

How to Learn to Play a Bar Chord (Barre Chord) in Under 2 Minutes

By Douglas Niedt

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Guitarists spell it both ways — *bar chord* or *barre chord*, from the French [barré](#). Same technique.

[You are on DouglasNiedt.com](#)

Watch video clip #1. Then, read the instructions below. And yes, I know. The lengths of these videos add up to more than two minutes. But with the information in the videos, you can play or teach someone else to play a full barre chord in under two minutes.

How to Play a Bar Chord in Under 2 Minutes, Clip #1 of 5



This is how to play a barre chord in under two minutes:

Place your 4th finger (little finger) on the 4th string at the 7th fret. Be sure to place the finger right up against the fret, but not on top of the fret.

Place your 3rd finger (ring finger) on the 5th string at the 7th fret. Push, squeeze, shove it as close to the 7th fret as you can without displacing the little finger.

Your left-hand thumb should be opposite the 5th or 6th fret in about the middle of the neck. The tip joint should NOT be bent. The tip joint should be flat or hyper extended. The left side of the thumb will contact the neck.

Place your 2nd finger on the 3rd string at the 6th fret, right behind the fret.

Place the 1st finger across all six strings at the 5th fret. Place it parallel with the fret and behind the fret, not on top of it.

Strum all six strings with the right-hand thumb.

90% of the time the barre chord will come out fairly clearly the first try.

The trick, when first learning to play a barre chord on guitar, is to **always place the barre last**.

SPECIAL TIP ON PLAYING BARRE CHORDS

Use your arm strength. Don't try to play barre chords using hand strength alone. Pinching or squeezing hard between the thumb and barre finger is counterproductive. It results in extreme muscle fatigue and distortion of the hand and finger positions. The barre chord will fail.

Instead, use your arm strength to hold barre chords. The muscles in your arms are far stronger than those in the hand and thumb. Pull the guitar against your chest with both arms to provide the strength to hold the barre chord. If you use your arm strength to maximum advantage, you can actually hold a barre chord without the thumb even on the neck!

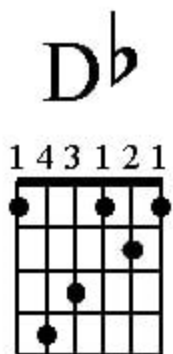
Watch this mesmerizing cinematic masterpiece (video clip #2):

How to Play a Bar Chord in Under 2 Minutes, Clip #2



The thumb is a passive participant. It stabilizes the hand and finger positions, and channels the brute force of the arm muscles into holding the barre chord. For a full discussion of this important classical guitar technique, [see my tech tip on barres](#).

When I first wrote the classical guitar technique tip about “Little Jennifer”, I received (and continue to receive) sometimes severe criticism of the concept of using arm strength to hold barre chords. Some teachers maintain that the weight of the arm alone is enough to hold a barre chord. Oh yeah? Try that on a Db major full barre chord at the first fret:



Watch how arm weight alone is inadequate to hold many barres (video clip #3)

How to Play a Bar Chord in Under 2 Minutes, Clip #3



Using one's arm strength is a basic technique used by all master guitarists (whether they realize it or not) when playing anything, not just barre chords. This simple test will prove it: play the guitar without the guitar resting against your chest. Keep one or two inches of space between the back of the guitar and your chest. You will notice very quickly how little control you have and how your left-hand fingers and thumb become fatigued. Most players don't realize it, but we are always maintaining a certain amount of arm pull of the guitar into our chest. You simply can't play the guitar without it.

Watch me demonstrate this simple test in video clip #4:

How to Play a Bar Chord in Under 2 Minutes, Clip #4



Barre (bar) chord didn't work? Every string is not clear?

This is how to fix it:

Watch this spellbinding video (video clip #5):

How to Play a Bar Chord in Under 2 Minutes, Clip #5



First, figure out exactly which string or strings in the barre chord are not sounding clearly. Pluck each string individually to determine which string is not sounding clearly.

