# Essential Jazz Chord Exercises

www.jazzguitar.be/blog/jazz-chord-exercises/

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If you're a jazz guitarist, you've spent time working out chord shapes on the guitar but have hit a roadblock or two along the way. You've learned dozens of cool-sounding grips, but when it comes time to apply these shapes to a tune, things fall apart.

Learning how to play chords and how to comp over your **favorite jazz standard** require different skills and a different approach to practicing in the woodshed.

To help you expand your playing from **memorizing shapes** to comping with confidence over jazz tunes, here are 5 essential jazz chord exercises for guitar. Each of these exercises will take your chord playing to the next level, expanding **your confidence** and chord vocabulary at the same time.

So, grab your guitar, turn on your amp, and get ready to push yourself to **new levels of excitement** and engagement in your jazz guitar comping phrases.

## Chord Qualities in Position

The first **jazz chord exercise** in this lesson is one of the most fundamental and important chord exercises you can practice.

This exercise involves playing a maj7 chord on the guitar, then **altering one note** at a time to produce the next chord in the sequence. When doing so, you'll be **flattening** one note to produce the next chord, such as flattening the $7^{th}$ of a maj7 chord to produce a dominant 7 chord.

Here's the order of **chord qualities** that occurs when you begin on maj7 and work your way down to dim7 chords on the fretboard.

- Maj7
- 7
- m7
- m7b5

- dim7

To help you visualize this **movement**, altering one note at a time to produce the next chord, here's a handy chart.

| **Cmaj7** | C | E | G | B |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| C7 | C | E | G | Bb |
| Cm7 | C | Eb | G | Bb |
| Cm7b5 | C | Eb | Gb | Bb |
| Cdim7 | C | Eb | Gb | A |

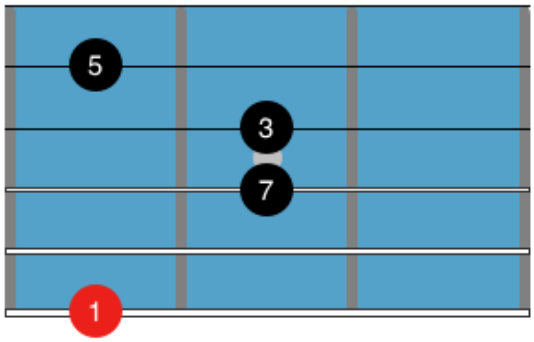
Now that you know how to change one note to produce the next chord in the sequence, you can **apply this concept** to the fretboard.

Beginning with Drop 3 chords on the **6432 string set**, here's an example in the key of C that you can practice in your jazz chord studies.

The note in **blue** is the one that is moving between each chord shape.

