GUITAR WEEKLY

BEGINNER ESSENTIALS

Know Your Open Chords

36 Shapes · Every Song You Want To Play

How to read a chord box, how to land your fingers, and the chords that get you playing real music.

36	5	0
CHORDS	PROGRESSIONS	BARRE CHORDS

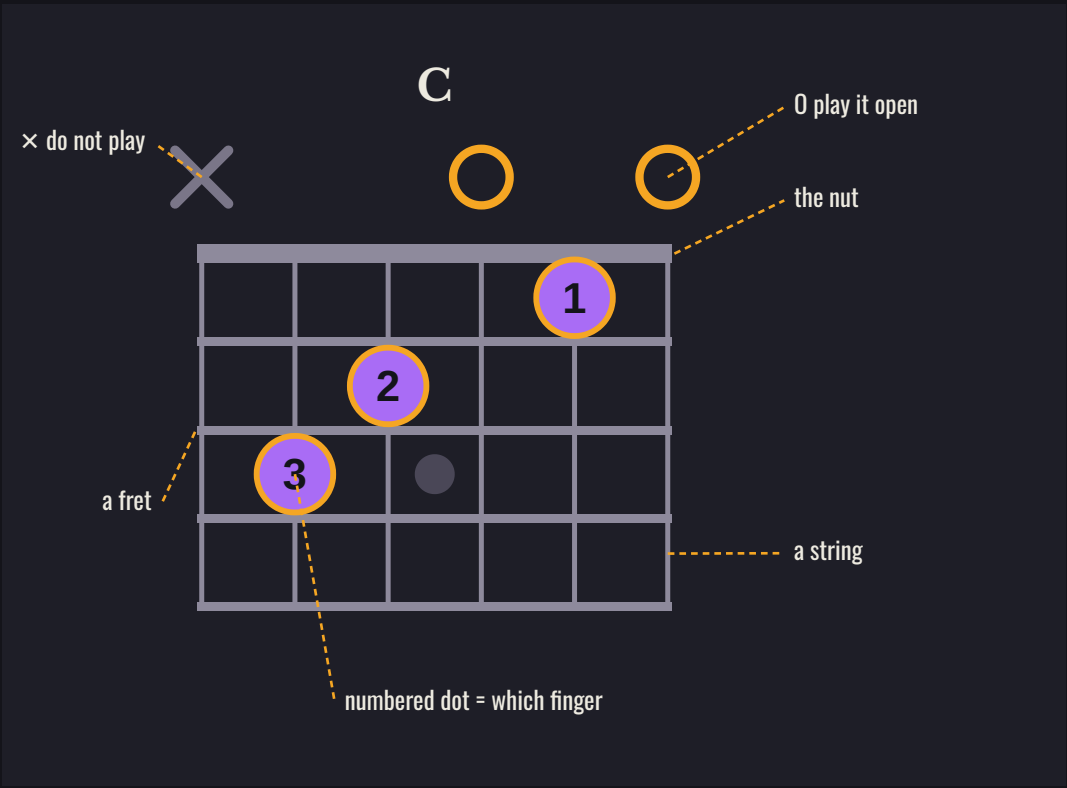
Steve Anthes

guitarweekly.com

Start here

How To Read These Diagrams

A chord box is a picture of the guitar neck stood upright, as if you set the guitar on the floor and looked straight at it.



The six vertical lines are the strings. The thick low E is on the left, the thin high E on the right — the same order you see looking down at your own guitar. The horizontal lines are the frets, and the heavy bar at the top is the nut, where the neck meets the headstock.

The four things that fix most problems

—**Use your fingertips**, not the flat pads. Curl your fingers so they come down on the string from directly above.

—**Sit just behind the fret**, not on top of it and not halfway back. Right behind the metal takes the least pressure.

—**Thumb wrapped, not cupped.** Bring your thumb around the top of the neck, over by the low E. The neck should never sit in the palm of your hand — if you can feel it there you are cupping, and your fingers lose their reach and their angle.

—**Press only as hard as you need.** Squeezing harder does not fix a buzz. Moving closer to the fret usually does.

On the thumb: not everyone has the forearm flexibility for this on day one, and forcing it just flattens your hand out. If the wrap is a stretch, keep the thumb back behind the neck for now and bring it over the top as you loosen up. What matters from the start is the palm staying off the neck.

The habit that makes chords fast

Land Your Fingers Top Down

Most beginners build a chord from the bottom up and wonder why it never gets any faster. Build it from the top down instead and let gravity do the work.

