where you can leave your fingers in the same pattern, or “cluster”, as you move to a change. You don't break up the hand or finger cluster. This way you don't have to spend the time reshaping your fingers to voice the next chord. It makes changing chords must faster and much easier.

**E to Am change** - to illustrate the cluster principle first lets examine changing chords from E to Am. This is a fairly simple change to play because the chord shapes are exactly the same and they are also played with the same fingerings. The only difference is they are one string apart. In the illustration below you can see that the chord shapes are identical. Concentrate on leaving your fingers in the exact same **cluster** as you lift off the E chord and just move the whole shape down one string. It's a quick lift off and put back – do not allow your fingers to come far off the fret board – slide them right along the strings. Keep them close in and formed in the same shape.



## OPEN POSITION CHORD CHANGING TECHNIQUES AND PRINCIPLES -written by David Taub

### MORE CLUSTER CHORD CHANGES TO PRACTICE:

**Em to Am change** - Let's practice the cluster principle with another change. This time we will change from Em to Am. To switch between the Em and Am chords leave your 2nd and 3rd fingers on the Em shape **cluster** and just shift them both one string down in the same **cluster** while at the same time adding your 1st finger on the C note on the B string. It's a very fluid change. Then when going back from the Am to the Em just lift the 1st finger off the B string and again leave your 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fingers in the same cluster but just move them up one string. Remember to keep your fingers as close as possible to the fret board. Never move your fret hand out of position.

**A to D change** – For this change keep your hand in that same tight cluster when moving from the A chord to the D chord. You can even leave your third finger on the B and just slide it over from the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret to the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret when making the change. Keep your other fingers close to the fretboard and bunched together coming off the A chord and lift them slightly off the strings to get to the D chord.

**C to D change** – for this change there is no clustering or shared fingers. You will have to take all three fingers off the C chord and reshape them into the D chord. Try to keep your fingers as close to the fretboard as possible and move your fingers in unison. Keep practicing the motion and it will get very fluid over time.

**A to Em change** – when playing the A chord with three fingers leave your first and second fingers in the same **cluster** and just bump them up one string each into the Em chord voicing. It is a very fluid change. Remember to keep your fingers close to the fretboard, just move them off the strings slightly when you move from the A chord to the Em chord.

**Dm to E change** – Much like a Am to Dm change the two chords are similar in shape, the Dm is just spread out the extra fret. All three fingers will change positions during the change but keep them in the same **cluster** and just move them in unison up or down the strings when making the change.

**Am to Dm change** – the shape of the A minor chord is similar to the shape of a D minor chord. The D minor is just spread out across one more fret – so it is a little wider. Take a look at both chords and note the similarity. When executing this change utilize the **cluster** principle and keep your fingers in the same basic shape, just spread it out for the extra fret when changing to the Dm chord. All three fingers will change positions during this change but keep them **clustered** together and just slide them in unison the one fret distance to finger the D minor chord. Practice this motion and when you have it solid and in time then add in a strum.

**3. THE SLIDE PRINCIPLE** – at times when changing chords you will have to lift all your fingers off the fretboard to form the next chord as the chords may not share notes or have common clusters. However, there are instances where you can keep a finger or two down on the fretboard and just slide them into position for the next chord. This slide provides you with a “guide” of sorts that lead you to the next chord. Usually you will find a slide where the next chord has a note on the same string but one or two frets over. Lets analyze some examples over the next few pages.

### THE SLIDE PRINCIPLE CHORD CHANGES TO PRACTICE:

**E to D change** - concentrate on leaving the 1st finger on the G# note on the G-string but when you change to the D **slide** it up one fret, (a half step). At the same time lift the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fingers from and the A and D strings and fret the D and F# notes on the B and high E string. **Slide** back down one half step when changing back from the D to the E chord and move the other fingers to fret the notes indicated. Practice this motion and soon the **slide** will be a very fluid movement that will make chord changes faster and easier to finger.

**A to D minor change** – this change will incorporate both **shared fingers** and the **slide principle**. Play the A chord with three fingers. When changing to the D chord there is a **shared finger**. Leave your second finger on the A note, (2<sup>nd</sup> fret, G string). Then **slide** your third finger from the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret to the third fret on the B string. The last part of the change is to be done at the same time you are sliding on the B string. Move your first finger from the E note, (2<sup>nd</sup> fret, D string), to the F note, (1<sup>st</sup> fret, high E string). Remember like with the other changes you want to train your fingers to execute these moves all at the same time. It takes practice, but stay positive, keep working on it and it will come!

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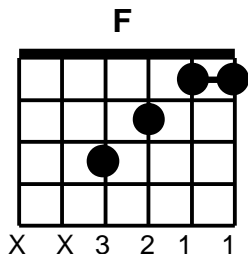
From previous lessons you have started building a chord vocabulary of widely used open position chords. So lets try a four-chord progression utilizing some of the open position chords and changes we have discussed. When first attempting to play a piece of music with more than a two chord change, first write out all the chords in the song. Then write out the changes two at a time and analyze them for shared fingers or clustering. Practice the finger changing movements first, to get them rock solid before putting a strum to them. This progression below may sound familiar as the band Pearl Jam used this chordal foundation to cover the song "Last Kiss" a song made famous by the Cavaliers in 1964.

