Three Chord Patterns Every Player Can Learn

A short, practical guide from Kenzo Productions

These are three simple patterns that let you find useful chords quickly, without needing to read music or memorize a big theory chart. Each one works the same way in every key. Once a pattern clicks, you can use it anywhere on the keyboard.

Pattern 1: Finding a Secondary Dominant

A secondary dominant is a chord that temporarily makes another chord feel like "home," even if it isn't the actual key you're in. It creates a small pull toward a chord, making the move to it feel more exciting.

The pattern:

Find the chord you want to move toward. Find its 5th note. Build a major chord (or dominant 7 chord for a stronger pull) on that note.

Example:

> Say you want to move toward D minor.
>
> Step 1: D minor is the target chord.
>
> Step 2: Find the 5th note of D, which is A.
>
> Step 3: Build a major or dominant 7 chord on A: A, C sharp, E, G.
>
> Play A major or A dominant 7, then move to D minor. You'll hear it pull toward D minor and settle there.
>
> Why it works: a dominant chord contains a tritone, which is a tense interval that wants to resolve. Building that tension chord on the 5th of your target note aims that tension straight at the target, so the ear expects and enjoys the resolution.

Pattern 2: Finding the Borrowed Minor 4

This pattern lets you borrow a chord from the parallel minor key while playing in major. It's a quick way to add an emotional, slightly darker color to a major key progression.

The pattern:

Find the 3rd note of your major scale. Raise it up one semitone. Build a minor chord starting on that note.

Example:

Say you're playing in C major.

Step 1: The 3rd note of C major is E.

Step 2: Raise E up one semitone to F.

Step 3: Build a minor chord on F: F, A flat, C.

Play F minor in a C major progression, for example C major, F minor, C major. That F minor is borrowed from C minor, even though you're in C major the whole time.

Why it works: F minor is the 4th chord of C minor, the parallel minor key. Borrowing it into a major progression keeps the same root movement your ear expects, but swaps in the darker minor color for a moment before returning to the major sound.

Pattern 3: Getting a Minor 7 Sound From a Major Chord

This pattern is a shortcut for finding a minor 7 chord by thinking about it as a major chord stacked on top of a minor chord. It's a useful way to hear how the two chord types connect.

The pattern:

Start with any minor chord. Find its minor 3rd, the middle note of that chord. Build a major triad starting on that note. Play it on top of, or instead of, the original minor chord.

Example:

Start with C minor: C, E flat, G.

Step 1: The minor 3rd of C minor is E flat.

Step 2: Build a major triad starting on E flat: E flat, G, B flat.

Combine both triads together and you get C, E flat, G, B flat, which is C minor 7.

Why it works: the major triad built on the minor 3rd always lands on the flat 7 of the original chord, which is exactly the note that turns a plain minor triad into a minor 7 chord. This works the same way for any minor chord in any key.

Using These Patterns

None of these need music notation. They all work directly from note names and simple counting in semitones, so you can apply them on any keyboard, in any key, by ear. Try picking a random starting note and running each pattern from there until it feels automatic.