Hold the guitar in playing position and look at the neck. The thick strings sit above the thin ones. Your fretting hand is hanging off the neck, and gravity is pulling it down toward the floor.

So place your fingers in that same direction — highest string first, working down. For a C chord: **ring finger on the 5th string, then middle on the 4th, then index on the 2nd.** Each finger drops into place with the weight of your hand behind it.

Build it the other way and every finger is travelling against that pull. That is what produces the throwing motion you see in beginners — fingers flung at the strings and landing wherever they land, instead of being placed.

> **Why it matters more than it sounds**
>
> Chord changes are not one movement, they are three or four in quick succession. If each finger is fighting gravity you lose a fraction of a second per finger, every change, forever. Landing top down removes that cost permanently, and it costs nothing to learn now — it just costs a lot to unlearn later.

Landing order for the core chords

Chord	Land in this order
C	ring (5th) → middle (4th) → index (2nd)
Am	middle (4th) → ring (3rd) → index (2nd)
E	middle (5th) → ring (4th) → index (3rd)
Em	middle (5th) → ring (4th)
G	middle (6th) → index (5th) → ring (2nd) → pinky (1st)
D	index (3rd) → ring (2nd) → middle (1st)

Practise this away from the guitar too. Form the shape in the air, top down, then bring it to the neck already built.

The first twelve

Start Here

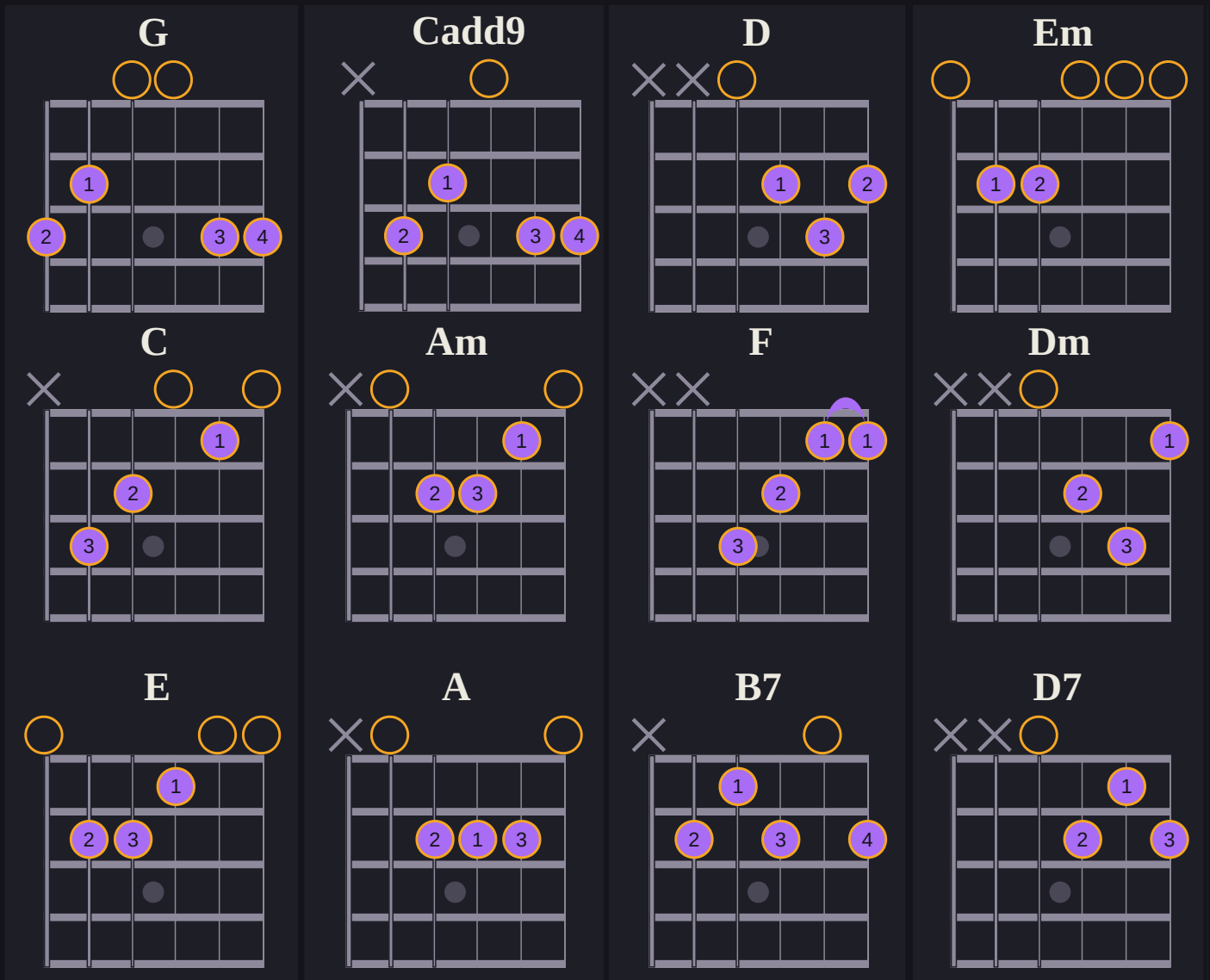
Learn them in this order: Em, E, A, D, G, C. Em is two fingers. E adds one more. A and D are the workhorses. G and C are harder and worth waiting for.

