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Introduction:

I love to teach. Among the more noble reasons, it makes me a better player. Sometimes I selfishly get to bounce new ideas and techniques off my students, hoping they will find their own way in the process. The content in my previous books, *Voicing Modes*, *Modal Etudes*, and *The 4-Note Universe*, tends to emphasize original thought and creativity rather than fulfilling the typical expectations of what students need in terms of essential skills. This fact became even more obvious to me when a student once told me in his first lesson, “I want to find the holes in my playing.” As he was already a fine musician without any obvious shortcomings, his desire to fill any gaps, I thought, was very wise. Even though he was asking for my opinion, the answer lies not really in my perspective but in a universal truth: the fundamentals.

If you ask 100 guitarists to define the “fundamentals” of playing, you’ll likely hear 100 unique answers. To me, fundamentals are the essential tools you wield to give confidence and conviction to your musical ideas. Every guitarist has their own toolkit, shaped by their experiences and mastery of different techniques. The tools at your immediate disposal define how effortlessly you can express yourself through music. Sometimes, our limitations define our sound as we lean into our strengths; however, this can lead to frustration down the road. The mastery and consistent practice of fundamentals makes everything else easier.

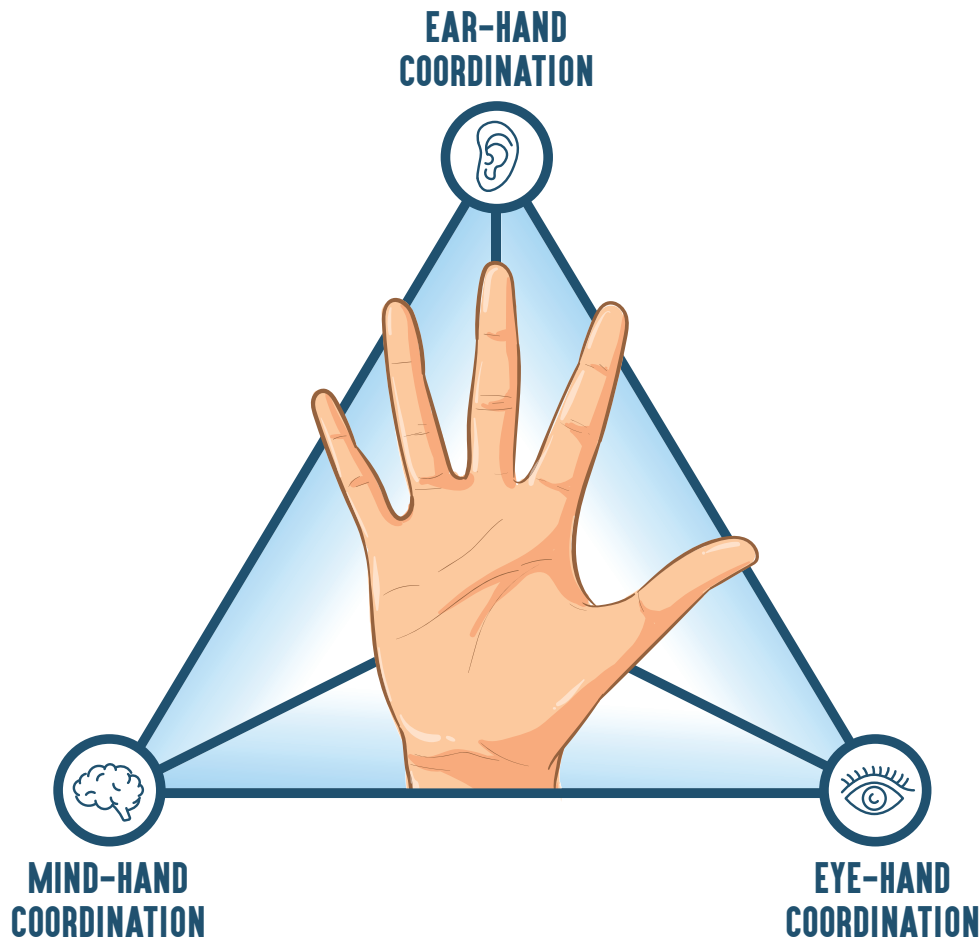
One of the most successful college basketball coaches, John Wooden, was meticulous about teaching fundamentals. In his book *Practical Modern Basketball*, he stated, “The team that has the best command of the fundamentals—passing, catching, dribbling, shooting, and defense—will usually win.” Another successful coach, Tom Crean, said, “Game plans win games. Fundamentals win championships.”

