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I. Introduction to the CAGED Chord System

The CAGED Chord System is a method where in you can play a particular chord in any position of the fretboard of a guitar in standard tuning. The CAGED Chord System covers a large aspect of guitar playing technique. It can obviously improve your rhythm playing but it also brings in a wider perspective regarding lead guitar technique.

The big question is, "What is CAGED and why should I learn it?" Good question. In the CAGED system, you are learning how to play a chord (or any chord for that matter) across the entire fretboard. As asked earlier, why should you try to learn how to play one chord in various positions of the fretboard when you can already play it effectively in one position? Here are the reasons why:

1. With regard to rhythm guitar technique, learning the CAGED System gives you the freedom to play anywhere you want to to get different chord voicings.

2. It removes the problem of playing "blocky" i.e. where you can only play one chord somewhere and then you can play another chord somewhere else. By using the CAGED system, you can play an entire chord progression in just a specific spot of the fretboard, therefore lessening your movements and allowing for smooth and fluent chord progressions.

3. The CAGED System, within the context of lead guitar or soloing, improves your melodic abilities and broadens your perspective.

II. Five Essential Major Chords

To truly learn the CAGED System, we need to make sure that we know and understand the five essential major open chord shapes. Those chord shapes are C major, A major, G major, E major, and D major. Put them together and they spell CAGED.
The thing about the CAGED acronym is that it is spelled in such a convenient manner as you will see. When we think about CAGED, it is actually the sequence of chord shapes in which one particular chord will appear across the entire fretboard.

The C chord is the first open chord we will encounter as shown below. The numbers on each dot correspond to the fretting hand finger numbering used in guitar literature (1 = index, 2 = middle, 3 = ring, 4 = pinky).

Possible fingerings are indicated in the diagrams:

Before we proceed to the next chord shape, we need to keep in mind that the most important thing to learn is how to do something truly effective. It's no good at all if you do not completely understand the concept. Whenever we perform a technique, it needs to be fast, clean, and accurate. In terms of learning the chord shapes, one exercise we can do is how to "bounce" chords. For example, if you have a C major chord shape and you're not very good at it, try practicing it this way:

1. Assume the C major chord position. Try pretend your fingers have superglue in them and that they stick to the fretboard.

2. Take your fingers off the fretboard slightly while maintaining or holding the chord shape.

3. Set your fingers back to the fretboard, as if your fingers were being pulled by superglue.

In this activity, the emphasis is NOT on setting your fingers down on the fretboard but rather your brain being able to assume the chord shape without the fretboard. You don't want to approach the fretboard and then form the shape of the chord. When you are about to play a chord, you want to be able to approach the fretboard with the chord shape already formed. In that matter you are already prepared and you can perform and change chords effectively, quickly and accurately. During bouncing, you want to be able to form your chord shape accurately IN THE AIR.

"Bouncing" chord shapes can be done in a number of ways as follows:

1. "Bounce" a single chord repeatedly.

2. "Bounce" a single chord a number of times and then move on the the next chord in a chord progression.

3. "Bounce" from one chord to the next.

The thing about practicing chord bouncing is that we need to be able to do it accurately first. Practice slowly.
The A chord features three notes fretted in a single row

The G chord shape has two variants. The first one is a three-finger G (it has the open B) while the second one has a D fretted at the 2nd string 3rd fret. Learning either one of these is fine for the CAGED system:
The E chord is shown below in two fingering variants. You can play all of the strings for this chord and it will sound good:

Here we feature the D chord shape in two fingering variants:
III. Barre Chords

Each of the CAGED open chord shapes we discussed can be turned into barre chords in order for us to get other chords.

Being able to transpose open chords by turning them into barre chords is essential in learning the CAGED system because we will be moving across the entire fretboard.

In playing barre chords, the first finger works just like a capo. By functioning that way, we can transpose each of the five CAGED chord shapes to higher pitches by playing the open chord shape behind it, giving us the ability to play in different keys. Essentially, a capo shrinks the guitar fretboard, and the first finger barre works in the same way but is more mobile and faster. When we use the first finger as a capo, we get all the advantages of the capo plus eliminate the disadvantages of using one.

Since we are going to be using the first finger as our "capo", we need to make use of the alternate fingerings for CAGED described in the earlier sections (using fingers 2, 3, and 4 to form the chord shapes).

Let's take an open E major chord as an example. We can use the same E chord shape and the first finger as the "capo" and turn it into F. We do this by applying the first finger barre to the first fret and then form the E chord shape afterwards at the 2nd and 3rd frets. We can continue making other chords using the E chord shape using the first finger barre and then moving upwards the fretboard:

---

CAGED CHORDS PRACTICE TIPS:

1. **Visualization**: Imagine the chord shape (or whatever technique or piece of music you are learning) in your head. If you can't see it, you can't play it.

2. **Bouncing**: Picking your fingers up and setting them down over and over.

3. **Form the chord with clarity**: When you make the chord, you want to make sure that it is nice and clean. Make sure that all the notes are playing cleanly when you pick through them. Strum the correct strings.

It is assumed that most of you who are taking this course already have knowledge of these chords. However, if you are still at the initial stages of learning guitar and is experiencing difficulty with learning these chords, keep on referring to this manual and the DVD lesson to figure out strategies for learning them.
The first finger bar is very important because it transposes what used to be open strings into the appropriate pitches for a particular chord. If you just try and move the open chord shape across the fretboard, it usually does not work because you have not changed the pitches of the open strings to the correct ones.

To get used to barre chords, try this little exercise. This exercise features a chord progression using only the E chord shape and the first finger barre.

Remember the practice tips mentioned earlier in the course (visualization, bouncing, clarity) and apply them when practicing the example below:

**Ex. 1**

**Tempo** ≈ 80

```plaintext
G

```

```plaintext
Bb

```

```plaintext
G

```

```plaintext
Bb

```

---

DVD 1
The barre chord formed using the E chord shape is what’s called a **6th-string barre chord**. This is because we are eyeballing the 6th string i.e. the lowest pitched root note of the chord can be found in the sixth string. For example, the open E major chord’s lowest pitched root note is the open 6th string (which is tuned to the pitch of E). If you play the 6th-string barre chord at the 3rd fret, the lowest note is the G at the 6th string, 3rd fret.

Another popular kind of barre chord is the **5th-string barre chord**. This kind of barre chord uses the A chord shape. It follows the same concept as the 6th-string barre chord in that we are moving the A chord shape around the guitar. We also need to move the open strings from the A chord shape as well, and so (as in the earlier examples), we use the first finger as a “capo” or barre. This will necessitate the second kind of fingering for the A chord shape (fingers 2,3,4) so that we can use the first finger as the barre.

