The Complete Drop Chord System For Guitarists

This lesson will go into detail about a new method for understanding and playing drop chords.

Please note that all the chord grids used in this lesson simply show the shape of the chord you are playing. Use the tab/music to determine where to play the shape for each example.

Traditionally, drop chords are analyzed and created in a two-step process that involves two different inversions.

In this definition a drop chord is created by starting with a close-voiced chord (meaning the voices are voiced as closely together as possible) in a particular inversion, then dropping a note (either the highest, second highest or highest note) an octave lower.

Before we get started, don’t forget to pick up your free 64-page e-book, the Jazz Guitar Primer!

To begin, we will take a look at the close position voicing of a C major 7\(^{th}\) and apply the traditional approach to drop chords. We have stacked the chord as tightly as possible:

**Close Voiced C major 7**

\[
\text{R} - 3 - 5 - 7
\]

\[
\text{C} - \text{E} - \text{G} - \text{B}
\]
To create a drop 2 chord, the traditional method would ask us to drop the second highest tone, being the G, which would ultimately give us: G – C – E – B. True, this is a drop 2 chord, but it is a drop 2 chord in second inversion.

Second Inversion C major 7 Drop 2 Chord

5 – R – 3 – 7

G – C – E – B
You have now created a drop 2 chord, however the chord is now also in second inversion. This is the main problem with the traditional approach to drop chords on the guitar.

In order to get the chord in root position, we would first need to memorize the correct close position inversion. In this case, you would need to think of a second inversion C major 7 (Cmaj7/G):

**Cmaj7/G - Second Inversion Close Chord**

5 - 7 - R - 3
After thinking of the Cmaj7/G you would then drop the second highest note in the chord (C) to get a root position drop 2 chord.

Cmaj7 - Root Position Drop Chord

R - 5 - 7 - 3
Musicians are taught, whether it's classical, jazz or popular genres to think of harmony from the bass note up. Even in sight reading, the most efficient and practical approach to reading is from the bass (or lowest note) up. The lowest voice in a chord provides the foundation for the harmony and function of the chord. Developing ear training also begins from hearing from the bass note up, this is because the harmony can often be derived from the bass notes alone!

The traditional approach to drop chords goes against this crucial way of thinking about harmony,
which has existed for hundreds and hundreds of years. Anyone with a bit of extra time can research ‘figured bass’, a method for thinking about harmony that was used extensively in the baroque era. In short, it is a system that indicates specific notes for creating chords and improvising relative to the bass note.

All of that aside, how should we approach drop chords? If we are playing a root position C major 7 chord, we should think of it from the lowest note up regardless of the chord voicing you are trying to play. On paper the traditional approach to drop chords looks great; we simply stack the chord and lower one of the notes by an octave. Unfortunately, this approach ultimately leads us to think of 2 different bass notes (and therefore chord inversions) for every chord we want to create.

The good news is, that there is a much simpler way to do all of this. With fewer steps, and less thinking, this method will allow you to access of all of your voicings quickly, thinking only of the inversion you intended to play.

To get a drop 2 chord in only one step, while maintaining the same bass note and chord inversion, simply raise the second lowest note of the close voiced C major 7 chord.

**Close voiced C major 7 in root position**

R - 3 - 5 - 7

C – E – G – B
Drop 2 C major 7 in root position

R - 5 - 7 - 3

C – G – B – E
The result is: C – G – B – E.

We have now created a drop 2 chord in the inversion we wanted originally (which was root position) in one step, instead of having to think of multiple inversion for the same outcome.

The concept of raising notes instead of lowering them works with every drop chord voicing type and inversion, and for all drop chord types. Check out the articles below to learn the process for each drop chord type and inversion. Each approach demands that we always think of the chord from the root up, without having to translate which inversion leads to the inversion you want.

Drop 2 Chords

Drop 3 Chords

Drop 2 and 4 Chords

I have also included an exercise for practicing your Drop 2, Drop 3 and Drop 2 and 4 chords below, using C major 7 as an example. The idea is to promote root first thinking. Be sure to apply this exercise to other chord types once you become familiar with the inversions.
Major 7 Chords - Drop 2 Inversions
E-string Drop 2 maj7 Inversions

