

The Ultimate Guide to:

Minor Chord Progressions



Many of us are familiar with popular major chord progressions like I–IV–V–I. Now it's time to delve into the exciting world of minor chords. Minor scales give flavor and emotion to a song, adding a level of musical depth that can make a mediocre song moving and distinct from others.

Because so many of our favorite songs are in major keys, those that are in [minor keys](#)¹ can stand out, and some musical styles like rock or jazz thrive on complex minor scales and harmonic wizardry.

Minor chord progressions generally contain richer harmonic possibilities than the typical major progressions. Minor key songs frequently modulate to major and back to minor. Sometimes the same chord can appear as major and minor in the very same song!

But this heady harmonic mix is nothing to be afraid of.

By the end of this article, you'll not only understand how minor chords are made, but you'll know some common minor chord progressions, how to write them, and how to use them in your own music. With enough listening practice, you'll be able to recognize minor chord progressions in songs almost instantly!

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¹ <https://www.musical-u.com/learn/the-ultimate-guide-to-minor-keys>

A Tale of Two Tonalities

Western music is dominated by two tonalities: major and minor. While music written in major keys sounds bright and cheery, minor music tends to be darker and sadder, with chords to match.

Though it may be tempting for the beginner musician to stick to major keys only, the world of minor isn't as sad as it seems - quite the contrary! Minor chords add a depth and richness to your music that major chords alone will not give you. Everlasting, perpetual happiness in music gets boring. And no, learning minor chords isn't just for songwriters - **they're also a must for anyone who wants to improve their ear, cover others' songs, and understand music theory.**

Before we dive into how to build these melancholy minor chords, let's compare major vs. minor chord progressions. Just take a listen to this famous R.E.M. tune "Losing My Religion" transposed to a major key. Characteristic of major chords, the song sounds unusually chipper and almost happy, regardless of the lyrics and meaning behind the song. Notice how the change from minor chords to major chords nearly changes the overall style to something that might fit better on a country radio station.

R.E.M. seems pretty chipper in this version of "**Losing My Religion**" in a major key:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6KmiIq2-m8>

Now compare to the original song, and you can hear how the minor chord progressions add a distinctly morose moodiness that is not evident in the major version. The original R.E.M. tune's use of minor chord progressions for guitar gives it a particularly brooding quality:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwtdhWltSIg>

What about the reverse?

Sure enough, transposing a song from a major key to a minor key lends a more brooding, melancholy feel to the song. Check out Chase Holfelder's minor rendition of "How Far I'll Go" from Disney's Moana:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUaHQeutCv0>

Exercise: Major or Minor?

When learning how to play minor chord progressions, you need to be able hear the difference between different chord qualities. While there are many chord qualities, including diminished and augmented, **right now we are going to focus on the difference between minor and major chords.**

In the following six examples you are going to hear a chord. Is it major or minor? Can you grab an instrument and work out exactly which chord it is? Write down your answers and then check with the answers below.

[LISTEN ONLINE²](#)

[LISTEN ONLINE³](#)

[LISTEN ONLINE⁴](#)

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<https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Minor-Chord-Progressions-Example-1CMAJOR.mp3>

3

<https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Minor-Chord-Progressions-Example-2FMAJOR.mp3>

4

<https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Minor-Chord-Progressions-Example-3GMINOR.mp3>

[LISTEN ONLINE⁵](#)

[LISTEN ONLINE⁶](#)

[LISTEN ONLINE⁷](#)

Answers:

- Example 1: C Major
- Example 2: F Major
- Example 3: G Minor
- Example 4: E Minor
- Example 5: B Minor
- Example 6: E Major

How did you do? Were you able to tell which ones were major or minor? Bonus points if you could identify which chord you heard. If you answered all of the answers correctly, you can tell major chords from minor chords and you are ready to move on to chord progressions.

Need A Little More Practice?