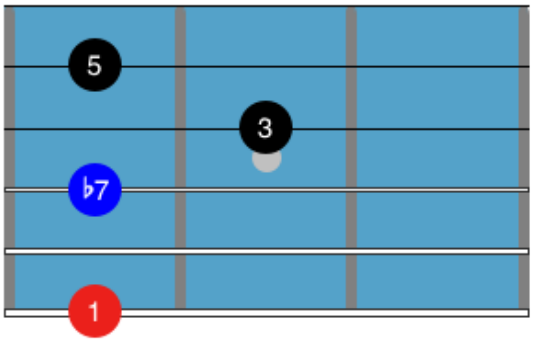
*Listen & Play*

## Cmaj7



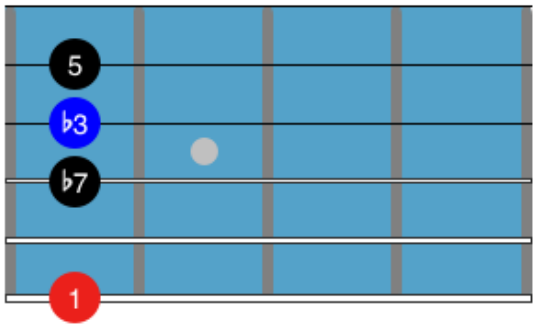

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## C7



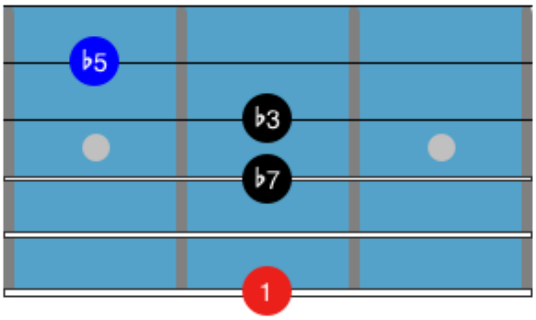

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## Cm7



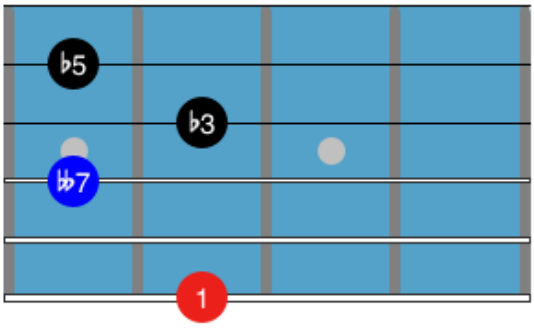

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## Cm7b5




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## Cdim7



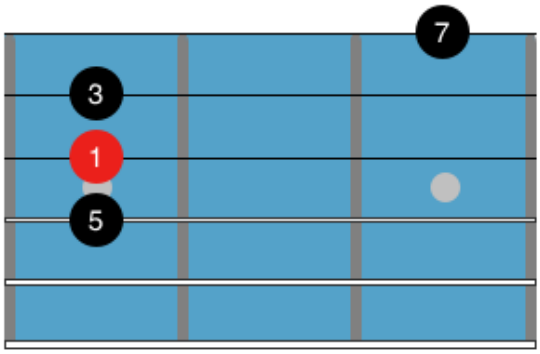

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As well as work on chord qualities in **root position**, you can apply this jazz chord exercise to inversions as well.

Here's an example of Drop 2 chords in **second inversion** on the top 4 strings to explore in your jazz practice routine.

