# Inversions of Triads

Let's consider two definitions: a triad is a group of 3 notes built from 3rds played at the same time; a chord is a group of at least 3 notes which aren't all built from 3rds and aren't necessarily played at the same time. Chords and triads should never be thought of as a single event in their own right, but as a progression of one to the next. Inversions are important when viewing how this movement occurs as they give the composer and improviser many more subtle shades to their rich musical colour palette. Considering how successive chords relate to each other is crucial.

If we take a standard A Major triad, we would have A,C# and E. It may be that this has been used in the first bar of a piece and so to add a little variety C#, E and A might be written in the next bar. This is still an A Major triad, it is just that the letters have changed order. A subtle change would have been made to the harmony of the piece rather than using a totally different triad.

In all the examples that follow there are three triads for each key. On the left the triad has the tonic or root at the bottom - this is known as *Root Position* (sometimes abbreviated to *a*). In the middle we have the 3rd of the triad at the bottom - this is called *1st Inversion* (often abbreviated to *b*). On the right we have the 5th of the triad at the bottom - this is called *2nd Inversion* (often abbreviated to *c*). It is always the bottom note played that tells us which Inversion is being used. Thus if a piano piece was being analysed it would be the bottom left hand note that would need to be looked at in the context of all the other notes being played in order to discover which chord and inversion is being played.

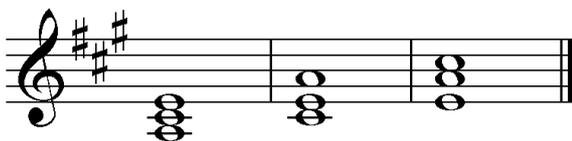Let me know if there is anything you don't understand here.
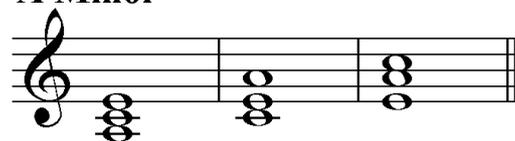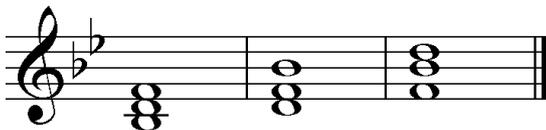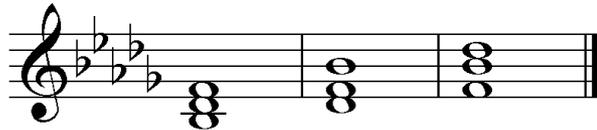
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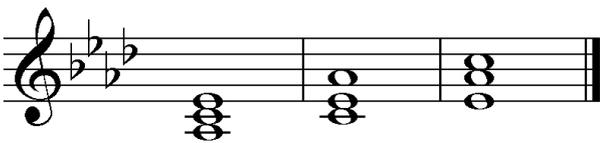
G# Minor
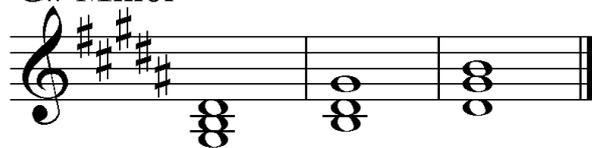
A Major

A Minor

Bb Major

Bb Minor

B Major
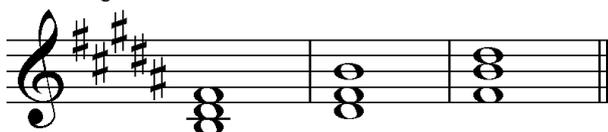
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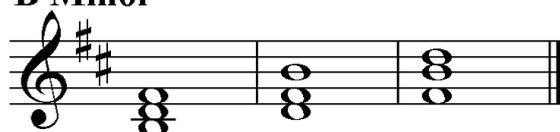
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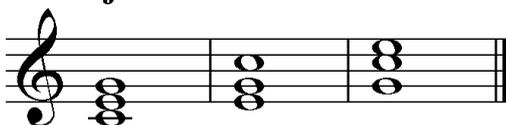
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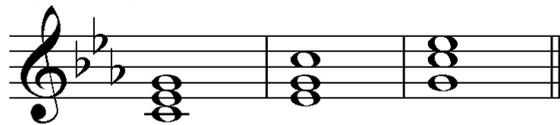
Db Major
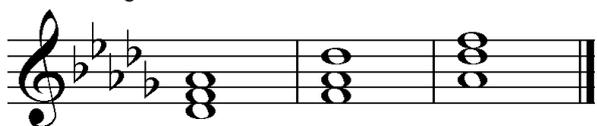
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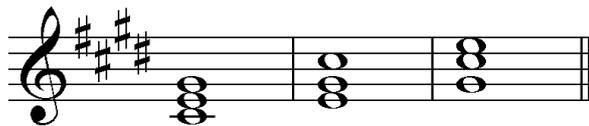
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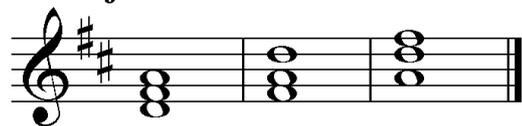
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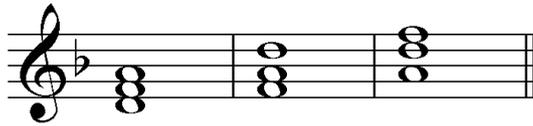
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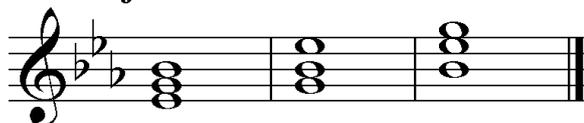
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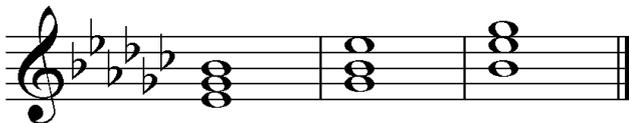
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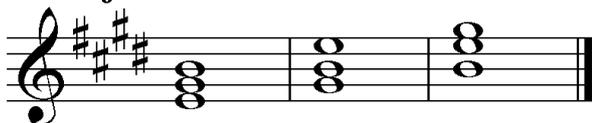
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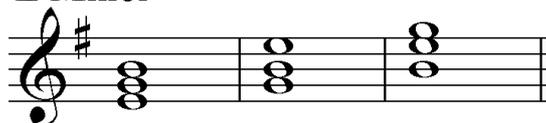
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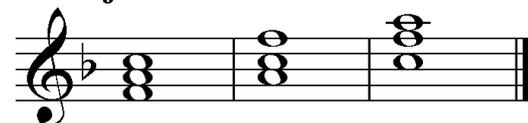
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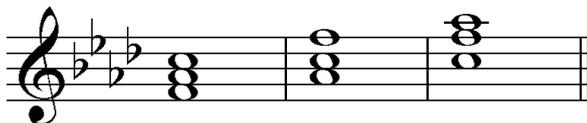
F# Major

F# Minor

G Major

G Minor