



# Creating Ease at the Piano

## *What is the easiest way to learn piano chords?*

article by Michael Smolens ©2022

Triads are the simplest and most basic part of our harmonic language. The easiest way to memorize the triads is to first learn to recognize how they are built, not only from an interval standpoint but from a *physical* standpoint. You'll want to learn how the shape of a triad reinforces its component parts. This will help you to recognize any triad quickly.

The keyboard looks very symmetrical at first glance, but it's really not. So if you want to learn how to memorize chords it's important to use **similar shapes**; i.e. chords that have the identical distance (interval) from the top and bottom note, starting with just white notes on the tops and bottoms. After all, the brain is always seeking to organize or group whatever new things it encounters. If you jump ahead to try inversions (different interval combinations of a given chord), or try to play triads by going up or down by half-steps, you're not going to allow your body and brain to wire things together. It's a recipe for confusion and overwhelm, which is why so many students quit after their first three or four months of lessons.

Here's a system that organizes the simplest chords for the right hand from easy to difficult (major and minor triads in root position):

Group 1 — C / G / D / A / E (white notes on bottom & top)

Group 2 — B (white note on bottom & black note on top)

Group 3 — Eb / Ab / Db / Gb (black notes on bottom & top)

Group 4 — Bb / F (black note on bottom & white note on top / white notes on bottom & top)

You'll notice how these triads increase in difficulty as soon as you try them. You might ask, "Why is F labeled the hardest triad, isn't it also white notes on the bottom and top (like Group 1)?" The easiest way to play triads is to place all of your fingers onto the first five notes of their respective scale — major scales for major triads, and minor scales for minor triads. So as soon as you try playing an F major triad in the right hand with all white notes except your *4th finger*, you'll immediately see the challenge. It's not easy at all!

If you use this system of triads that escalate in difficulty, you'll not only memorize your triads faster, you'll also learn how to play with less tension by keeping your hands balanced.