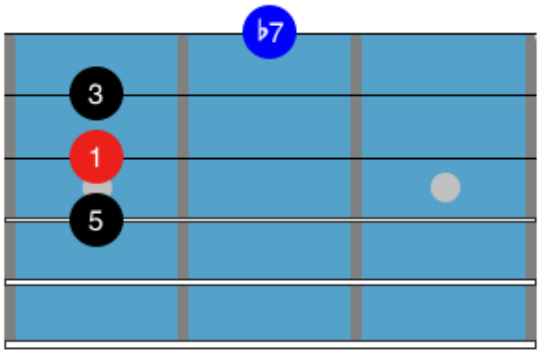
*Listen & Play*

**Cmaj7**



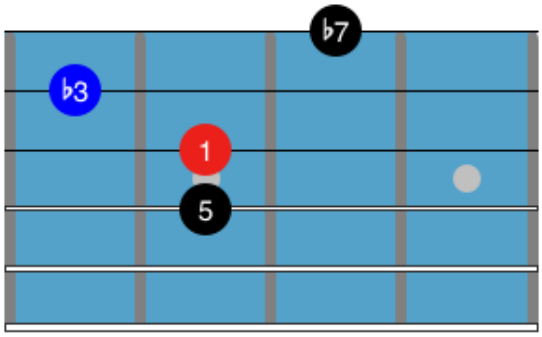

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**C7**



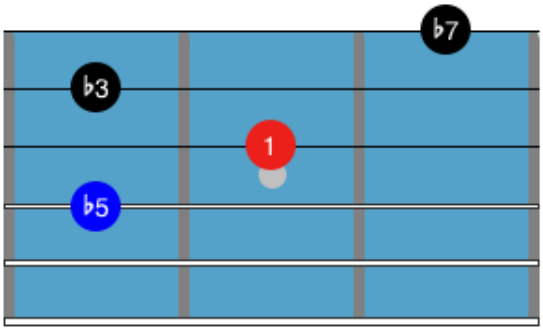

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**Cm7**



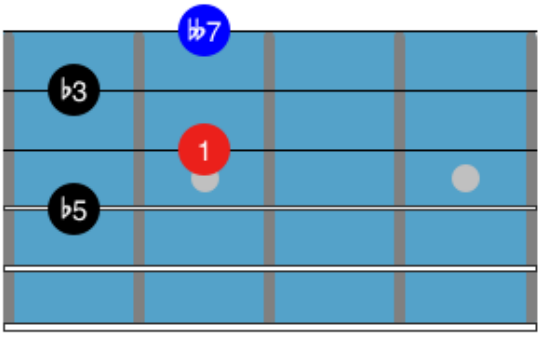

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**Cm7b5**




4

**Cdim7**




4

After you've worked out these examples, move them both to **other keys**, as well as apply this exercise to other inversions, chord types, and string sets in your studies.

## Chord Inversions

Speaking of inversions, working **chord inversions** across the fretboard is an effective way to learn chord shapes in any area of the guitar.

As well, inversions feature **different intervals** on top of each chord shape, which will come in handy when working on chord melody arrangements on guitar.

This exercise is fairly **simple on paper**, but can be difficult to visualize and execute on the fretboard.

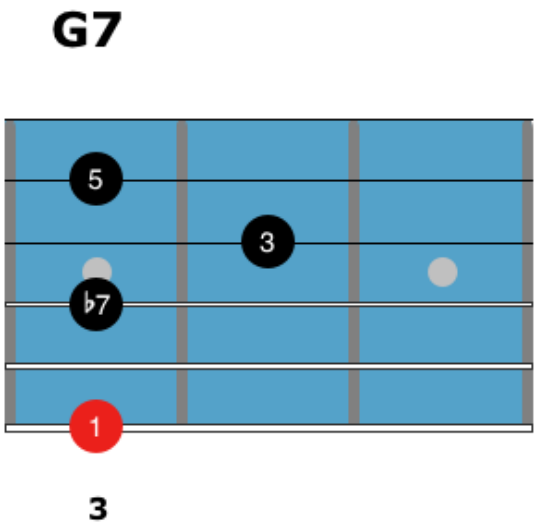
Here are the steps for this jazz chord exercise that you can follow in **your studies**.

- Pick a **chord type** – such as Drop 3
- Pick a **chord quality** – such as dominant 7
- Pick a **string set** – such as 6432
- Pick a **key** to work in – such as G
- Play the G7 Drop 3 inversions on the 6432 strings from **memory**
- Repeat with **other keys**

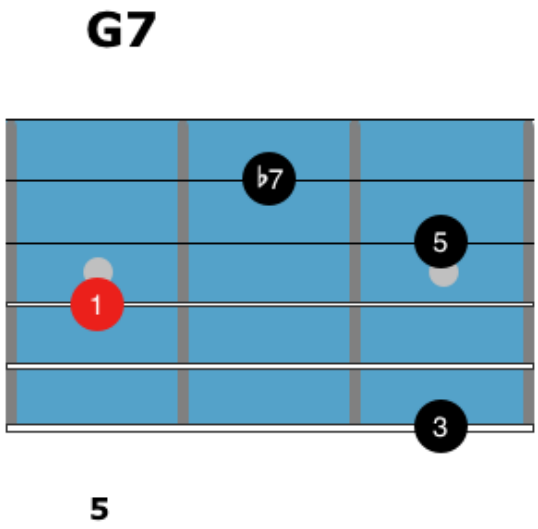
From there you can apply this exercise to any key, **chord type**, chord quality, and string set in your jazz guitar practice routine.

Here's an example of those same G7 Drop 3 chords on the 6432 string set to explore in the **woodshed**.

