

10-WEEK TEACHING PLAN: INTRO TO CHORDS, PROGRESSIONS & COMPOSING

*The Most Kick-Butt Chord
Teaching Program Ever*

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The Most Kick-Butt Chord Teaching Program Ever

This 10-week teaching plan is designed to suit any student and can be introduced within the first couple of weeks of lessons, depending on the student's age, maturity and hand size for playing chords*.

If teaching beginner teens, I use the content of Lesson 1 at the first or second lesson as teens really respond to chord-based teaching alongside traditional note reading and technical work. The plan is based on my own experience of what works.

This is a very broad-based teaching plan and will depend very much on the speed at which your student is comprehending the material. It's much better to do a few things per lesson well and leave students wanting more than trying to squash too much in at once and overwhelming them. There is a fair bit of composition involved in this method. I believe composing (creating progressions) is the best way to learn about music and play other songs.

You can also check out my post about the [Top 10 Pop Songs for Piano Students](#) which is another great resource for helping students practice chords.

Please be aware that if you print this guide out, you won't be able to access the hyperlinks, so I suggest you save an online copy for reference to the many online resources that I link to.

Have fun!

Tim.

*If student's hands are too small or can't play triads with the traditional 1-3-5 fingering, try using 1-2-3 in the RH or just use a 3rd (eg. C + E) and play with 5ths in the LH. This is normally manageable by beginners of all ages.

1

DURING LESSON



Intro to triads/chords: what are they, how to play. Start with C major.

Demonstrate a simple chord progression using perhaps I VI IV V (pop progression) in C major. Chords in RH, octave bass notes in LH. Play with pedal and rhythm to demonstrate how cool it sounds!

Show student **how to form major and minor chords** using [Big/Small \(BS\) method](#).

Get students used to always **playing chords in the middle of the piano** around middle C or a bit lower works best for a rich, thick sound.

Realise and discuss that only one note changes going **from Major > Minor** and vice versa.

Listen to the **sound difference between Maj/Min**. Challenge student to tell the different with eyes shut while you play the chords. This is an important aural skill.

Ask students **to play major and minor chords using BS method**, starting on any note of the chromatic scale. Start with easy chords on white notes and progress to black notes (eg. F# minor, Bb major). They'll soon realise that with the BS method, these are just as easy to find as white-note chords.

It's good to start getting students **to remember the shape and 'feel' of these chords**. ie. Most chords starting on a black note will always have 5th finger on a black note too (Bb is the exception). This is the reverse of white-note chords. Get students to realise that playing Eb major feels the same as Ab major, Db major, etc. These are things that come naturally to us, but won't be obvious immediately for students.

HOMEWORK TASKS



Practise playing any major or minor chord starting on any black or white key **with RH or LH in root position**.

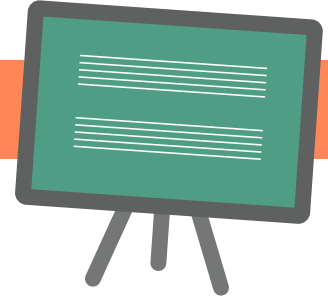
Listen to the differences in sounds.

Start remembering what these chords look and 'feel' like to play (ie. Remember the arrangement of black and white notes).

They could download the [DecideNow! app for iPhone/iPad](#) (around \$4) and enter in all the possible starting notes of the chromatic scale (eg. C, C#, D, D#, etc.). Then they spin the wheel and play major and minor chords on that note with both hands sep.

2

DURING LESSON



Test students on BS method and understanding. They should be starting to find chords more quickly.

Introduce idea that in pop music, most often **the RH plays chords while LH is the bass player** (ie. LH plays single notes or octaves low on piano to add depth).

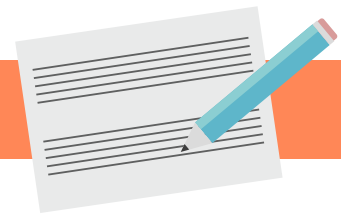
Show students **how to repeat four chords in RH** while holding down LH octaves on the root note of the chord **to add rhythm to chord playing** (ie playing and keeping a simple, steady beat). Demonstrate this to check understanding.

Add pedalling and especially syncopated pedalling (chords are a great way to introduce this). Demonstrate bad and good pedalling and explain that if you want a connected sound between chords, you need to change the pedal after the next chord is played. (This is a great way to practise syncopated pedalling).

Discuss that while playing single chords is fun, **playing a sequence** of them is much more musical. Ask them to come up with a series of chords that they can play in a row, finishing on the starting chord.

Students experiment playing a variety of chords while keeping a steady beat and moving to the next chord before they need to so they don't have big pauses between the bars.

HOMEWORK TASKS



Students **continue to experiment playing chords** in simple four chords per bar rhythm while LH holds bass notes.

Students can play major or minor chords **starting on any note of the C major scale**.

Ask them **to make up a composition** using a few chords that they like.

Don't worry about the order of chords or progressions yet - that's next lesson.

3

DURING LESSON



Introduce chord charts (ie. lead sheets) in music. Show them examples of pop music and show them where the chords are written above the music. You can just Google for any pop song (ask them what they like) if you don't have any pop music on hand.

Show them written-out jazz standards which show just the melody and chords (Google Jazz Lead Sheet or Real Book). You can also use an iPad with music on-screen to do this. See [Video 7: Apps and Technology for Teaching Pop music](#).

Check out my list of the [Top 10 Piano Pop Song teaching pieces](#) that only use a few chords.

Show the students **how easy it is to play pop songs** when you know the chords and can feel the rhythm.

Make sure students plan ahead so that they can get to the next chord quickly rather than moving at the end of the bar and interrupting the flow. This takes considerable practice and will be the focus of this week's work.

Practice moving both hands from one chord position to the next in the lesson so students know how to practice.

It's likely that you'll come across **a 7th chord**, so the idea behind these can be introduced at this point if you wish (or done later - your call!).

HOMEWORK TASKS



Practice playing one or two simple chord songs from my Top 10 list, ensuring that the beat is consistent and the pedalling effective.

Make sure students are playing chords **in the middle of the piano** for a rich sound and that their LH is moving to the new chords in sync with the RH.

The most important thing is preparation, thinking ahead and moving before the music so that **there is no interruption in the pulse of the song**.

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