With *Creative Fundamentals*, my goal is to systematically equip you with the raw skills needed to become a versatile, well-rounded guitarist (with examples for application along the way via compositions and etudes). Through a blend of pure technical exercises for your hands, ear-hand coordination to sharpen your musical intuition, eye-hand coordination to navigate both the visual symbols of music and the fretboard’s symmetry with precision, and mind-hand coordination to unlock the creative potential that analysis can provide, this book offers both the knowledge and a clear game plan. Whether you’re a beginner or a seasoned player, these exercises will help you identify your weaknesses, build a strong foundation, and expand your ability to make music with confidence and conviction.

Practicing fundamentals doesn’t have to be mundane. In this book, I share creative approaches to mastering essential skills, transforming routine practice into ideas for composition. By thinking like a composer, you’ll learn to weave technical proficiency into musical ideas that turn the routine into something fun and interesting. My hope is that *Creative Fundamentals* not only fills the gaps in your playing but also sparks new ways to express your unique voice as a musician.

Throughout this book, I’ll try to help you master the fundamentals not just in terms of technique, but how to access that technique: by *ear*, by *eye* and by *mind*.

Musicianship Stats:



- The hand represents your technique
- If you have bad technique, you cannot execute the appropriate/intended sounds.
- Great ears/eyes/mind are limited by your technical ability, BUT you can use your ears/eyes/mind to force technical improvement over time.
- This is the aspect people MOST notice about your musicianship and it's what defines YOUR sound.

Technique: raw technique for:

- Good time,
- Touch,
- Tone,
- Clarity,
- Dynamics,
- Finesse,
- Speed,
- Tuning

Learning songs can improve your technique, but you can improve/maintain it via “Fundamentals” like:

- Digital patterns,
- Scales,
- Arpeggios,
- Chord inversions,
- Picking patterns, etc.

...And committing them to “muscle memory” to free up your conscious thought (more on this in the mind-hand coordination part later), and regulate your emotions.

Closed Triad Arpeggios:

Creative ways to practice these:

1. See if you can incorporate chords as *anchor shapes* (or *target shapes*) mentally attached to these arpeggios (associate a new memory with an old memory for easier application)
2. Work out the most efficient fingering for speed. That way, you can more easily incorporate the shapes into your muscle memory freeing up your conscious mind for other things.
3. Work on your time in the process: With these sample shapes, up and down yields 15 notes: try them as triplets in 5/4. With 16th notes straight up and down without repeating notes, it takes 7 beats to play the starting note on the downbeat again.
4. Be able to play the pattern starting on any beat. If you always practice these patterns starting on the downbeat (and starting on the root), it becomes stuck in that context.
5. Start with a melody note and go from there. Be aware of the interval.
6. Try to play the arpeggio shape with a certain melody note of a chord shape as the start (or destination).
7. Compose an idea using two randomly (or cool sounding) keys. Alternate between the two across and/or up the neck.
8. Try to dovetail the notes from two separate triads. You'll get a 4, 5 or even a 6-note scale (Hexatonic scale)
9. Don't just learn them in succession, check out some *permutation* ideas from the scales chapter.

The included triad arpeggios:

Major

Minor

Diminished

Augmented

Sus4

Dom7 (shell): 1-3- \flat 7 (not exactly a triad, but a bonus, useful 3-note arpeggio)

A Note About Position Playing and Fingerings:

While some of the arpeggio shapes in this book involve shifts, I generally subscribe to strict position playing when working on them. Position playing helps efficiently develop muscle memory and build confidence without the need to look at your fretboard. In a given position, the four fingers can span six frets - the first finger can shift back and/or the fourth finger can shift up. (Mick Goodrick in his book, *The Advancing Guitarist* talks about position playing in this way.)

↓ (The fret number on which the 1st finger is not stretching defines the *position*)

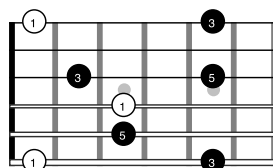
1 2 3 4 (4 fret span)

1 1 2 3 4 (5-fret span)

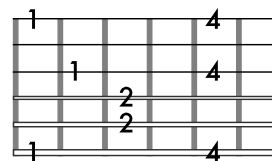
1 2 3 4 4 (5-fret span)

1 1 2 3 4 4 (6-fret span)

The shapes are labeled with interval numbers because I want you to be aware of the intervals. The fingering should be carefully considered and practiced consistently for it to become ingrained in your muscle memory. The more you have in your muscle memory, the more ideas you have at the ready!

