

Getting Started – Chords & The CAGED System



We have now looked at the 5 basic shapes for both major & minor chords that make up the CAGED system. Before going on any further, make sure that you can confidently play each of these chords. If you are struggling with any of them, practice until you get them right, because you will need to play them correctly to move onto the next stage.



5 Chord Shapes, 25 New Chords

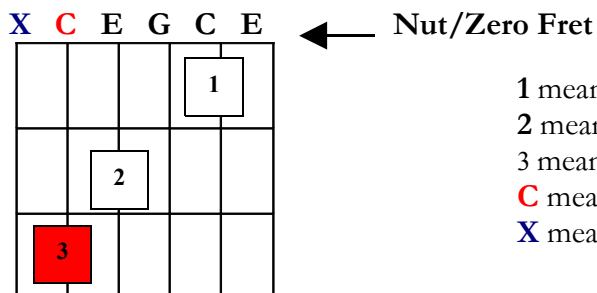
The CAGED system works on the principle that 5 basic chord shapes allow you to play one chord *5 different ways*. This is useful for a number of reasons:

- you can play a chord 5 ways and make it sound different each time (even though it's the same chord, each shape puts the notes in a different order, which alters the sound)
- you can play a chord in 5 places on the fretboard, which means you are not limited to just one area, e.g. the first three frets where all the open chords are



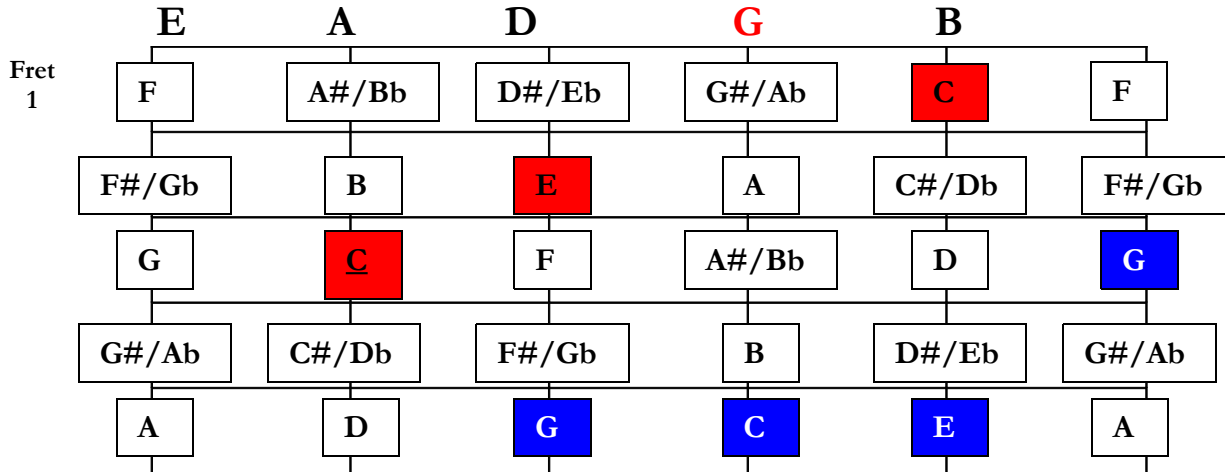
Major Chords

Let's take the first major chord shape in the CAGED system, the chord of C:



- 1 means your index finger
- 2 means your middle finger
- 3 means your ring finger
- C means root note
- X means DON'T play!

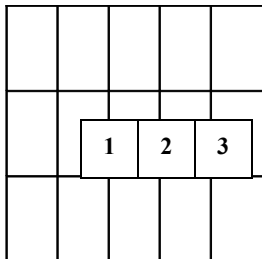
If we take the next letter in the CAGED system, we can use the A-shape chord to also play the chord of C. In order to understand this, look at a section of the **Fretboard Map**.



As you can see the notes of the chord of C are marked in red, with the root note underlined. The A-shape chord of C is marked out in blue, retaining the same root note of C. Confused? Don't worry, it is simpler than it first appears, you just have to grasp the concept.

You'll remember an A chord looks like this:

X A E A C# E ← Nut/Zero Fret



- 1 means your index finger
- 2 means your middle finger
- 3 means your ring finger
- A means root note
- X means DON'T play!

