TRANSPOSING FOR GUITARISTS

Transposing has allowed me to take any song and move it into a zone of comfort for playing (favourite chords and licks) or singing, or both. Many Beatles songs were off-limits for me because my attempts at Eb, Bb, Ab, Db etc. chords sounded woeful. But transposing them into C, D, E, G, A etc. allows full bodied chords with lots of extra options - open strings, extra notes, hammer ons, and so on. For guitar duets, rather than playing exactly the same chords as your partner you can play different chords elsewhere on the neck (usually higher) which extends the range of sounds, and emphasises different notes in the same scale.

If you are not familiar with names of notes and chords and their positions on the neck, look at FIG 1. This shows all the note names. It is not so important to know the names of every/fret (although it will help), but to see the relationship between them ...

- every fret equals a half-note
- given the range of a guitar, every note gets repeated
- some half-note changes do NOT give a sharp/flat. E-F and B-C are both one-fret/half-note changes without the '#/b' tags

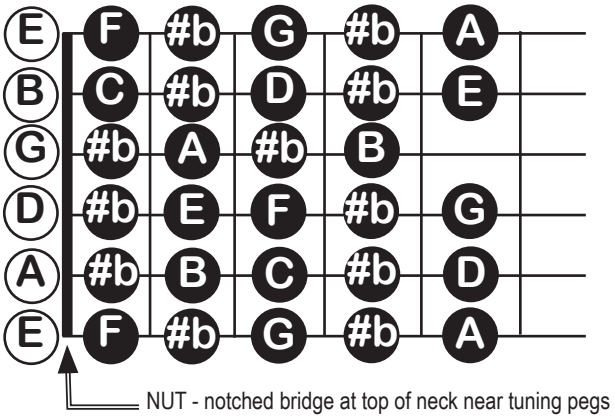
FIG 1 *Note/frets on the neck*

'#' means the previous named note UP a half-note ("sharp")

'b' means the next named note DOWN a half note ("flat")

D# is the same note as Eb, and are named differently only according to the key being used

E.g. the keys of E, A, D, G, and B employ sharps, while F along with Eb, Ab, Db, and Bb uses flats



The whole note system can be displayed better as a keyboard (FIG 2) which is a continuous set of notes. The distance between every rectangle on the keyboard is one half-note (one fret).

Find the symbol for E and count how many intervals are required to get to G:

E ..... F (1 step) F#/Gb (2 steps) G (3 steps).

So if you move the WHOLE chord shape of E up THREE FRETS you will be playing the chord of G (FIG 3).

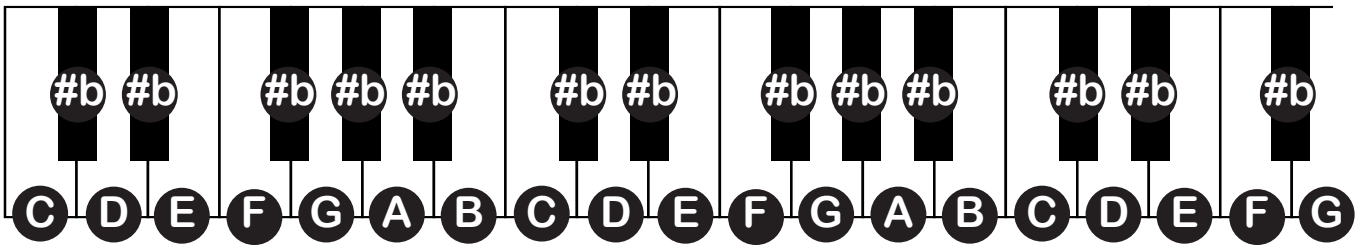
Similarly, taking the A shape up to Eb takes 6 frets (FIG 4):

A ..... A#/Bb(1) B (2) C (3)
C#/Db(4) D(5) D#/Eb (6)

In both these examples, the chords have been transposed.

The simplest and most flexible way to achieve these new alternative chords is by using a capo. This moves the nut further up the keyboard. If you place the capo between fret 2 and 3 you are bringing the nut up to fret 3.

FIG 2 *The keyboard – a single-stringed fretboard!*



USING A CAPO

A good capo, correctly applied, will move ALL the strings up to the fret of your choice *without the strings buzzing, sounding dead or going out of tune.*

For example, place the Capo on Fret 3 and play the chords E A and D, you will be now singing/playing 3 semitones higher, the equivalent of G, C and F.

The capo is used to:

a) find alternative simpler chords (where more difficult ones are specified) or to use chords better suited to your playing style (e.g. finger-picking)

b) adjust music to suit your vocal range - to drop or raise the key

c) to adjust your guitar to match or contrast another instrument (e.g. when I use a capo in a duet I stay in the same key but play different chords to Mike to give a richer mix of notes being played). Also if you are playing against other instruments - piano, woodwind, brass - you can change to their key easily while keeping your familiar chords.