Why Cadd9 and not just C?

Put G and Cadd9 side by side. Your ring and pinky stay planted on the same two frets for both chords — only the lower fingers move. That makes G → Cadd9 almost effortless, which is why the pair turns up in so many songs. Plain C is here too, but reach for Cadd9 early.

About that F

This is the four-string F. You only play the top four strings and your index lies across just two of them. The full six-string barre F can wait — this version sounds fine and you can play it this month rather than next year.



Colour and flavour

Twelve More

These are the same open shapes with one note changed. Each family has its own job.

7th chords

A7 · G7 · E7 · C7

Restless and bluesy. A 7th chord wants to move somewhere. This is the sound of the blues and of any turnaround.

Minor 7ths

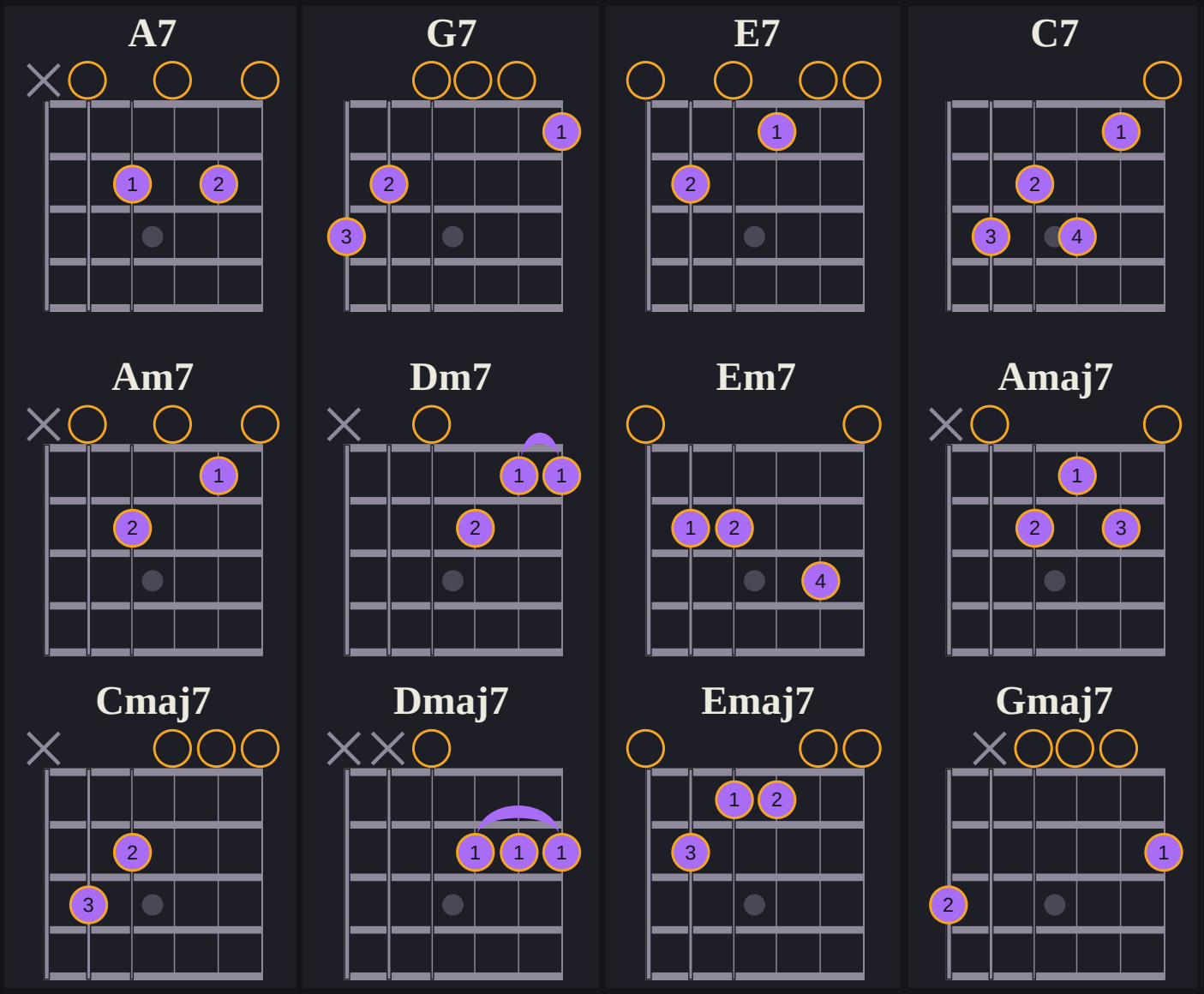
Am7 · Dm7 · Em7

Softer, rounder versions of the minor chords you already know. Often easier to fret, too.

Major 7ths

Amaj7 · Cmaj7 · Dmaj7 · Emaj7 · Gmaj7

The dreamy ones. Swap a plain major for its maj7 and a strummed progression suddenly sounds considered.



Suspensions and bass notes

Twelve Worth Adding

These are the chords that make a beginner sound less like a beginner — and none of them need a barre.

Suspended

Asus2 · Asus4 · Dsus2 · Dsus4 · Esus4 · A7sus4 · Gsus4

Neither major nor minor — the 3rd is swapped out. Hammer between a chord and its sus and you have an instant riff.

