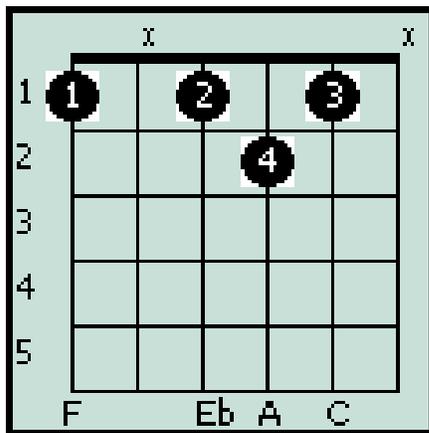


Jazz Guitar Chord Method

By Eric Elias © 2005

Lets talk about how to create chords for jazz guitar. Here is an example of an F7 chord in a typical chord diagram. The grid represents the guitar neck. The numbers along the left side are the fret numbers. The numbers in the darkened circles represent the left hand fingers used to hold down that particular note. The X's indicate which strings to mute. Along the bottom of the grid are letters indicating the chord tone represented by each note.

F7



This is a movable shape (just like the barre chords that we once learned). You can simply play the chord on a different fret to transpose it to a new key.

With this in mind, let's look at how chords are made. The notes of the F7 chord (F A C Eb) are derived from the F major scale. Eventually you will want to memorize the notes in all 12 major scales (just like an accountant memorizes math facts or an attorney memorizes the law, a musician needs to memorize some things as well). Here is a two-octave F major scale with the numerical degree under each note.

F	G	A	B ^b	C	D	E	F	G	A	B ^b	C	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13

Generally, chords are created by starting on one degree and going up in thirds (ie: skipping every other note of the scale). You may have hear the term triad to refer to a chord before. A triad is a three note chord, so an F triad would consist of the notes F, A, C (root, 3, 5). Triads are most often used in folk, pop and rock music. In jazz, however, we usually use four note chords (quartal chords) consisting of the root, 3, 5 and 7 degrees. So an F major 7 would be F, A, C, E. The F7 that we have above is a dominant 7 chord and requires a b7 (F, A, C, Eb).

Let's define a few terms to help with understanding chords and this lesson.

Voicing:

You will hear the word voicing in reference to chords. A voicing is a particular arrangement of notes. All of the chords presented represent a specific voicing. Since we're using the F7 chords as our example, all of the F7 chords provided will include the notes F A C Eb in some particular order. Not only can the notes be presented in any order, but one or two of the notes can be dropped down an octave to create a more comfortable shape to play or create a more interesting sound. Think of the chord tones as voices in a choir.

Close position:

Close position (or closed position), refer to chords that are written with all of the notes as close as possible in the same octave. On the guitar, these chords require large finger stretches and are very difficult to play. On an F7 chord the notes from the melody note down would be F, Eb, C, A. There is virtually no way to play the F and Eb together without playing one quite a few frets away from the other.

Drop 2 chords (or drop II):

These are chords in which the second degree (down from the melody) is dropped an octave. These will be chords that are played on the top four strings and middle four strings on the guitar. Examples of these chords will be given later in this lesson. These chords are usually comfortable to play and are often used for chord-melody playing, chord soloing and comping. So for an F7 chord with F, Eb, C, A (melody note down) to be turned into a drop II chord, we would drop the Eb an octave. Now the chord would be F, C, A, Eb (melody note down) and would be much easier to play.

Drop 3 chords (drop III):

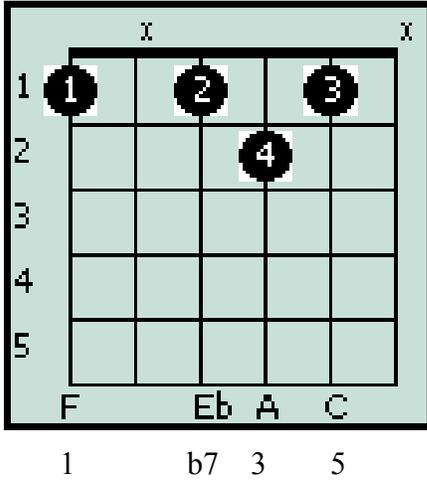
This is where the third note down is dropped an octave. These chords are played on the bottom four strings and are often used for comping and bossa playing. The bass note creates a prominent sound. The example given before F, Eb, C, A (top note down) would be F, Eb, A, C.