Root Position

1st Inversion

2nd Inversion

3rd Inversion
A-String Drop 2 maj7 Inversions

D-String Drop 2 maj7 Inversions

Major 7 Chords - Drop 3 Inversions
E-string Drop 3 maj7 Inversions

Root Position

1st Inversion

2nd Inversion

3rd Inversion

A-String Drop 3 maj7 inversions
Major 7 Chords - Drop 2 and 4 Inversions

Root Position | 1st Inversion | 2nd Inversion | 3rd Inversion
--- | --- | --- | ---
```
R
7
3
5

R
    7

5
3
7

5
3
7
```

```
2nd Inversion:
S - R - 7 - 3
G - C - B - E

3rd Inversion:
7 - 3 - R - S
B - E - C - G

Root Position:
R - 5 - 3 - 7
C - G - E - B

First Inversion:
3 - 7 - 5 - R
E - B - G - C
```
E-string Drop 2 and 4 maj7 Inversions

Root Position   | 1st Inversion   | 2nd Inversion   | 3rd Inversion
---             | ---             | ---             | ---
[Diagram]

A-string Drop 2 and 4 maj7 Inversions

Root Position   | 1st Inversion   | 2nd Inversion   | 3rd Inversion
---             | ---             | ---             | ---
[Diagram]

Major 7#5
This lesson will cover all the voicings for major 7#5 **drop 2, drop 3** and **drop 2 and 4** chords. Along with the chord shapes, an example using C major 7#5 in music and tab is included for each chord type. Before we get started with the chord shapes, be sure to take note of the following analysis of the major 7#5 chord:

- A **major 7#5** chord contains chord tones 1, 3, #5 and 7. With C as the root, the chord is spelt: C – E – G# – B
- It occurs naturally on:
  - The **third** scale degree of the **melodic minor** scale
  - The **third** scale degree of the **harmonic minor** scale
- Its function is usually that of an altered I chord in a II – V – I chord progression
- The **major 7#5** chord can also be used as a **chord substitution** for a variety of different chords.
  - To learn more about chord substitutions, head over to the chord substitutions page.

Feeling comfortable with your **drop chords**? Be sure to check out more lessons on jazz guitar chords. For information on how to play major 7#5 arpeggios, take a look at the major 7#5 arpeggio page here

### Major 7#5 - Drop 2 Chords

**E-String**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root Position</th>
<th>1st Inversion</th>
<th>2nd Inversion</th>
<th>3rd Inversion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="#" alt="Root Position" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="1st Inversion" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="2nd Inversion" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="3rd Inversion" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A-String**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root Position</th>
<th>1st Inversion</th>
<th>2nd Inversion</th>
<th>3rd Inversion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="#" alt="Root Position" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="1st Inversion" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="2nd Inversion" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="3rd Inversion" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The music and tab below includes all the chords and inversions posted above using the C major 7#5 chord as an example. It has been included to give context to the shapes above if you are not quite familiar with the notes on the fretboard yet. Each line covers a different string group of drop 2 chords. The first line includes drop 2 chords built form the E-string, the second line includes drop 2 chords build from the A-string and the third line includes drop chords built from the D-string. The same examples are posted for the following drop 3, and drop 2 and 4 chords.

Example with C Major 7#5
Major 7#5 - Drop 3 Chords

E-String

Root Position

1st Inversion

2nd Inversion

3rd Inversion
A-String

Root Position  1st Inversion  2nd Inversion  3rd Inversion

Example with C Major 7#5

Major 7#5 - Drop 2 and 4 Chords

E-String
A-String

Example with C Major 7#5
This lesson will cover all the voicings for major 7b5 drop 2, drop 3 and drop 2 and 4 chords. Along with the chord shapes, an example using C major 7b5 in music and tab is included for each chord type. Before we get started with the chord shapes, be sure to take note of the following analysis of the major 7b5 chord:

- A major 7b5 chord contains chord tones 1, 3, b5 and 7. With C as the root, the chord is spelt: C – E – Gb – B
- It occurs naturally on:
  - The third scale degree of the melodic minor scale
- Its function is usually that of an altered I chord in a II – V – I chord progression
- The major 7b5 chord can also be used as a chord substitution for a variety of different chords. To learn more about chord substitutions, check out the Intro to Chord Substitutions page!
- The major 7b5 chord can also be used as a chord substitution for a variety of different chords.
  - Find more information and lessons on chord substitutions here
The music and tab below includes all the chords and inversions posted above using the C major 7b5 chord as an example. It has been included to give context to the shapes above if you are not quite familiar with the notes on the fretboard yet. Each line covers a different string group of drop 2 chords. The first line includes drop 2 chords built from the E-string, the second line includes drop 2 chords built from the A-string and the third line includes drop chords built from the D-string. The same examples are posted for the following drop 3, and drop 2 and 4 chords.

Example with C Major 7b5
Major 7b5 - Drop 3 Chords

E-String
Example with C Major 7b5
Major 7b5 - Drop 2 and 4 Chords

E-String

Root Position

1st Inversion

2nd Inversion

3rd Inversion

A-String
Example with C Major 7b5