If the 3rd, 4th, or 5th string is not clear, that's a simple fix. Those strings are held by the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th fingers, so they have nothing to do with the barre. Simply reset the finger on its string more carefully or press harder.

If the 1st, 2nd, or 6th string is not coming out, the problem is with the barre. The main cause of barre chord failure is caused by the back joint of the 1st finger (the barring finger) being lower than the plane of the fingerboard. In other words, that back joint should be raised up so it is level with the middle joint of the finger. This means the barre finger must be straight or flat along its length from the tip to the back joint. When that is corrected, the success rate climbs to about 98%.

If the 6th string is not clear, put more finger pressure onto the fingertip of the barre finger.

If the 1st or 2nd strings are not coming out clearly, they may be under a soft, cushiony part of the barre finger. Move the barre finger up (towards the ceiling) or down (towards the floor) slightly so the first two strings are held by a firmer segment of the barre finger.

Want the Wizard to do this diagnosis for you?

Figuring out which string is failing and why is exactly what my **Barre Chord Wizard** does. Enter the chord's fingering, mark which strings aren't sounding clearly, and it gives you specific solutions — the hand, elbow, wrist, arm, thumb, and finger positioning that makes that particular chord come out clean. It understands every kind of barre: full, arched, partial, interior, hinge, and diagonal.

[Try the Barre Chord Wizard →](#)

TIPS

Don't try to practice barre chords for more than 30 seconds at a time. The hand and finger muscles become fatigued very quickly when learning to play barre chords. Once they tire (and you may not realize they are tired), if you keep trying to play the barre chord, it will get worse and worse. Stop! Rest for 30-60 seconds, shake it out, and then try again.

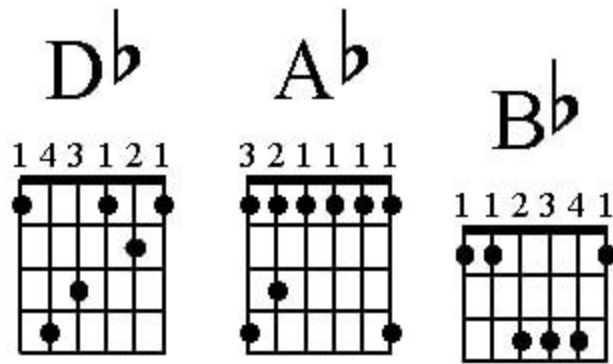
Practice barre chords with the barre at the 5th fret as I have instructed. Playing barre chords on guitar at the first fret for example, is far more difficult because the string tension is higher for the barre finger at the first fret.

DISCLAIMERS

Yes, there is always some bad news.

These instructions will help you successfully play this particular (and very common) major barre chord. Other barre chord formations will require a few tweaks and additional muscle development to play clearly. However, all the same key principles apply to learning to play any full barre chord.

Difficult full barre chords such as Db, Ab, and Bb in first position (show diagrams) also require the use of these same key principles. But, they require far more strength which will require using more of your arm strength as described above:



Partial barre chords (barre chords of fewer than six strings), hinge barres, and cross-fret barres present different problems and will be topics of future technique tips.

REMEMBER:

1. Place the barre last. (Placing the barre last is for learning purposes. Eventually you will learn to place the barre with or sometimes before the other fingers.)
2. Keep the back joint of the barre finger raised up.
3. Use your arm strength.

Barre chords on guitar are some of the most useful chord formations available to the guitarist for any kind of music. Don't think they are too difficult for you to learn. Don't think they will take forever for you to learn. If you do it right, you will probably nail this one in less than two minutes.

Watch this video summarizing these important points:

How to Play a Bar Chord in Under 2 Minutes, SUMMARY



Late Night Special:

BARRE CHORDS--THE GINSU KNIVES OF GUITAR PLAYING

Remember those hokey late-night commercials for Ginsu Knives back in the 70's?

Watch this:

How to Play a Bar Chord in Under 2 Minutes, Clip #1