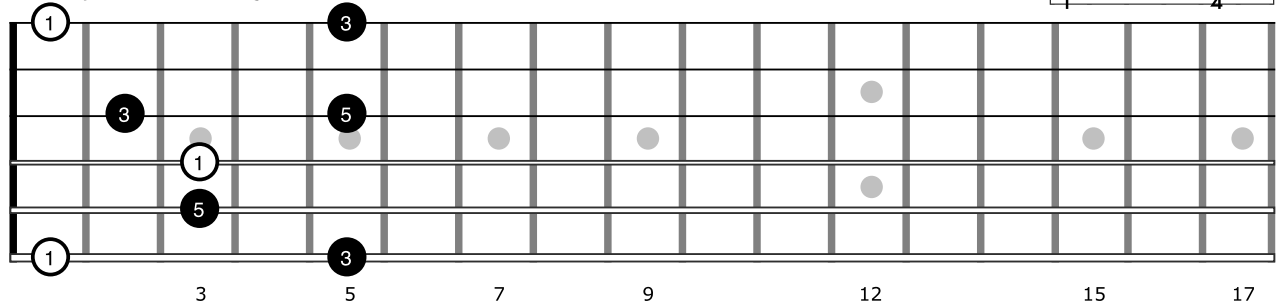


(In this book) Labeled with intervals

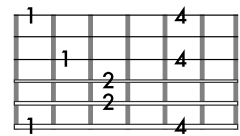


(occasionally this book) Labeled with fingerings if the fingerings are less obvious

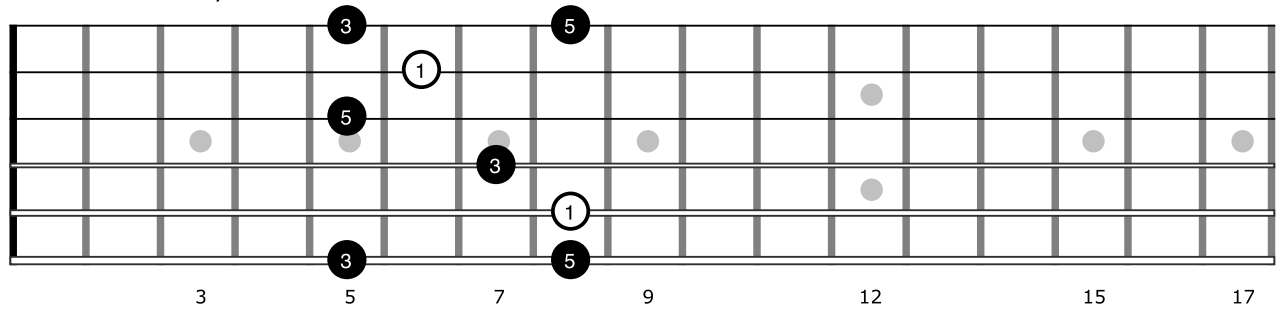
Root position F Major Triad



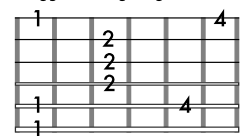
(Suggested fingering)



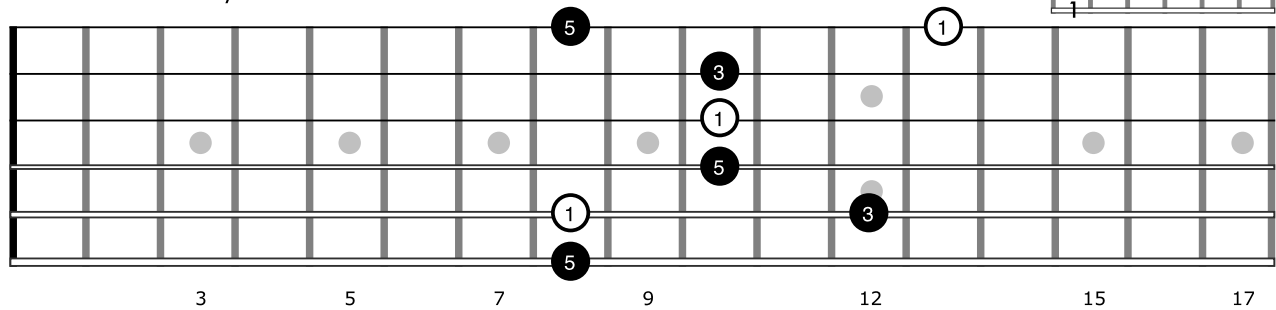
1st inversion: F/A



(Suggested fingering)