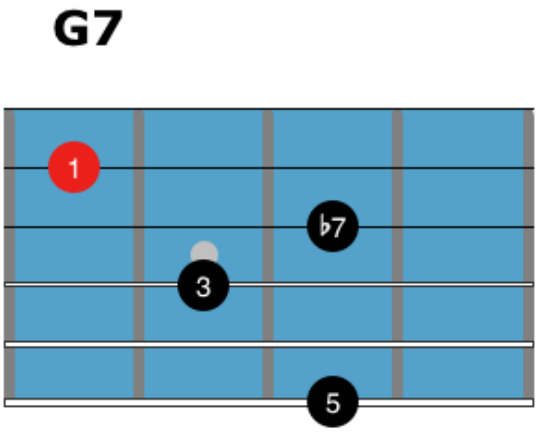
*Listen & Play*



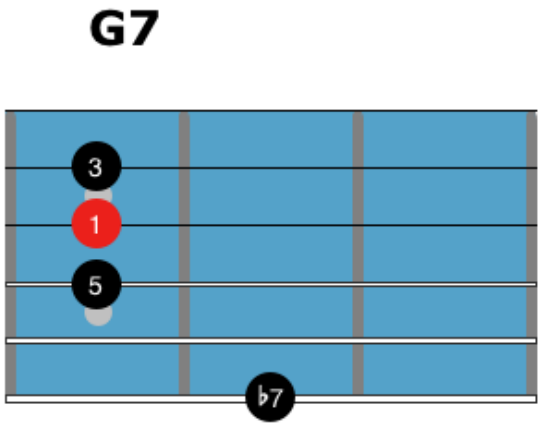

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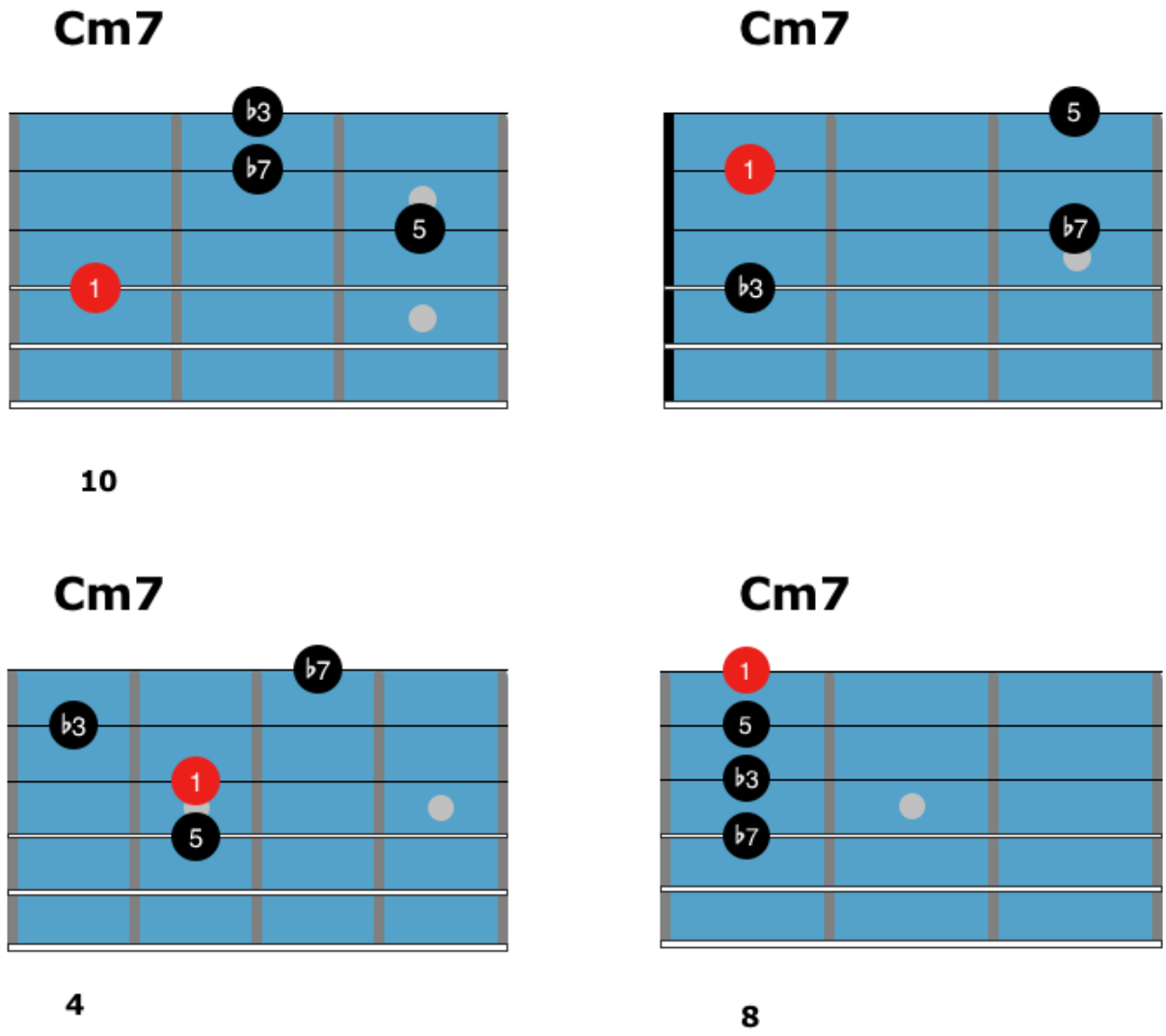



