

BEGINNERS UKULELE THEORY

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So you're probably asking "why do I need to know music theory to play the ukulele?" The short answer is you don't. This series of notes will look at some key concepts of music theory to practically support your ukulele playing.

TUNING YOUR UKE: You may have already encountered the chromatic scale on an electric tuner, refer to figure 1. Play the top string of your ukulele, the tuner will show you which note the string is closest to. Tighten or loosen the string to move up and down the chromatic scale until you have found the correct notes for that string. Starting from the top string to the bottom, ukulele tuning is: G, C, E, A

CHROMATIC SCALE: C, C#, D, D#, E, F, F#, G, G#, A, A#, B > continues loop back to C <
The piano is a wonderfully way to visualise the scale, refer to figure 2. The chromatic scale consists of all 12 notes of the musical alphabet. Chromatic means from one note to the next. A one-octave chromatic scale simply consists of 12 notes played one after the other. For now all you need to know is that Sharps (#) and Flats (b) are 2 different ways of expressing the same thing. C# is Db and D# is Eb. They are the black keys on the piano and are also know as accidentals. To make things less confusing I will only talk about Sharps (#)

Figure 1.



You can play the chromatic scale by playing just one string and moving down the neck of the ukulele one fret (metal line on the uke) at a time, refer to figure 3.

Figure 3.

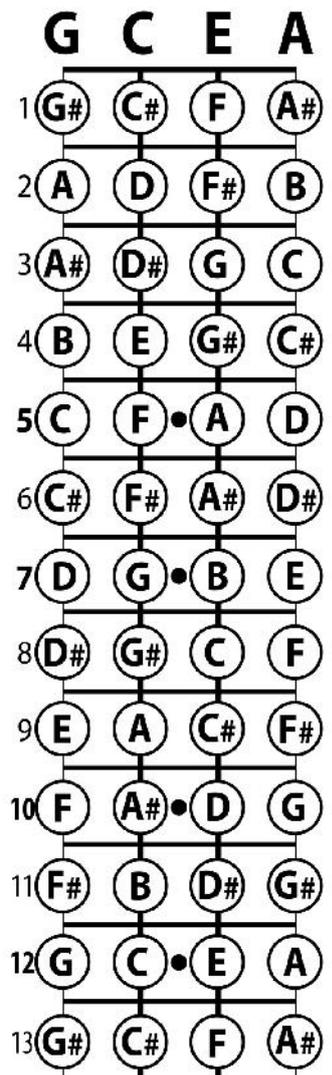
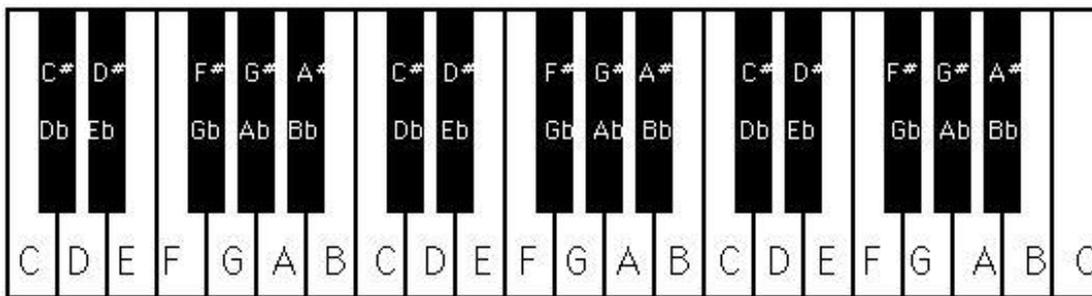