For players with smaller hands, what they would sometimes use to form the A shape is the third finger as a barre across the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th strings. The difficult thing about that is that the third finger has the tendency to fret the 1st string as well, and so the third finger has to be kinked to leave the 1st string alone.
For players with smaller hands (such as Steve himself), what they would sometimes use to form the A shape is the third finger as a barre across the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th strings. The difficult thing about that is that the third finger has the tendency to fret the 1st string as well, and so the third finger has to be kinked to leave the 1st string alone.

One question that often pops up in the discussion of chords is, "Why can't you move D or C or G up and down?" Actually, you can do that using the CAGED system. The CAGED system is about learning to play all five chord shapes in all areas of the fretboard.

With such knowledge of chords, another question arises: "Which chord version should I use?" The answer to that is use whatever you want. The choice of chord shape, however, will depend on a number of things:

1. Is it the most applicable in terms of sound?
2. Does it seem to fit in what you're interested in playing?
3. Is it the easiest chord shape to switch to from a previous chord?

As you may have noticed in learning barre chords, we learn how to apply the barre for the E and A shapes. The next thing to do is to learn barre chords based on C, D and G shapes, learn how to connect them together, and learn how to use them effectively. Practice these barre chords starting with the E and A shapes until the become comfortable or second nature to you then move on to the other shapes.
IV. Musical Notes and Notes on the Guitar

Learning some music theory is very important in being able to play the guitar. However, the term itself tends to scare people off. They sometimes ask, "Do I have to learn all this stuff?" The answer is, "No. You don't have to learn all that stuff. BUT you need to have some basic knowledge of the notes on your guitar and how they work." If at the very least you know where the notes of the guitar are, you will know where you're supposed to go. Music theory at this point is going to be learning the notes on the guitar.

To know the notes of the guitar, the first thing we have to understand are the notes that are available to us in music regardless of instrument. The notes available to us in music are A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. These start all over again like a circle.

If we move from one particular note to the same letter note name at the higher or lower register (e.g. A to the next A) that is what's called an **octave**.
In a piano keyboard, each of the letter named notes are represented by the white keys. In the guitar, this is not easily seen as in a piano. The thing is that in music, there actually are more notes than the seven letter named notes. These five extra notes, found in between most of the letter named notes, are represented by the black keys of the piano. The notes of both the white keys and black keys is called the **chromatic scale**. The chromatic scale has a total of 12 notes.

The black keys of the piano are called either **sharps (#)** or **flats (b)** (a.k.a. accidentals). These notes are found in between most of the notes. For example, the black key after C is called C#. While they may look related, they are in fact different notes, C# being a certain pitch (half step) higher than C.

Initially you may think that if there are 7 letter note names, there should be 7 sharps for a total of 14 notes. However, it doesn’t work that way. The chromatic scale only has 12 notes, seven of which have the letter names while five are sharps or flats. The general rule (as far as guitar is concerned) is that every other note has a sharp or flat except for B and E which no sharps and C and F which have no flats. If you think about the chromatic scale, B# is essentially C, Cb is B, E# is F, and Fb is E. We don’t really use B#, Cb, E# and Fb to describe notes.
The next thing we need to know are the notes of the open strings of the guitar. The guitar in standard tuning is tuned as follows:

The easy way to memorize the notes of each open string of the guitar is the mnemonic below:
The thing to think about next is what are the notes of the guitar when we stop a string at a particular fret? To know this we just have to follow the letter naming convention. Say we have the E at the open 6th string, what is the note at the 6th string 1st fret? Since we already know that E doesn’t have a sharp, we can say that the note at the 6th string 1st fret is an F, which is essentially the same as an E#. We can then name the notes as we go up the fretboard on just the 6th string:

The problem about memorizing the notes of the guitar by counting the frets is that it is slow. There is a faster way of memorizing all the notes of a particular string on the fretboard. The thing about the guitar is that most of these instruments have single dots (fret markers) at the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 15th, 17th, 19th and 21st frets, and then two dots on the 12th and 24th frets. For now, let us limit ourselves only up to the 12th fret. The tip here is that we must first know what are the notes on those dot markers. If we know these notes by heart, we can easily identify the notes beside those dots.

If we go to the 12th fret, it has two dots. It represents the octave. Everything beyond those 12 dots is just a repeat of the guitar from the open string up to the 12th fret. As an example, our open 6th string is an E; therefore, the note at the 6th string 12th fret is a E an octave higher. Next thing we need to be concerned about are the dots of the odd-numbered frets 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9. The dots at frets 1, 3, 5, and 7 are (in order) F, G, A, and B. The dot at the 9th fret serves as a marker where C and D are because C (8th fret) can be found before the 9th fret and D (10th fret) can be found after the 9th fret. From here on you can easily memorize the notes of the fretboard.

How valuable exactly is this information can be demonstrated in this example. If you know your 6th string notes, you know that there are just 12 notes in music. If you know how to form 6th string barre chords, you can therefore play all of the 12 different chords (E, F, F#, etc.) with their root notes at the 6th string. This also means that you can play a chord in a number of different ways but there will be always only 12 kinds of each variety of chord i.e. there are only 12 major chords, 12 minor chords, 12 dominant chords, 12 diminished chords, etc. If you know one particular chord shape on the guitar, you can already play all 12 of these by just shifting the chord shape up and down the fretboard, using the first finger barre to take care of what used to be open string notes.
The next question is what exactly are flats? We already know that a sharp is one fret (or a half step) higher than a letter named note e.g. C to C# is a half step higher. A flat lowers the note a half step (or one fret) e.g. Bb is located at the 1st fret 5th string, one fret lower than B.

If we take G at the 6th string 3rd fret as an example, Gb is at the 6th string 2nd fret. But isn't the note at the 6th string 2nd fret F#? That is also correct. Gb and F# are the same notes. This is what we call **enharmonic**.

From a practical musicianship standpoint, it doesn't matter whether you call F# as Gb or Bb as A#, etc. The thing that matters is that you can find where those notes are and get to them quickly.

Now that we're done memorizing the notes at the 6th string, let's try dealing with the 5th string notes. We follow the same principle as in the 6th string notes except that we have to take note of the 2nd fret instead of the 1st fret. So, to memorize the 5th string notes, take note that the open 5th string is an A. Afterwards, take notice of the frets 2, 3, 5, 7, and 9. We have B at the 2nd fret and then C, D, and E at the 3rd, 5th, and 7th frets respectively. We also now know that F can be found before fret 9 and that G exists after fret 9. The 5th string 12 fret is an A an octave higher than open string A. From there, we can now easily identify the notes of the other frets.