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For a bit of variety, here's a Cm7 Drop 2 chord taken through it's various **inversions** on the top-4 strings.

Notice that you begin higher up the fretboard with the Cm7 shapes, and then jump down once you get **too high** on the fretboard to continue with your inversions.

*Listen & Play*




After you've explored these two examples, take them both to other keys on those string sets, before moving to other chord types, **qualities**, and string sets.

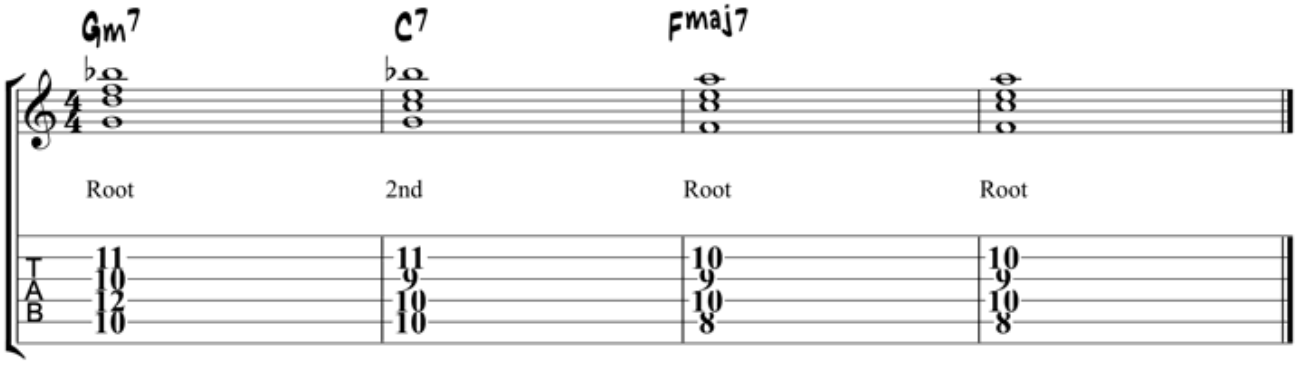
ii V I Inversions

Moving forward, you can now begin to work chord progressions in inversions, starting with the most popular jazz progression of all, **the ii V I**.

When working this exercise, you start with the **ii chord**, move to the closest inversion of the V chord, and then the closest I chord from there.

Here's an example of this exercise using **Drop 2 chords** in the key of F major.

