How to write chords
(if you don't know anything about music theory)

When you first start making music, many people find it easiest to get their heads around programming drums first. There's no key you have to worry about, just rhythm. Writing chords, bass lines or melodies is a different monster altogether and can be really frustrating if you don't understand music theory or read music. This booklet is designed to take you through different keys, chords and scales so that you can build tracks that make sense musically, without having to spend years studying theory.

Basic notes

Music is made up of notes and each of these notes has a letter name to go with it. The letter names start on **A** and go up through the alphabet till you get to **G**, the next note after that is another **A**. On a keyboard it looks like this:


The notes in between the white notes are either called sharps or flats. The black note between **C** and **D** can be called one of two names, either **C sharp** (written as **C#**) or **D flat** (written as **Db**). I know this is confusing, but for the time being all you need to know is that musical parts to your tunes will be using these notes.

These notes can be used together in groups of three to make chords. There are two main types of chords, major and minor. A major chord sounds light and looks like this (if you turn your head, you can see how it relates to a keyboard:
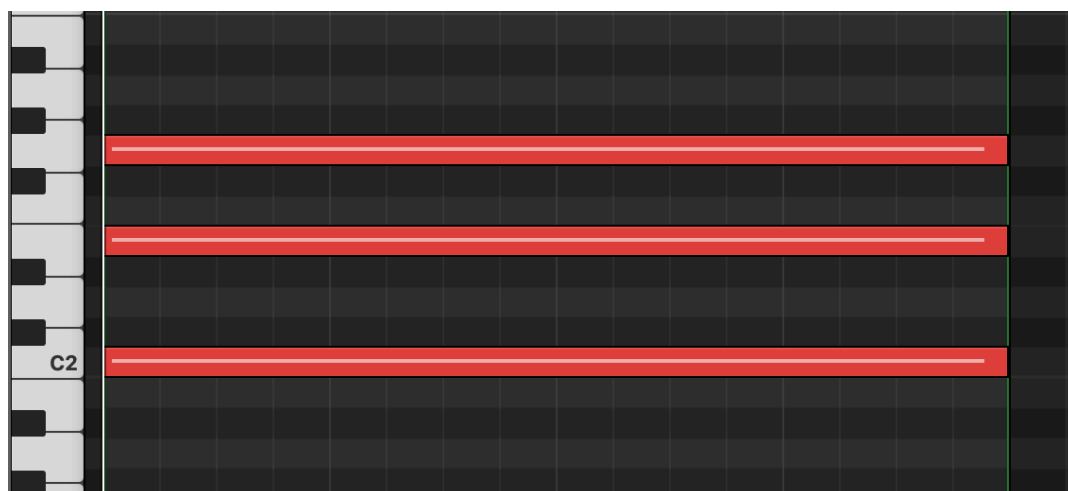
A minor chord sounds a bit darker and looks like this:
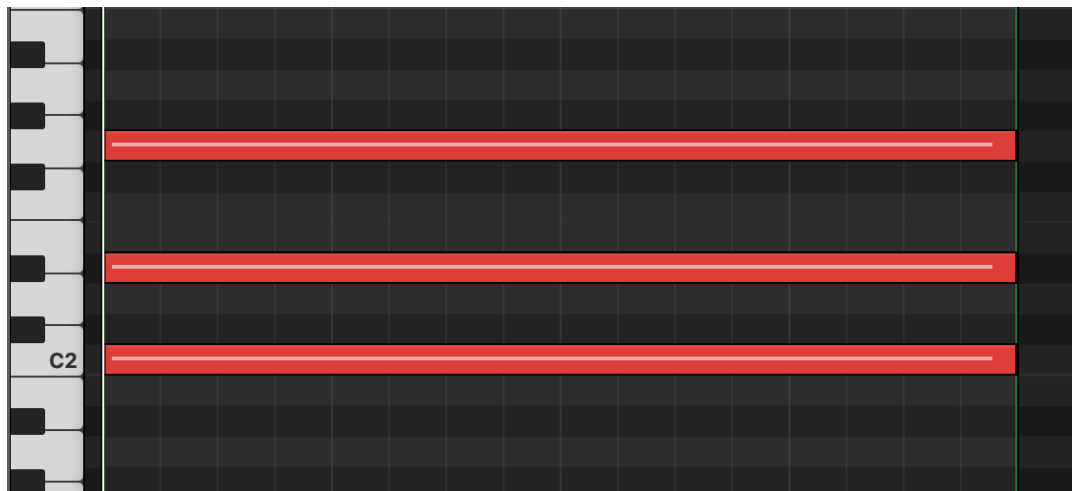
Notice that the only difference between a major or minor chord is the middle note (on the minor chord it's one small step lower).