To become effective at understanding these concepts, try quizzing yourself or with a partner e.g. think about where F is on the 6th string, where C is at the 5th string, etc.
V. Key Signatures Simplified

More often than not, we talk about music as being in a particular "key". Now, what exactly is a musical key or key signature? What exactly does it mean when a person says this particular piece of music is in the key of D?

In this particular example, this means that D is the main note. The music will go to other notes, but it will always go home to D. Subsequently, the D chord is the main chord of the piece and therefore the music will always go home to that D chord. The other notes and chords are of course important, but it is essential to understand that the music will gravitate towards a central or home note/chord. That is how we can explain what a key signature is.

When we talk about key signature, we often equate that with a particular major scale. From that major scale, we can then derive all the possible chords within that key signature. For example, if we are in the key of A, there will be an A chord of some sort, a B chord of some sort, C chord of some sort, etc. Generally speaking, all major scales have A, B, C, D, E, F, and G notes of some sort (the accidentals i.e. sharps and flats depend on what the key signature actually is). It is very important that we understand this because we will be soloing over chord progressions. If we want to perform a good sounding solo, it must fit within each chord of the chord progression, and for us to do so we must be able to see what particular chords will go into a particular key.

In a particular major key signature, some chords will be major and some chords will be minor, but there will always be seven chords in a key (corresponding to seven notes in a major scale).

Also try to understand how a chord is constructed. The diagram below shows a C major chord. If you had learned what a C major chord is like a lot of guitarists have, you know that it is a C major chord because somebody taught you that that particular chord shape is C major, not because you thought about the notes. It's fine that you've learned it that way (even without being able to read the notes or staff) because you can immediately play music with it. But one thing to think about is that chords sound what they are (regardless of being major, minor, diminished or augmented) because they are always built on three different notes: the root, the 3rd and the 5th. These notes are named after their position in a major scale. C major has C as the root, D as 2nd, E as 3rd, F as 4th, G as 5th, A as 6th, and B as 7th. Since we stated that a chord contains a root, 3rd, and a 5th, the C major chord therefore has C, E and G. Everytime you are playing a C chord, you are just playing the root, 3rd and 5th even though you are strumming across five strings.

For more details regarding music theory, please refer to Steve Stine's "Music Theory Made Easy" course.

Now that we have a rudimentary understanding of music theory as it relates to the guitar, we can now go on creating the CAGED System.
VI. The CAGED Concept

To acquaint ourselves with how the CAGED system works, let’s start with the chord C:

While we have assumed the C shape correctly and may have probably identified what this chord should be (based on some music theory knowledge), there’s still a problem. The open strings don’t fit in what this chord is supposed to be, and thus we need a capo at the 5th fret. Hopefully by this time you already understand the fact that all of the chords are movable but they need that capo. As talked about in the discussion regarding barre chords, that capo is your first finger.
With our first finger as a capo at the 5th fret and the rest of our fretting fingers assuming a C shape starting at the 8th fret, we can properly form an F major chord based on a C shape.

![F chord diagram]

Going back to the C chord, one of the things we can easily learn when we know how to form chords is how to strum through them rhythmically.

![C chord diagram]
We can also think about chords from a melodic perspective. In this instance, melody is taking the notes of a chord and correlating those notes of a chord with somebody singing. Somebody might sing or solo over that chord, playing the same chord notes/tones. If you play each of the notes of that C chord in a particular sequence, there already is a melody underneath, following just that chord shape as demonstrated below:

**Ex. 2**

**Swing** \(\frac{}{4} = 110\)

(Note: For this example, use the fingering suggested in the chord diagram)

It may look simple but if we apply a rhythmic passage using the same chord underneath this example, it will really sound melodic (no matter how basic it may sound). If we knew some more about scales or use some other chords within a chord progression, we can start visualizing multiple chords in the same spot, and your fretting hand will keep shifting within the same area of the fretboard.
Think about this next: If you were moving from a C chord to a G chord, all of the notes within that G chord become available. Take a look at this example to realize how we move melodically from a C chord to a G chord all within the same spot as we go through a simple chord progression.

Ex. 3

Swing \( \downarrow = 110 \)

Think about this next: If you were moving from a C chord to a G chord, all of the notes within that G chord become available. Take a look at this example to realize how we move melodically from a C chord to a G chord all within the same spot as we go through a simple chord progression.
Again, this seems to be a very basic idea if you listen to it. But if you start thinking about it, you are visualizing one chord then another chord over the top of each other. This is the beginnings of what the CAGED System really does for you. It puts everything in one spot, and so you can start seeing all of these things moving. The more information you have about other things, the more you can sort of thread all of those into one thing. These would then start working melodically.

And so that’s what we want to start our focus on. We will now officially going to create the CAGED System with our C chord. Think about the term CAGED for now. The beauty about the guitar in standard tuning is that those chord shapes are going to connect to each other across the fretboard in the exact same order! The diagram below shows C major in all CAGED shapes. If you look into the tab below, you will be able to see how they connect to each other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C shape</th>
<th>A shape</th>
<th>G shape</th>
<th>E shape</th>
<th>D shape</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| T | 1 | 3 | 5 | 8 | 12 |
| A | 0 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 13 |
| B | 2 | 5 | 5 | 10| 12 |
|   | 3 | 8 | 8 |   | 10 |
Let’s get into more detail. Take a look into the C chord with the C shape. You know already that the 5th string 3rd fret note is is a C, and that serves as your landmark, letting you know that you are correctly making a C major chord. Now make the C major chord using the A shape (remember that this is the 5th string barre chord at the 3rd fret). Can you see what note connects both shapes together? It’s the C at the 5th string 3rd fret!

Take note of the fact that we refer to CAGED as shapes. This is because our fretting fingers are assuming these patterns. To us guitar players they will look like C, A, etc. simply because we learn them first as such. But as we move these shapes across the fretboard they will sound and function differently because we are effectively transposing them into other chords, even if the shape remains the same. For example, if you move the open C shape to the area of the fretboard where you have the 5th string note at the 7th fret (with the first finger as a barre for the 4th fret), it no longer is C major but E major. It’s the same thing when you move the E chord to the area of the 5th fret (turning it into a 6th string barre chord). Visually, it looks like E to us guitar players, but it sounds as A major. All of these open chords that we know are shapes can move up and down the guitar. That is exactly how the guitar was created when its designers conceived it as an instrument with six strings tuned in a fashion that we now know today as standard tuning. The guitar’s designers have actually thought of these chord shapes being moved around and not staying in one place.
Going back to our C shape and A shape for our C major chord, once we know how to form these shapes in their correct positions, we can now easily see C major within the first five frets of the guitar. If we now realize that the acronym CAGED is the actual order of the chord shapes for one particular chord, we can expect the next C major chord to be in the G shape. Think about it first. We have our open G chord starting with the 6th string 3rd fret G note. If you remember how we map the fretboard, the 6th string 7th fret note where we find a dot marker is B. Therefore we can then correctly identify that the 6th string 8th fret note as C! Subsequently we can produce a C major chord with a G shape from there.