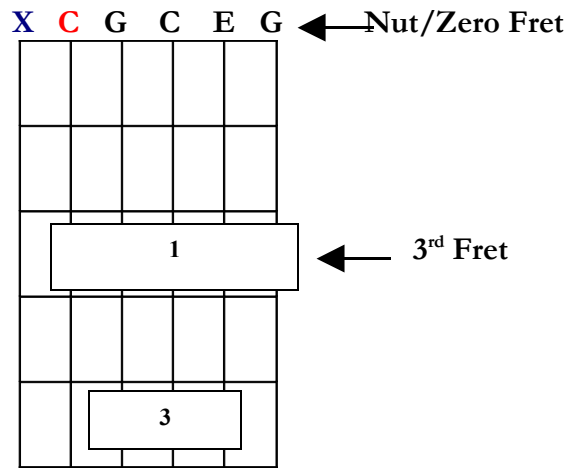
In order to use the A-shape to play the chord of C, you just have to move it up until the root note becomes C. If you were learning the piano, you would have to learn an entirely new chord shape, but the guitar is far easier – when you want a new chord, you can move the same shape up the neck! To do this, you will need to use your index finger to create a barre.



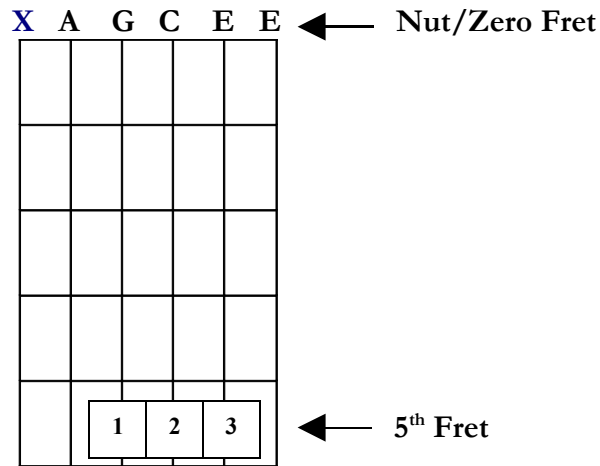
Using the Barre - the secret weapon of the CAGED system

A *barre* (pronounced *bar*) does exactly the same job as the nut on your guitar, in that it provides a starting point for the “open strings” in any chord. To achieve this, you will need to use your index finger to be the “nut”, whilst using your other fingers to make to chord shape.

To make an A-shape C chord, look at the following:

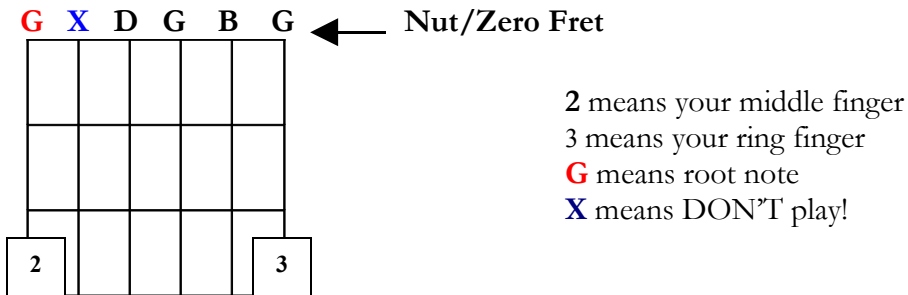


You will see that the barre creates the root note of C on the 5th string & G on the 1st string (remember that the major chord of C is C, E, G). If you simply moved the A-shape up without using the barre, it would look like this:

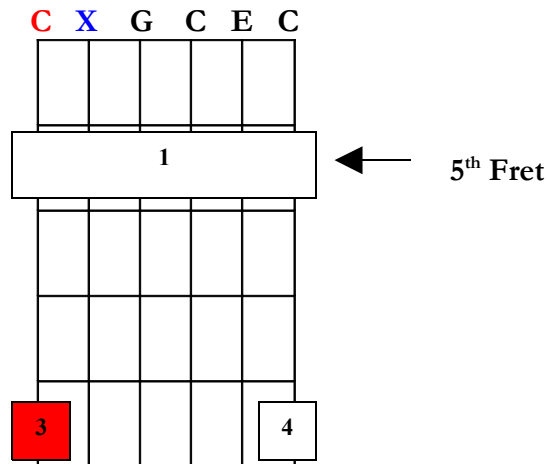


Your chord now has the notes A, G, C, E which is C/A – a type of C chord, but your root note is now A instead of C. You therefore use the barre to retain the all the correct notes of the chord.

