

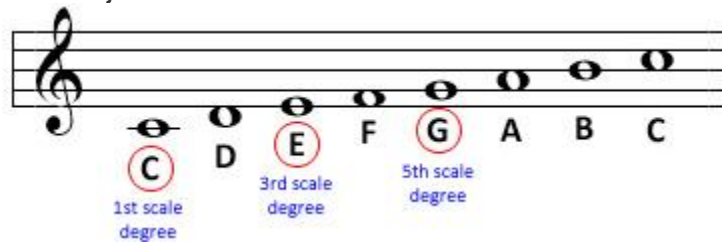
Major, Minor, Diminished & Augmented Chords:

A Simple Explanation

When we describe a chord by major, minor, diminished, or augmented we're referring to the **quality** of the chord. In their simplest form, each of these chords are *three note chords* known as **triads**. The quality of these chords or triads is determined by the **intervals**, or space, between each note of the triad.

Major Triads

If we recall what we learned from our [explanation on scales](#), we can construct a major triad on the 1st, 3rd, and 5th scale degree of a major scale.



And with the chord stacked up:



Another way to think about a major triad is in terms of half steps and whole steps (see my [explanation on half steps and whole steps](#)). Between the 1st and the 3rd scale degree there are two whole steps (a major 3rd interval). Between the 3rd and 5th scale degree there is a half step and a whole step (a minor 3rd interval).

Minor Triads

If we know the major form of a chord, it's very easy to make it into a minor chord. All we have to do is lower the 3rd degree of the chord a *half step*. The 1st and 5th stay the same.



This gives us a whole step and a half step between the 1st and 3rd degree (a minor 3rd interval), and two whole steps between the 3rd and 5th degree (a major 3rd interval).

Diminished Triads

Then, if we know a minor triad, we can easily make it diminished by lowering the 5th scale degree a half step. This means from a major triad, we've lower the 3rd and 5th scale degree both a half step.



With a diminished triad, we've essentially stacked two minor 3rd intervals on top of each other, because there is a whole step and a half step between the 1st and 3rd degree (a minor 3rd interval), and then, there is a whole step and half step between the 3rd and 5th degree (another minor 3rd interval).

Augmented Triads

With augmented chords, we need to go back to our major chord. An augmented chord is a major chord with the 5th degree raised a half step.



This means we have two whole steps between the 1st and 3rd degree (a major 3rd interval) and two whole steps between the 3rd and 5th degree (a major 3rd interval).