

6th Chords

Just like making a 7th chord by adding the 7th interval to the triads, you achieve a 6th chord the same way.

Most of the time you can take the 5th interval of a chord and raise it to the 6 or b6. Sometimes it may be easier to lower the octave of the root note down to the 6 or b6.

In many cases you can play chords without the 5th interval present because it does not typically define the sound of the chord. Without the 5th interval a Major chord still sounds Major because of the 3rd interval. A Minor chord will still sound Minor because of the b3rd. If you are playing a chord that is supposed to have a b5 then you need to keep that in the chord structure because that b5 is now a defining sound in the chord.

That little tidbit of info was shared because when you deal with chords of 4 or more notes on the guitar, things can become a little tricky. With limited fingers you sometimes need to choose what intervals remain a chord for the sake of convenience in order to achieve the sound you are trying to create.

The following chord formulas are different 6th chords that you may encounter. The ones with roman numerals underneath are found in the Major Scale.

When starting with the Major Triad of 1, 3, 5

1, 3, 5 + 6 = Major 6 (*can just be written as 6*)
I – IV – V

1, 3, 5 + b6 = Major b6

When starting with the Minor Triad of 1, b3, 5

1, b3, 5 + 6 = Minor 6
ii

1, b3, 5 + b6 = Minor b6
iii – vi

When starting with the Diminished Triad of 1, b3, b5

1, b3, b5 + b6 = Minor b6 b5
vii

1, b3, b5 + 6 = Minor 6 b5
(*This will actually produce the same notes as a °7*)

When starting with the Augmented Triad of 1, 3, #5

1, 3, #5 + 6 = Major 6 #5

You can't add a b6 to an Augmented Triad because a #5 and a b6 are the same distance up from the root note.

Here are the 6th chords in order as they appear in the Major Scale:

Major 6 – Minor 6 – Minor b6 – Major 6 – Major 6 – Minor b6 – Minor b6 b5
I ii iii IV V vi vii