Inversion:

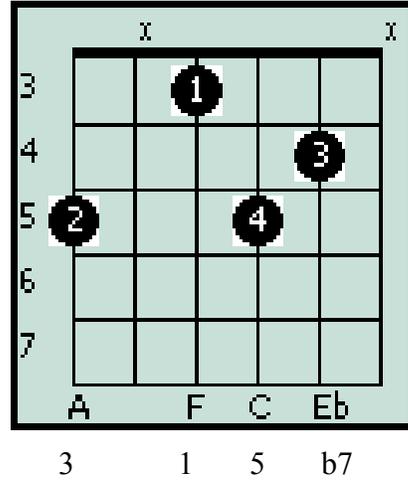
An inversion is a particular arrangement of chord tones. When the chord tones are moved systematically (in order) we get a total of 12 possible inversions of the F7 chord on the guitar. Our first set of inversions that we will examine will be drop 3 voicings.

Here are the first set of inversions of the F7 chord

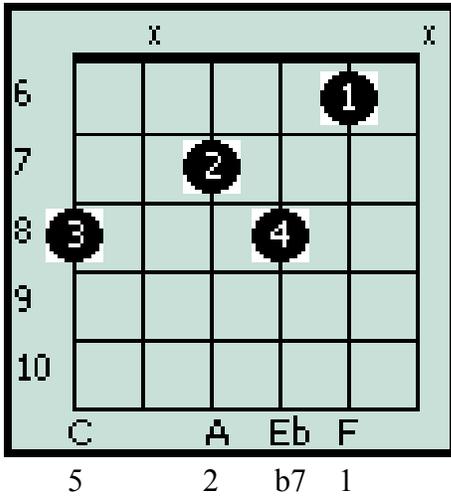
F7 First inversion (drop 3)



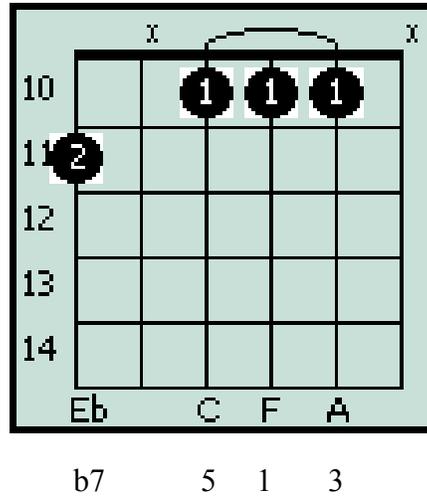
F7 Second inversion (drop 3)



F7 Third inversion (drop 3)

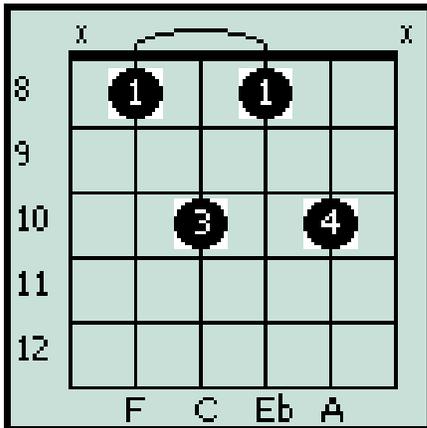


F7 Fourth inversion (drop 3)



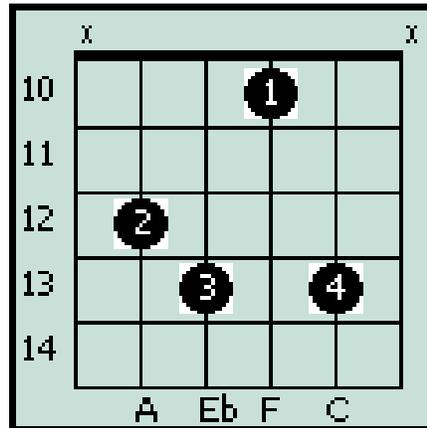
The next set of chord inversions are on the middle four strings. Since we have started with the F7 chord for the first set of inversions, let's continue with using F7 for the next set of chords as well.