Now, if you had tried to form the C major chord in its G shape, it can feel very awkward, especially the first example. For our purposes of learning the CAGED system, take a look at the second example of C in a G shape. Have you noticed that the first finger barre covers the 5th fret? In what chord shape would you find such coverage? If you answered C major in the A shape, you are correct. The first finger barre we used at the 5th fret in C major G shape contains the same notes in the exact same location as the 5th fret notes of the C major A shape. The diagram below shows how the C, A and G shape versions of C major are connected to each other:
Using the CAGED concept, we expect the next shape for our C major chord to be E. This would be easy to do because it is a 6th string barre chord at the 8th fret. It shares the bottom 6th string note with that of the G shape of C major. Let us update the diagram to show the connections of the CAGE chord shapes for C major:

The last shape in the CAGED sequence is D. Now, where would the D shape of C major be located? Take note that the D shape starts at the 4th string, so we can deduce that from the E shape, the D shape should connect to the E shape via the 4th string note:
We can once more review how the C major chord looks like in all five shapes and how they are connected together:

Learning and Practicing CAGED Effectively:

1. The first thing is that you have to be able to see how the CAGED shapes are formed and how they are connected to one another. Practicing how to form these CAGED shapes for a particular chord helps in understanding the concept.

2. Know how to form your 6th and 5th string barre chords to make learning the CAGED System easier.

2. For some of the trickier shapes like G, in many instances we don't really use the entire shape, just a fraction of it (unless your song calls for a sound requiring the entire shape, which is rare). As long as you can visualize the shape, you can just pick out three notes and noodle around with it in a song.

3. Always be aware of the connection points between shapes, so that you will know how you can move from one shape to another.

4. To remember the CAGED System easily, always keep in mind that the order in which the chord shapes appear follow the spelling of CAGED i.e. the C shape is immediately found before the A shape followed by G, E and D shapes.

5. When practicing the CAGED System, start with one shape and then try to figure out how to connect it to the previous or the next shape.

6. Practice at your own pace. There's no need to hurry. It's important that you fully understand a concept first before moving on to the next.
I. A Chord

For this segment, let’s look at another open chord, A major, and then use the CAGED system to play A major in various positions across the fretboard.

A major in the open position is obviously in the A shape. Using the CAGED System, we expect the next available shape to be G. If we think about it, the A shape can function as a barre to form the G shape version. We will form the G shape version of A major by barring the open A shape (at the 2nd fret) with our 1st finger, use our 3rd finger for the 6th string 5th fret note (A) and then the 2nd finger for the C# at the 5th string 4th fret.

Observe the diagram above and the tab. You can see that the common thing between the A and G chord shapes is the three notes of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th strings across the 2nd fret. These have been colored distinctly in the chord diagrams above. Let’s figure out the succeeding shapes. The next shape from G is E, which is a 6th string barre chord at the 5th fret.
After the E shape, the next available shape is D.

After the D shape, the next shape is again the C shape. The CAGED system just repeats over and over (until you run out of frets!). Remember that all chords on a guitar in standard tuning connect according to the CAGED sequence.
II. G Chord

The first shape after open G is the E shape, and we expect the next shapes to follow the CAGED concept. Again, always remember our acronym CAGED because it shows us the exact order in which the shapes should appear. Also take note of the connecting points between shapes. Illustrated below are the CAGED shapes for G.

Remember the following:

1. You must be able to see how the CAGED shapes connect together in your head.

2. Take note of the connection points so that you will know what finger you are connecting from each time to the next shape.

The next phase of learning is to figure our how to use CAGED in a realistic manner. Using the principles previously discussed, we can apply the CAGED concept to any chord and use it in a variety of ways.
III. E Chord

After working on G, let's start taking a look at the E chord. Obviously, the E chord starts with the open E shape and moves through the rest of the shapes in the order as provided by the CAGED acronym. Here below you will find all of the CAGED shapes for E major:

![E chord diagram]

IV. D Chord

The D major chord is the last one on our CAGED acronym. We'll start taking a look at the D chord as the open D shape and then go through the rest of our CAGED shapes:

![D chord diagram]
V. Using Other Chords

The CAGED concept can be used outside of our five open chords. This is where our knowledge of barre chords would come into play. Since the theoretical principles in forming chords remain the same regardless of key, we can apply the CAGED system to any chord. To understand this, let's try and figure out a chord like F major.

The first kind of F we usually learn is the 6th string 1st fret barre chord version. From our previous learnings, we can recognize this as an E shaped chord:

Using our knowledge of CAGED, we expect the next F major chord to assume the D shape form. Remember that the connection point between the E shape and the D shape is at the 4th string. In this case, the connection point is the 4th string 3rd fret note:
After the D shape, the next shape is C. For our F major chord, the connection point between the D and C shapes are the notes at the 1st, 2nd and 3rd strings.

After the C shape, we can now try to find the A shape for F major. The 5th string note connects the A and C shapes together:
Lastly, we have the G shape for F major. It connects to the A shape via the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th string notes:

As demonstrated, we were able to find out all the CAGED shapes of F major using the 6th string barre chord as a starting point. The important thing here is that you should be aware the 6th string barre chord is an E shape. With the sequence of CAGED in mind, we can easily figure out where the other forms of F major, or any other 6th string barre chord are.

The same principle would apply for some awkward chords like C#. How do we figure out the shapes for C#? The key here is to build something from what you know. For example, we know our C# to be a 5th string barre chord or A shape at the 4th fret. Using our CAGED knowledge, we can then figure out all of the shapes starting from the A shape:
Using our CAGED knowledge, we also can find out that there's a C shaped C# major behind the A shape:

VI. C and F Chord Progression (Improvisation)

What are the practical implications of being able to figure out the CAGED shapes of one or more chords? One of these is that the CAGED system gives us the ability to play or improvise melodies over a chord progression in a more interesting manner.