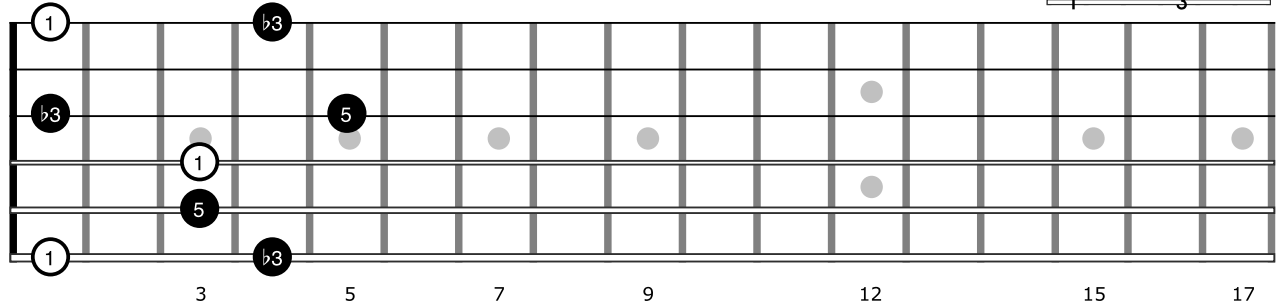


2nd inversion: F/C

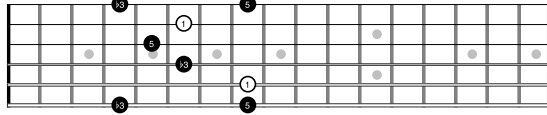


These are my favorite shapes. The fingering options are built for speed.