What if you need a little more practice? That's okay! It just takes some time and practice to learn a new skill like hearing chord qualities. Here are more great exercises and information on chords:

- [Chord Ear Training 101⁸](#)
- [Chord Ear Training Exercises⁹](#)

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<https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Minor-Chord-Progressions-Example-4EMINOR.mp3>

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<https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Minor-Chord-Progressions-Example-5BMINOR.mp3>

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<https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Minor-Chord-Progressions-Example-6EMAJOR.mp3>

⁸ <https://www.musical-u.com/learn/chord-ear-training-101/>

⁹ <https://www.musical-u.com/ear-training-exercises/chords/>

- [Chord Ear Training: How To](#)¹⁰
- [Tone Savvy: Chord Ear Training](#)¹¹
- [Hearing Chord Progressions: Minor Keys](#)¹²

Chords in Minor Scales

Before you can play with chord progressions, let's talk about the different chords available in minor. Because there are three distinct minor scales – natural, harmonic, and melodic – some of these chords are altered based on which scale you choose.

While we are going to discuss these different scale variations here a little bit, it's best not to get caught up in them: in the real world, minor melodies, and the chords supporting them, can vary between the different minor scales in the same piece of music.

Because of the way that we traditionally write a chord progression, where specific tones move towards the tonic or dominant for resolution, **we often use the chords found in the melodic or harmonic minor scale rather than the natural minor scale.** Without the G# leading tone, the natural minor scale can be ambiguous and lack movement, and can kill a tune by stripping it of musical motion.

Natural Minor

A m	B dim	C	D m	E m	F	G	A m
I	ii.dim	III	iv	v	VI	VII	I

¹⁰ <https://www.musical-u.com/learn/chord-ear-training-how-to-chord-types/>

¹¹ <https://tonesavvy.com/music-practice-exercise/216/chord-identification-ear-training-game/>

¹² <https://www.musical-u.com/learn/hearing-chord-progressions-part-3-minor-keys/>

Melodic Minor

The image displays two musical staves illustrating chords for the Melodic Minor scale. The first staff shows chords: Am (I), Bm (ii), C+ (III+), D (IV), E (V), F#dim (vi.dim), G#dim (vii.dim), and Am (I). The second staff shows chords: Am (I), G (VII), F (VI), Em (v), Dm (iv), C (III), Bdim (ii.dim), and Am (I).

This doesn't mean that you will never use the natural minor scale—depending on your musical style, you may run into it a lot. But for most commercial purposes, you will avoid building a chord progression using the natural minor scale.

Building Minor Chords On Each Scale Degree

To build a basic chord, remember you need to build up triads in the key. In A Major, the I major chord is A–C#–E, but in A Minor, the I minor chord is A–C–E. You have the tonic, the minor third, and the fifth. **You can build up this minor chord on the starting note, or the *tonic*, of any minor scale.** On [guitar](http://www.guitar13.com)¹³, you have multiple ways of building up any given minor chord, and you even have the option of adding more notes within the chord (for example, adding a high A on top of an existing A minor chord!).

Because A Minor, the relative minor of C Major, has a simple key signature with no sharps or flats, we will use this key for the examples. You can apply what you learn with A Minor to other keys. Let's look at the chords in the key of A harmonic minor, starting on each scale degree:

¹³ <http://www.musiclearning.com/gtr/guitar-chords/>

like progressions in major scales, those in minor scales focus primarily on **moving between three chords: the 1, 4 and 5**.

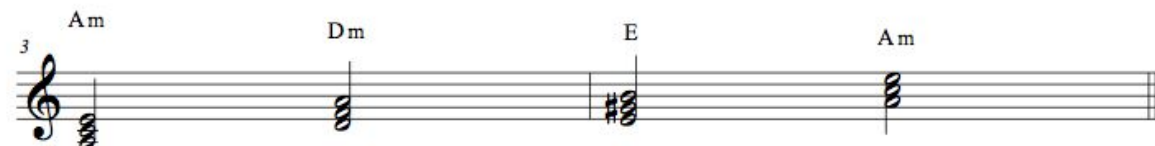
As we learned in the first part of this tutorial on Minor Scale Basics, the 5 (a.k.a. "dominant") chord in a minor key can be the major version (V) or minor (v).

Listen to the audio example below. In the first audio sample, the progression includes the minor 5 chord, or an E minor chord (v).



[LISTEN ONLINE¹⁵](#)

Now, listen to the second audio sample. The third chord in the following clip takes the raised 7th from the harmonic minor scale, making the V chord an E major chord. Listen for the differences in the quality between the V chords from the first clip and the second:



[LISTEN ONLINE¹⁶](#)

When Resolution is Not Resolved

Remember that in most forms of Western music, you will be moving to resolve to the dominant or tonic. For example, in the key of A minor,

¹⁵ <https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Minor-Chord-Progressions-145-E-MINOR.mp3>

¹⁶ <https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Minor-Chord-Progressions-145-E-MAJOR.mp3>

you will be trying to resolve back to the A or the E. In the key of D minor, you will want to resolve back to the D or the A. In most cases, you will be resolving back to the tonic (the first note of the scale), but ending with the dominant is common in melodies meant to end on a suspenseful note - keep that in mind as you play around with common chord progressions.