Let’s say we have a very basic chord progression like C, F and G. If we’re supposed to play over this chord progression, what would be our choices? We could play some scales over it, but sometimes playing scales tends to sound like just moving up and down without any sense of direction. We can then try building our melodies and solos from the notes of the chords themselves. In music theory, the chord progression C-F-G is also known as a I-IV-V chord progression in the key of C. Many songs follow the I-IV-V chord progression in various keys (e.g. A-D-E for key of A, etc.) but the principles for this activity remain the same regardless of key signature.

Try picking out each note of the chord sequentially. This is what’s called arpeggiating the chord (from arpeggio, playing the chord’s notes individually a.k.a. broken chords). Going back to our C and F chord progression, imagine interlocking the notes of C and F major together using the things we’ve learned about using the CAGED system. From there, we can think of writing our solos using chords as a reference rather than scales. In the next sections, we’re going to explore a variety of methods of improvisation over a jam track playing that simple C and F chord progression.
As discussed earlier, we can make up melodies by using the notes found in chords within a particular chord progression. There are two ways of doing this:

1. Play only the notes of the chord when a particular chord comes up e.g if the chord is C major, play melodically using the notes of C major.

2. Play the notes of the chords used in the chord progression, giving emphasis to the chord presently playing in the chord progression. For example, if the chord progression is C and F, you can use notes from BOTH C and F but emphasize the notes of a particular chord as it appears in a song/piece i.e. you may solo over C major using both notes from C major and F major but emphasize C, E and G (notes of C major).

When soloing, remember how the notes form chords within the context of CAGED and then play along within the chord shape/s. We have a transcription below of Steve playing over C and F using the first method over one of the backing tracks included in this course. In the first few examples, Steve is playing over what's called the "first position". The first position in this instance is around the 1st to 3rd frets, using the C major chord in its C shape and the F major chord in its E shape.

This example uses the first method of improvising/soloing (chord tones only on particular chord).

Ex. 4

Straight, Moderate \( \downarrow = 90 \)
Again, notice that in this example, Steve is only playing the chord tones over the present chord being played in the track. When C major is up, he only plays C major’s notes and when F major comes, he only plays F major’s notes. However, the ideal thing would be to be able to use all of the notes of both C and F major regardless of the chord being presently played i.e. bringing both notes of C and F major in the solo. Steve refer’s to this technique as "meandering" where chord tones of the present chord are given particular emphasis at some point while the notes of the next chord are used as passing or neighboring tones to create a more melodically interesting solo. For example, the rhythm player is playing a C major chord. The lead guitar player can play around or meander along both the notes of C major and F major BUT bring particular emphasis, at some point, to one of the notes of C major for proper emphasis.

While it is true that "meandering" brings in more notes, without a good degree of control the risk of playing "sour" notes increases. Using the CAGED system limits this possibility while still maintaining a good deal of melodic interest. Be very certain that when you are using the CAGED system, you understand well what you are trying to do. This limits the amount of "mistakes" you can commit while improvising a solo.

In the next example, Steve is using the "meandering" technique.

**VIII. Jam Track - Method 2**

Ex. 5

Straight, Moderate $\downarrow = 90$
Now that we've tried improvising using the first position, let us try improvising at the second position. We described the first position as somewhere where the open C major chord is and the 6th string barre chord for F major. The second position is somewhere around the 3rd to 6th frets, using the A shape of the C major (5th string barre chord at the 3rd fret) and an F major chord in the D shape. Try forming the said chords first before we go on improvising using them:
IX. Jam Track - Method 3

In this next example, we have Steve’s improvisation using just the notes of the chord over each chord being played in the backing track:

Ex. 6

Straight, Moderate $\frac{\text{d}}{\text{b}} = 90$

Excerpts of the sheet music and tablature are shown, with frets and strings indicated for the chords C and F.
Ex. 7  This example is still in the second position but makes use of "meandering" for a more interesting solo:

Straight, Moderate $\downarrow = 90$

```
93  C

\begin{tabular}{cccccc}
T & 5 & 6 & 3 & 5 & 3 \\
A & 6 & 5 & 6 & 3 & 5 \\
B & 5 & 6 & 5 & 5 & 6 \\
\end{tabular}

96  C

\begin{tabular}{cccccc}
T & 5 & 5 & 5 & 3 & 5 \\
A & 3 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 \\
B & 3 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 \\
\end{tabular}

99  F

\begin{tabular}{cccccc}
T & 3 & 6 & 6 & 6 & 5 \\
A & 6 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 \\
B & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 \\
\end{tabular}
```

C

DVD 2
X. Jam Track - Method 4

We will now proceed to solo over C and F using notes of the same chord in the third position. The third position consists of C as an G shape and F assuming the C shape. This example uses the first method (C over C and F over F):

Ex. 8

Straight, Moderate \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{t}} = 90 \)

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{C} \\
102
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{l}
105
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{l}
108
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{l}
102
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{l}
105
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{l}
108
\end{array}
\]
XI. Jam Track - Method 5

This example demonstrates Steve's "meandering" technique, still using the third position:

Ex. 9

C

111

Ex. 114

C

Ex. 117

F
We will now explore using the fourth position (somewhere around the 8th to 10th frets). Our C major chord here exists as a 6th string barre chord (E shape) and the F major chord assumes a 5th string barre chord (A shape). Again, Steve demonstrates first using the first method (melody using the chord tones per chord).
XIII. Jam Track - Method 7

This next example uses the "meandering" method where Steve mixes up notes from both C and F major in the fourth position while giving emphasis on chord tones per chord:

Ex. 11

This next example uses the "meandering" method where Steve mixes up notes from both C and F major in the fourth position while giving emphasis on chord tones per chord:
XIV. The Fifth Position

The fifth position for our C and F chord progression consists of a C major chord in a D shape starting at the 10th fret and F major assuming a G shape starting at the 14th fret. This example uses the matched-chord-tone-over-chord method (first method):

XV. Jam Track - Method 8
XVI. Jam Track - Method 9

This example still is in the fifth position for our C and F chord progression but makes liberal use of notes from both chords, giving emphasis on chord tones for the particular chord being played in the backing track ("meandering"): 

Ex. 13

147  C

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

150  C

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

153  C

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]

\[\text{GuitarTab}\]
XXVII. Jam Track - Method 10

After figuring out how to play in all positions of the fretboard, the next thing to work on is how to see the entire fretboard according to the chords that we’re playing in the chord progression. This is a very big step as you will work on mapping out all the notes of the chords on the entire fretboard (C major and F major in this case). It will take a while to be able to do so, and therefore patience is required. The goal here is to start figuring out what you see best and which one of these positions you tend to move through the best and how to make some music with them.

