

## John McGann's Guide to Mando Triads

Knowing, hearing and seeing chords on your fingerboard will help you understand harmony, get to know the instrument better, and lead you to better melodic and harmonic improvisation. You will see and hear theory in action!

When we spell triads with the notes in sequence as close as possible from the root (i.e. the notes in a row next to each other, like 135, 351, 513), we are spelling a 'closed position' voicing.. Some closed position chords are long stretches.

**Easy: DF#A (740x)**  
**Hard: Eb G Bb (851x ouch)**

A good way around that 'ouch' is to voice them as 'spread' voicings. The middle note in each closed position chord goes up an octave.

Closed voiced root position A major: **A C# E** (unplayable in lower octave)  
Open position voicing: **A E C#** (the C# has been raised an octave).

Of course there ARE other ways to voice triads on the mando, but this is a relatively easy to follow and effective set of voicings.

Note that as long as the root remains in the bass, it is still 'root position' and not an 'inversion'. An inversion has a note OTHER than the root in the bass.

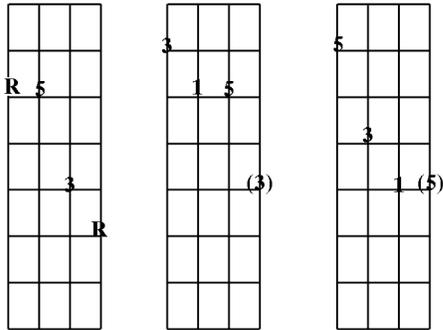
Any triad can be "inverted", meaning a note other than the root can appear in the bass. The 3rd in the bass is also called "first inversion"; the 5th in the bass is called "second inversion". Each of these inversions has it's own unique character, which can be best heard with the bass note doubled on another instrument. These inversions are used extensively in classical music as well as jazz and pop music; you will also hear them in certain roots music such as Texas fiddle and Irish/Scottish music.

The four triad spellings:

**MAJOR 1 3 5**  
**MINOR 1 b3 5**  
**AUGMENTED 1 3 #5**  
**DIMINISHED 1 b3 b5**

The chart below gives you the graphic for each triad. The notes in parenthesis are optional doublings; we will play these as three note voicings. You can practice connecting through all 3 inversions for each chord type, and learn them not only from the root, but also starting the pattern on the lowest available note (i.e. E major would start with the first inversion on the low G#).

Be aware that these shapes are the same for strings 432 and 321 (strings numbered 1st string=highest pitched i.e. E).



ROOT            1st inv.            2nd inv.

Interesting observations:

- The augmented triad is the same shape in all 3 inversions, but it is arrived at by changing a different note on each string.

- Go through the circle of 5ths starting with root position A. I suggest playing through the circle of 5ths to get all 12 keys under your belt; you'll find it's not that difficult as the same shapes just reappear on different frets. I find it easy to progress through the circle by pretending the current key is the "V" of the upcoming key (i.e. A is the V in the key of D, which is the V of G, etc.)

If you 'voice lead' (connect from one chord to the next with a minimum of movement between voices) you get a 2nd inversion D and a 1st inversion G. As you continue, you'll find the exact same shapes (in that order) as you continue through the cycle.

Circle of 5ths from A: A D G C F Bb Eb Ab Db/C# Gb/F# B E

Try voice leading a 1 4 5 chord progression (A D E) and you may find these chords working for you in your next jam...not that there's anything wrong with the chop chord!