

LESSON 1

FIRST CHORDS, FIRST SONG

Your first chord is called D.

The diagram at right, variously called a *chord grid* or *diagram* or *frame*, is a graphic representation of your guitar. The strings are the vertical lines, with the thickest and lowest-pitched sixth string on the left and the thinnest and highest-pitched first string on the right. The thick horizontal line is the nut—the piece of plastic or bone that holds your strings on the tuner end of the fingerboard. The dots show where you press down the strings, and the numbers indicate which finger to use: 1 for the index, 2 the middle, 3 the ring, and 4 the pinky. The little X's mean you don't want to actually play the two lowest strings of the guitar when you play this chord. The little 0 means you do want to hear the open fourth string ring out as part of this chord.

Now, holding your pick, make a series of downstrokes: strumming or dragging the pick across the strings from the fourth, open string, D, through the top string. Tap your foot first, counting “1, 2, 3, 4.” Then try strumming down, toward the floor, with each tap of your foot. On paper, we notate that like this:



Every slash stands for a beat, and right now you're playing a strum on every beat. So play a strum for every slash, or four strums.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS

“Dave,” I hear you say, “that’s cool, but my D chord doesn’t sound like much. I’m getting maybe two strings to sound, and the rest is all just the futile sound of my pick clicking against the strings with no notes coming out.” Well, yes, that’s usually how it sounds at first. The lack of sound is mostly about your fretting hand right now, so let’s look at a few of the most common snags.

Fingers falling flat. You need to keep your fingers somewhat squared, with your two joints making a box in which the fingerboard is the fourth side. Check on your ring finger in particular: on a D chord it probably wants to flatten out at the first joint, which means *R* is now muting the high string. That is, even if you’re fretting the high string just right, the underside of your ring finger may be muffling it. Squaring up your ring finger should help.

Too far from the fret. “Put your index finger at the second fret” really means, “place your index finger between the first fret and the second fret.” You don’t want to put your finger down on the string right over the second fret, but you can’t leave it too far back toward the first fret either. The ideal location is about



Too far from the fret.



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