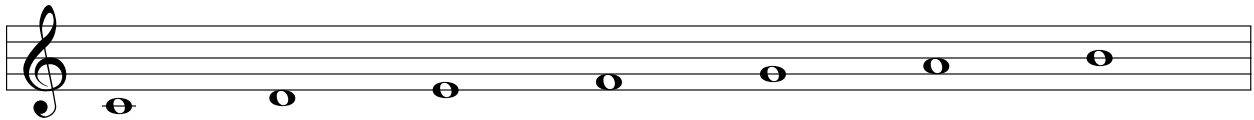


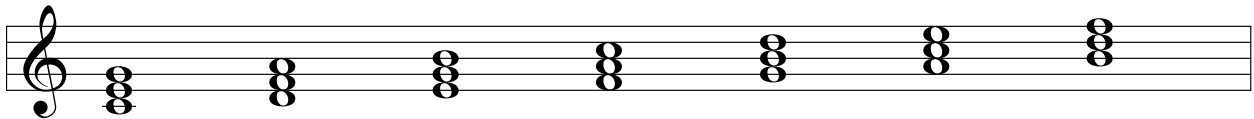
Unit 8 ~ Triads

Triads are 3-note chords. They are the building-blocks of harmony, and we use them to harmonize tunes and melodies.

We can build triads by using the notes of the major and minor scales. Let's start with C major again:



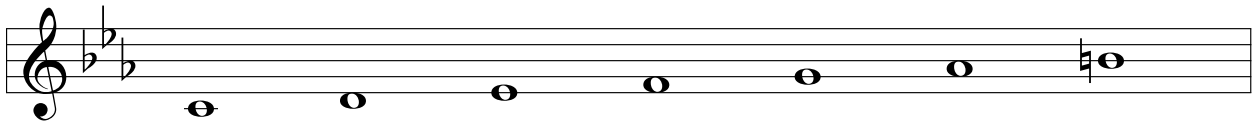
To build a triad, you add a 3rd and 5th above a given note. For example, to build a triad on the note C, you would add a 3rd above C, which is E, and a 5th above C, which is G. To build a triad on D, you'd add a 3rd (F) and a 5th (A). Here I've built triads on all the notes of C major:



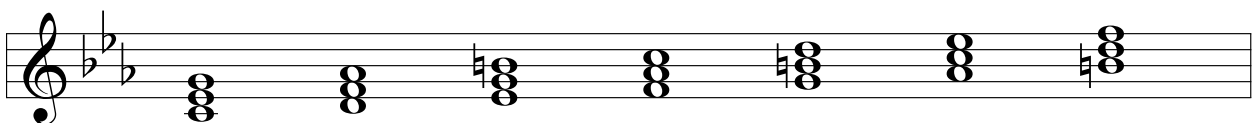
So you can make 7 triads from the notes of a major scale.

Important: the bottom note of these triads is called **the Root**. So for example, the root of the first triad above is C. The root of the 2nd triad is D, and so on.

We can also build triads on the notes of the minor scale. Generally we use the **harmonic minor** for this. Here is C harmonic minor:



And here are the 7 triads we can build using C harmonic minor:



Types of Triad

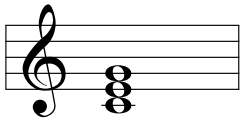
Let's take a closer look at these triads. There are actually 4 different types of triad:

- Major
- Minor
- Augmented
- Diminished

Each type has a slightly different structure. They each have a 3rd and a 5th above the root, but the type of 3rd and 5th varies between triad type.

Major Triads

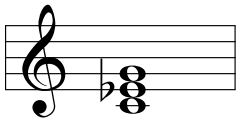
Major triads contain a major 3rd and a perfect 5th above the root:



This is a C major triad. C is the root. The 3rd is major, and the 5th is perfect.

Minor Triads

Minor triads contain a **minor 3rd** and a **perfect 5th** above the root:



This is a C minor triad. C is the root. The 3rd is minor, and the 5th is perfect.

Diminished Triads

Diminished triads contain a **minor 3rd** and a **diminished 5th** above the root:



This is a C diminished triad. C is the root. The 3rd is minor and the 5th is diminished.

Augmented Triads

Augmented triads contain a **major 3rd** and an **augmented 5th** above the root:



This is a C augmented triad. C is the root. The 3rd is major and the 5th is augmented.