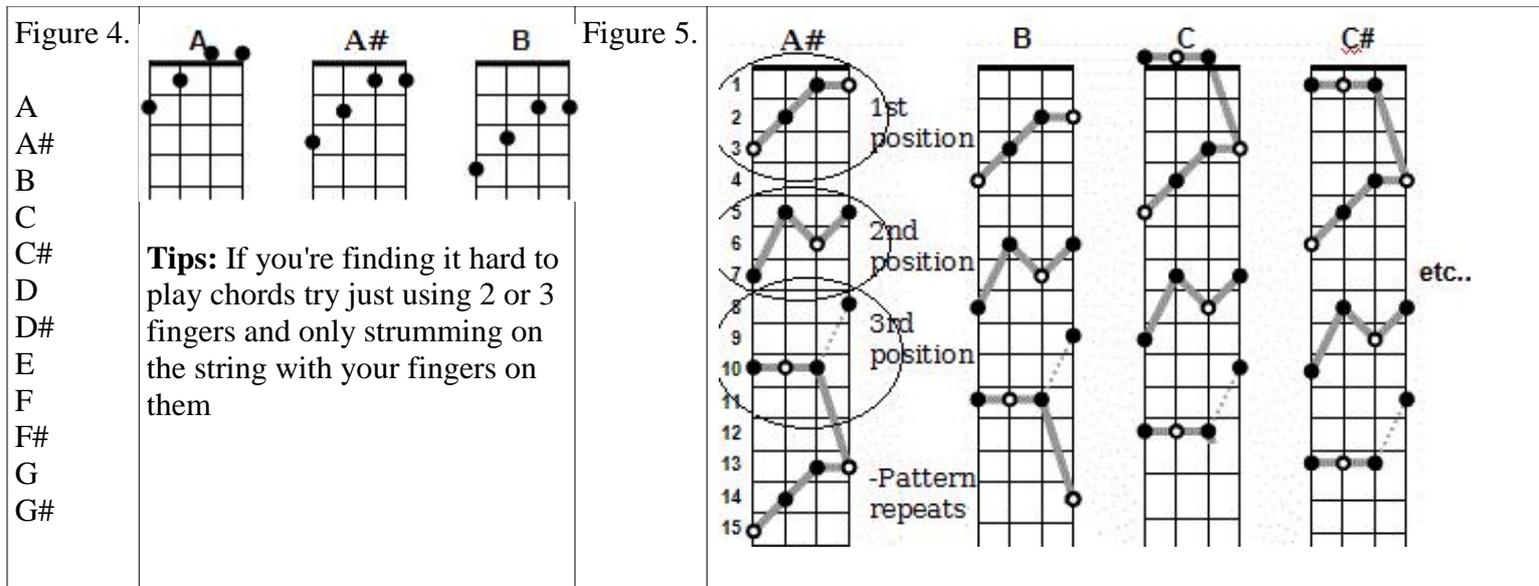
Figure 2. The chromatic scale on the piano



CHORDS: A CHORD is three or more notes played in unison. As you hold a chord your fingers create a shape. As with notes when you move the shape of the chord down the neck of the ukulele, you move through the chromatic scale. Although the chord will change, it will always stay a major chord, refer to figure 4. This is also true of all other types of chord such as; Minor, 7th, Diminished, augmented ect. I am going to suggest 2 ways to navigate around your ukulele using this approach.

FIXED SHAPES: So far we have just looked at fixed shapes, refer to figure 4. The starting point is the shape of the chord. Moving the shape one fret down the neck of the ukulele corresponds to moving one note down the chromatic scale.

CHANGING SHAPES: Figure 5. starts with A#. The 1st circled chord is know as the 1st position of the A# chord, as you move down the fret the shape changes but the chord remains the same. Further down are the 2nd and the 3rd positions and then the pattern repeats. All Major chords on the ukulele can be played by using these 3 shapes placed in different positions on the ukulele. See the example of B, C and C# in figure 5. Note that the 3 different shapes repeat in the same order regardless of which shape or chord you start with. Use this diagram to see how C in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions sounds to the C Chord that you're already familiar with.



