

FOUR-CHORD PROGRESSIONS IN FOUR KEYS: D, G, F AND E

Three degree-based formulas, transposed and played in several ways

Ten sheets to understand that a four-chord progression is a formula you transpose, then to play it in rhythm, as arpeggios, fingerpicked and improvised over.

10 sheets · level 1 to 3 · at your own pace

Layout optimised for 7-inch e-readers (Kobo, Kindle, Boox...), also easy to read on phones and tablets.

WHY THIS PACK

A small number of four-chord progressions come back very often in pop and rock. This guide presents three of them, given as scale degrees: I–V–vi–IV (in D, then in G), I–V–vi–iii (in F) and I–IV–V (in E). A progression in degrees does not depend on the key: to transpose it, you shift every chord by the same distance. The guide has you work these formulas in several ways — steady rhythm, changes, muted strums, syncopation, arpeggios, fingerstyle — then ends with improvisation. The order is deliberate: first one formula in one key (sheets 1 and 2), the same one in another key (3 and 4), a neighbouring formula (5 to 7), the simplest one, I–IV–V (8 and 9), finally improvisation (10). The classic trap is learning each key as something new when the structure is already familiar.

THE 10-SHEET PATH

01 Pop in D — strumming pattern

LEVEL 1 · POP

Lay a strumming pattern over D, A, Bm, G, without worrying about the changes.

02 Pop in D — chord change

LEVEL 2 · POP

The D–A–Bm–G changes: fluency before speed.

03 Pop in G (4 chords) — muted strums

LEVEL 1 · POP

The same I–V–vi–IV formula, in G, with the palm: another move over transposed chords.

04 Pop in G (4 chords) — syncopated rhythm

LEVEL 3 · POP

The same progression, an offset pattern: the harmonic difficulty stays the same, only the rhythm changes.

05 Pop in F — 4 chords

LEVEL 1 · POP

Another formula, I–V–vi–iii, in F: the structure of the C version, transposed.

06 Pop in F — muted strums

LEVEL 2 · POP

Muting the progression: palm at the bridge, a short percussive sound.

07 Pop in F — arpeggios

LEVEL 3 · POP

Spell out the same chords note by note: precision for the picking hand.

08 Pop in E — strumming pattern

LEVEL 1 · POP

I–IV–V: the simplest formula, in E (E, A, B).

09 Pop in E — fingerstyle

LEVEL 3 · POP

The same three chords fingerpicked: thumb on the bass, three fingers on the treble strings.

10 Improvisation — pop in G, relative scale

LEVEL 3 · POP

Improvise over the I–V–vi–IV loop in G, with the relative minor scale, E minor.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE PLAN

Week 1 — I–V–vi–IV in D (sheets 1 and 2)

D, A, Bm, G: a steady strumming pattern, then the chord changes. Note the degrees as you play.

Week 2 — The same formula in G (sheets 3 and 4)

G, D, Em, C: same degrees, different chords. Muted strums, then syncopation over the same progression.

Week 3 — I–V–vi–iii in F (sheets 5 to 7)

F, C, Dm, Am: the structure of the C version, transposed. Introduction, muted strums, then arpeggios.

Week 4 — I–IV–V in E, then improvising (sheets 8 to 10)

E, A, B: the simplest formula, in rhythm then fingerpicked. Finish by improvising over the loop in G.

01 · POP IN D — STRUMMING PATTERN

Level 1

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/d-pop-rhythm>

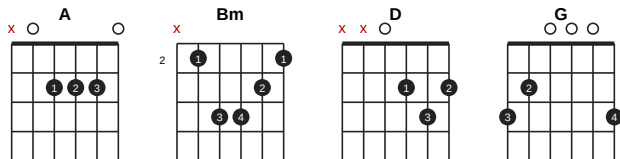
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Lay a strumming pattern over D, A, Bm, G, without worrying about the changes.