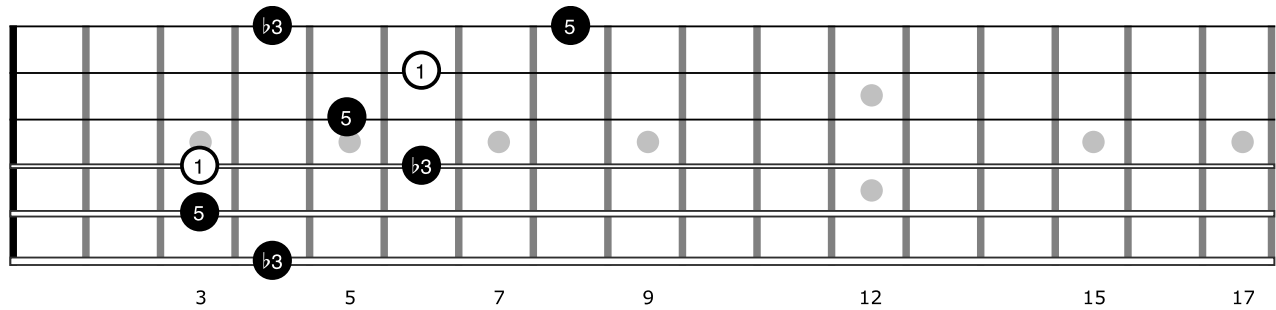
F Minor Triad



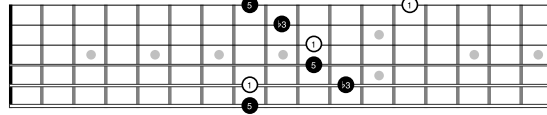
1st inversion alternate



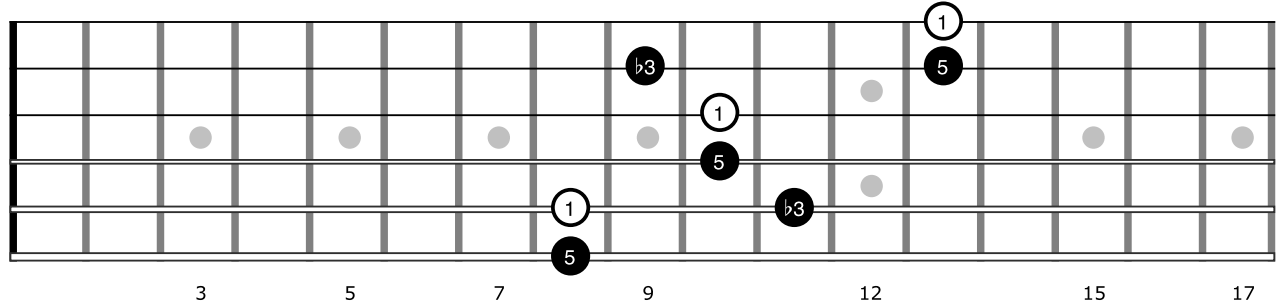
Fmi/A♭



2nd inversion alternate



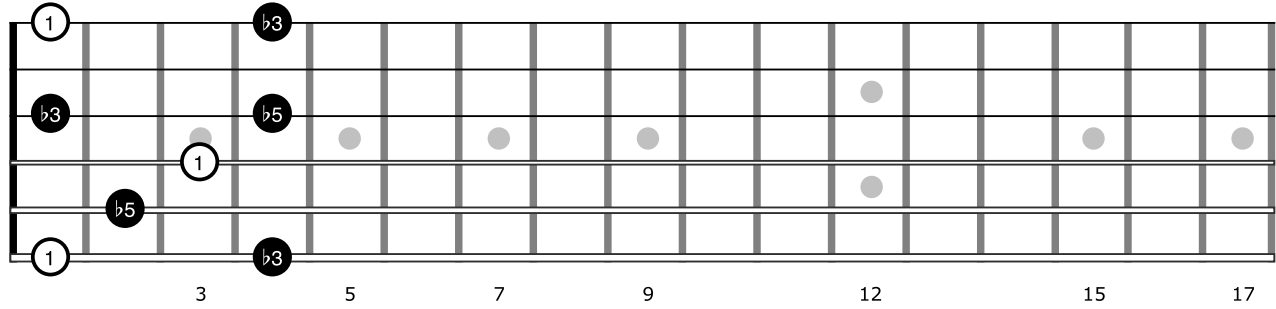
Fmi/C



Options: Sometimes ascending favors a different fingering from descending.

Try not to lose too much sleep over these options. The important thing is for you to learn *something* well enough to be readily available.

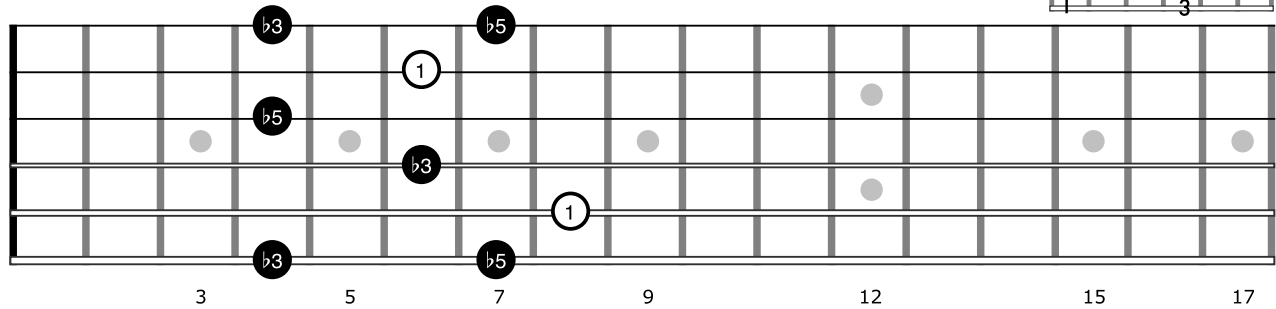
F Diminished Triad



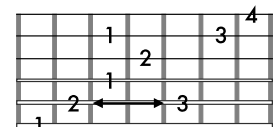
(Suggested fingering)



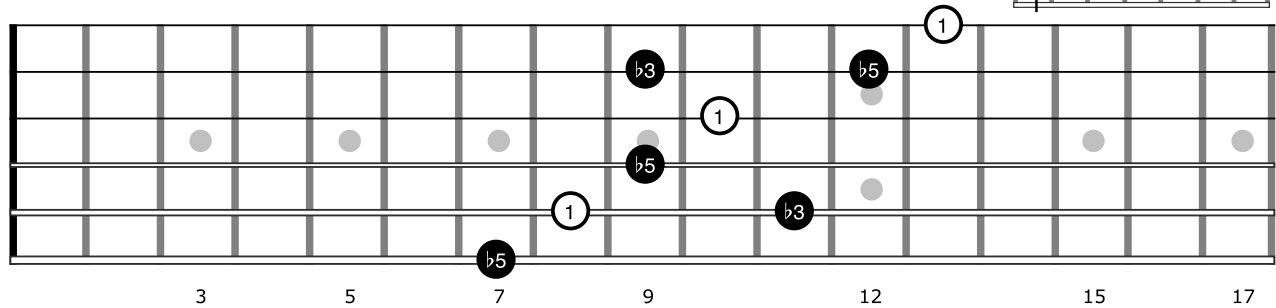
F Diminished Triad



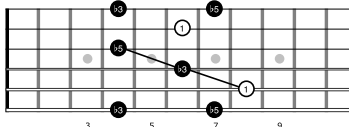
(Suggested fingering)