F7 first inversion



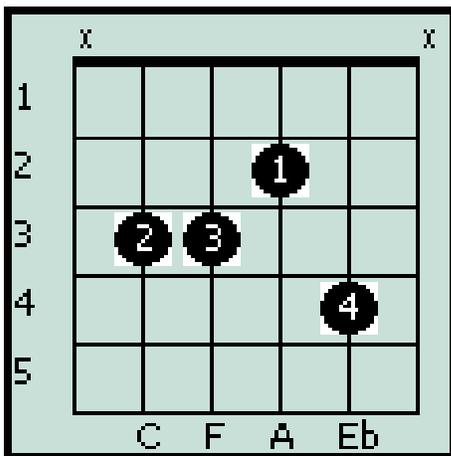
Root 5 b7 3

F7 second inversion



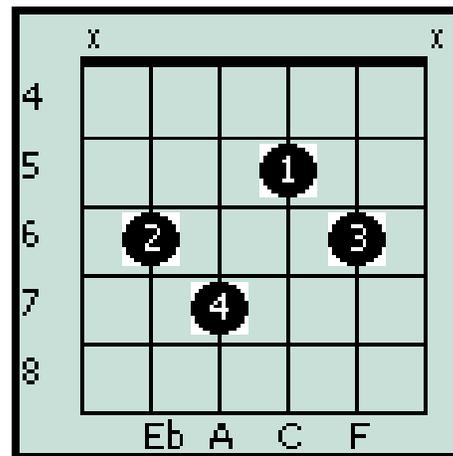
3 b7 1 5

F7 third inversion



5 1 3 b7

F7 fourth inversion

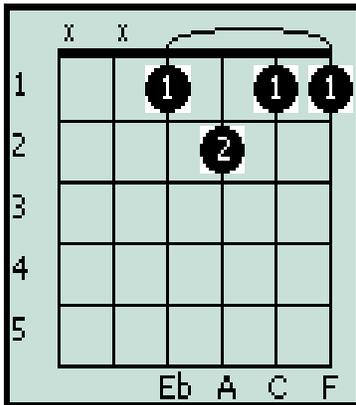


b7 3 5 1

The two easiest ways to get comfortable with these chords are first, to begin playing them up the neck in the key of F. You can then move them to other keys by simply beginning them on another note (or fret). Next start using them in songs. Try one or two of the inversions in a song that you play regularly. This will help memorize the shapes.

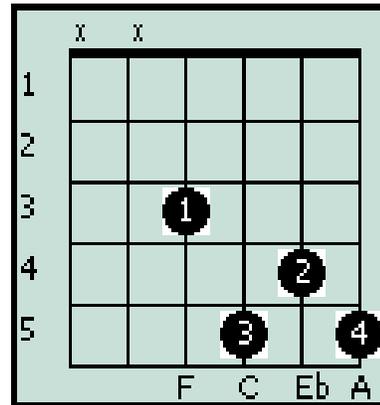
Here are the last set of chord inversions on the top four strings. If you notice these are just like the first set on the “Jazz Guitar Master Class” page except the note on the low E string is now on the high E string.

F7 first inversion



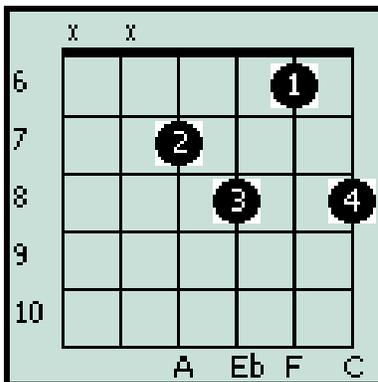
b7 3 5 1

F7 second inversion



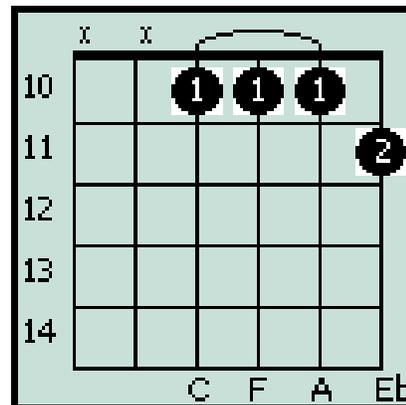
1 5 b7 3

F7 third inversion



3 b7 1 3

F7 fourth inversion

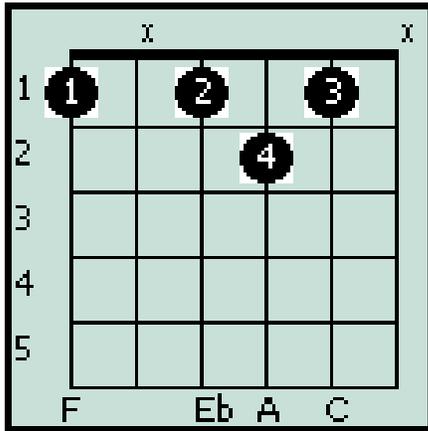


5 1 3 b7

Play these up and down the neck and then change keys and see if you can play the 4 inversions in several different keys. A good goal is to be able to play them in all 12 keys (that will take a while though). So as you practice these, keep trying to use them in songs.