Easier stand-ins

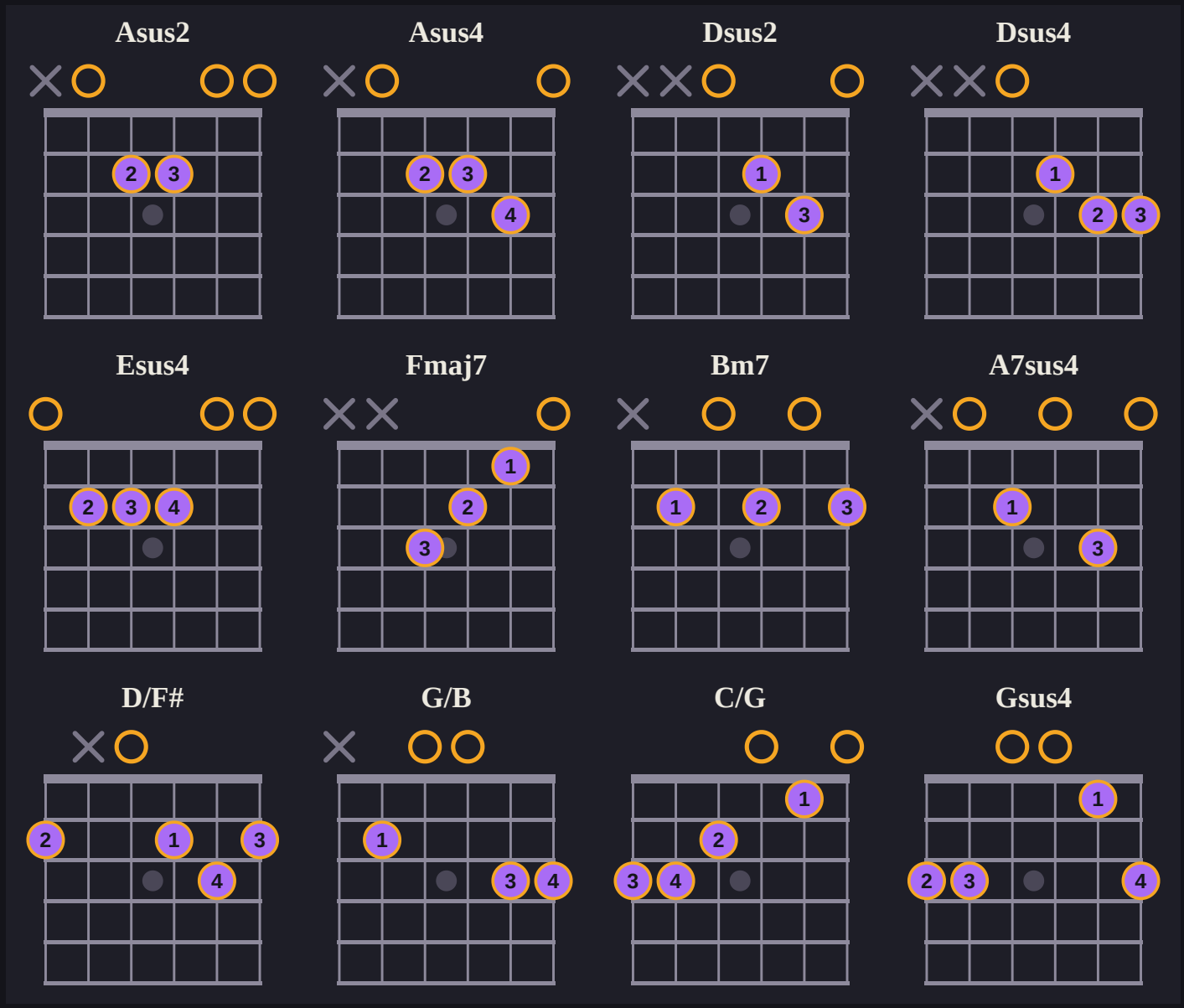
Fmaj7 · Bm7

Fmaj7 gets you the F sound with three fingers and no barre. Bm7 does the same job as barre Bm and is far easier to grab.

Slash chords

D/F♯ · G/B · C/G

Same chord, different bass note. They let the bass walk smoothly instead of jumping, and they are all over real songs.



Progressions

Put Them To Work

A chord on its own is a shape. Two chords in a row is music. Every progression below uses only chords from this booklet.

G	**G · D · Em · Cadd9** I–V–vi–IV · The most-used progression in popular music. Start here.
C	**C · Am · F · G** I–vi–IV–V · Fifties doo-wop. Works with a slow strum or a fast one.
D	**D · G · A** I–IV–V · Three chords, thousands of songs. Folk, country and rock and roll.
Am	**Am · G · F · E** i–VII–VI–V · Descending and dramatic. The E at the end pulls hard back to Am.
E	**E7 · A7 · B7** 12-bar blues · Four bars of E7, two of A7, two of E7, then B7, A7, E7, B7.
G	**G · D/F♯ · Em · Cadd9** with a walking bass · The same first progression, but the bass steps G–F♯–E instead of leaping. This is what the slash chord is for.

How to practise one

Pick a progression and play four slow strums on each chord, round and round, for two minutes without stopping. Do not speed up and do not restart when you fumble — keep the beat and catch up. Playing through mistakes in time is the skill; playing perfectly while stopping and starting is not.

The real skill

Making The Switches

Forming a chord is not the hard part. Changing between two of them in time is the whole game.

> **The whole secret, in one sentence**
>
