
The Capo

The “Capo” is a small device for the guitar that allows guitarists to quickly transpose from any key to any key. This is especially handy when keys are difficult (eg Bb, Eb) or when you desire to add a different timbre (tone) to the sound of the guitar.

The fretboard of the guitar is arranged chromatically in half-steps or semi-tones. If you play a C on the guitar and finger up one fret on the same string, you will move up to C#.

How is this applied to the capo?

Let’s assume that you are familiar with the three main chords in the key of D. These chords are D, G and A. If you would like to transpose these same chord shapes to the key of E, you would place the capo up two frets. This would raise the sound of the strings by 2 half steps. The key of E is 2 half steps above the key of D. Now, with the capo on the strings on the second fret, when you place your fingers in the chord “shapes” of D, they sound two half steps higher. The chord of D becomes E. The chord of G becomes A. The chord of A becomes B.

If you would like to play in the key of F but play the chord shapes for D, just place the capo one half step (or one fret) higher. Now, when you play the chord shapes for D, G, and A, they become F, Bb and C.

Using a capo is not just for beginners. It gives an entirely new palette of sounds to the guitar. If you raise the capo quite high on the neck you can almost get a mandolin-type sound. This is very effective where you have more than one guitar in a group and you wish to vary the sounds of the two instruments.

Capo Transposing Chart

Select the key (chord shapes) that you wish to use. Now, place the capo at the fret indicated to move that chord shape into the key you wish to play in.

With Capo placed at the following fret, it raises the key to:							
Chords/keys without capo	1 st fret	2 nd fret	3 rd fret	4 th fret	5 th fret	6 th fret	7 th fret
C chord	Db or C#	D	Eb or D#	E	F	Gb or F#	G
D chord	Eb or D#	E	F	Gb or F#	G	Ab or G#	A
E chord	F	Gb or F#	G	Ab or G#	A	Bb or A#	B
F chord	Gb or F#	G	Ab or G#	A	Bb or A#	B	C
G chord	Ab or G#	A	Bb or A#	B	C	Db or C#	D
A chord	Bb or A#	B	C	Db or C#	D	Eb or D#	E

One other use for the capo is to reverse it on the neck so that you have an open low E string. If you place the capo on the second fret (only on the top five strings), and play in the chords of the key of D you have a drop E tuning.

Other more advanced uses are to use two capos on one guitar neck. Place one on the first fret. Now place a second, reversed capo on the top five strings as in the drop E form mentioned before. Now, play in the key of D and you have a drop F tuning.

The capo is a wonderful tool for the guitarist. Use it in creative ways to open up new worlds of sound.

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