### **FOUR-CHORD CHANGE TO PRACTICE: G – Em – C - D**

**Analyze the changes two at a time** - the G to Em change has a **shared finger** - leave your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger in place on the B note and move your 3<sup>rd</sup> finger directly below it to the E note on the A string. Nudge your 2<sup>nd</sup> finger over a bit to make room. The Em to C change also has a shared finger as we discussed that change above. The hardest change in this progression will be the change from C to D, as you will have to move all three fingers off the C chord to change to the D chord. Then the D back to the G has a **shared finger** as we discussed on the previous page. Break the changes down to two at a time and practice them individually. G to Em, Em to C, C to D, and D back to G. Then when you have all the change movements solid for each change then try to string them together in time to play the four-chord change. Remember to visualize the change before you move your fingers, take things slow, and it will come. Work through the finger movements first, then strum with quarter notes in time, then try eighth notes in time. Then try an eighth note strum pattern. Remember to tap your foot and keep solid meter. Soon you will be able to play the progression faster and then with different strum patterns and rhythms.

### **THE F MAJOR CHORD – YOU CAN DO IT!**

The F major chord is one of the more challenging chords to learn and master when first starting out on the instrument. This is due to the need to bar across two strings with your first finger while stretching to the third fret with your third finger. Most students struggle with this chord at first, but if you keep practicing and pecking away it will come just like all the other open position chords that you learned to date. Remember to utilize the fingering listed and play the notes of the chord individually to ensure all notes are ringing true. If you are hearing muted strings, other strings ringing, or any other noises check your technique and fret hand position to examine why the chord is not sounding proper. Narrow it down string by string until you find the culprit and correct. Eventually you may utilize an F major bar chord in place of this open position chord, but there is still a lot of value of learning it and having it in your chord vocabulary.



**F major** – F (root), A (3<sup>rd</sup>), C (5<sup>th</sup>). F major chord has no open strings. Do not play the low E string and the A string as indicated in the illustration on the left. Utilize your first finger as a bar and press firmly down on the high E and B strings. Sometimes it helps if you angle the bar a little. If you are not able to stretch far enough to reach the A and F notes with your 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fingers then move the whole shape up to the 7<sup>th</sup> fret and practice it there where the frets are closer together. Then slowly move the shape back down the fretboard as you practice the chord each day and your fingers get used to the stretch. Don't get discouraged, this is one of the harder chords to get at first. Stay positive and it will come with time.

**C to F change** – the C and F chords are very similar in shape. When playing this change utilize the **cluster principle** as you move your third and second fingers down one string each to voice the F chord. Keep your fingers close to the fretboard and just shimmy your fingers down a string and then bar the B and high E strings with your first finger to get the top two notes of the F chord to sound. Your fingers should have minimal extraneous movements and should be **clustered** in the same shape as you move through these two very similar shaped chords.

**F to G change** – the F to G change is a bit more challenging but with a little practice you will have it dialed in just right. Utilize the cluster principle keeping your third and second fingers at the same angle and in the same position as you move them from the F chord to the G chord. Add your pinky to the G note on the high E string and remove the first finger bar as to finish this change as you go to the G chord.

### **REVIEW**

Chord changing can be one of the most challenging aspects of guitar playing. When first learning guitar just getting your fingers to be able to form and play the chords properly with all the notes ringing true can be a challenge in itself. Then add the challenges of strumming on top of that, keeping time on top of that, and then....you have to change chords!.....“I am holding down this perfectly good sounding chord and now you want me to change it...GEEZ!” At times it can seem an impossible task to do all those things at once and in time. As we have discussed the initial learning curve when first learning guitar is quite steep and very challenging. But I can honestly tell you that it gets much easier once you get “over the hump” of the initial learning curve. If you regularly practice the principles in the lessons above, soon you will be tackling the most challenging of chord changes. The easier ones will become “automatic”, you wont even have to be thinking about them – they will just happen – you fingers will just fall into place. Like anything that is worthwhile in this world it takes a lot of hard work and practice to get proficient at the guitar. So stick with it, stay positive, and know that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Below is a review from the above lesson and techniques on chord changing.

1. Playing slow and clean is ALWAYS better than fast and sloppy.
2. Always play with good technique
3. Do not get discouraged – it may take a while to get the fingerings down and for some chords to start sounding very clean – it takes time for your finger tendons and wrist to get adjusted.
4. At first play the chords one note at a time before strumming to ensure they ring clean. Each note should ring true with no “clicks” or overtones from other strings, then strum all strings at the same time. Do this for all the chords as you learn them.
5. Try to play in time by counting out the measure or tapping your foot.
6. Focus on moving fingers only slightly off the fret board when changing chords, keep you pinky finger attached to your third finger tucked tight, wrist down, fingers cupped, and on your fingertips.
7. Analyze chord changes for shared fingers and clusters.

When analyzing a piece of music with multiple chord changes:

- a – When first learning the song write out all the chords in the song
- b – Write out all the changes two at a time
- c – Practice each two chord movement individually until they are all very fluid
- d – String the two chord movements together into four, five, or more successive clean changes
- e – When ready put a quarter note strum to the changes and work up to an eighth note strum
- f – Strum as slow as necessary to make the changes in time and then work up to the needed speed
- g – Always play slow, clean, and in time as opposed to fast, sloppy, or out of time
- h – Remember...Rome was not built in a day. Stay positive, take your time and keep practicing and it will come!