1. The i-iv-v Chord Progression

While you may write other chords in, like the ii chord (or submediant chord), you will most likely be moving around the i, iv and v (or V) chords of the minor scales.

Here's a little cheat sheet for the common minor i-iv-v progression in each minor key:

- **A minor:** Am-Dm-Em
- **B♭ minor:** B♭m-E♭m-Fm
- **B minor:** Bm-Em-F♯m
- **C minor:** Cm-Fm-Gm
- **C♯ minor:** C♯m-F♯m-G♯m
- **D minor:** Dm-Gm-Am
- **E♭ minor:** E♭m-A♭m-B♭m
- **E minor:** Em-Am-Bm
- **F minor:** Fm-B♭m-Cm
- **F♯ minor:** F♯m-Bm-C♯m
- **G minor:** Gm-Cm-Dm
- **A♭ minor:** A♭m-D♭m-E♭m

2. The i-ii dim-V-i Chord Progression

Just like many major chord progressions, you will find that in minor tonality chord progressions the ii chord and the V chord are paired together. In this example, you will hear a simple chord progression:

Am-Bdim-E-Am.

1. Look at the sheet music.
2. Listen to the example.
3. Play along with the chords.

Progression Example i-ii dim-V- i

Piano

[LISTEN ONLINE¹⁷](#)

Here's a cheat sheet for the i-ii dim-V-i progression in each minor key:

- **A minor:** Am-Bdim-E-Am
- **B \flat minor:** B \flat m-Cdim-F-B \flat m
- **B minor:** Bm-C \sharp dim-F \sharp -Bm
- **C minor:** Cm-Ddim-G-Cm
- **C \sharp minor:** C \sharp m-D \sharp dim-G \sharp -C \sharp m
- **D minor:** Dm-Edim-A-Dm
- **E \flat minor:** E \flat m-Fdim-B \flat -E \flat m
- **E minor:** Em-F \sharp dim-B-Em
- **F minor:** Fm-Gdim-C-Fm
- **F \sharp minor:** F \sharp m-G \sharp dim-C \sharp -F \sharp m
- **G minor:** Gm-Adim-D-Gm
- **A \flat minor:** A \flat m-B \flat dim-E \flat -A \flat m

¹⁷ <https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Minor-Chord-Progressions-PROG-Ex1.mp3>

3. The i-VI-III-VII Chord Progression

This is another simple minor chord progression found in numerous famous songs, especially ballads.

Progression Example i-VI-III-VII

The image shows a musical score for a four-measure chord progression in 4/4 time. The key signature is one flat (A minor). The chords are: Am (A2, C3, E3), F (F2, A2, C3), C (C2, E2, G2), and G (B1, D2, F2). The notation is written on a grand staff with a treble clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The Am chord is shown as a triad in the treble clef. The F, C, and G chords are shown as single notes in the bass clef.

[LISTEN ONLINE](#)¹⁸

Here's a little cheat sheet for the i-VI-III-VII progression in each minor key:

- **A minor:** Am-F-C-G
- **B \flat minor:** B \flat m-G \flat -D \flat -A \flat
- **B minor:** Bm-G-D-A
- **C minor:** Cm-A \flat -E \flat -B \flat
- **C \sharp minor:** C \sharp m-A-E-B
- **D minor:** Dm-B \flat -F-C
- **E \flat minor:** E \flat m-B-G \flat -D \flat
- **E minor:** Em-C-G-D
- **F minor:** Fm-D \flat -A \flat -E \flat
- **F \sharp minor:** F \sharp m-D-A-E
- **G minor:** Gm-E \flat -B \flat -F
- **A \flat minor:** A \flat m-E-B-G \flat

¹⁸ <https://www.musical-u.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Progression-i-VI-III-VII.mp3>

And Many More...

Beyond these basic progressions, there are many more that suit specific musical purposes. For example, we have the classic [ii-V-i](#)¹⁹, a popular jazz chord progression.

