

Flatpicking Guitar Magazine

Free E-mail Newsletter

Guitar Paradigms

by Mickey Abraham

Hello and welcome once again to *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine's* free lesson portion of our monthly newsletter. This month I have decided to go in a different direction. Instead of presenting a tune I thought I'd share with you some insight on the famous I IV V chord progression. As many of you know, the I IV V chord progression can be considered to be the back bone of all forms of popular music from bluegrass to classical and everything in between.

The concept of chord paradigms is deep and worth exploring. For this lesson I have decided to use the chords G, C, and D (the I IV V in G major) as a starting point. I'm pretty sure most reading this article know how to play your typical G, C, and D chords. The dedicated musician would take this lesson further by exploring these paradigms in other keys as well as in minor keys.

Paradigms will introduce your ears, fingers, and brain to new ways to play common chords. If you are an experience picker who knows most of these shapes, you may still find the concept of chord paradigms fascinating. You may also find it worthy of your time to explore the paradigms to other famous chord progressions such as the I vi ii V.

So, what is a paradigm? As it turns out, there are only so many ways to connect chords I, IV, and V in ways that make musical sense. By musical sense I am referring to the natural motion (voice leading) of one chord to the next. The most natural motion is usually achieved by connecting chords by one and two fret intervals - or even by no frets changing at all. This makes the change sound smooth as opposed to jumping around the neck in a way that makes the changes sound disjointed.

In the world of bluegrass and old-time fiddling folks use these ideas all the time just by using their ears. Most fiddle tune melodies connect chord tones in this way and most experienced back-up players employ tasty chords that stay in roughly the same location on the neck. Let us get down to it. I encourage you to click on the included lesson mp3 to hear these guitar paradigms in action and work carefully through the chord diagrams below.

G major scale with each scale degree named and numbered:

G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Paradigm set 1:

Chord progression G C G (I IV I)

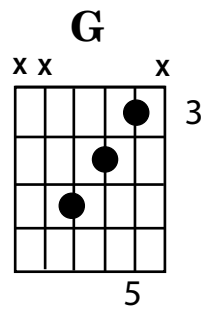
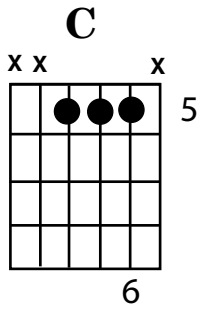
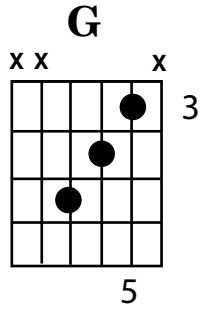
Scale melody notes:

- 1) 5 6 5
- 2) 5 4 3
- 3) 3 4 3
- 4) 1 1 1

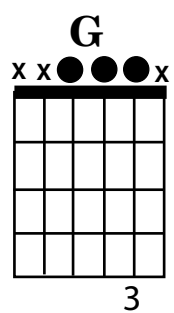
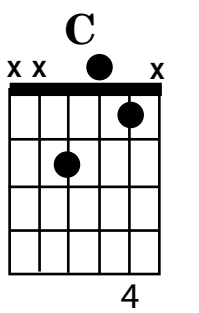
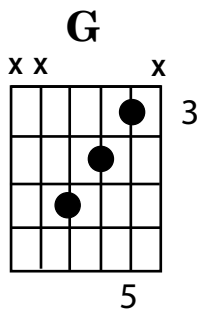
As you play through the chord shapes you will notice that the highest note in each chord lands on the scale degrees listed. These are, in fact, the only "professional" ways to connect a I chord to a IV chord. Crazy, eh?! You can combine these together or play them in reverse.

Paradigm Set 1

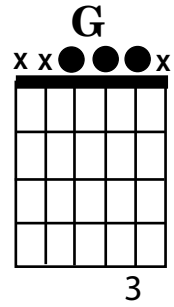
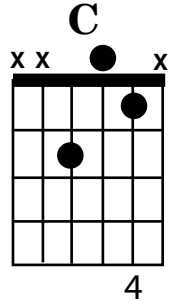
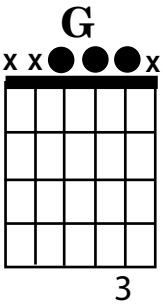
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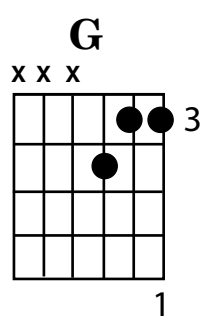
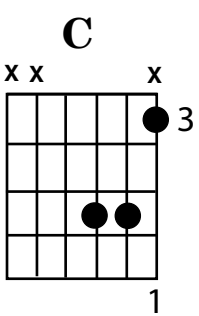
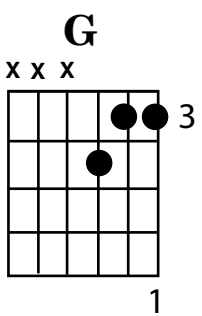
1) 543