GUIDE TIP

Note the degrees: D is I, A is V, Bm is vi, G is IV. You will meet this I–V–vi–IV formula again in G on sheet 3: same degrees, different chords.

CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

D	A	Bm	G
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A strumming pattern applied to the D, A, Bm, G progression, to build right-hand consistency independently of the chord changes.

TIPS

Isolate the strumming pattern on a single held chord first, before applying it across the full progression.

02 · POP IN D — CHORD CHANGE

Level 2

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/d-pop-chord-change>

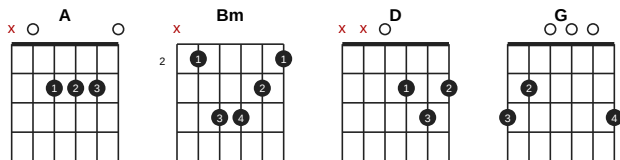
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

The D-A-Bm-G changes: fluency before speed.

GUIDE TIP

Spot the move to Bm, the only barre chord in the progression, and slow down only that change before replaying the full loop.

CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

D	A	Bm	G
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Practice switching between D, A, Bm, G in this Pop progression. Focus on smooth transitions between chords rather than speed.

TIPS

Play each chord for several beats before switching, and only speed up once the transitions feel clean.

03 · POP IN G (4 CHORDS) — MUTED STRUMS

Level 1

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/g-pop-muted-strums>

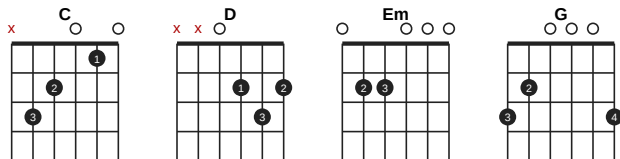
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

The same I–V–vi–IV formula, in G, with the palm: another move over transposed chords.

GUIDE TIP

Compare this progression with the one on sheet 1: same degrees, different chords. You hear the same loop, just lower or higher.

CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

I	V	VI	IV
G	D	Em	C

As with the catalogue's already-present rhythm version, these four chords (G, D, Em, C) are all in open position, with no barre at all. But unlike a power chord (2 or 3 strings to mute), G and Em each use all 6 strings of the guitar: the palm has to cover a much wider area to watch than on one of the catalogue's metal grids.

TIPS

Mute each chord separately, counting its active strings: G and Em (6 strings each) demand the widest palm coverage in this grid.

Compare with one of the catalogue's muted power-chord grids: the palm width needed here is noticeably greater. Once all four chords are mastered muted separately, chain them while keeping each palm adjustment automatic.

04 · POP IN G (4 CHORDS) — SYNCOPATED RHYTHM

Level 3

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/g-pop-rhythm-syncopated>

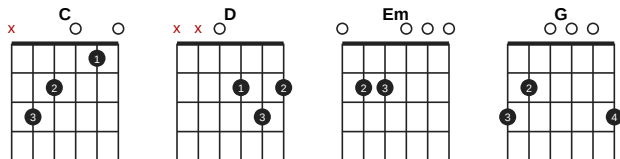
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

The same progression, an offset pattern: the harmonic difficulty stays the same, only the rhythm changes.

GUIDE TIP

Play the regular version then the syncopated one back to back: the progression is identical, everything new you hear comes from the picking hand.

CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

I	V	VI	IV
G	D	Em	C

This syncopated version uses exactly the same grid (G, D, Em, C) as the catalogue's basic rhythm version, with the same open-position chords throughout: the only variable that changes between the two levels is the right-hand pattern. It's a good illustration of the site's progression logic: the harmonic difficulty stays identical, only the rhythmic complexity increases.

TIPS

If the regular version of this grid is already solid, the left hand shouldn't be an obstacle here: put all your focus on the rhythmic displacement.

First clap the off-beats with no guitar, before folding them into the strum.

Consciously compare both versions by ear to really hear what the syncopation adds.