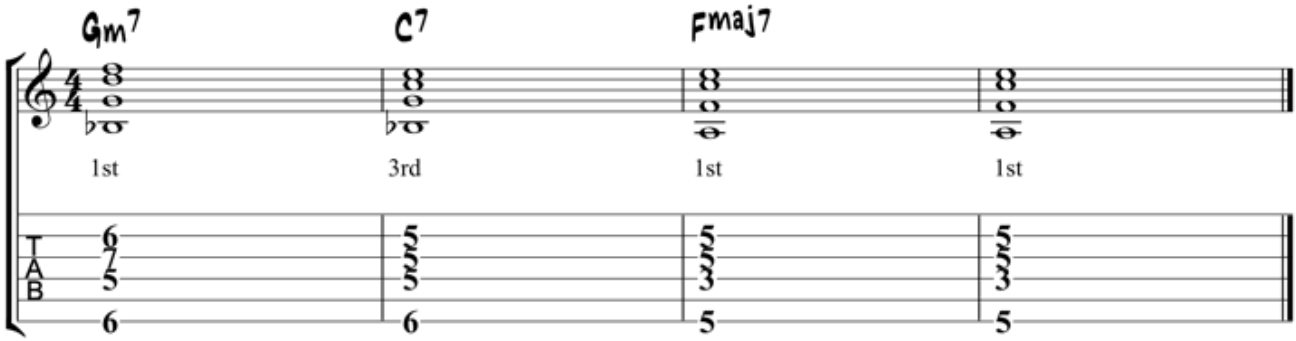
*Listen & Play*




As well as working this exercise from a root-position ii chord, you can start on any **inversion** of the ii chord and move to the closest V and I shapes from there.

Here's an example of that using **Drop 3 chords**, with the iim7 chord being in first inversion and the rest moving to the closest shape from that point.

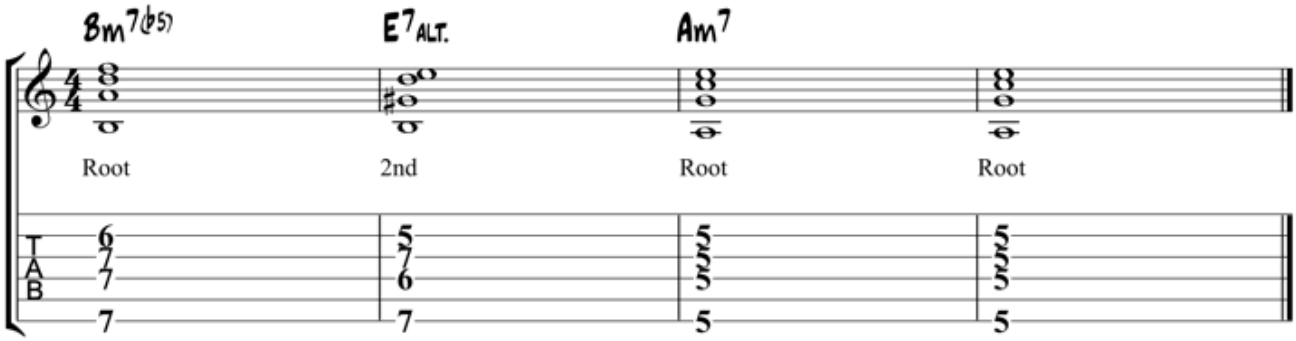
*Listen & Play*




Working on ii V I changes means working in **major and minor keys**, and so you can apply this jazz chord exercise to minor ii V I's in your studies as well as major.

Here's an example of a ii V I in the key of **A minor**, with the closest inversions being used for each chord after the iim7b5 chord gets things moving.

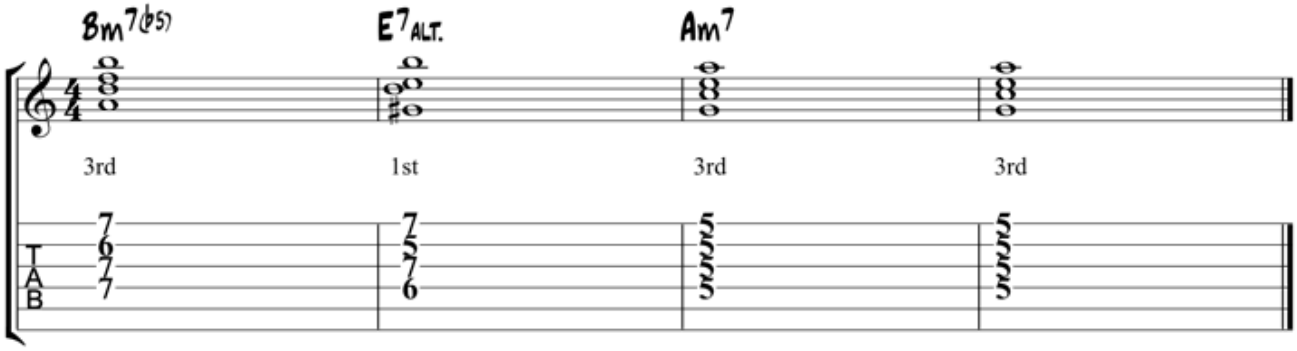
*Listen & Play*



As was the case in the **major progression**, you can apply this concept to a iim7b5 inversion, moving to the closest inversion from that starting chord in your playing.

