

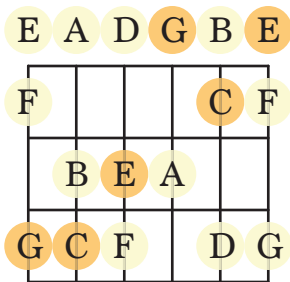
## OVERVIEW

The CAGED System is just an observation of how Major Triads *happen to be arranged* across the guitar fingerboard. Essentially, that's it. This basic observation can be used as the foundation for some more complex concepts, and this lesson is designed to give you a concrete understanding of CAGED basics so you can apply the system to those more complex concepts.

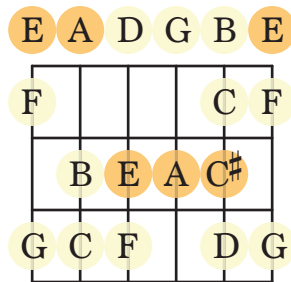
We're going to start with a true statement: **Almost any possible major triad on the guitar is going to fall into one of these five shapes: C A G E D**

Here are those shapes:

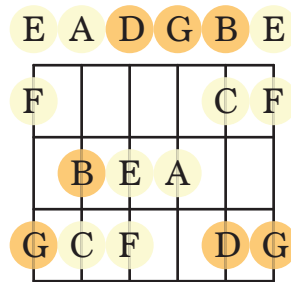
### C



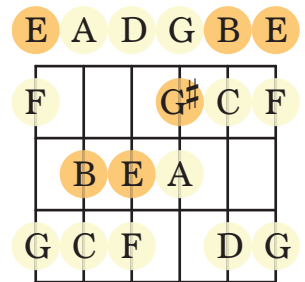
### A



### G



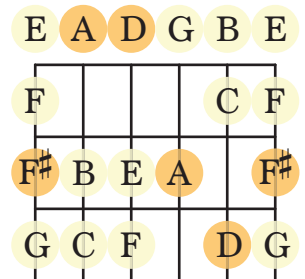
### E



You might be looking at these “shapes” right now thinking “umm, Scott? These are just chords.” You’re right. They are just chords, but each of these chords makes a shape and each shape can move up the neck to become a different chord. This is where guitar gets cool and weird.

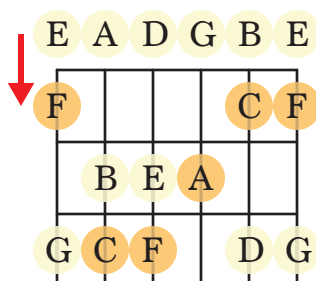
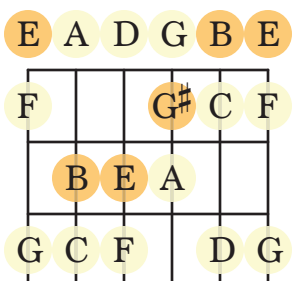
Check out the example below. On the far left, you can see an E Major chord. If we raise each note of the chord one half step, it becomes an F Major chord. This is an F bar (or barre) chord.

### D



E Major  
E G# B

F Major  
F A C



The relationships between each of the notes remained the same, but each note is shifted up the neck one fret, or one half step. It's no longer an E chord when it's shifted up a fret, but the shape of the chord still *looks* like an E chord.

## OVERVIEW

That open E Major is an E Major Triad BECAUSE you're grabbing E's, G#'s, and B's. Once you move that E chord up the neck you're no longer grabbing those three notes. On the previous page we moved the whole system up the neck one fret, making it an F Major Triad, but it looks like an E chord! That's why you can call it an *E Shaped chord*. **It maintains an E chord shape, but it's not an E chord!**

To actually play the E Shape up the neck, a bar is required with the index finger, which is often why people don't notice the similarities between the barred F Major Chord and the open E chord. On paper, the similarities are more obvious. Check out this randomly chosen sequence of E shaped chords moving up the neck:

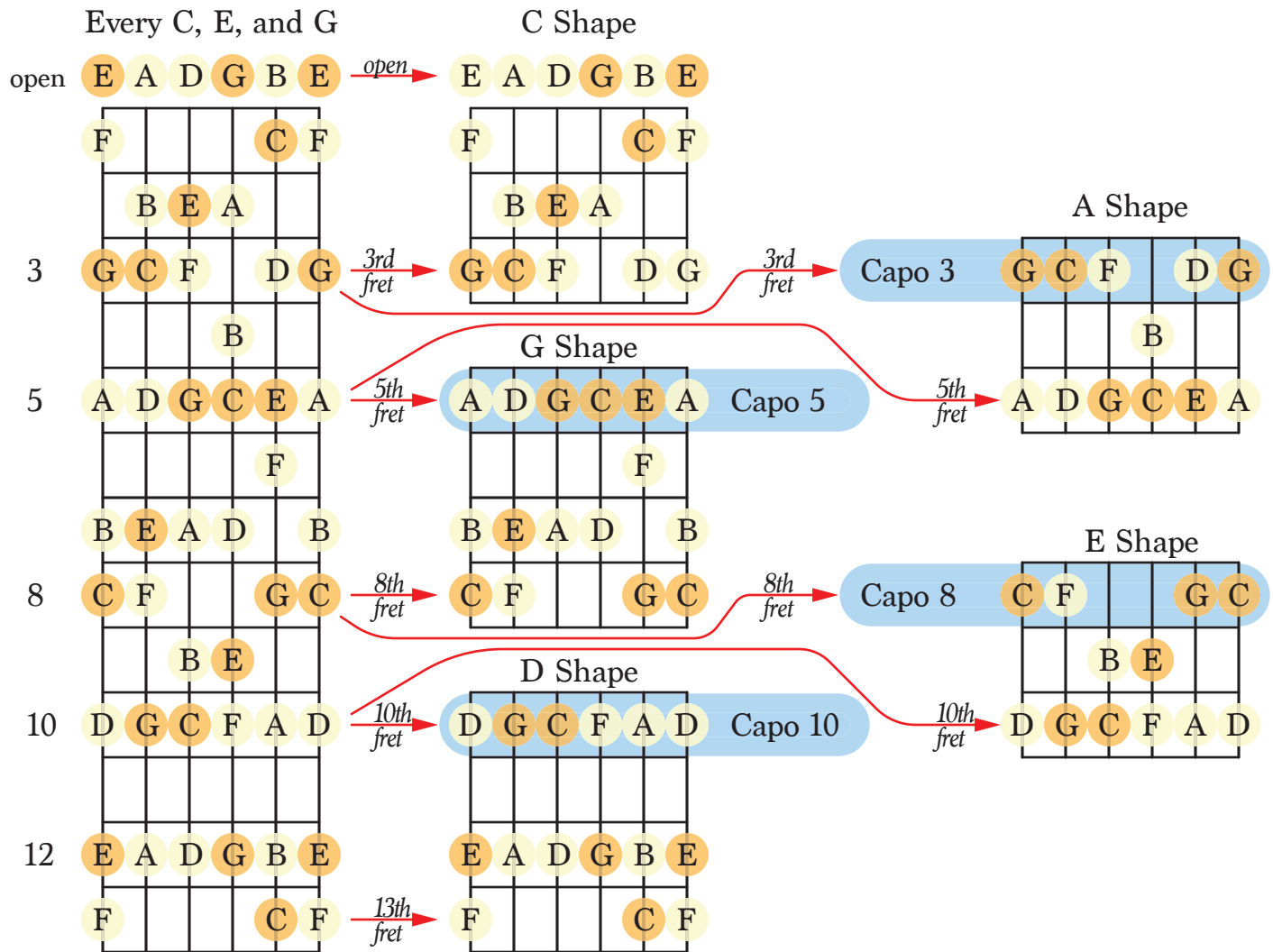
<p>E Major E G# B</p>	<p>G Major G B D</p>	<p>B Major B D# F#</p>	<p>D Major D F# A</p>
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This isn't the whole CAGED System, but is a crucial aspect of it. Chord shapes are movable up and down the neck, and the only possible chord shapes that exist are C, A, G, E, and D. You'll see.

## OVERVIEW

The essence of the CAGED System is this: When playing any major triad up the neck, the shapes will ALWAYS follow the CAGED order. The C shape is always connected to the A shape, the A shape is always connected to the G shape and so on: C-A-G-E-D

Use a capo for the chords below to see all these shapes up the neck!



On the left side of the page, I've circled all the C's, E's, and G's all up the neck. On the right, you can see first an open C chord. Then, if you capo at the 3rd fret and play an "A Chord," shape the actual notes you're grabbing are exclusively C's, E's, and G's which means the chord is actually a C chord, but its in the shape of an A chord. Thus, it is an "A-shaped C chord." This continues up the neck. If you capo at the 5th fret and play a "G chord" shape you'll be playing a C chord. If you capo at the 8th fret and play an "E chord" shape you'll be playing a C chord.

**OVERVIEW**

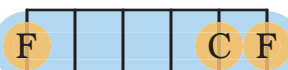
Another cool thing about this system is the fact that it loops around on itself. In other words, the next shape after “D shape” is another “C shape.” The system repeats in a CAGEDCAGED pattern. It happens to spell a word, but that is just a delightful coincidence. This is the order the shapes always go in. This system works with ANY major chord. For example, on the left of this page, you’ll find an “E-shaped F chord.” For each chord, the blue bar represents a potential capo or bar, whichever is preferable (or possible.)