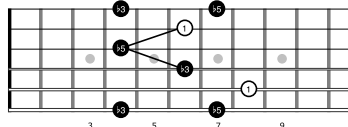
F Diminished Triad



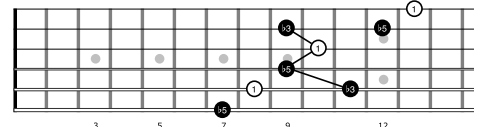
F Diminished Triad



F Diminished Triad

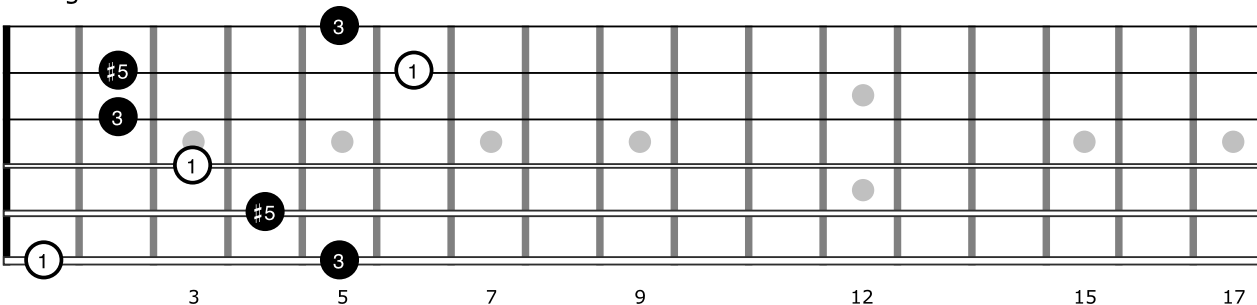


F Diminished Triad

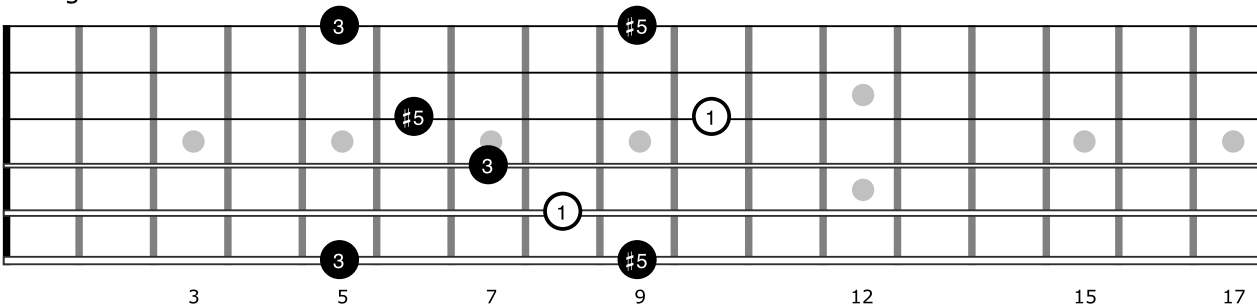


“Target shapes” - If you can visualize the chord shapes amongst the arpeggio shapes, it makes the shapes easier to remember.

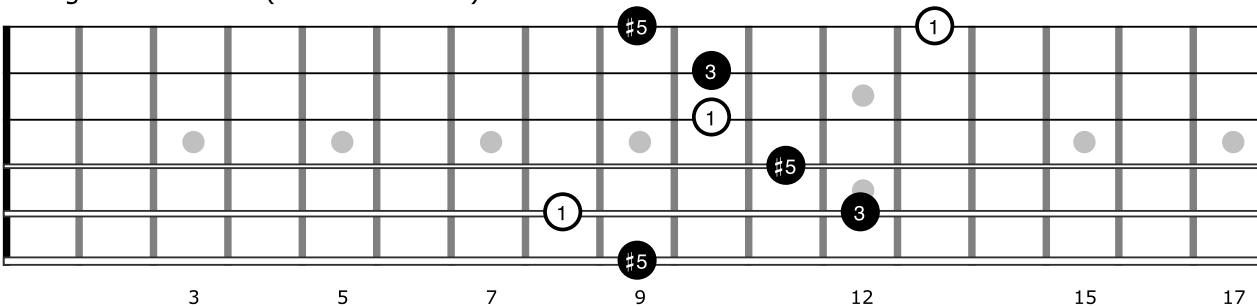
F Augmented Triad



F Augmented Triad

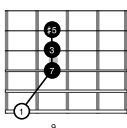


F Augmented Triad (Noel's Favorite)

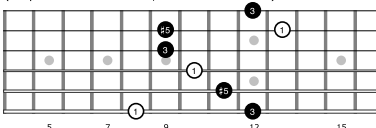


All these inversions are symmetrical - Any can be used as root position, 1st inversion or 2nd inversion so these shapes are interchangeable. If one (or two) shapes feels most comfortable, you can stick to that. Something to keep in mind, however, is sometimes a certain finger or chord shape may put your hand in a certain position where one particular arpeggio shape is more accessible:

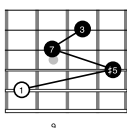
CMaj7(+5)



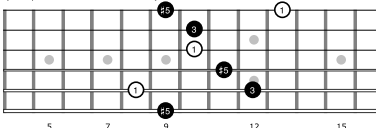
(shape 1 more convenient, smoother transition)



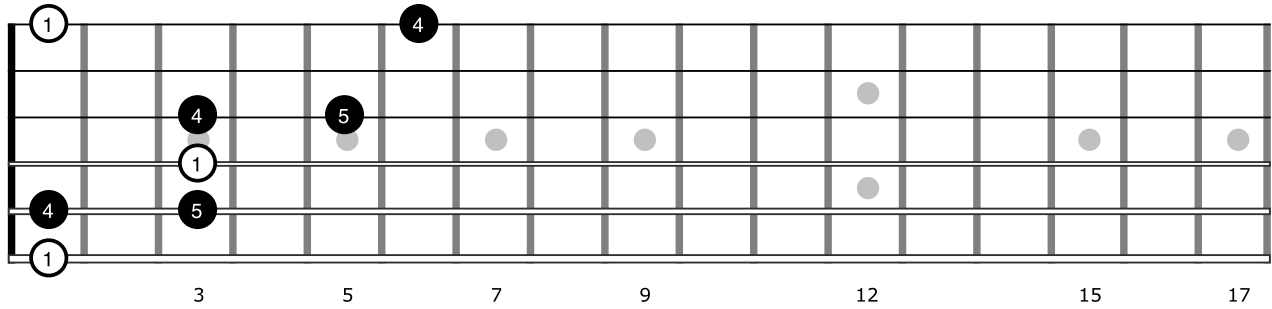
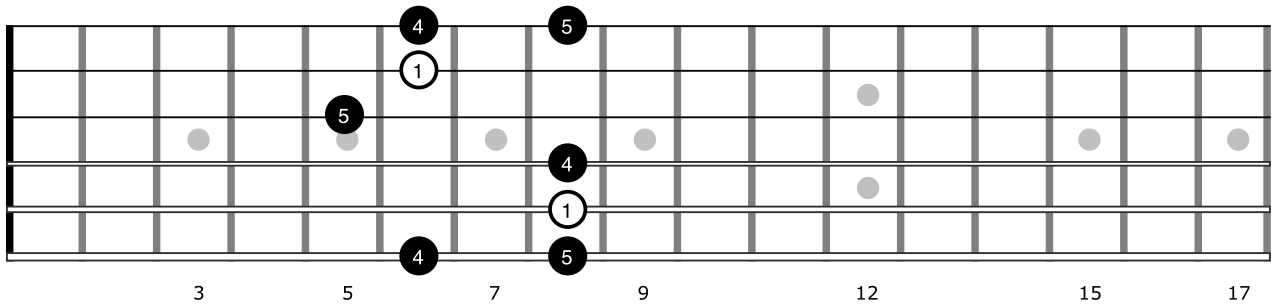
FMaj7(+5)



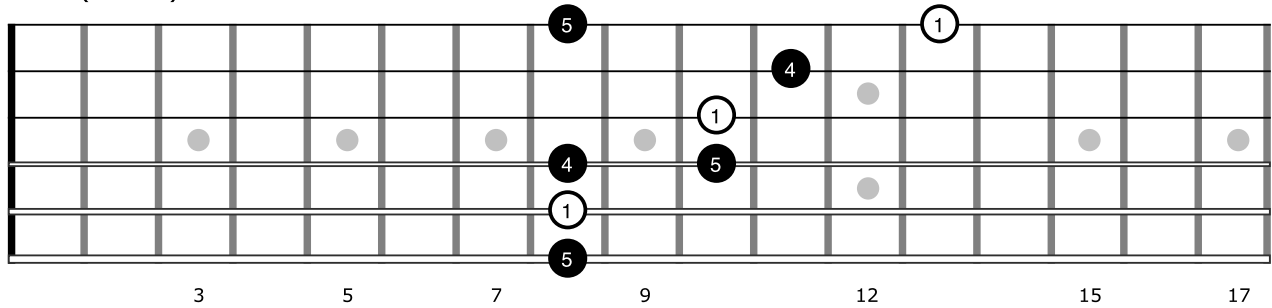
(Shape 3 more convenient)



