

# How To Accompany Another Acoustic Guitarist

## **First off... let's define what we mean by accompanying another guitarist...**

In most traditional acoustic guitar duos one person is singing and playing guitar. This singing guitarist is often strumming or playing chord arpeggios (picking chords) and they could use additional techniques like bass note runs, hammer ons, flick offs and percussive playing. In a nutshell the first player is playing rhythm guitar.

The second player is often not playing as much guitar and they are positioning themselves in the performance to serve the song and the first guitarist. The second player often plays lead guitar, arpeggios and harmonises with the first players chords to create musical layers within the song.

## **How To Get Started?**

First and foremost it's essential that the singing guitarist (or first guitarist if you will) plays their song while the other player listens. In time you will be able to accompany someone right away, but for now it's vital that you listen to their song and get a feel for the rhythm, tempo and start to identify the chords that are being used.

## **Listening...**

It's worth reiterating the above point... listening is essential. As an accompanying guitarist your job is to support the song and think about what you can add to the first guitarists performance to give the song more meaning, emotion and musicality. If you're not listening to the song it's difficult to accompany the performance. Instead you might do too little or worse still start competing with the first guitarist. While competition in life is natural for some people, within this type of musical context it's important that both players are a sum bigger than their parts.

## **The Easy Part (Or it least it should be...)**

Once the first guitarist has played their song it's time to pick up the chords together. Before you do this check if the first guitar has a capo or different tuning. Now is the time to get everyone on the same page.

Go through the song together and it's important that the first guitarist shows the second guitarist all the chords that are used and when the changes happen. Break the song down into parts (Verse, Chorus, Bridge etc) and play parts of the song to aid the learning process.

## **How To Begin Accompanying?**

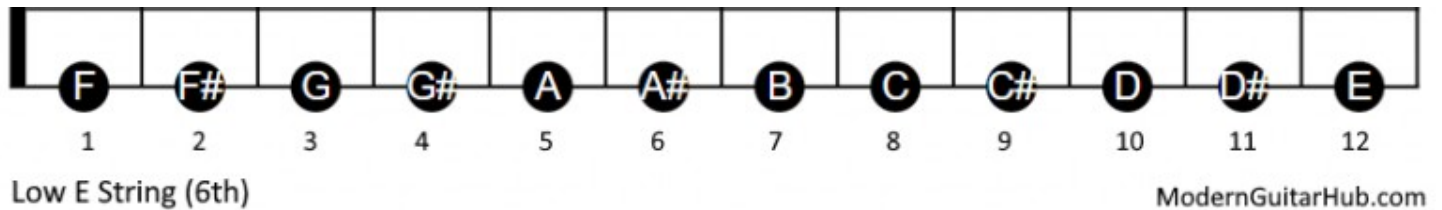
Once the song has been listened to and the chords learnt we can begin to start accompanying. For the purpose of our workshop today we're going to look at accompanying using triads. But like I explained there are other techniques like lead guitar (based on scales and chord arpeggios) and harmonising that can be used.

## The Beauty Of Triads

Triads are the 3 notes that make up major and minor chords. You've learnt most major and minor chords as a beginner. These triads can be found in other areas of guitar study like barre chords and the CAGED system.

For today we'll be learning about the E shape and A shape barre chord triad system found on the bottom thinnest strings.

For you to understand this you need to be reasonably quick at identifying the notes on the E string.

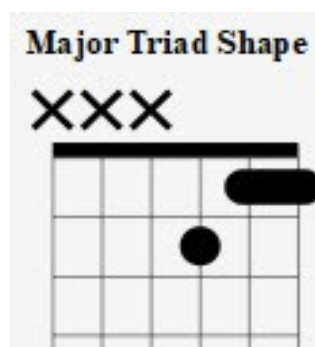


## The Only 2 Shapes You Need...

Once you know the names on the E string these will then directly correspond to the chords the first player is playing. For example, if they are playing a C chord you know that C is on Fret 8! For now it doesn't matter if it's major or minor.