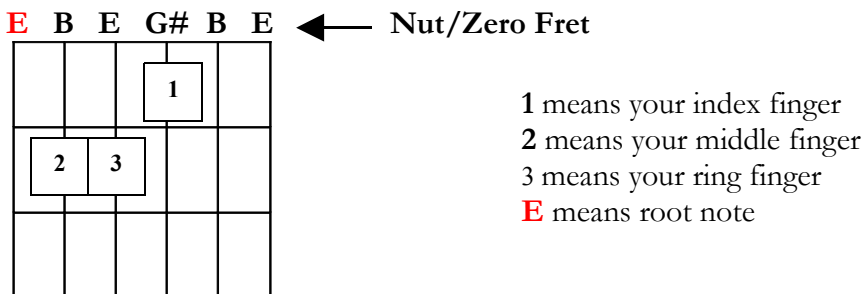
The next letter in the CAGED system is G, so in the same way as before, you take a G-shape chord:



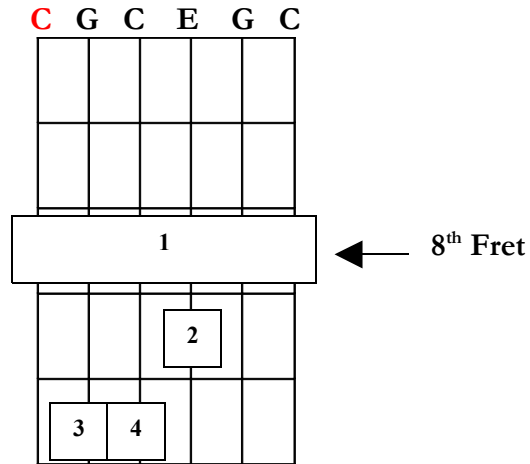
To play C using a G-shape chord, move the G-shape up the fretboard until the root note is C, as illustrated below:



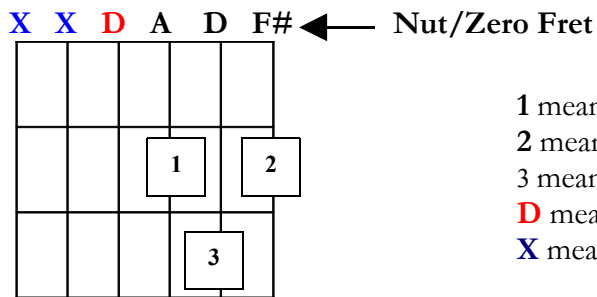
The next letter in the CAGED system is E, so in the same way as before, you take an E-shape chord:



To play C using an E-shape chord, move the E-shape up the fretboard until the root note is C, as illustrated below:

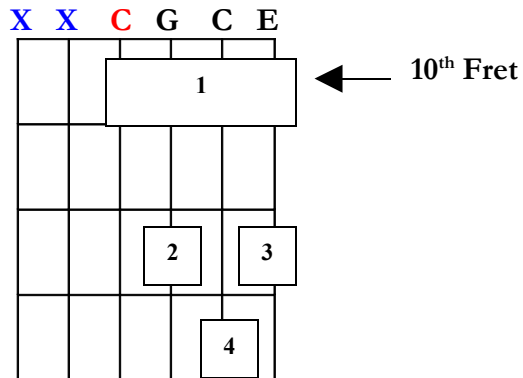


The final letter in the CAGED system is D, so in the same way as before, you take a D-shape chord:



- 1 means your index finger
- 2 means your middle finger
- 3 means your ring finger
- D** means root note
- X** means DON'T play!

To play C using a D-shape chord, move the D-shape up the fretboard until the root note is C, as illustrated below:





So what have I just done?

Okay, in summary, you have just taken your 5 basic chord shapes of C, A, G, E, D and used them to play one chord in five different ways. Check again that you understand how this works; it's all very well just learning chord shapes, but you'll find it far easier later on if you understand what you're playing, especially when you start to experiment with chord shapes!



So what do I do now?

Well, you might want to give your left hand a break! But, once you're ready to press on, you just apply what you've learnt so far to the other chords in the CAGED system. You therefore need to do the following:

- play the chord of A using the shapes of G, E, D, C
- play the chord of G using the shapes of E, D, C, A
- play the chord of E using the shapes of D, C, A, G
- play the chord of D using the shapes of C, A, G, E

Incidentally, have you noticed a pattern here? If you haven't, the word CAGED is helpful in yet another way, in that whichever chord you start with, the next chord shape you will find on the fretboard will always be the next letter in the word CAGED. Not just a catchy title...



And finally...

It's a lot to take in, and it may seem a bit daunting at the moment. However, once you grasp the concept, it's pretty simple, and if you're willing to put the groundwork in & learn this, you will immediately be streets ahead of many guitarists who play the same old chord shapes time after time.