There's also the somewhat-misnamed [Andalusian Cadence](#)²⁰, a i-VII-VI-V progression that is popular in an astonishing array of musical styles, from Flamenco to metal to baroque.

The i-VII-VI progression is similar to the above, popularized by famous tunes such as Adele's [Rolling in the Deep](#)²¹ and Jimi Hendrix's [All Along the Watchtower](#)²².

We could go on, but that's enough theory for now. Let's put your newfound knowledge to the test with some exercises in minor chord progressions.

Exercises in Minor

We'll start you off nice and easy with some playalong exercises, then give you something a little more challenging and creative to try...

Exercise 1: i-iv-V-i Chord Progression

In this exercise you are going to practice playing along with chords following a simple minor chord progression: Am-Dm-E-Am.

1. Listen to the example.
2. Look over the sheet music.
3. Play the chords along with the track on your instrument.
4. Improvise over the chord progression.

¹⁹ <http://pickupjazz.com/minor-ii-v-i-chord-progression/>

²⁰ <https://www.uberchord.com/blog/andalusian-cadence-the-most-common-guitar-chord-progression/>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYEDA3JcQqw>

²² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLV4_xaYynY

Chord Progression Practice: i-iv-V-i

The musical score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 125. It consists of two systems. The first system is for Piano and Electric Bass. The piano part has four measures with chords Am, Dm, E, and Am. The electric bass part has a simple eighth-note line: A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3. The second system is for Pno. and E.B. with the same chord progression and bass line, starting at measure 5.

[LISTEN ONLINE²³](#)

Remember that many chord progressions are built around these chords, using the i, iv, or V chord as a means to move the harmonic progression forward.

Exercise 2: i-ii dim-V-i Chord Progression

In this exercise you are going to practice playing along with chords following the simple chord progression: Am-B dim-E-Am.

1. Listen to the example.
2. Look over the sheet music.
3. Play the chords along with the track on your instrument.
4. Improvise over the chord progression.

Chord Progression Practice: i-ii dim-V- i

♩ = 125

Piano

Electric Bass

Pno.

E.B.

The sheet music is divided into two systems. The first system is for Piano and Electric Bass. The piano part has a treble clef and a bass clef. The right hand plays chords: Am (A2, C3, E3), B° (B2, D3, F3), E (E2, G2, B2), and Am (A2, C3, E3). The left hand plays single notes: A2, B2, E2, and A2. The electric bass part has a bass clef and plays eighth notes: A2, B2, E2, and A2. The second system is for Piano and Electric Bass. The piano part has a treble clef and a bass clef. The right hand plays chords: Am (A2, C3, E3), B° (B2, D3, F3), E (E2, G2, B2), and Am (A2, C3, E3). The left hand plays single notes: A2, B2, E2, and A2. The electric bass part has a bass clef and plays eighth notes: A2, B2, E2, and A2. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 125.

[LISTEN ONLINE²⁴](#)

Exercise 3: Chord Progression Playalong

In this simple backing track to George Gershwin's "Summertime" from Porgy and Bess, you can practice playing along with a longer minor chord progression in A Minor. While there are plenty of 7th chords in

this track, you can easily drop the 7th and just play the basic triads like this instead:

Summertime

Modified Chord Progressions

Am Am Am Am

F G Cm F B° E

Am Am Am Dm G

C Am B° E Am Am B° E

[LISTEN ONLINE²⁵](#)

In this song you can hear how the chord progressions move towards the A minor chord and the E major chord. Remember that in most songs, the harmonic progression wants to resolve to the tonic (A) or the dominant (E).

1. Review the modified chord progressions from "Summertime" above.

2. Listen to the modified chords audio.
3. Practice improvising and playing the chords in the modified version.
4. Once you are comfortable with these chord progressions, then play the YouTube video below.
5. Play the chords with the playalong track.
6. Once you are comfortable with the modified chords, start to play the 7th chords in the YouTube video.
7. Improvise over the playalong track.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5V7jNjZwQs>

If you find that playing along with the YouTube track is too difficult, then work with the modified chord audio. It always helps to use your ears to really hear for chord changes. Sometimes it can be difficult. Memorizing the sound and quality of the chords will help you as you learn these chords.

As you become more comfortable with playing the basic chord progression, you may find that some melodies for improvising over the progression pop into your head! Check out some [tips for improvising](#)²⁶ over minor chord progressions on piano for some excellent ideas on where to start!