Here's an example of that approach using Drop 2 chords on the top-4 strings, with the iim7b5 being a 3rd inversion and moving to the **closest shape** from there.

*Listen & Play*




After you've worked out these examples, you can apply this exercise to other chord types, inversions, and **string sets** in your studies.

## Chord Scales

Another **effective jazz chord exercise** is chord scales, where you play a series of shape through a key on the fretboard.

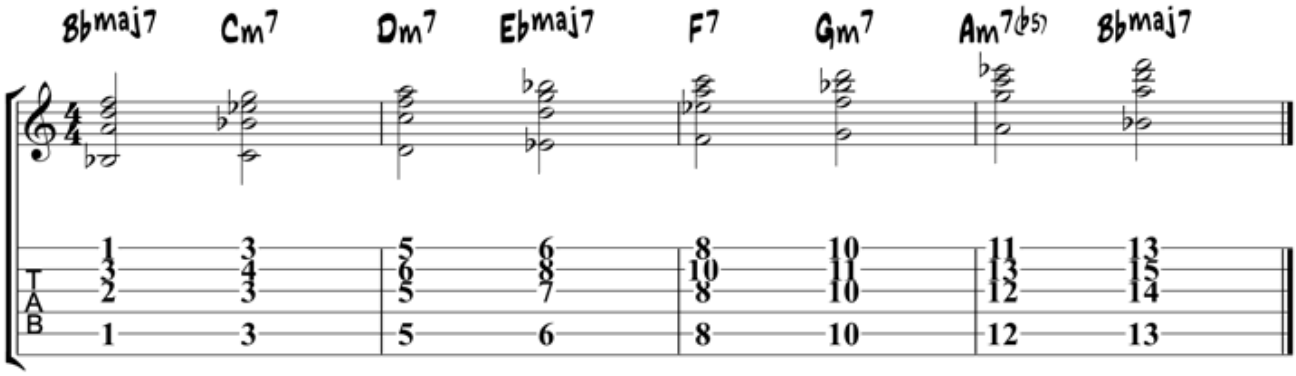
Here are the steps for building this **exercise** in your studies.

- Pick a **chord type** – such as Drop 3
- Pick a **string set** – such as 5321
- Pick a **key** – Bb major for example
- Start on the **Imaj7 chord** and play each chord in the key from there

Sounds pretty simple on paper, but it can be **tricky** to execute, especially if you're just getting into finding chords in any given key.

Here's that same example **on the fretboard** to help you visualize this exercise on the guitar.

