

How Many Chords Are There, Anyway?

Since chords (the main component of harmony) are one of the three most vital elements of music - the others being melody and rhythm - it would be useful to know how many chords there are. And it doesn't matter whether you play piano or guitar or some other instrument - chords are chords.

It's certainly not necessary to learn all the chords in the whole wide world, but it is necessary to learn some of them - at least enough to allow you to harmonize the songs you would like to play.

But meanwhile, there are 3 chords -- just 3 -- that you absolutely, positively have to know. If you don't know these three, there's hardly a song in the whole world that you could play. But by knowing just 3 chords, you can play hundreds, if not thousands of songs! And those chords are simply the primary chords in any given key:

?The I chord (the chord built on the 1st degree of the scale)

?The IV chord (the chord built on the 4th degree of the scale)

?The V chord (the chord built on the 5th degree of the scale)

For example, if you were playing in the Key of C, the I chord would be C (c, e, g), the IV chord would be F (f, a, c), and the V chord would be G (g, b, d).

But as you probably know, there are thousands of other chords, so it would be helpful to at least know of their existence and maybe someday learn them.

So here goes:

Since there are 12 major keys one can play in (not counting enharmonic keys - keys that sound the same but are written differently), there are:

*12 major triads (a triad is a 3 note chord)

*12 minor triads

*12 diminished triads

*12 augmented triads

*12 diminished 7th chords (4 note chords)

*12 major 6th chords

*12 minor 6th chords

*12 dominant 7th chords

*12 major 7th chords

*12 minor 7th chords

*12 half-diminished chords

*12 9th chords

*12 flat 9th chords

*12 9th/major 7th chords

*12 9th/minor 7th chords

*12 11th chords

*12 13th chords

*12 suspensions

*12 flat 5th chords

*12 flat 5th maj 7th chords

If that's not enough chords for you, remember that each chord can be inverted - turned upside down. So multiply all the triad chords by 3, and all the 4 note chords by 4, and all the 5 note chords by 5....

Then there are:

? poly-chords - chords that combine two or more other chords, and

? voicings - the way chords are positioned on the piano keyboard

And that's just in one octave. A standard piano has 7 octaves, so multiply all that by 7 and you get the answer to how many chords there really are:

More than you can count.

But again, you don't need to know them all. Just master enough so that you can play the songs you want to play, then gradually over time learn more and more chords. Your musical world will continue to grow and maturity as a musician will become obvious to others.

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About the Author

Duane Shinn is the author of over 500 music courses for adults. His low-cost CD ROM software titled <http://www.keyboardchords.com/> "Duane Shinn's Instant Piano Chord Finder Chart!" is used by musicians around the world. He is also the author of the popular free 101-week online e-mail newsletter titled <http://www.playpiano.com/> "Amazing Secrets Of Exciting Piano Chords & Sizzling Chord Progressions" with over 60,000 current subscribers.