

How To Write & Harmonize Original Riffs



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Key: C minor

Tempo: 80 BPM

Chords needed: Cm, Gm, Eb

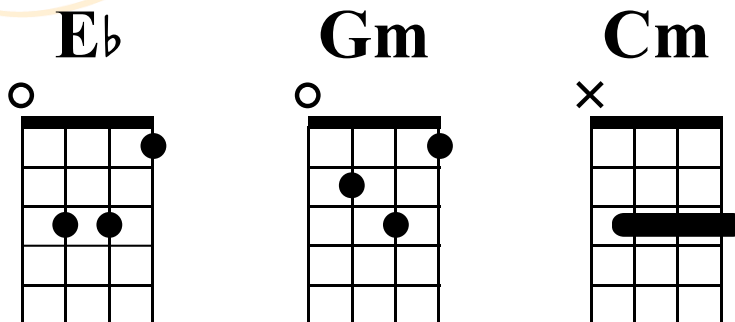
Video Tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFokvj7Abks>

Step 1: Choose a key and look up all the chords in that key. You can do this simply by googling the information. When I google "chords in C minor" I am provided the following chords, with the 7th extensions in parenthesis.

- i - C minor (C minor 7)
- iidim - D diminished (Dm7b5)
- III - Eb (Eb major 7)
- iv - F minor (F minor 7)
- v - G minor (G minor 7)
- VI - Ab (Ab Major 7)
- VII - Bb (Bb7)

These chords all sound good together, experiment with them and create your own progression, I chose Eb, Gm, Cm

Chord Shapes:



After choosing my progression the next thing is to develop a strum pattern

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
Eb | Gm | Cm | Cm |
D D D DUD D D DU | D D D DUD D D DU | D D D DUD D D DU | D D D DUD D D DU |

The next thing to do is examine the notes of the scale and the chords and look for overlapping notes.

Eb - Eb, G, Bb

Gm - G, Bb, D

Cm - C, Eb, G

C minor pentatonic - C, Eb, F, G, Bb

Here is the C minor scale for reference

Musical notation for the C minor scale. The top staff shows the scale in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb) and a common time signature. The notes are C, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, C. The bottom staff shows the fretboard with fingerings: 0, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12.

The minor pentatonic is a great place to start but you aren't limited to the scale, for example you will find that the G minor chord has a D note, which is a note in our minor pentatonic scale, you can use that D note in the riff, it is okay. The notes outside the pentatonic are more dissonant though, so use them sparingly if you choose to use them at all.

Resolution - This is that last note that you play in the idea, the last note is the most important note. You have resolution of phrases and resolution of the riff. The resolution of a phrase will be strongest if finished on a chord tone and the resolution of the riff could be the root note of the scale. Meaning we should resolve the overall riff with a C note, but we have more options when resolving the phrases of the chords. I have chosen Eb, G and C to resolve my phrases with, the root note of each chord, so the first thing we will do is play only that note on the first beat.

Musical notation for chord resolutions. The top staff shows four measures in 4/4 time, each starting with a whole note chord: Eb, Gm, Cm, and C. The bottom staff shows the fretboard fingerings for each chord: Eb (3), Gm (7), Cm (0), and C (0).

Next we will build a riff with 4 phrases, each less than a measure, resolving on these respective notes

Musical notation for a riff with 4 phrases. The top staff shows four phrases in 4/4 time, each starting with a quarter note chord tone: Eb, G, C, and C. The bottom staff shows the fretboard fingerings for each phrase: Eb (3-0-3-5-3), G (7-5-3-5-7), C (7-5-3-7-0), and C (7-5-3-5-0).

Lets examine what happens when we do the same thing but we don't resolve these ideas on the root note, instead we resolve the Eb on the G note, the G on the F (the F comes fro the G minor 7, G-Bb-D-F) and C remains the same

The image shows a musical score for a ukulele riff. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The riff consists of four measures, numbered 17, 18, 19, and 20. The notes in each measure are: Measure 17: G4, A4, Bb4, G4; Measure 18: G4, A4, Bb4, G4; Measure 19: G4, A4, Bb4, G4; Measure 20: G4, A4, Bb4, G4. Below the staff is a fretboard diagram with four strings (T, C, G, B) and four frets. The fret numbers for each string are: Measure 17: 3-0-3-5-7; Measure 18: 7-5-3-7-5; Measure 19: 7-5-3-5-0; Measure 20: 7-5-3-7-0.

Alright, time for you to go out and make your own riff! I wanted you to be able to do this exactly like we are doing but it is much more important that you are able to take these ideas and apply them creatively to create your own unique riffs and ideas.

You can use the free app "acapella" to record yourself playing one ukulele and then record yourself playing over it. This is a video app to so you can share these videos.

I would love to see what you come up with, if you want something more private share your ideas in the facebook group "10 Thumbs Challenges" but I would also love to hear your ideas on instagram. Tag me @TenThumbsPro and I'll share your riff in my story!