WHAT'S NEXT? Apply the same principles to other chords such as; Minor, 7th, dim etc. Understanding the patterns and how they repeat is the key to understanding figure 6. Some patterns repeat once and others four times but they are all variations of a B chord

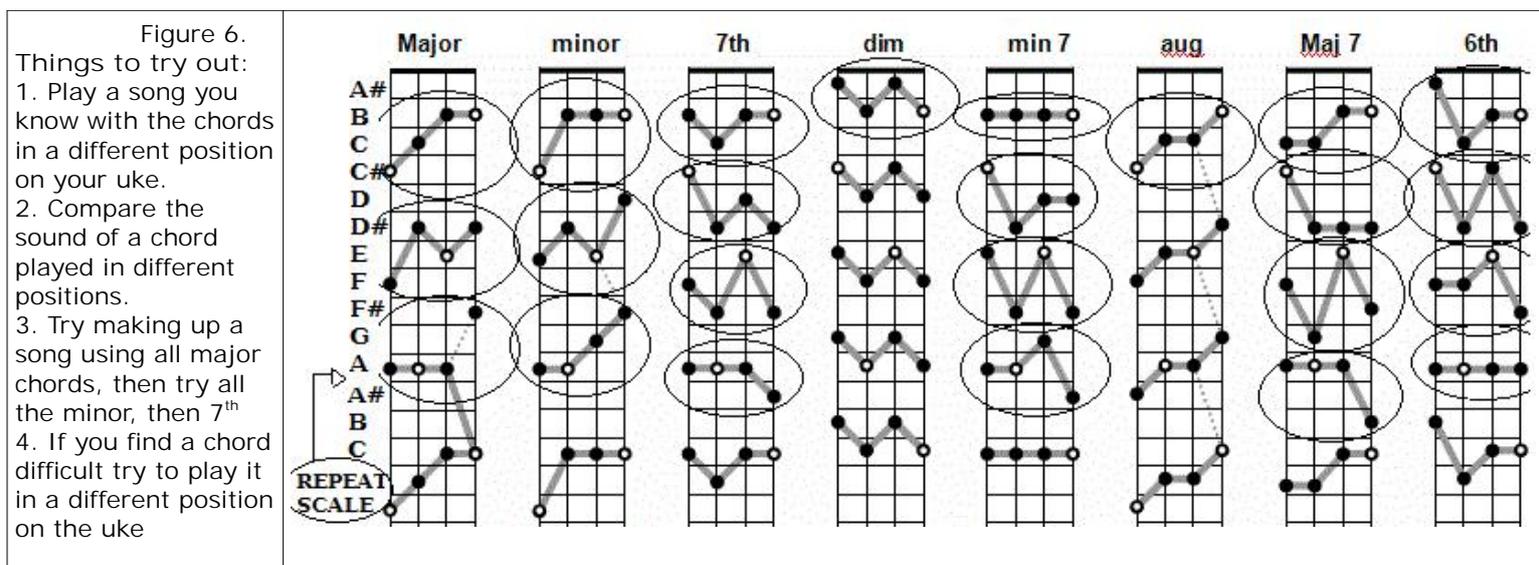


Figure 6.
Things to try out:
1. Play a song you know with the chords in a different position on your uke.
2. Compare the sound of a chord played in different positions.
3. Try making up a song using all major chords, then try all the minor, then 7th
4. If you find a chord difficult try to play it in a different position on the uke

Things to remember

1. (#) and (b) are really the same thing for example C# is the same as Db refer to figure 2.
2. The chromatic scale C, C#, D, D#, E, F, F#, G, G#, A, A#, B -(continues loop back to C)
3. Major= simply refereed to as its name ie. B, B Minor= Bm, 7th= B7, B Diminished= Bdim, B Augmented= Bau.
4. Figure 4,5 & 6 are also known as bar chords. In most but not all chords you will need to flatten your index finger like a bar over the strings. This technique can be quite difficult and takes time to perfect.