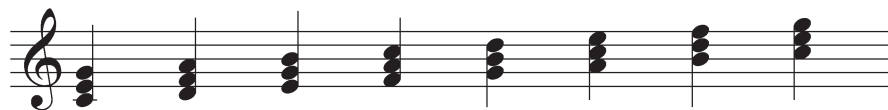


Diatonic Triads and Roman Numerals

Diatonic chords are those that fit with the key you are in. Imagine that you want to list off all the chords in C major. You could build a triad on every scale-degree, using only the “white notes”, like so:



People often refer to these chords using roman numerals. In the key of C major, the C triad is known as “the I chord,” d minor is “the ii chord” and so on. You need to be able to recognize and spell these triads for all keys.

You should memorize the pattern of major, minor, and diminished chords. I’ll label our seven C major chords below with their proper roman numerals.*

- For each major triad, we’ll use an uppercase roman numeral.
- For each minor triad, we’ll use lowercase.
- For each diminished triad, we’ll use lowercase plus a little circle.

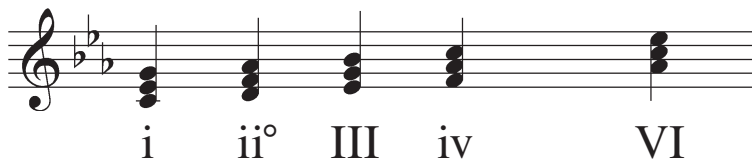


* Not every theory book agrees with this system of uppercase, lowercase, etc. Some give all roman numerals in uppercase.

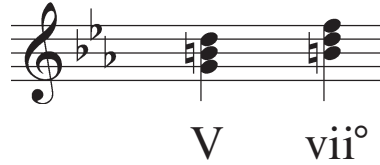
Minor Keys

Hopefully you remember that minor keys are a bit more complicated than major ones. Traditionally one is taught three different versions of the minor scale, which differ only in scale degrees $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$.

Most of the diatonic triads in minor are drawn from the “natural” minor scale. I’ll show these in C minor. Since the “natural minor” scale uses the notes that are in the key signature, we won’t have to add any accidentals to our chords.



However, two chords require the “raised” version of scale-degree $\hat{7}$, which is often referred to as the “leading-tone.” We do this for the V chord and the vii° chord.



Even though the key signature is handling all the sharps or flats in the “natural” scale, we have to add an accidental to each of these chords to raise the leading tone. Sometimes we simply add a sharp to $\hat{7}$, and sometimes we “undo” the flat in the key signature with a natural.

Classical composers preferred these versions of V and vii° , because they frequently use them to go back to the i chord. In C minor, the raised B-natural “leads” back to C much more strongly than the B-flat. Also, the major V provides a nice contrast to the minor i. Perhaps an all-minor i-v-i sounded too harsh to classical composers. Play these progressions and compare:

i v i i V i

To sum up, you need to learn this pattern of chords in minor keys. Since minor is more complex than major, there are occasional exceptions to this “rule”, but this is a good framework to get started:

i ii° III iv V VI vii°