FIG 3 *'E' plus 3 frets gives 'G'*

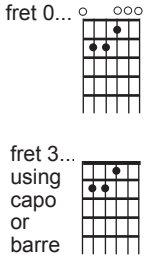
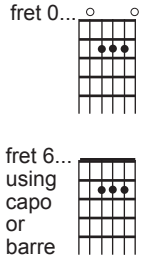
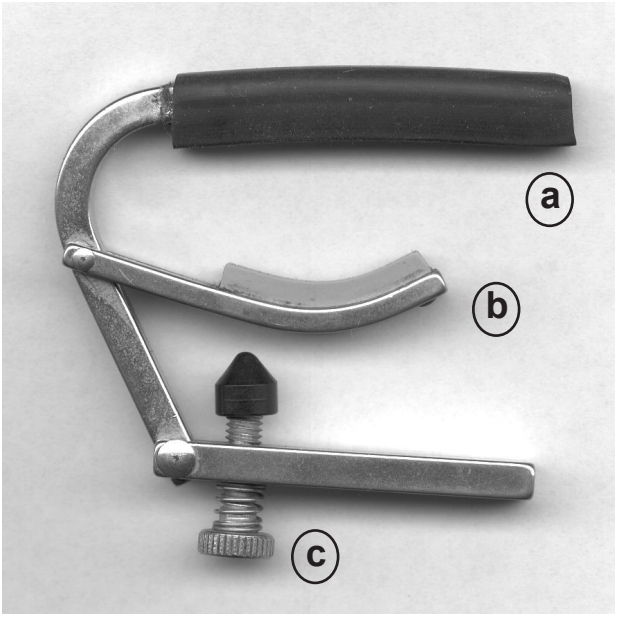


FIG 4 *'A' plus 6 frets gives 'Eb'*



The capo that both Mike and I currently use (FIG 5) is a brilliantly simple and well engineered German marvel from Shubb. Made from stainless steel, it is small and light and beats anything I've ever used before and was particularly suitable on Mike's Maton which would go out of tune whenever he used his previous metal clamping capo. The Shubb has a hard rubber pad (a) for the strings (a 12-string version has a slightly longer bar), and a clamping pad (b) for the underside of the neck. The finesse lies with the infinitely variable pressure controlled by a knurled finger-adjustable knob (c) which works against the curve of the bar (b). The knob allows you to select a pressure which is just enough to hold the strings firmly without buzzing without pressing the life out of them so they go out of tune - and this threshold pressure will vary according to position along the neck. The capo closes in a single motion which does not require any hand strength, and unclamps just as easily. I thoroughly recommend it.

FIG 5. *The SHUBB capo*



It has struck me that great players like Tommy Emmanuel, Bruce Matthiske and others seem to have extra long slim fingers. The benefit they get is a much larger spread to reach higher frets and also it gives a higher arch so that fingers reaching across the neck to play bass strings are less likely to touch and deaden the other strings. Yes, I *am* jealous. A capo helps to limit the disadvantage that we ordinary mortals suffer.

Further examples are given below to show how transposing helped with songs on our album.

SAME KEY - DIFFERENT CHORDS: AN EXAMPLE

Gonna Get You is played in the key of A. Because we both wanted to contribute a different ragtime/blues guitar flavour, I knew I would have to bring in a different set of chord shapes (which emphasise different pull-offs and hammer-ons). Using the chart given in FIG 6, I scanned each chord in the song to produce an equivalent set that would allow me to provide fair bit of relatively easy finger picking. Any alternative set giving large numbers of sharps and flats is immediately tossed out. Obvious contenders would be a set of C, F, G ("folk") or E A B ("blues"). The devil is in the detail.

To go from A to C takes 3 half steps up; A to G is 2 steps down (shortest route always best); and from A to E takes 5 steps down . So, comparing the chord sets I extracted from FIG 6:

Now	3-up	2-dn	5-dn
A	C	G	E
D	F	C	D
E	G	D	B
F	Ab	Eb	C
G	Bb	F	D
C	Eb	Bb	G
B	D	A	F#

All three sets contain common "easy" chords, and it depends on your favourite chords you like to hear and play, but the third alternative suits me the best - and contains only one "difficult" chord (F#), but this is more than offset by all the things I like doing with the others.

Because this desired set of chords is five steps DOWN, I have to use a capo to raise the nut 5 FRETS to get back to the same point in order to remain in the same key as Mike. My "E" with capo on 5 is actually the same as the A-shape chord in that position (see FIG 6), and the same holds true for all the others.

CHANGE OF KEY TO SUIT THE VOICE: AN EXAMPLE

When we wrote *Listen* we started off with normal Em, G, D etc (no capo). As we developed the song, it turned out that the lowest notes were going to test Mike's voice. Different chords had a different resonance, but it was mainly the style of playing Em (and the slide guitar, and open string harmonics) that really made us want to keep those specific chords. So we raised the pitch of the whole song by three semitones (half-notes or steps) simply by putting a capo on Fret 3 and still playing Em. Mike could have gone higher, but I had already hit my limit on the high notes of the chorus, so this was the best compromise.

The Em shape on fret 3 makes it the equivalent of Gm so, when it came to producing the piano score, the piano key is Gm. The guitarist and the keyboard player can still play together.

EASY LOOK-UP CHART - see FIG 6

Stick with it! It looks complicated but once you've done it a couple of times, it's a breeze. To stop your head exploding while trying to follow things on the chart, block off columns not being checked. Or photocopy the page, cut the columns into strips so they can each be placed right next to the "now" column. Once you are relatively familiar with the concept, you can just compare the "now" column with any other just by running two fingers down the columns to see if there are "problem" chords which would mean searching for another set.

It makes no difference if you go "up" into the plus columns, or "down" into the minus colums, as all notes repeat themselves after 12 halfnotes/frets.

You will also find that having transposed a few songs you will be able to do many changes automatically in your head ... certain chord groups - and there are only about 2 or 3 common groupings which use "b" terminology - tend to always fit the one or two chord groups that you like to use.

FIG 6. TRANSPOSING CHORDS – LOOKUP CHART

-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	NOW	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	+7
F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G
G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab
G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A
A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb
A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B
B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C
C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db
C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D
D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb
D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E
E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F
F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb
F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G
G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab
G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A
A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb
A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B
B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C
C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db
C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D
D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb
D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E
E	F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A	A# / Bb	B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F
F	F# / Gb	G	G# / Ab	A		B	C	C# / Db	D	D# / Eb	E	F	F# / Gb