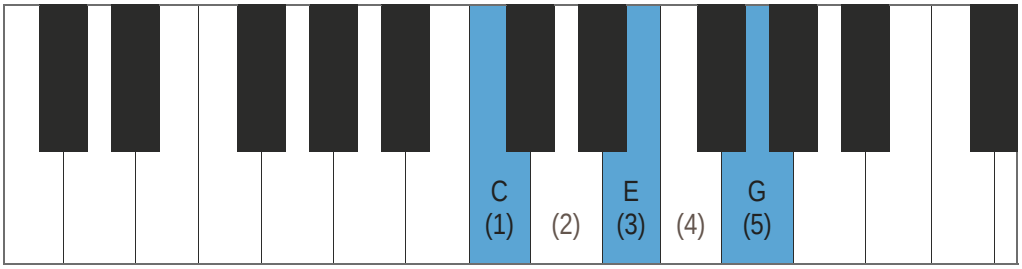
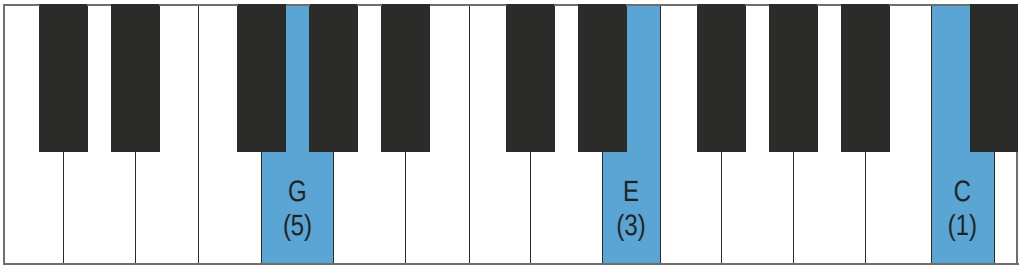
Inversions—Triads

In most cases, the lowest note of a chord is the note that the chord is named after (also known as the 1). This is called "root position." For example, the chord below is a "C" chord, and it is in root position because "C" (the 1) is the lowest note being played.

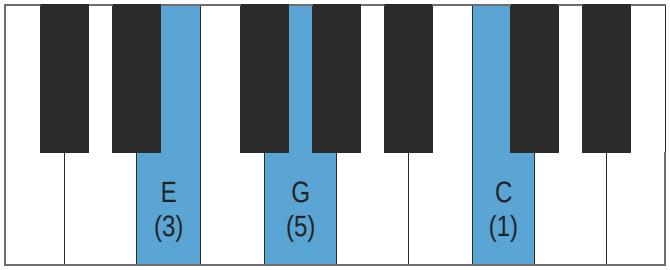


However, a "C" chord is just a C, an E, and a G together. The notes don't have to be in any particular order. The chord below is a "C" chord because the notes C, E, and G are being played together. It's just not in root position because the "5" of the chord is on the bottom instead of the "1".

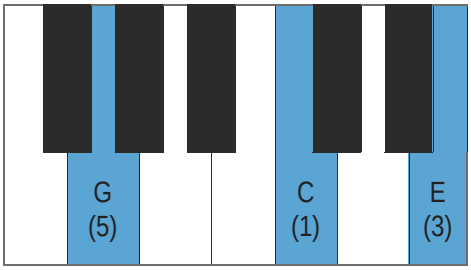


All chords are in either "root position" or what's called an "inversion." There are two inversions:

When the 3 is on the bottom, we say the chord is in "**first inversion**". This can traditionally be noted by putting a 6 to the top right of the chord. For example, this chord would be "C^6"



When the 5 is on the bottom, we say the chord is in "**second inversion**". This can traditionally be noted by putting a 6 to the top right of the chord and a 4 below the 6. For example, this chord would be "C^6_4"



HOWEVER... Other styles of music hi-jacked the "6" to mean something else, so pretty much the only people who would use a 6 to mean first inversion anymore are music theory students.

Why the numbers for inversions?

The "6" indicates that the interval from the lowest to the highest note is a 6th. The "4" indicates that there is a also a 4th between the lowest note and the middle note. That's why the "C^6" could also be written "C^6_3"