Here’s an example where Steve meanders through C and F across the whole fretboard, looking for melodically interesting things in this improvisation:

Ex. 14
You have seen from the previous example that utilizing more of the fretboard gives more freedom to move different places. The goal is just to keep seeing all of the positions as you go across the chords of a particular chord progression. This is why the most important thing for you is to follow these learning steps:

1. Focus improvising on one chord (in one position) first, using only the chord’s notes. Absorb that information.
2. Move to another chord and improvise using chord tones alone. Absorb that information.
3. Try out combinations (or "meandering"), emphasizing chord tones depending on what chord you are in the chord progression.
4. Try the succeeding positions, following steps 1 through 3.

**XVIII. How to Use Chords Effectively**

In any playing situation, variety keeps things interesting, regardless of lead or rhythm playing. There may be certain situations when you are playing with another rhythm player and you want to spice things up by playing the same chord progression differently. For this to happen, you need to understand how to see chords in single position and use them effectively. We can look for what we call chord fragments. In the next example, we will start playing a C-F-G chord progression (a I-IV-V chord progression, the most used chord progression in the history of music!).

When we try to do this, look at the fretboard and look for a C, F and a G chord. But instead of playing it in a "blocky" fashion, look for those chords in just a single position. Take note that there really is nothing wrong with playing "blocky" e.g. playing open C major and then playing F and G as 6th-string barre chords. The objective here is to play the same chords in a single, different position to add a different texture or timbre.

To illustrate this point, start going to C in the A shape (5th string barre chord on the 3rd fret). Instead of using the whole chord, just use the fragment where your 3rd finger is supposed to be (or fingers 2,3,4) like an open A chord.
Form the said chord using your 1st finger as a barre. Afterwards, we can try playing a rhythmic pattern with our chord fragment like in the example below. Be careful to only hit the strings you are fretting! If you cannot avoid hitting those extra strings, deaden or mute them out with the flesh of the 2nd finger of your fretting hand.

This example is in itself a great idea where you take what you already know (5th-string barre chord) and instead of playing it entirely, you just play a fragment of it. Another example of this is dividing up your 6th-string barre chord into high and low fragments as shown below:

If you want low notes like a power chord

If you want high notes
Going back to our initial idea, we were playing the C (A shape) as a fragment. After playing it for the first two bars, our F major chord is coming up. Think about this: Since you are already playing that A-shaped fragment at the 3rd bar, where can you find an F major that is relative to the position of that C major fragment that would be most comfortable to perform? The C shaped version of F major would be a good fit:

In this instance, however, you probably don't need the entire shape, so all you do is just fret the 2nd string 6th fret note with your index finger and then the 4th string 7th fret note with your ring finger. One of the really cool things about it is that you only move from C to F with minimal effort. This technique of smooth movement was especially popular with bands from the 1970s such as the Doobie Brothers, KISS, Led Zeppelin, etc. When you're on a I chord and you want to go a IV chord, you can just add those two extra notes, and you're set.
If we say that we can move from the I chord to the IV chord that easy, it means that we can apply the same technique to any I chord (in any key using the A shape) and be able to do achieve the same result. Let’s try playing this example in B flat:

Ex. 16

Using the principles of the CAGED System, you can always use this I to IV technique as long as you know where the I chord is as an A shape.

The next thing we have to deal with is moving to IV to V. Again, remember that we don’t want to sound "blocky" at this point. Let’s try looking for a G within the position we’ve been working on. The nearest G is a D shape. Again, you don’t really have to use the entire shape, so we can just go ahead and mute the first string note:
Since we now know where the chord shapes are for I-IV-V within a single position, we can now attempt to play the entire chord progression using fragments on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th strings, changing only the positions of our middle and ring fingers:

**Ex. 17**

**Straight \( \frac{\text{tempo}}{\text{beats}} = 120 \)**

```
C/G
X5 5 5 5 5 5 5
X5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

```
F
X5 5 5 5 5 5 5
X5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

```
G
X5 5 5 5 5 5 5
X5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

```
F
X5 5 5 5 5 5 5
X5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

---

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 6 6
A: 5 5 5 5 5 7 7
B: 5 5 5 5 5 7 7
```

```
T: 8 8 8 8 8 6 6
A: 8 8 8 8 8 7 7
B: 8 8 8 8 8 7 7
```

---

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 6 6
A: 5 5 5 5 5 7 7
B: 5 5 5 5 5 7 7
```

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 6 6
A: 5 5 5 5 5 7 7
B: 5 5 5 5 5 7 7
```

---

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
A: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
B: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
A: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
B: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

---

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
A: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
B: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
A: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
B: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

---

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
A: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
B: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
A: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
B: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

---