1) 343



1) 111



Paradigm Set 2:

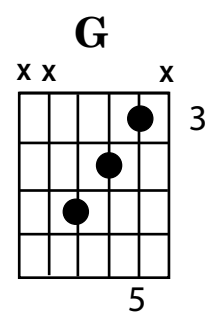
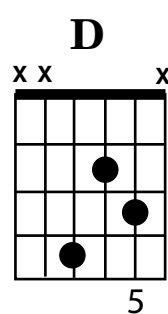
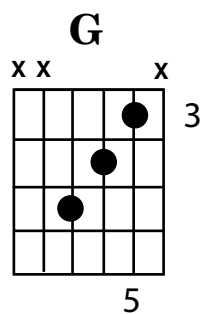
Chord progression G D G (I V I)

Scale melody notes

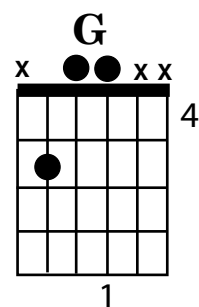
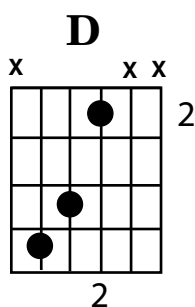
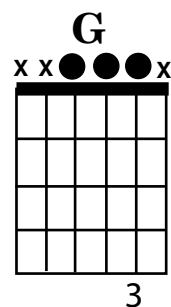
- 1) 5 5 5
- 2) 3 2 1
- 3) 3 2 3
- 4) 1 2 3
- 5) 1 2 1
- 6) 1 7 1

Paradigm Set 2

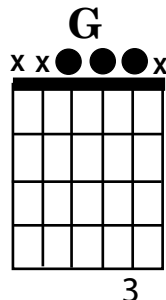
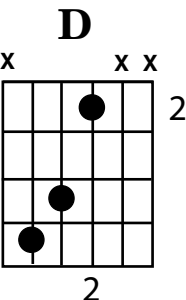
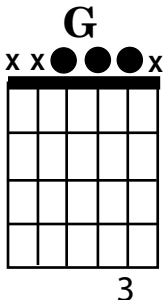
1) 555



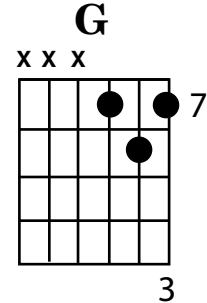
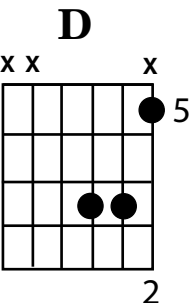
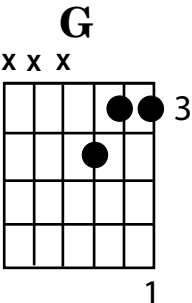
2) 321



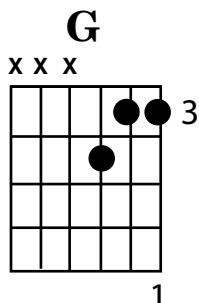
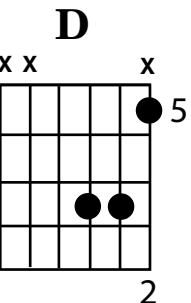
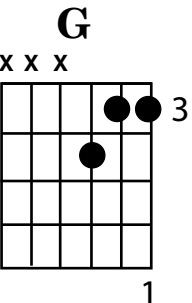
3) 323



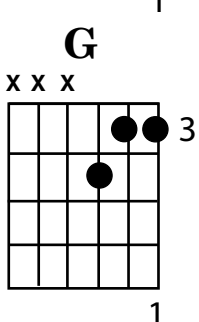
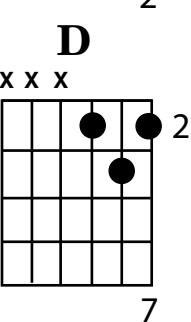
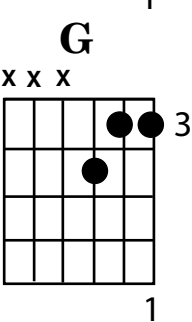
4) 123



5) 121



6) 171



Paradigm Set 3:

Chord progression G C D G (I IV V I)

