

# Write a Riff

## 7 Different Techniques for Riff Composition



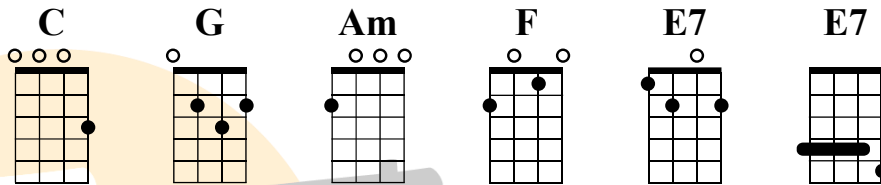
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Key: C

Chords: C, F, G, Am, E7

Video Tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ts-pCtlowY>

Chord Shapes:



### Base Progression and Strum Pattern:

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |  
C | G | Am | F |  
D D U U D U | D D U U D U | D D U U D U | D D U U D U |

### Borrow Chord Progression and Strum Pattern: For Technique 7

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |  
C | G | Am | E7 |  
D D U U D U | D D U U D U | D D U U D U | D D U U D U |

### Scale Review - C Major Scale Shapes 1 and 2



- Remove the F and B notes and you have the C major pentatonic scale
- Treat the A note as the root and you have the A minor scale
- Remove the F and B notes and treat the A note as the root note and you have the A minor pentatonic scale
- Remove the F and B notes, treat the A note as the root and add the flat 5<sup>th</sup> interval, the Eb note, and you have the A blues scale

## Technique 1 - Connecting with chord tones

Musical notation for Technique 1, measures 41-44. The notation shows a progression of chords: C, G, Am, and F. The notation includes a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar fretboard diagram below. Measure 41 is C, 42 is G, 43 is Am, and 44 is F. The fretboard diagram shows fingerings for each chord: C (3-0-0-0), G (3-2-0-0), Am (0-0-0-2), and F (1-0-0-2).

- If you are new to this the best way to do it is to start with your target tones
- Target tones are chord tones, notes in the chord, that you are going to try to land on with the scale, by choosing them first you create the destination, making the path much easier
- After choose your tones the next thing is to try and connect them using the scale

Musical notation for Technique 1, measures 9-12. The notation shows a progression of chords: C, G, Am, and F. The notation includes a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar fretboard diagram below. Measure 9 is C, 10 is G, 11 is Am, and 12 is F. The fretboard diagram shows fingerings for each chord: C (3-0-0-0), G (3-2-0-0), Am (0-0-0-2), and F (1-0-0-2).

- As you can see here the target tones are the same as the previous 4 measures
- After strumming the chord we are playing notes in the scale that land on that target tone
- The more you practice this the more naturally you'll be able to compose this ideas
- To create this with your own progression choose the notes in the chord you want to land on and then play around with the scale and rhythms to land on that note.
- Keep it simple, if you have to only use quarter notes, that is okay

## Technique 2 - Using double stops

Musical notation for Technique 2, measures 45-48. The notation shows a progression of chords: C, G, Am, and F. The notation includes a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar fretboard diagram below. Measure 45 is C, 46 is G, 47 is Am, and 48 is F. The fretboard diagram shows fingerings for each chord: C (0-0-0-0), G (3-2-0-0), Am (0-0-0-2), and F (1-0-0-2).

- Here we started off similar to the last idea, here we start with our double stops, we are choosing two notes that are both in the scale and the chord
- Note that all the notes from all these chords will be in the scale as the chords are literally created and built from the scale
- Here is a link on how to turn a scale into chords
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEIh9JnRwr4>

- Once you have chosen your double stops you are going to try to play around with some ones to create a riff
- You can play any two notes that you want in a scale at the same time
- Certain notes will sound better together than others, but none of them will sound bad.
- Really the only thing you want to avoid are half steps, meaning notes one fret apart. You don't want to play E and F together and you don't want to play B and C together, other than that all combinations will sound good
- You can also skip a string, try and play the C string with the A string or the G string with the E string or even the G string with the A string

- Here we went with a pretty basic approach and try to use double stops that also featured multiple chord tones from the scales, like the D and G from the G chord for example
- The very last one just involved a half step as one tone was in both of the chords but I could have gone with F and A if I wanted to and done two completely different notes
- As always knowing where you are going to finish first makes these ideas a little easier.

