



Listening Skills

Common Chord Progressions





Introduction

- Learning the ability to hear what chords are in a chord progression seems daunting
- As with anything in music, it takes practise
- A good way to practise is to take common chord progressions and change something about them
- When you can hear where it's different, you can start to hear when it isn't
- You also get to write some new music whilst you're practising



Roman Numerals

- When we're talking about chord progressions in music, we often use Roman numerals to represent them, as you can apply it to any starting note, or 'Key'
- Uppercase numerals are major chords (I II III IV V etc.)
- Lowercase numerals are minor chords (i ii iii iv v etc.)



Common Chords in C Major

- Once you've picked your root note, the chords in a key follow this pattern:
 - I, ii, iii, IV, V, vi
 - You can use chords outside of these, but these are the most common ones
- We tend to use the key of C major, as we don't have to consider sharps and flats as much
- The above chords in C major are
 - C, Dm, Em, F, G, Am



Common Progression - I V vi IV

- The chord progression I V vi IV can be found in hundreds of songs
- In the key of C major: C G Am F
- Play it round and listen to the interaction between the chords
 - Which sound 'finished'?
 - Which pull back to another chord?



Activity 1

- Take the chord progression C G Am F
 - Change one of the major chords to a minor chord, or the minor to a major. Listen to how this alters the feel of the whole progression
 - Change one of the chords to another chord from the key - C, Dm, Em, F, G or Am - again listening to how it changes the whole progression
 - Change one chord to anything you like
- Make a final version of your progression, that has one, two or all three of these changes



Activity 1 - Example

- C G Am F
 - Change one to major or one to minor
 - Cm G Am F
 - Change one to another chord from the key
 - C Em Am F
 - Change one to anything you like
 - C G Ab F
 - Final version - including some of the above
 - Cm Em Ab F



Common Progression - 12 Bar Blues

- An extremely common chord progression, especially in blues, jazz and rock - Play it a few times listening to the chord interactions

12 Bar Blues structure

I	I	I	I	
IV	IV	I	I	
V	IV	I	V	

12 Bar Blues in C

C	C	C	C	
F	F	C	C	
G	F	C	G	



Activity 2

- Change one chord in the 1st line to F or G
 - Play it all the way through listening to how it's changed
- Change a chord in the 2nd line to another chord from the key - C
Dm Em F G Am
 - Again, play all the way through
- Change a chord in the 3rd line to anything you like
- Do a last play through, keeping all the changes you liked and listening to how the chords interact now



Activity 2 - Example

- Change one 1st line chord to F or G
- Change one 2nd line chord to C, Dm, Em, F, G or Am
- Change one 3rd line chord to anything

Example				
C	C	G	C	
F	F	Am	C	
E	F	C	G	



Musical Rules

- Although we talk a lot about musical rules, they are there to be experimented with - develop your style
- The most important thing is to listen, and to practise listening and reflecting on what you hear
- This goes for when you are playing music too



Thank
You