

Mastering Chord Changes

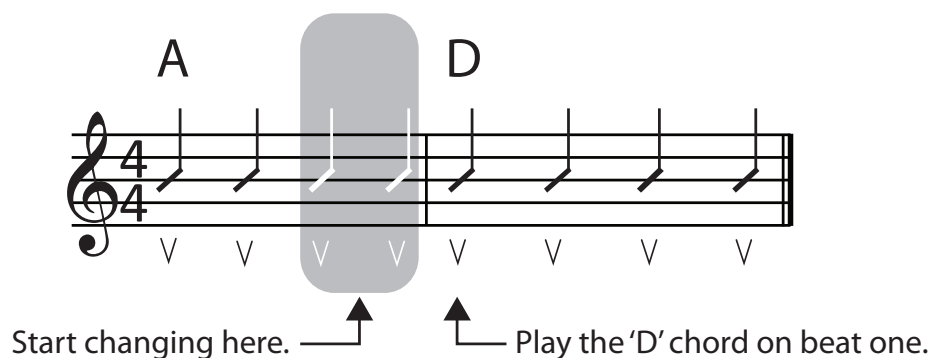
There are two steps to learning how to change chords more effectively. The first step is to learn the chord shape itself, to master the proper technique of playing the chord and develop sufficient muscle memory to be able to form the chord shape quickly. The second step is often neglected. To effectively play a song or exercise you must learn when it is appropriate to start changing from one chord to another; chord changes will never be instantaneous, so it's important that we learn how to start our chord changes early enough to arrive at the next chord in time.

Preemptive Changing

The most important element of playing a song or exercise is to complete it without pausing or slowing down; although being a beginner your chord changes are likely to get in the way of this. The key to success is to start changing early enough to arrive at the next chord in time. Take the short exercise below (Figure 1) as an example. We have one bar of an 'A' chord and one bar of a 'D' chord. Most students would play the whole bar of the 'A' chord, stop playing while they change to the 'D' chord and then complete the exercise. Preemptive changing teaches us that it is more important to play the first beat of the 'D' chord at beat one than it is to strum the first chord all the way to the end of the bar. With this knowledge we can now start planning to change from the 'A' chord early enough to arrive at the 'D' chord on beat one.

Start strumming through the exercise as normal, but once you reach beats three and four, start the chord change early (while still strumming) so that you have the 'D' chord in place for beat one of the next bar.

Figure 1:



At first this may seem like cheating, but in fact this is something that every guitarist does, the difference is that a professional guitarist uses only a fraction of a beat to make this change. We recommend you use at least two beats to make your chord change, and as you become more proficient you can reduce the time you've allocated for changing chords. The advantage is that once you master this technique your basic songs and exercises will sound smoother, and more musical. Additionally you will be learning the most important element about chord changes; learning how to make a change in time with the music.

Trouble Shooting

There are many different problems that occur when first learning this technique, solutions for the most common problems have been listed here.

- If your strumming hand stops when you change chords early have a friend or teacher count the beats for you and call out 'keep strumming' as you reach the beats where you will be changing chords to help remind you.
- If you arrive too early at the next chord then you may need to decrease the amount of beats you've allocated for changing chords, learning exactly how long it takes you to change between chords at different tempos is all part of the process for this exercise.