

Guitar

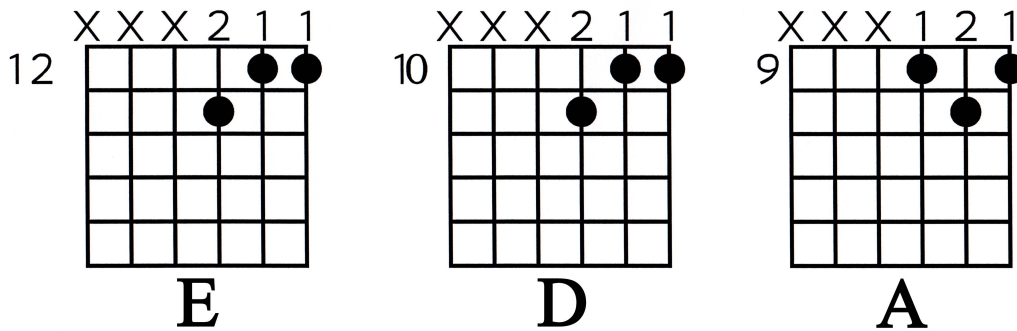
The Basics

Column #10 – Partial

Partial chords are simply two and three note, occasional four note, versions of chords. While the two note versions are often called “double stops”, they can be seen also as chord partials in a rhythmic context.

Knowing how to play partials requires that you also understand chord construction. But, without going too deeply into that subject, we will walk you through some basic chord partial forms and also demonstrate a few examples from the real world.

The first example will use two forms, both major in structure, to illustrate how they can be used. First, the chords:



Now we will play them. The following passage is from the song “Gloria”, by Them, featuring Van Morrison, a perennial classic from the 1960s. You’re going to be playing the ‘break’ section, which is in a “3 over 2” context. That’s a triplet over two beats, not unlike a regular triplet, but spread out. If you listen to the break on the recording, you’ll totally understand it.

E D A D E

3 3 3 3 3 3

T 12-12-12-10-9-10 12-12-12-10-9-10 12-12-12-10-9-10 12-12-12-10-9-10
A 13-13-13-11-9-11 13-13-13-11-9-11 13-13-13-11-9-11 13-13-13-11-9-11
B

This second batch of partials you may or may not already know. We're taking 7th chords and laying down a Blues intro. Here are the chords:

The diagrams show the following chord structures:

- A7:** Fret 8. Muting: X X X. Fingering: 2 1 3. Notes: 8th fret (4th string), 7th fret (3rd string), 8th fret (2nd string).
- Ab7:** Fret 7. Muting: X X X. Fingering: 2 1 3. Notes: 7th fret (4th string), 6th fret (3rd string), 7th fret (2nd string).
- G7:** Fret 6. Muting: X X X. Fingering: 2 1 3. Notes: 6th fret (4th string), 5th fret (3rd string), 6th fret (2nd string).
- A:** Fret 5. Muting: X X X. Fingering: 2 1 1. Notes: 5th fret (4th string), 5th fret (3rd string), 5th fret (2nd string).

For each of the chords, except the final A chord, the root tone is missing. It would be located on the fourth string, one fret below the played figure, just so you know where the root tone lies if you want to include it as part of the run. Here's how you would play it:

The musical notation shows a blues intro in 12/8 time. The chords are A7, Ab7, G7, and A. The guitar tablature below the staff indicates the fretting for each string (T, A, B) across the 12 measures.

T		9	9	9	8	8	8	7	7	7	5
A	12	8	8	8	7	7	7	5	5	5	5
B	8	9	9	9	8	8	8	7	7	7	6

Notice that it is in 12/8 time. The eighth note gets the beat. This time signature is used in many tunes that employ the shuffle feel.

The third and final example, taken from the chorus of the song “Jeopardy”, by Greg Kihn, is one in which you are playing partials, but you are arpeggiating them. It’s important to understand all the different ways you can play a partial chord figure. It uses a Dm7, with the $\flat 7$ tone on top, and a Dm13, with the 13 tone on top. Very easy, but very effective.

The image shows musical notation for two chords: Dm7 and Dm13. The notation is for a guitar, with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The first measure is for Dm7, and the second measure is for Dm13. Above the staff, the chords are labeled "Dm7" and "Dm13". Below the staff, there are two measures of "let ring" instructions, indicated by dashed lines. The guitar tablature is shown below the staff, with strings labeled T, A, B from top to bottom. The first measure of Dm7 has fret numbers 7, 7, 6, 8, 8. The second measure of Dm13 has fret numbers 7, 7, 6, 7, 7. The tablature for the Dm7 measure shows a 7 on the 4th and 5th strings, a 6 on the 3rd string, and an 8 on the 2nd and 1st strings. The tablature for the Dm13 measure shows a 7 on the 4th and 5th strings, a 6 on the 3rd string, and a 7 on the 2nd and 1st strings.

The important thing to take away from this lesson is to break down your chords into smaller versions, fewer notes. Also, bear in mind that they don’t always have to be on the top three or four strings. They can be any three or four note renditions. While the top three strings tend to cut through better, they may not convey what you hear in your head the best way.

Take time to look at every chord you know, not just “types”, like minor and major, but literally every chords you know. Break them down into smaller bits and move them around, re-voice them, which is to say change the note order around so different notes are in different parts of the structure (bottom, middle, and top). It will take some time, but be well worth the time you take to **expand** this fascinating aspect of your chord knowledge.

This counter-intuitive approach will yield some very satisfying results and make you sound far more capable than you may actually be!

The primary reason to explore the idea of minimal chord voicings (another name for partials) is that when you are playing with another guitar player or a keyboard player – or both, the sonic landscape fills up really quickly, with a lot of midrange tones spilling out of the instruments. This means the rhythmic sound of the song can be quite muddy and undefined – a mushy mess without any character. Other players may not have enough knowledge or experience to know or understand that sometimes you must **play less in order to add more** to the given piece of music you are playing.

If you are in a two guitar band, getting both players to **play different parts** will expand the sonic palate in ways just “doubling” the rhythm for density (both players playing the same A chord, for example) cannot accomplish. It will actually add complexity, clarity and a better kind of density to the songs in which you apply this technique.

And that is what makes one band stand out more than another, the ability to do things a little differently than the expected.

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