05 · POP IN F — 4 CHORDS

Level 1

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshef.com/en/fiche/pop-f-4-chords-beginner>

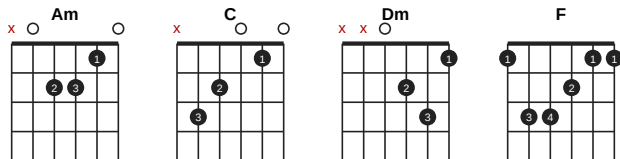
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Another formula, I–V–vi–iii, in F: the structure of the C version, transposed.

GUIDE TIP

Compare F–C–Dm–Am with C–G–Am–Em: every chord is shifted up a fourth. That is what transposing means.

CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

I	V	VI	III
F	C	Dm	Am

The F-C-Dm-Am progression (I-V-vi-iii), the same structure as the C version but transposed to F: a good way to introduce the F barre chord within an otherwise simple sequence.

TIPS

Place the F chord on its own first and check that no string is muted before adding it to the loop. The other three chords (C, Dm, Am) should already feel familiar if you've worked the C or A minor progressions.

06 · POP IN F — MUTED STRUMS

Level 2

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/f-pop-muted-strums>

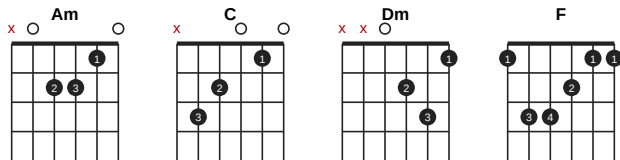
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Muting the progression: palm at the bridge, a short percussive sound.

GUIDE TIP

Adjust the palm: pressed too hard, no pitch is audible any more. Look for the point where the chord is still recognisable.

CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

I	V	VI	III
F	C	Dm	Am

The F, C, Dm, Am progression played with the picking hand's palm resting on the strings right in front of the bridge: a short, percussive sound instead of a chord ringing out fully.

TIPS

Ease off the palm pressure to dial in the muting: press too hard and no pitch comes through at all.

07 · POP IN F — ARPEGGIOS

Level 3

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/f-pop-arpeggios>

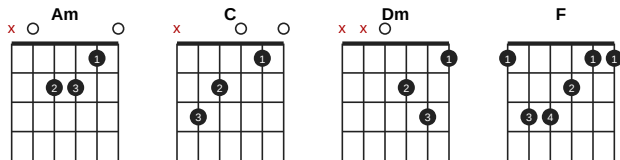
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Spell out the same chords note by note: precision for the picking hand.

GUIDE TIP

Compare with the strumming of sheet 5: the same chords, but a note that mutes or drags stands out immediately.

CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

I	V	VI	III
F	C	Dm	Am

The F, C, Dm, Am progression played as arpeggios: each chord is picked note by note instead of strummed, to build picking-hand precision.

TIPS

Slow down until every note rings clearly before increasing the tempo.

08 · POP IN E — STRUMMING PATTERN

Level 1

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/e-pop-rhythm>

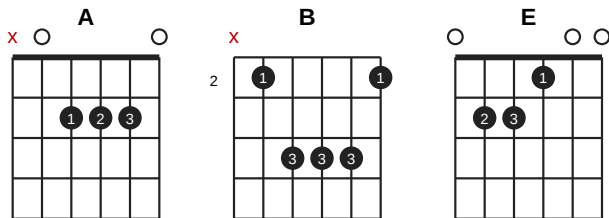
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

I–IV–V: the simplest formula, in E (E, A, B).

GUIDE TIP

Say the degrees as you play: E is I, A is IV, B is V. This trio comes back in a large share of blues and rock.

CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

E	A	B	E
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A single strumming pattern, repeated over the most common pop progression (E-A-B), to cleanly split two problems usually faced at once: holding a steady rhythm with the right hand, and changing chords with the left. Here the right hand does exactly the same thing, bar after bar; only the left hand moves. Once the pattern is automatic, you can drop it onto any four-chord song without thinking.