```
T: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
A: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
B: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
```

---
The thing about using this technique in the third position is just it sounds very fluent to the extent that you can even insert awesome licks into your rhythm playing with it. Here's an example using the same chord progression as in Ex. 18:

Ex. 18

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{C/G} \\
\end{array} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{F} \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
XX\\nXX \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
180 \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{C/G} \\
\text{F} \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
T & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X \\
A & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X \\
B & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X \\
6 & 6 & 5 & X & X & 6 & 5 & 5 & \\
7 & 7 & 7 & 7 & 7 & \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
C/G \\
G \\
C/G \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
XX\\nXX\\nXX \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
182 \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{C/G} \\
\text{G} \\
\text{C/G} \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
T & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X \\
A & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X \\
B & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X & 5 & X & X \\
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
8 & 8 & 8 & 8 & X & X & 8 & 6 & 5 & 8 & 5 & 5 & X & X \\
7 & 7 & 7 & 7 & 7 & 7 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 \\
7 & 7 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 \\
\end{array} \]
If you know your CAGED System well enough, you can perform licks like this within the CAGED framework:

**Fast** \( \frac{\text{note}}{\text{beat}} = 140 \)

Shifting between I, IV and V becomes easy with CAGED as well as demonstrated in the previous examples.

Remember that the principles behind the CAGED system are universal. They are applicable to any key, allowing you to produce consistent results every time you play.

Practice the previously discussed concepts before moving on to the next segment.

Here are some of the things you need to think upon:

1. Learning how to do the CAGED across the fretboard. We started that from playing open C until we spelled out CAGED. After that, we started looking at C and F all the way across the fretboard. We were then able to look at C, F and G (I, IV, V) across the fretboard.

2. Think about the idea behind chord fragments. When you're sitting in one spot and you're looking for the I, IV and V, you are not required to play all the notes of that chord shape. Choose whatever you want.

3. Combining rhythmic and melodic ideas e.g. inserting licks within the framework of the chord.
Here is another good example of applying the concepts we have learned so far. Let’s say you have a G chord this time in the D shape. You can play a nice rhythmic figure with just the top three notes (at the 1st, 2nd and 3rd strings) as shown below:

Ex. 20

You can continue on playing the I-IV-V chord progression in G major by continuing on to playing C in the E shape, selecting only the 1st, 2nd and 3rd strings:
Our V chord is a D, the nearest one to this particular chord progression and position is based on the A shape:

\[\text{D} \quad 7\text{fr} \quad \text{C} \quad 8\text{fr}\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{T} \\
7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \\
\text{A} \\
7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \\
\text{B} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{T} \\
10 \quad 10 \quad X \quad X \quad 10 \quad X \quad X \quad 10 \quad X \quad X \\
\text{A} \\
7 \quad 7 \quad X \quad X \quad 7 \quad X \quad X \quad 7 \quad X \quad X \\
\text{B} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{T} \\
8 \quad 8 \quad X \quad X \quad 8 \quad X \quad X \quad 8 \quad X \quad X \\
\text{A} \\
9 \quad 9 \quad X \quad X \quad 9 \quad X \quad X \quad 9 \quad X \quad X \\
\text{B} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{T} \\
7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \quad 7 \\
\text{A} \\
7 \quad 7 \quad X \quad X \quad 7 \quad X \quad X \quad 7 \quad X \quad X \\
\text{B} \\
\end{array}
\]
You can go ahead and add interesting melodic ideas into your rhythm pattern, still following the I-IV-V chord progression. Say for example we have these melodic ideas based on the present chord progression:

You can go ahead and add some of these melodic ideas into your rhythm pattern, still following the I-IV-V chord progression. Here's the synthesis of both rhythmic and melodic ideas:
There are many bands with two guitar players that use the CAGED System effectively. One particular use of CAGED is to write riffs based on chord progressions. A rhythm player might just play the chord progression, while the lead guitarist would play purely melodic ideas based on the chord progression. Here is an example of a melodic based on the D-G-A chord progression (I-IV-V). Take a look into the chord shapes for this example and see how the melodic line falls into place:
I. Scales (The Pentatonic Scale)

When people talk of improvising or soloing on the guitar, scales usually come up in the discussion. Intertwined to some degree within the CAGED System are scales. After, chords are made up of notes that line up to a particular scale and that scales are the basis of musical keys (out of which chords can be formed). This segment primarily deals with how scales relate to the CAGED System. For more details regarding scales and soloing, you can refer to Steve’s other courses such as Solofire or the 96 Licks Series (96 Rock Licks and 96 Blues Licks).

In this discussion of scales within the CAGED System, we'll be showing one position of the pentatonic scale and the major scale. More importantly, however, we will see how scales go into action as we play using the CAGED system.

Here we have below is the A minor pentatonic scale at the first position:

In theory, A minor pentatonic would be used over something in the key of A minor (any minor pentatonic scale would be used for minor keys). Up until this point, we have not talked about minor keys with the CAGED System since we have been dealing mostly with major keys (especially the I-IV-V chord progression). What we are going to now is shift this scale into major by taking the entire shape toward the headstock to three frets to play a major pentatonic scale. We start playing the exact same shape at the 5th fret with our pinkie finger:
Another way of figuring out how to play C major pentatonic is by going to the C minor pentatonic (starting the A minor pentatonic pattern we first learned from the 5th fret to the 8th fret) and then shifting the entire shape four frets below as we have discussed earlier. You will end up with the same C major pentatonic scale as written above.

When you compare your C major pentatonic scale to the C major scale, you will be able to find all of the C chord’s notes to be within C major pentatonic. However, if you look into our F major chord, there is a note (F) that you will not find in C major pentatonic. This comparison and analysis between the major pentatonic scale and chords is an exercise where we try to break down various components in music and then bring them back together to become capable of playing. There are times when you will be able to see the pentatonic as it flows through both chords, and then become capable of seeing the CAGED shapes the next. In doing all of this study, you will be able to use a pentatonic motion along with your CAGED chord shapes (in the key of C major) and you can visualize all of their notes are compatible with each other. At onc instance, you may be capable of just using the pentatonic and do some things with it, see part of the CAGED and be able to work on other things with that, etc.

Going back to the I-IV-V chord progression, it’s important to become comfortable about the I-IV-V’s in all of the primary keys, so that you’ll be able to determine the I-IV-V chords in any given key instantly. Soon thereafter, you’ll be able to apply your pentatonic scale and CAGED concepts right inside your I-IV-V’s.

The next question is what are chords built upon? Each chord contains three notes commonly referred to as a triad (containing the root, 3rd, and 5th of a scale). For example, whenever we play a C major chord, whether open C, 6th-string barre chord, etc., we’re only playing the same three notes over and over. It’s the same thing when we play an F (F, A, C) and G (G, B, D).
II. How Chords are Made (The Major Scale)

Why do we need to know all about what triads are made of? In a chord progression, we may try to combine the notes of a C chord and F chord melodically but we always try to emphasize the notes of a chord whenever we’re playing over one in a particular chord progression. For instance, if we’re in a C chord, we emphasize C, E and G even if we occasionally play some notes from our F chord, etc. Even if we do all that, if you were to take all the notes of the C, F and G chords and put them together, you will end up having the major scale! If you play all of those three chords melodically, you end up playing the major scale even if you don’t realize it.

The major scale (your do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do scale!) is perhaps the most melodic of all scales you can play. As a matter of fact, all music theory is built around it!

If you play all of the white keys of the piano, you will be playing C-D-E-F-G-A-B over and over again, the C major scale.