## Major + Minor Triad Shapes

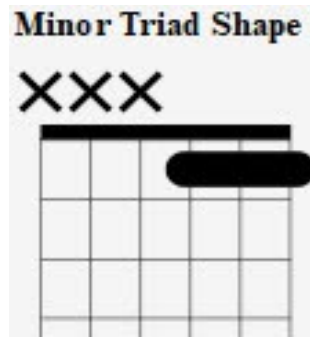
The major shape is based on the bottom 3 strings that are played in an E Shape Barre Chord. Place your index finger on the bottom 2 strings (mini barre chord) and your middle or ring finger on the G string at the next fret over.



Remember that these shapes are movable!

That means that where you place these shapes on the neck will determine their root note. So if you put the shape above on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret it would make a G major triad.

Here is the minor shape:

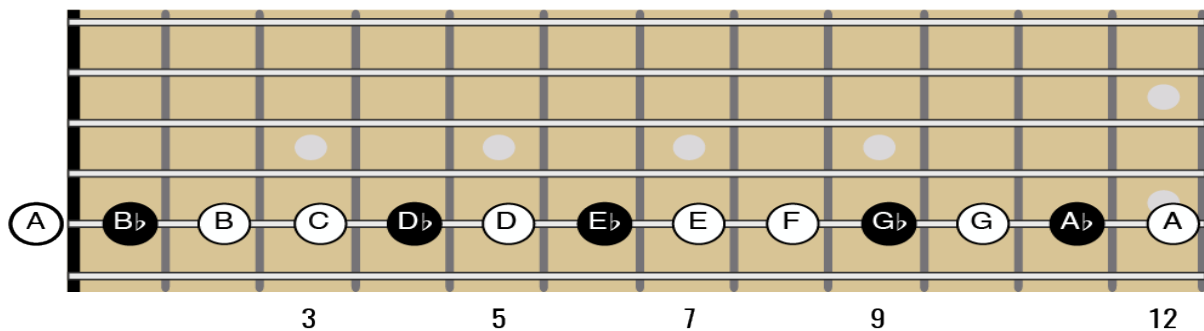


The minor shape is basically the bottom 3 thinnest strings played as another mini barre chord. It's just a one note change from the major shape but it makes all the difference in terms of sound.

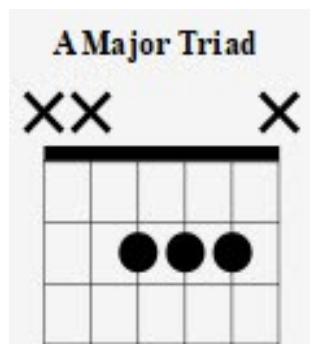
**Ok... I lied... there are a couple of other triad shapes that are useful...**

Once you have familiarised yourself with the E Shape Barre Chord major and minor triads look into the A Shapes...

For this knowledge to be effective it's important you know the notes on the A string:



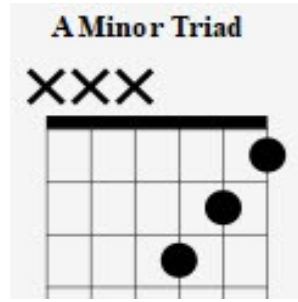
Here is the A major shape triad:



It's important with all of these triad shapes to only play the strings that you are holding down. The open strings are NOT part of the triad.

If you played the shape above on the 5<sup>th</sup> fret you would make a C major triad.

Finally here's the A minor triad:



You might be thinking “Why doesn't this look like an A minor open chord?” Well, if you included the third fret on the d string to make a 4 finger chord then you would have the A minor shape.

### **Rhythms To Accompany...**

You might be thinking “Right Drue I understand the shapes and the positions, but what rhythms should I use to accompany the first guitarist?”

Start off by strumming the triads on the first beat of the bar (or whenever the first guitarist changes to the chord). From there you could pick the triads, use downbeat 8<sup>th</sup> strums or short staccato strums. But remember... do what's right for the song and don't overplay or distract from the first guitarists performance.

### **Final Thoughts...**

If you're ever in a position where you'd like to play with another guitarists please use this triad system. It's remarkably effective and easy to accompany those common open chords with this method.

It adds more variety and texture than just playing along with the first guitarists open chords.

Obviously a quick understanding of the fretboard notes is essential. You can also apply this system to other chord shapes like D and Dm.