Notice that several minor key chord progressions can be extracted from this example.

- Measure 11: i-iv-VII-III-i
- Measure 13: i-ii dim-V-i
- Measure 15: i-ii dim-V

By starting with shorter chord progressions and learning how to combine them with other chord progressions, you will expand your harmonic skills.

²⁶ <https://insidepiano.com/jazz-piano-lessons-how-to-improvise-minor-scales>

Exercise 4: Build-Your-Own

In this article we talked about several different minor chord progressions. For this exercise you will need a piece of paper and a pencil, and your instrument. Choose a key to use for this exercise (you might like to start with A minor).

If you can't play chords on your instrument, try playing broken chords or arpeggios instead.

1. Choose up to 4 chords from a minor key of your choice, and write a progression of 4 bars using these chords on a piece of paper. Start by using just the i, iv and v chords.
2. Practice playing through your chord progression several times.
3. Now choose another set of chords and write a new progression underneath your first one.
4. Practice playing that new chord progression several times.
5. Combine the two chord progressions into one long chord progression and play through all of the chords.
6. Create a third chord progression from the same key and write it under the second one.
7. Practice playing the third chord progression.
8. Play through all three chord progressions without stopping.
9. Continue adding chord progressions until you are playing through at least eight different chord progressions.
10. Practice this same exercises with other keys.

Writing Your Own Minor Chord Progressions

When you've grown comfortable with the minor chord progressions we've introduced you to above, try writing your own! Don't be afraid to use a [minor chord progression chart](http://www.doremistudios.com.au/scale-tone-chords-minor-keys/)²⁷ or [cheat sheet](https://countryguitaronline.com/chords-in-each-minor-key/)²⁸ to quickly find the chords you're looking for.

²⁷ <http://www.doremistudios.com.au/scale-tone-chords-minor-keys/>

²⁸ <https://countryguitaronline.com/chords-in-each-minor-key/>

Building Minor Chord Progressions with the Circle of Fifths

The [Circle of Fifths](#)²⁹ is just as useful for writing minor progressions as major ones. A refresher: adjacent minor keys on the circle are always a fifth apart. Experiment with playing chord progressions that travel stepwise and clockwise around the circle - you'll find some instant classics!

The diagram illustrates the Circle of Fifths, a circular arrangement of 12 musical keys. The keys are arranged in a circle, with major keys on the outside and minor keys on the inside. The keys are: C (C major), G (G major), D (D major), A (A major), E (E major), B (B major), F# (F# major), C# (C# major), G# (G# major), D# (D# major), A# (A# major), and E# (E# major). The minor keys are: F (F minor), Bb (Bb minor), Eb (Eb minor), Ab (Ab minor), Db (Db minor), Gb (Gb minor), Cb (Cb minor), F# (F# minor), C# (C# minor), G# (G# minor), and D# (D# minor). The diagram also includes musical notation for each key, showing the notes of the scale and the key signature. The text "The Circle of Fifths" is written in the center of the circle.

The Circle of Fifths

<http://musl.ink/c5ths>

You can freely use or share this image but please don't modify it or remove this footer.

²⁹ <https://www.musical-u.com/learn/how-to-use-circle-fifths/>

Match Chords to Moods to Lyrics

A sad song calls for sad minor chord progressions. But you can also throw some foreboding, tense, or even uplifting progressions in there to mix it up! Experiment with [marrying specific progressions with certain moods](#)³⁰ in your song. Which ones fit best with certain parts of the song?

Use A Chord Progression Generator

If your fountain of creativity has run dry (and we doubt it ever will, considering the infinite possibilities of chord progressions!), try this [Chord Progression Generator](#)³¹. Simply plug in the genre, feel (happy or sad?), and key that you want, and the generator will spit a readymade progression right back at you!

Your Minor Journey

There are many, many popular minor chord progressions. You have learned a few in this article and can use the practice tracks to continue to work on your musical skills. Continue to learn new progressions, and combine progressions together to make longer songs.

Experiment with chords and scales, combining both major and minor keys in your songs and training your ears for more kinds of minor chord progression. As you continue to expand your harmonic palette, you will be amazed at what you will create!

³⁰ <http://www.secretsofsongwriting.com/2017/07/07/choosing-chords/>

³¹ <http://www.zu-cool.de/chordprogression/>