TIPS

Isolate the pattern on one held chord, left hand still, until the right arm does it on its own, like walking.

The right hand never stops: on beats where you don't hit a string, it keeps moving in the air above the strings.

Add the chord changes only when the strum needs no attention at all.

09 · POP IN E — FINGERSTYLE

Level 3

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/e-pop-fingerstyle>

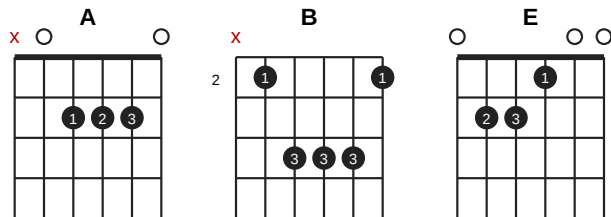
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

The same three chords fingerpicked: thumb on the bass, three fingers on the treble strings.

GUIDE TIP

Close your eyes for a few bars: if the thumb keeps the tempo on its own, the three fingers have room to join in.

CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

E	A	B	E
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The E-A-B pop progression played with the fingers, no pick: the thumb strikes each chord's bass while index, middle and ring pluck the three treble strings. Fingerstyle splits the right hand into two voices that must move together but independently, a bit like a pianist's two hands. The thumb is the metronome: until it's perfectly even, nothing above it will hold. It's the doorway to singer-style accompaniment without a plectrum.

TIPS

Work the thumb alone first: just the E, A, B basses in quarter notes, until they're as even as a click.

Add the fingers one at a time, index alone on one string first, then two, then three, never letting the thumb slow down.

Assign a fixed string to each finger (index = G, middle = B, ring = high E) and don't change: evenness comes from the automatism.

10 · IMPROVISATION — POP IN G, RELATIVE SCALE

Level 3

Pop

~100 BPM

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/improvisation-pop-g-relative-scale>

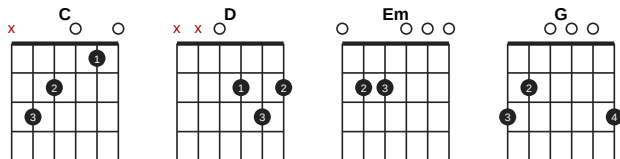
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Improvise over the I–V–vi–IV loop in G, with the relative minor scale, E minor.

GUIDE TIP

Aim for the notes of the current chord rather than the root of the scale, especially at the move to Em, the relative minor: that is where the melody settles most easily.

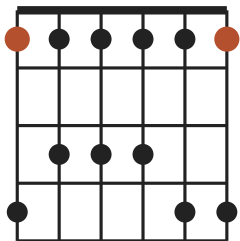
CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

I	V	VI	IV
G	D	Em	C

FRETBOARD POSITION



Pentatonique Mi mineur — pos. 1

This pop progression (G-D-Em-C) is in G major: its relative minor scale is E minor, already used on the E blues and rock sheets. Same notes, different harmonic context.

TIPS

As with the C version, stop using the scale's own root as your anchor — aim for the notes of whichever chord is playing, especially the move to Em, which is precisely the relative key.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Print the sheets in order, or keep them as a PDF on a tablet near your guitar.
2. One sheet per session is enough: better to replay it for several days than run through all ten at once.
3. Note the date and the tempo reached on the back of each sheet: playing is refined by ear, but progress is measured with a metronome.
4. Once you've gone through all the sheets, the same path exists in other keys on the site to transpose what you've learned.

WHAT IS GUITARSHelf

Guitarshelf is a guitar exercise sheet site, free and with no account to create:

- A catalogue of sheets sorted by style, level (1 to 6) and exercise type (grid, riff, scale, technique...).
- A generator that creates a brand-new exercise sheet on demand, based on chosen criteria.
- A glossary and gear guides to understand the vocabulary and upkeep of the instrument.
- A personal songbook: build your own selection of sheets and export it as a PDF, like this one.

Continue the journey on <https://guitarshelf.com>