> Let the fingers do the work. Your arm and wrist should stay almost still through a chord change — if your whole hand is repositioning between chords, you are moving four times more mass than the job needs, and you will never get it fast. Park the hand once, then change the shape inside it. Watch a player you admire and you will see their forearm barely move while the fingers reshuffle underneath.

Three drills that work

1

One-minute changes. Pick two chords. Swap between them for sixty seconds and count how many clean changes you get. Write the number down. Beat it tomorrow. Nothing else measures progress this clearly.

2

Find the common finger. Before drilling a pair, look for a finger that stays put or barely moves. Em to C: your index barely travels. G to Cadd9: two fingers never leave. Pivot on what stays.

3

Air changes. Hold the shape just above the strings, re-form the next shape in the air, then land it top down. Watch your wrist while you do it — if it is swinging, the fingers are not doing their share.

A realistic first month

Week 1	Em and E only. Get both clean, every string ringing. Land top down every single time.
Week 2	Add A and D. Drill A ↔ D as your first one-minute change.
Week 3	Add G and Cadd9. Drill G ↔ Cadd9 — the planted fingers make it the easiest fast change you will learn.
Week 4	Play the G · D · Em · Cadd9 progression all the way through, in time, without stopping. That is a song.

> **The honest part**
>
> Sore fingertips for the first two weeks are normal and they do pass. Buzzing is usually placement, not strength. And almost nobody's chords sound good in the first month — that is not a sign you lack talent, it is just what the first month sounds like.

KEEP GOING

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