Keys

When we write a piece of music, we need to make sure that the tune is written in a key. A key in music tells us what notes we can use and what chords sound good together. If we were in a major key such as **C**, which uses only the white notes, and we were to write out a scale of **C** (this is just writing out the notes from **C** to **C**) it would look like this:

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

You could also make chords on each note of the scale using any of the white notes. The chords that sound really good in **C major** are the ones with their bottom note on **C**, **D**, **E**, **F**, **G** and **A**. As long as you don't use any of the black notes or the chord that starts on **B**, your chord progression will sound pretty good. These are the notes we are allowed to use in key of **C major** (it's basically all the white notes):
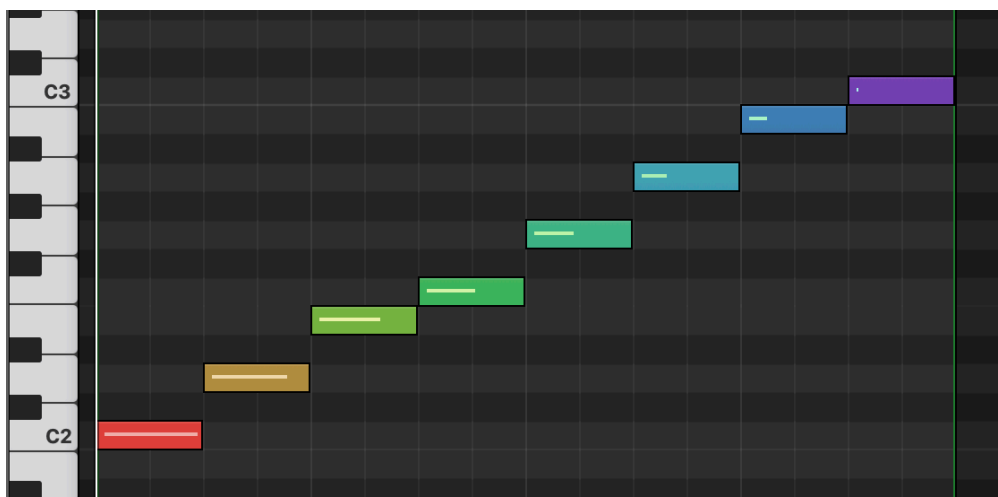
Making chords a bit more interesting

These chords sound really good to start with, but you may notice that they sound a little bland if you just stick with the three notes played altogether. If a chord contains the notes **C**, **E** and **G**, you will have written a chord of **C major**. A good rule to keep in mind is that you can write these notes in *any order* and it will still be a chord of **C major**. You can also have more than one note of **C**, **E** or **G** in your chord and it will still be a chord of **C major**, as long as you don't put in any other notes.

This chord is still a chord of **C major** (it only contains **C**, **E** and **G**, even though some of them are rearranged of doubled):
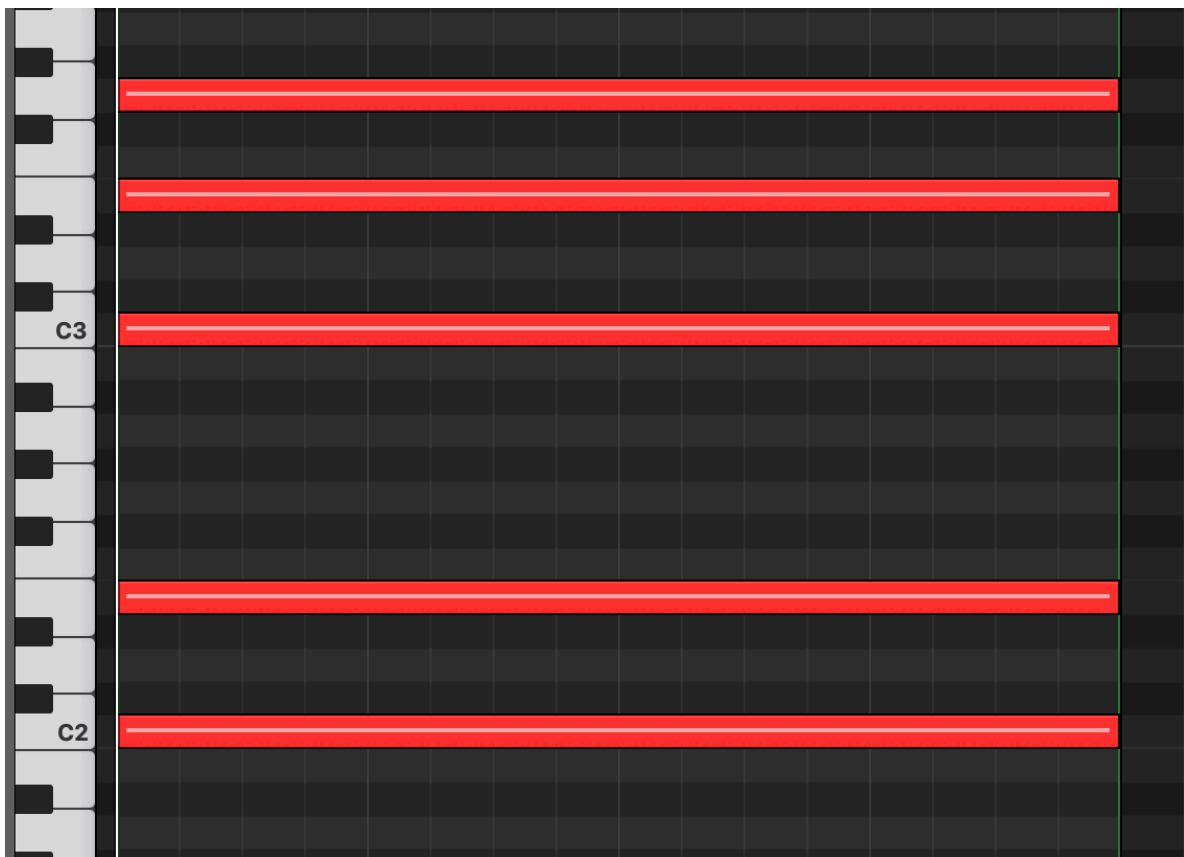
Extended chords