### Technique 3 - Call and Response

- Call and response is a riff that connects to the next one
- That connection is made by the last note, or the resolving note
- As with the other examples up to this point I started with where I was going to finish, so I used theory and my brain to choose notes that I know would work and sound good, I will use my creativity and playing ability to fill in the gaps with licks that are created with the scale
- One riff finishes on a certain note, so the next riff responds by finishing on another specific note
- The first riff finishes on a C note, and the second riff finishes on a G note
- In the key of C you have 3 stable notes
  - o C
  - o E
  - o G

- Three semi stable notes
  - o D
  - o A
- Three unstable notes
  - o F
  - o B
- That is how you can think about it, you are choosing to start on a stable, semi-stable or unstable note and respond with a stable, semi-stable or unstable response
- If my lick finishes on F note and my second finishes on an E note I have an unstable call with a stable response
- Experiment by playing a note and then playing another and seeing how they relate to each other, that is the feel that each lick is going to give you

Chords: C, G, Am, F

Measure 17: C (5-3-2-3)

Measure 18: G (3-2-1-1-3)

Measure 19: Am (5-3-2-3)

Measure 20: F (3-2-1-1-3)

- I kept it simple by repeating my call and response phrase
- I could have made it more articulate by another call and response in the second two measures
- I also could have had a two measure call and a two measure response as well, that would've covered all four measures
- My first phrase finishes on a C note, a stable note AND a chord tone of C
- My second phrase finishes on a G note, a stable note AND a chord tone of G
- This makes my call and response very safe, and slightly predictable, but easy on the ear and a good learning tool.
- If we look at the harmony over the next two chords the C is also a chord tone of the Am and the G is the 2<sup>nd</sup> interval of the F, so in the context of the key the licks remain stable and over the chords the first lick is stable while the G over the F is semi-stable, providing just a slight bit of tension.

#### Technique 4 - Three and One

Chords: C, G, Am, F

Measure 21: C (3-0-1-0-3)

Measure 22: G (3-0-1-0-3)

Measure 23: Am (3-0-1-0-3)

Measure 24: F (2-0-4-0-2-0)

- Many riffs that you will hear play the same idea 3 times and then something different the 4<sup>th</sup> time through

- You can heard this a lot with drums for example as the 4<sup>th</sup> measure will have a tom roll, snare roll, or something a little different to create some excitement and "turn the bar over"
- We can do the same thing with riff writing, we create one lick that we like, play it three times and then on the 4<sup>th</sup> time through we do something different
- With this one you don't have to pay too much attention to the underlying harmony, just have fun, the only rule is finish on the root note, so the in the key of C the very last note we play should be a C note.

### Technique 5 - Mini Solo

- This one also has the least amount of rules, try and finish on a C note, but even then because it is an intro you don't have to, I finish on the A note here because it makes the solo feel minor.
- If you just getting started with these concepts I would say try to resolve with the root note of the key of your progressions. It will just make safer and easier.
- As far as approach, use the scale and take them to Shredsville, population you.
- I usually improvise the solo and record it so I can play a couple and choose the one I like
- Another way I do it I improvise with a pen and paper or with guitar pro and if I get a lick I like I tab it out

### Technique 6 - Drone Tones

- There are 4 open strings, G, C, E and A, if any one of these is your root you can do some pretty cool stuff by constantly playing that note
- As we are in the key of C I can play the C note constantly against a riff
- I choose to combine the C note with the 3 and 1 technique

- If they weren't your root note you could still use them, just remember what we talked about with reference to stability, you also run the risk of losing the sense of key.

**Fancy Modal Talk** - If you don't understand don't worry, modes may be further down the line in your music theory understanding.

- These also work GREAT for modal playing. If I were in the key of C but constantly use the G as the drone throughout and inversion chords with G in the bass I can start create the feel of Mixolydian and the sense that G is the tonal center.

### Technique 7 - Borrowed Chord and Arpeggios

E7 Arpeggio 3 Shapes

- When using borrowed chords we can use any of the approaches that we talked about but we need to understand that the scale might not work over the chord.
- In this progression I play the E7 chord, which contains
  - o E - Root
  - o G# - 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - o B - 5<sup>th</sup>
  - o D - b7<sup>th</sup>
- 3 of those 4 chords are in our scale but the G# is not, so I have two options
- I can use the C scale and simply push the G note up to the G# over that chord, but this also has the potential to create unwanted discord
- The other option is using arpeggios, which is exactly what I did

- As you can see the first 3 measures are simply me soloing with the scale while emphasizing the chord tones
- When I get to the E7 I approach it with arpeggios, the half step from the A to the G# is really nice as half steps create cool sounds and it also slides right on to the the 1 note that isn't in the scale
- By highlight that specific note I really emphasize the fact that this is borrowed chord.
- More borrowed chord information here
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3Vhfg9XBZc>