Scale melody notes

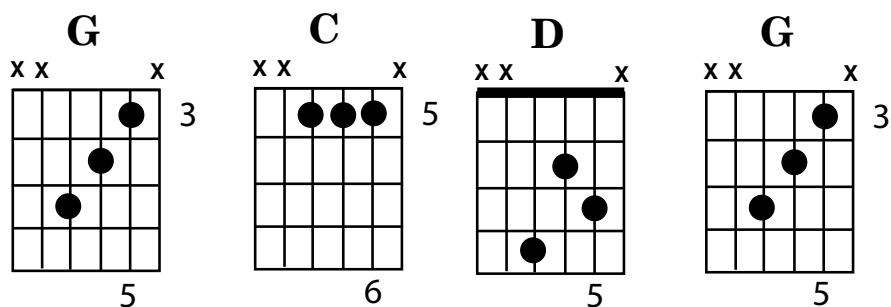
1. 5 6 5 5
2. 5 4 2 3
3. 5 4 2 1
4. 3 4 2 3
5. 3 4 2 1 (my personal favorite)
6. 1 1 7 1

Again, we are concerned with the highest note in each chord voicing. When you practice these paradigms I encourage you to play the shapes both as chords (all the notes at once) and as arpeggios (one note at a time). This way your ear will hear the top note by itself. Got it?!

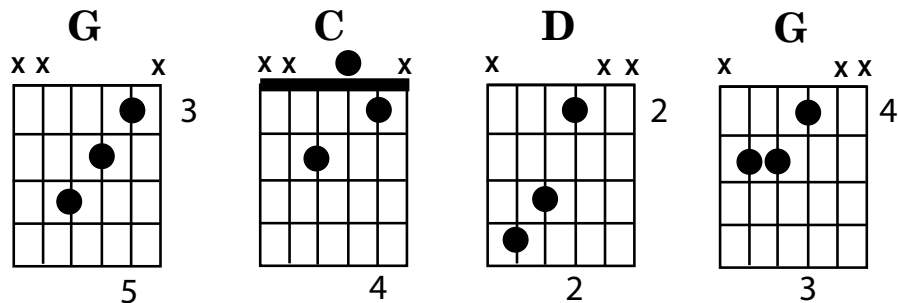
If you don't get this right away, not to worry. You can still enjoy using these shapes in place of your normal G, C, and D. I guarantee that learning these paradigms will improve the way you listen and play. As always, if you have any questions or comments on this e-lesson just drop me a line at michabraham@comcast.net. I'm looking forward to hearing what you guys have to say about chord paradigms.

Paradigm Set 3

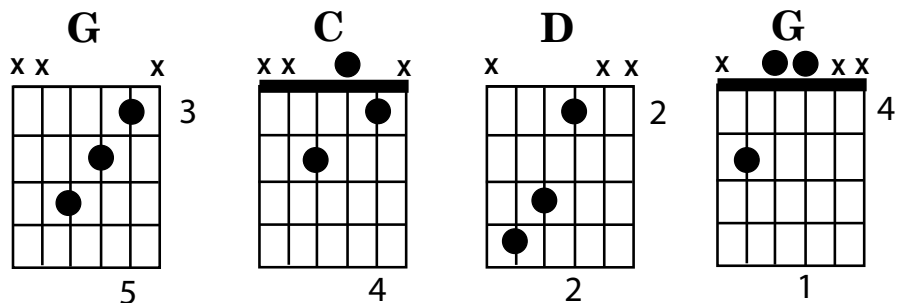
1) 5655



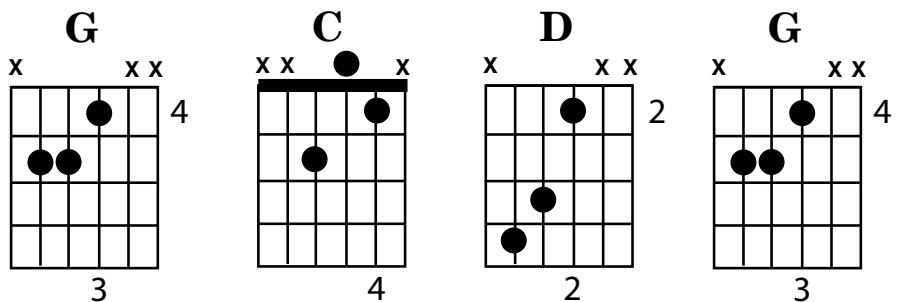
2) 5423



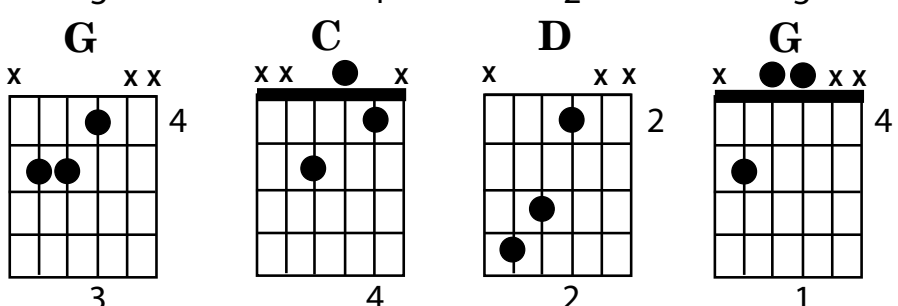
3) 5421



4) 3423



5) 3421



6) 1171