You can also add extra notes to your chords to make them sound interesting and a bit spicy. Normally our notes are made up of the bottom note (or root note as it's known), the note three above that (known as a 3rd), and the note five above that (known as a 5th). You can add the 7th and 9th as the next two notes, called extensions.

You don't need to know the theory behind this but the two notes that your can use to make your **C major** chord sound more interesting are either **B** and/or **D**. If you want to experiment, you could try to program in a **C major** chord and then add a **B** or a **D** to it and see how it sounds. You can use one of the extra notes, both of them, or just have your chord with the basic **C, E** and **G**, it's up to you.
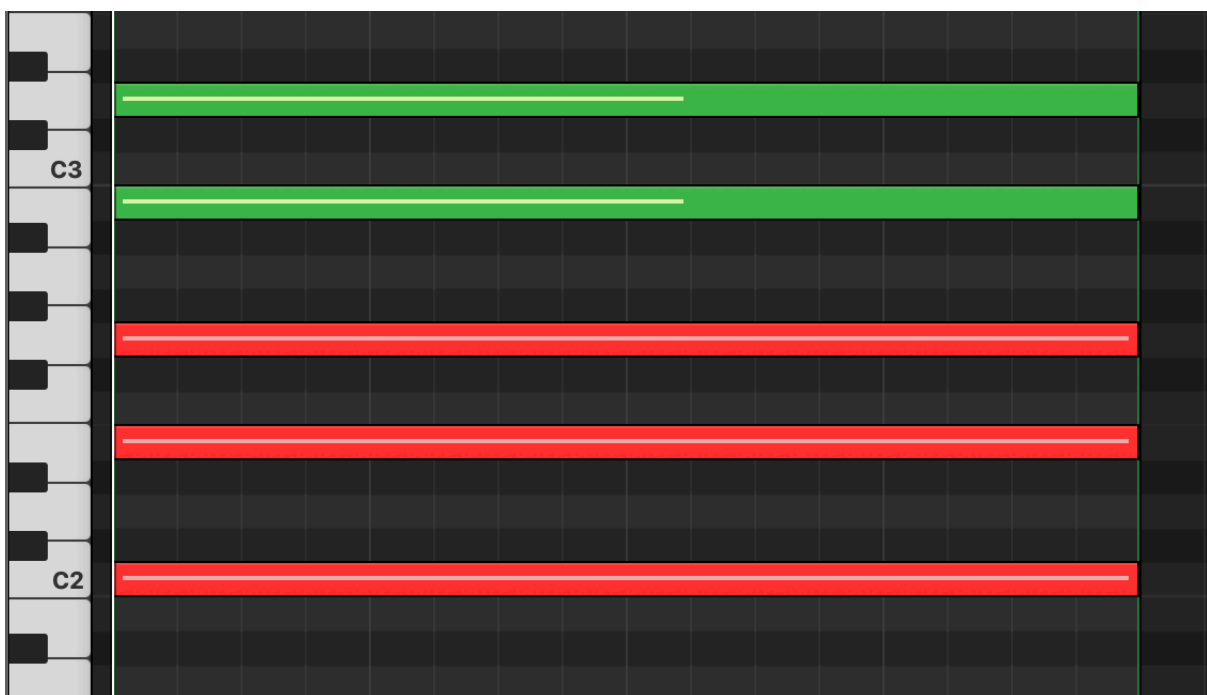
Now you have a little knowledge about how chords are put together, you should use the **Writing A Chord Sequence Walkthrough** handout to try and write yourself a chord sequence.