Triad Type Abbreviations

Here are some abbreviations for "major", "minor", "diminished" and "augmented":

"Major" ... can be shortened to **maj** or **+**

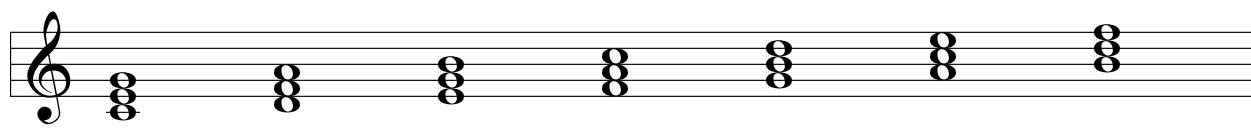
"Minor" ... can be shortened to **min** or **-**

"Augmented" ... can be shortened to **aug** or **x**

"Diminished" ... can be shortened to **dim** or **o**

Types of triads found in major and minor scales

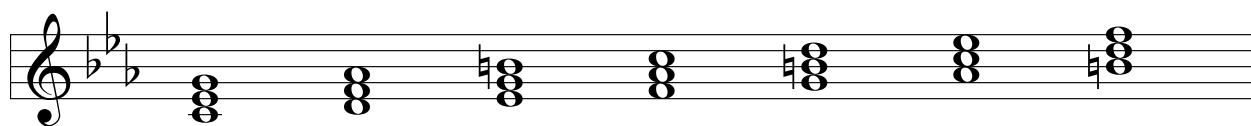
Let's look at the triads in scales again, and label them by type using the abbreviations above:



A musical staff in treble clef showing seven triads. From left to right, they are: a major triad (C-E-G), a minor triad (D-F-A), a minor triad (E-G-B), a major triad (F-A-C), a major triad (G-B-D), a minor triad (A-C-E), and a diminished triad (B-D-F). Each triad is represented by three notes on a staff.

maj min min maj maj min dim

Types of triads in minor scales



A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb). It shows seven triads. From left to right, they are: a minor triad (Bb-D-F), a diminished triad (Cb-Eb-Gb), an augmented triad (Db-Fb-Ab), a minor triad (Eb-Gb-Bb), a major triad (F-Ab-Cb), a major triad (Gb-Bb-Db), and a diminished triad (Ab-Cb-Eb). Each triad is represented by three notes on a staff.

min dim aug min maj maj dim

As you can see, major and minor scales both contain major, minor, augmented and diminished triads, but they are mostly on different steps. Let's make a list:

Major triads occur on the 1st, 4th and 5th degrees of major scales, and on the 5th and 6th degrees of minor scales.

Minor triads are found on the 2nd, 3rd and 6th degrees of major scales and on the 1st and 4th degrees of minor scales.

Diminished triads exist on the 7th degrees of both major and minor scales, and on the 2nd degree of minor scales.

Augmented triads, finally, are found only on the 3rd degree of minor scales.

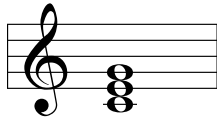
Triad Positions

Thus far in this unit we have seen triads only in what we call **root position**. This means that the root is the lowest note, and the 3rd and 5th are above the root.

However, any of the 3 notes can be the lowest: the 3rd can be the lowest note too, if we want, and so can the 5th. When the 3rd is the lowest note, this is called **1st inversion**. When the 5th is the lowest note, this is called **2nd inversion**.

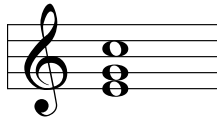
Let's apply this to a C major triad:

Root position



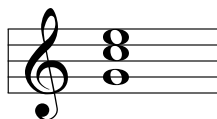
When it's in root position, the root, C, is the lowest note.

1st inversion



When the triad is in 1st inversion, the 3rd (E) is the lowest note

2nd inversion



When the triad is in 2nd inversion, the 5th (G) is the lowest note.

Open and Close Position

Note that it's only the **BOTTOM** note that determines the position of the triad. The order of the upper notes makes no difference to the position. If the notes are clumped together as tight as they can be, we call this **close position**. If they are spaced out, so that the triad spans more than a 6th, this is **open position**. See the examples:



Root position
Close position

Root position
Open position

1st inversion
Close position

1st inversion
Open position