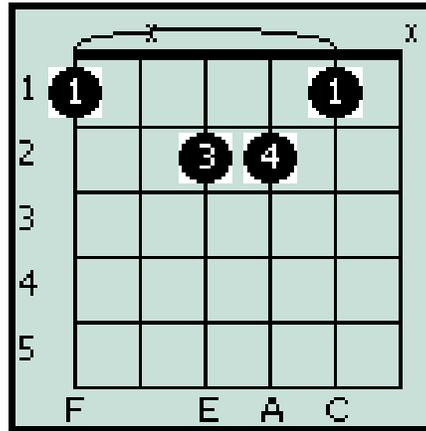
Now lets try to create a few other chords (major 7th and minor 7th) by moving a finger or two. This system allows us to create any other chord that we need.

F7 first inversion



1 b7 3 5

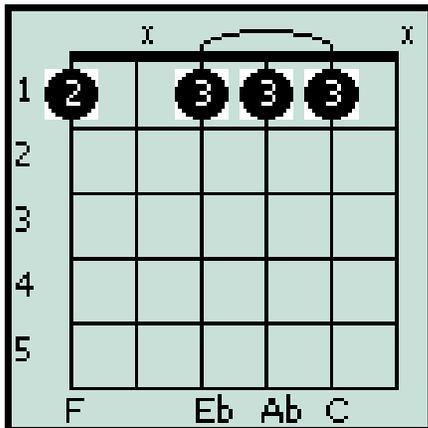
F Major 7 first inversion



1 7 3 5

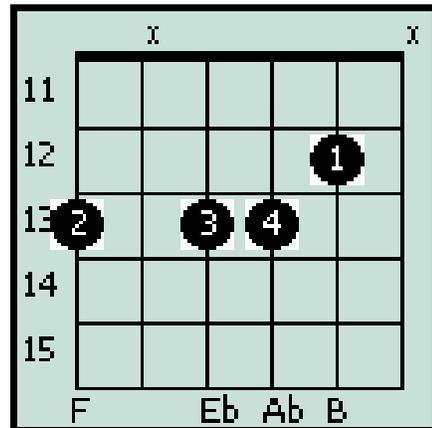
So by moving one note (Eb to E) we get the dominant 7 to change to a major 7 chord.

F minor 7



1 b7 b3 5

F minor 7 b5



1 b7 b3 b5

In this case we have lowered the 3rd and the 7th and in the next chord we've also lowered the 5th. You can do this with any of these chords. You can write out the chords you want for the middle strings and top strings and incorporate them into your playing. On the following page are a few examples of how to use drop 2 chords in a II-V-I context.

Earlier we referred to drop 2 voicings. Here are some examples of how to create these. As mentioned previously, a drop 2 chord voicing is one where the second tone is dropped an octave. Lets look at an example on the musical staff of how this works. A close voiced chord (a chord where all of the notes are within the same octave) often sounds good, but is difficult to play on the guitar. So if we move one of the chord tones down an octave (in this case the second note) they are easier to play and also allow for nice voice leading in the melody when moving to the next chord.

Examples of Drop II Chords

F7 Close voice
Very difficult to play

F7 Drop II
(Looks like our root inversion)

F Maj 7 Close Voice
Very difficult to play

F Maj 7 Drop II

The musical staff shows four measures of chords in 4/4 time. The first measure is F7 Close voice (notes: F, A, C, E, G). The second measure is F7 Drop II (notes: F, C, A, G). The third measure is F Maj 7 Close Voice (notes: F, A, C, E). The fourth measure is F Maj 7 Drop II (notes: F, C, A, E). The guitar fretboard diagram below shows fingerings for the top three strings (T, A, R) for each chord.

Chord	T (Treble)	A (Middle)	R (Bass)
F7 Close voice	10	13	15
F7 Drop II	1	1	2
F Maj 7 Close Voice	1	2	3
F Maj 7 Drop II	1	2	3

Lets create some II-V-I chords using drop II voicings

C min7

G7

F Maj9

The musical staff shows three measures of chords in 4/4 time. The first measure is C min7 (notes: C, E♭, G, B♭). The second measure is G7 (notes: G, B, D, F). The third measure is F Maj9 (notes: F, A, C, E, G). The guitar fretboard diagram below shows fingerings for the top three strings (T, A, R) for each chord.

Chord	T (Treble)	A (Middle)	R (Bass)
C min7	6	4	5
G7	7	6	5
F Maj9	8	9	7

That doesn't sound too bad. If we alter the chords a little bit, it will sound even better.

C min9

G7b9

F 6/9

The musical staff shows three measures of chords in 4/4 time. The first measure is C min9 (notes: C, E♭, G, B♭, A). The second measure is G7b9 (notes: G, B, D, F, E♭). The third measure is F 6/9 (notes: F, A, C, E, G, A). The guitar fretboard diagram below shows fingerings for the top three strings (T, A, R) for each chord.

Chord	T (Treble)	A (Middle)	R (Bass)
C min9	6	4	5
G7b9	7	6	5
F 6/9	8	9	7