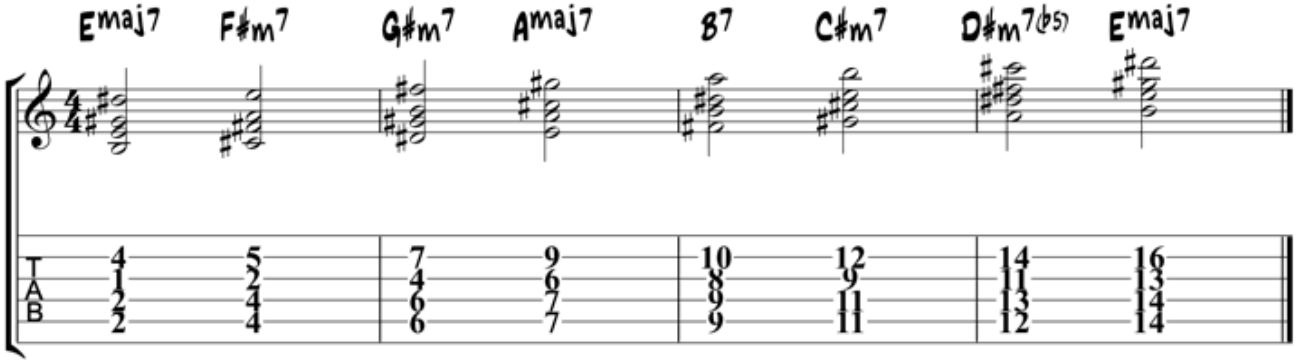
*Listen & Play*




As well as working chord scales in **root position**, you can use any inversion you're working on with this exercise in your studies.

Here's an example of a chord scale built with Drop 2 chords on the middle four strings in the key of E, using the **2nd inversion** for each chord.

*Listen & Play*




As you can see, chord scales allow you to play around the **entire fretboard**, without simply running inversions of chords in your playing.

When you've got these two written examples under your fingers in the given key, take them to **other keys** before moving on to other shapes and string sets.

If you find it challenging to work chord scales on the spot in your playing, you can **write out** any chord scale your studying on paper.

Then, after you've worked it out, you can **memorize that chord scale** on the fretboard as you take the exercise further in your studies.

## Tune Studies

The final jazz chord exercise involves taking **inversions** and various chord types to full jazz standards in your studies.

When doing so, you have **two options**:

1. The first option is to **write the chords out** with a plain rhythm, whole and half notes for

example. Then, you'd add in **your own rhythms** as you played through the study on the guitar.

2. The second option, which you can see below, is to **construct** a full comping study over the tune. This means including **chord shapes**, inversions, passing chords, melodic phrases, etc. as you emulate a real-life comping situation as much as possible in the study.

To get you started with this second approach, the more complex of the two on paper, here's a chord study over the tune "**Bluesette**."

You can learn the **study as written**, then begin to alter the rhythms, picking-hand attacks, and the chords themselves as you begin to personalize the study.

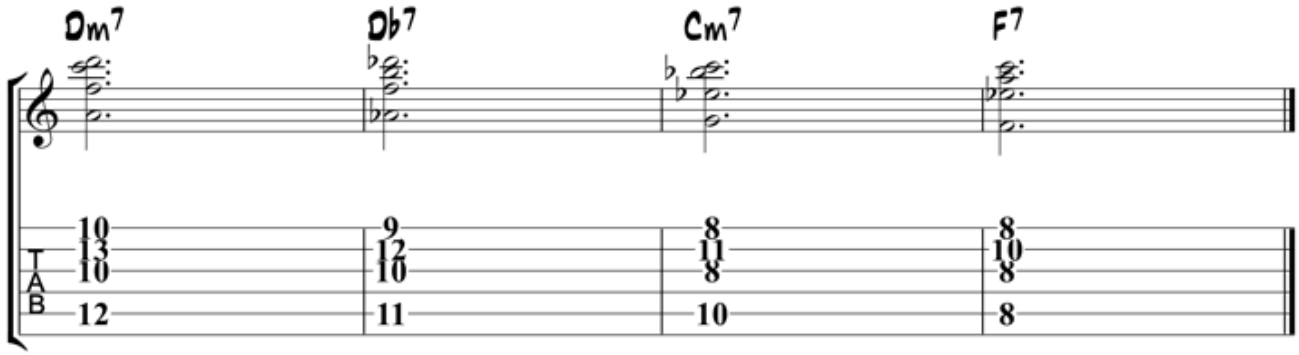
Once you have it down, and can bring **your personality** to the study, write out a jazz guitar chord study of your own.

You can use this tune **as a vehicle** for that study, or you can pick any jazz standard you're working on and use that in your practice routine.

*Backing Track*

*Listen & Play*


Bbmaj7
Am7(b5)
D7ALT.
Gm7
C7
Fm7
Bb7
Ebmaj7
Ebm7
Ab7
Dbmaj7
Dbm7
Gb7
Gmaj7
Cm7(b5)
F7ALT.
T
A
B


Dm7
Db7
Cm7
F7
T
A
B