The point here is that there are different roads to get the same effect. You can learn music theory (it is highly recommended that you do so) first and then apply it to the fretboard. Many players though, because of being visual players i.e. not thinking in terms of theory, you can apply that visualization to arrive at the same effect. Not only do you get all the notes of the scale, you’re also going to be thinking about which notes apply best to the chord being played because of the shapes you are seeing.

In order to help you understand better how CAGED applies to all this talk about the major scale, Try and learn how to play the major scale as shown in the diagram below:
Let us now try and correlate the C major scale we just played to all the other things we have discussed a while ago. We can clearly see a C major pentatonic scale from within the C major scale.

(Notes of the C major pentatonic scale are labeled with "P")

As stated earlier, you can also see each of the I, IV and V chords individually on your fretboard within the major scale.
III. Playing Over Jam Track

This next example will feature another improvisation by Steve over a jam track. This particular improvisation will feature the use of the CAGED shapes, the major scale, and the pentatonic scale within a cohesive melodic context. In every section of the piece, Steve is careful to place emphasis on chord notes/tones despite elaborate "meandering":

**Lively** \( \frac{\text{♩}}{\text{♩}} = 150 \)

Ex. 22

In measures 1 to 9, the main riff is based on notes from the A shape of C major.
Measures 10 to 16 feature a fragment from the G shape which then transitions to a D shape for measure 17.
Measures 34 to 41 make use of the D and C shapes of C major an octave higher than the first position. Measure 42 signals a return to the third position.
Starting around the last beat of measure 45, Steve goes to the first position with the open C chord (C shape) in mind.

Measure 50 starts at an F major chord as Steve improvises around the third and fourth positions.
IV. Minor Chords

So far in our CAGED System course, we have not dealt with minor chords. However, minor chords are significant in our efforts to learn the guitar and make music. Minor chords do not function as effective as major chords within the CAGED framework. This is the reason why guitarist usually focus on the five major chord shapes (CAGED). In order for us to make sense of how minor chords can fit into the system, it’s important we understand enough theory and how to implement it into our visualization.

Now, what are minor chords? In the general sense, we know that major chords sound "happy" or "bright". When we play minor chords, they tend to sound "sad", "dark" or "melancholic".

We know that chords are made up of its root, 3rd and 5th notes of a particular scale e.g. a C major chord is made up of C, E and G, the root, 3rd and 5th notes of the C major scale. A minor chord takes that 3rd from a major chord and lowers it a half step (one fret on the guitar, one key on the piano).

The easiest way to compare minor chords on the guitar is to play first an open A major chord, and then play an A minor chord. In A major, the 3rd is C#, and you find it at the 2nd string 2nd fret. In an A minor chord, the 3rd is lowered a single fret, and so we find our 3rd at the 2nd string 1st fret (C):
Here’s a cool thing about learning minor chords. We already know that in a given major key, the I, IV and V chords are major. The other three are the ii, iii and vi. These are your minor chords (represented as lowercase Roman numerals). As an example, let’s say we are in the key of C (when we say key of C, this is always understood as major, unless otherwise indicated), the I, IV and V are C, F and G, and then the ii, iii, and vi are Dm, Em and Am.

Remember, in any major key, the I, IV and V are always major and the ii, iii and vi are always minor. The vii° is always a diminished chord. However, we will not deal with diminished chords at this time as they are not used very often in many kinds of music.

If we want to make our chords minor, we always have to find the 3rd and flatten (lower) it, which is not always an easy thing to do on the guitar, especially with the C and G shapes because forming them whole with your fretting hands is physically impossible. This is the reason why the A and E shapes are the forms most used within the CAGED system because these shapes are the easiest to convert to minor (we only alter one note on one string). Take a look at this theoretical Cm chord:

Surely this is a correct minor chord in a theoretical sense given that the 3rds are flattened BUT it is impossible to form correctly on the guitar simply because of physical limitations (we only have four available fingers that we can use for our fretting hand!). The G shape, if you convert that to minor, is even worse. Try figuring that out and you will understand why it’s impossible. However, these seemingly impossible shapes can still be used if we play them as arpeggios.

In order to use a chord as a minor within the CAGED framework, there are a number of ways.

Think about various positions that you like the most, and then think about how to edit that one note.

Let’s go back to our C-F-G chord progression in the third position. Let’s say we want to add an Am chord to this.
In order to use a chord as a minor within the CAGED framework, there are a number of ways.

Think about various positions that you like the most, and then think about how to edit that one note.

Let's go back to our C-F-G chord progression:

Now, let's say we want to add an Am chord to this chord progression. You might think the open Am chord is too far and the G shape version is just impossible to play. Since all of our C-F-G chord fragments lie within the 5th fret, the 6th-string Am barre chord is a perfect fit. You can even play it as a fragment and it will sound correct. What's more is that this shape has all of its notes fit perfectly within an A minor pentatonic scale shape. Generally speaking, the E (6th-string barre chords), A (5th-string barre chords) and D shapes can be converted to minor easily.
In a I-IV-V chord progression, we can fit A minor (or vi) in between the I and the IV, giving us a I-vi-IV-V chord progression. Instead of extending C for a longer period of time, we can alternate or substitute it with A minor for variety:

The great thing about it is that, again, it is a visual thing. All the notes still exist there, and all you have to do is see which notes are different to create a minor chord.

While minor chords may take a lot more work than major chords, the thing you have to work on first is fully establish the concept behind the I, IV, and V chords. Once you have implemented the I, IV, and V chords into the position that you wish to play, and once you can see all three together (ultimately creating the major scale), your minor chords are there anyway and you can form your chords from there. Once you have figured that out and you are capable of visualizing those chords, you can easily find all the other notes you are looking for. In terms of looking for minor chords, you are simply editing to try making combinations for that.
Let's say we're still in the key of C major, and now you are looking for E minor. We still have our C in a G shape, our F in a C shape, and G as a D shape. Now think about it, what notes do I need to form E minor or how can I from E minor? You can either use the nearby 5th-string barre chord at the 7th fret...

...or you can see an E minor based on a C shape, and play a couple of melodic lines around it. Using E minor, it can definitely sound melancholic.
The goal of studying all of this is to be able to see and execute immediately what is most effective.

In terms of our discussion of E minor in the key of C, the 5th-string barre chord is the easiest to immediately execute. For example, if you're soloing over C...

...and then the Em chord comes up, you can then play another melodic passage based on the 5th-string barre chord shape. Because you can use that chord immediately and you can accurately visualize that shape, you can immediately use it for a passage like this one:
From that 5th-string barre chord, we can then continue on to F, G, and then back to C.

From that 5th-string barre chord, we can then continue on to F, G, and then back to C.

V. Conclusion

This marks the end of our CAGED system course. It does seem to be like a mountain of information in one go. It can be very overwhelming, and so it is most important that you know how to approach this course as well as other DVD guitar education series. Such videos and instructional material are not meant to be watched like a sitcom e.g. watch it in one go and then leave. The ideal way to learn through this CAGED course is to watch it a section at a time until you get something that you need and then stop, work/practice whatever you got. It’s only when you are ready for some more information (or if you get bored with it, for whatever reason) that you should continue to the next topic or chapter that you can really focus on. You can proceed to watch a particular chapter over and over again until you gain complete understanding of it. If there are things that still prove to be difficult, you can always visit the Guitarzoom forums or ask/email Steve for further help.

Remember, if you try to learn too much stuff at one time, you’ll get nothing. The best thing you can do is to take your time learning and practicing one facet of the course at a time, use it in your actual playing (live performance, jamming, studio work, etc.) and then move on to the next topic. In this way, you will be able to learn faster. Have fun on your learning journey with the CAGED System.