**F Chord = F A C**

E-Shaped F chord

Capo/bar 1st fret

E A D G B E



B E A

G C F D G

B

A D G C E A

F

B E A D B

C F G C

B E

D G C F A D

E A D G B E

F C F

B E A

G C F D G

B

A D G C E A

D-Shaped F chord

Capo/bar 3rd fret

E A D G B E



B E A

G C F D G

B

A D G C E A

F

B E A D B

C F G C

B E

D G C F A D

E A D G B E

F C F

B E A

G C F D G

B

A D G C E A

C-Shaped F chord

Capo/bar 5th fret

E A D G B E



B E A

G C F D G

B

A D G C E A

F

B E A D B

C F G C

B E

D G C F A D

E A D G B E

F C F

B E A

G C F D G

B

A D G C E A

A-Shaped F chord

Capo/bar 8th fret

E A D G B E



B E A

G C F D G

B

A D G C E A

F

B E A D B

C F G C

B E

D G C F A D

E A D G B E

F C F

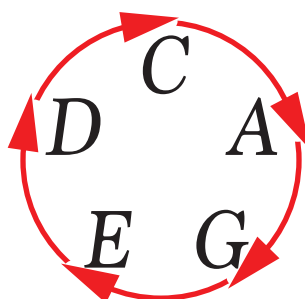
B E A

G C F D G

B

A D G C E A

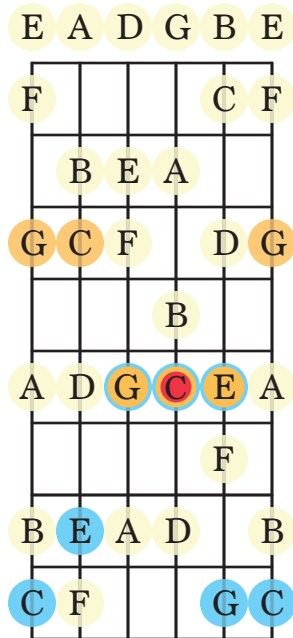
G-Shaped F chord  
Capo/bar 10th fret



If we had an infinite guitar neck, we could continue these same shapes repeating up the neck over and over, always in CAGED order. No matter what shape you start on, the next one will always continue in CAGED order.

## OVERVIEW

It can be confusing to think about these shapes and how they connect to each other, so the homework sections will get much more specific about these concepts and the practice sections will help show how to use these concepts in some really fun ways. However, a useful way to look at and compare CAGED shapes is to think about the notes they have in common. Each shape shares at least one root note with another shape, and one shape will always be up the neck from that root while the other is down the neck from that root.



On the left, I've chosen "C" as a root note in red.

Every C, E, and G that makes up the A-shaped C Major chord is in Orange.

Every C, E, & G that makes up the G-shaped C Major triad is in blue.

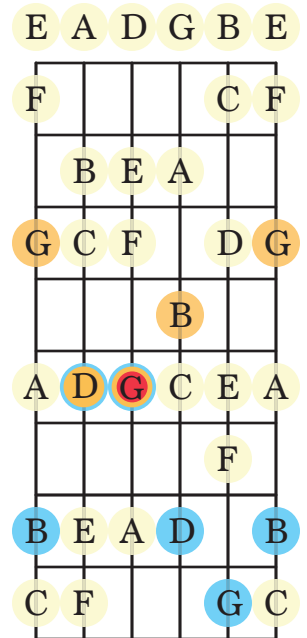
The red note is the shared root note. The blue/orange combo notes are the other notes that both shapes have in common.

On the right, I've chosen "G" as a root note in red.

Every G, B, and D that makes up the E-shaped G Major chord is in Orange.

Every G, B, & D that makes up the D-shaped G Major triad is in blue.

The red note is the shared root note. The blue/orange combo notes are the other notes that both shapes have in common.



To help the CAGED system make a little more sense, let me change the subject for a minute.

Lake Tahoe is a large freshwater lake straddling the border of California and Nevada in the Western United States. The native Americans in this area speak a language called Washo, and these natives called the lake "Da'aw." The word "Tahoe" is a loose English pronunciation of the Washo word "Da'aw."

"Da'aw" in washo means "the lake." When someone says "Lake Tahoe" they are basically saying **Lake "the Lake."**

In the same sense, when most people learn an open C chord, they often associate a C chord with that **shape**. If you've made it this far through Music Theory for Guitar, you know that a C chord is a C chord *because* it contains only C, E and G and that the open "C shape" is incidental. The CAGED system takes advantage of the fact that when guitar players first learn guitar, they often associate a specific shape with a chord and NOT the fact that a given chord is made of specific notes. Thus, the CAGED system uses chord names as a sort of quick reference guide.