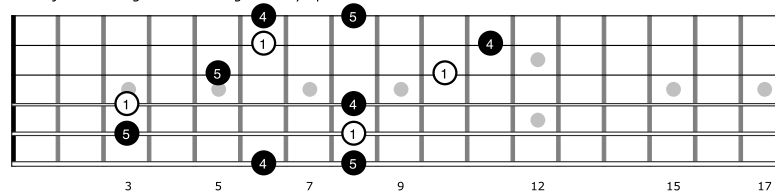
Fsus

Fsus (B \flat sus2)

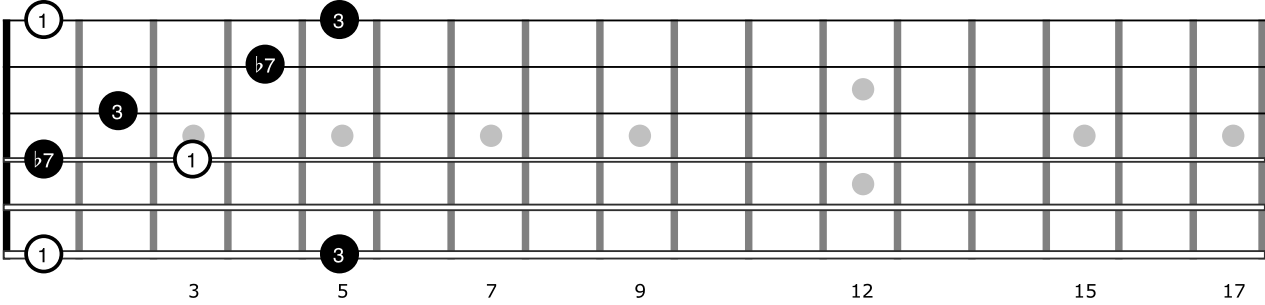
Fsus (C7sus)



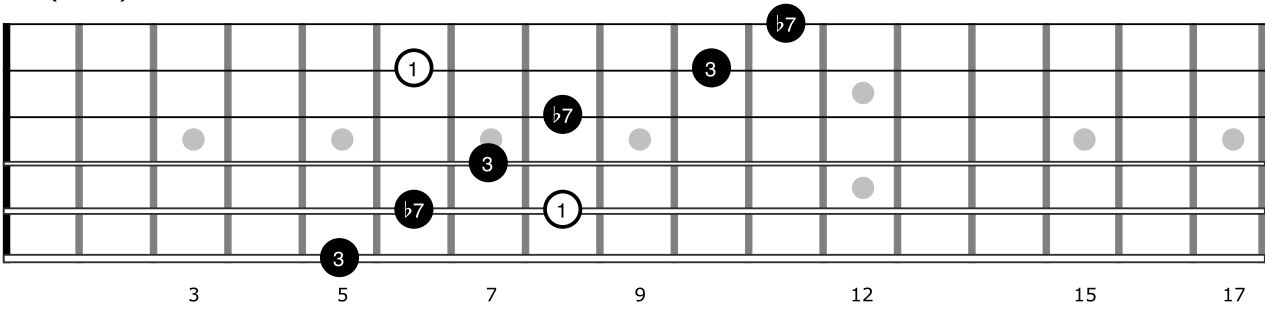
An adjacent-string-note-doubling stretchy option



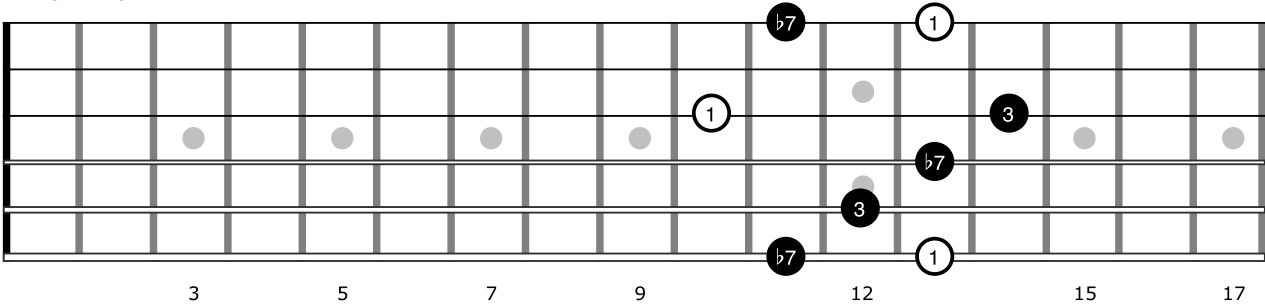
F7 (shell)



F7 (shell) 1st inversion



F7 (shell) 2nd inversion*



*Since it has the b7 as the lowest note, you may associate this shape as the 3rd inversion of a typical dominant 7 chord arpeggio