FREE SAMPLE · 4STRINGLAB

Ukulele Progressions

The progression that's in everything — from pop to bossa

C – Am – Dm – G7 – C

Hi! I'm **Ieda**, and this little book is an invitation for you to **play and understand** one of the most beautiful and fundamental progressions in music: the **circle progression I–vi–ii–V7–I**.

It's in everything — from Bach chorales to jazz, pop and Brazilian music — because it has a motion the ear loves: it starts at home (I), falls to the relative minor (vi), that bittersweet little chill, and then the roots descend **a fifth at a time**, with the V7 creating the tension that pulls everything back home.

Here you'll learn it in all **12 keys**, with easy chord diagrams, fingering and tone notes, and the theory behind it explained without the fright.

And most important: here you don't memorize isolated chords — you learn to think in **sequences**. You start to hear music as a **path**, where one chord leads to the next. That way of thinking — music as a **progression**, not as isolated chords — is what sets this material apart.

In practice, that unlocks a huge repertoire: you can accompany hundreds of songs, transpose to any key, hear **why** the music moves and resolves, and enrich your arrangements with tensions and substitutions. Grab your uke and come with me.

— Ieda, 4stringlab

Relax — it's easier than it looks

What “I – vi – ii – V7 – I” means

The Roman numerals are just **nicknames for chords** — and that's what makes everything easier. The same formula works in all 12 keys; you learn it once and travel the whole neck.

The five characters (in the key of C)

I	the **“home”** chord — where the music rests	**C** C MAJOR
vi	the **relative minor** — the bittersweet fall, the heart of this progression	**Am** A MINOR
ii	the one that **prepares** — a step forward	**Dm** D MINOR
V7	the one that **creates tension** — it asks to go back home	**G7** G DOMINANT 7
I	back **home** — everything resolves	**C** C MAJOR

An **UPPERCASE** numeral = major chord; **lowercase** = minor; the **7** is a dash of tension. (Here, both the vi and the ii are minor.)

You don't need to know theory. If you can play a few chords and switch between them, you're ready. Start with the **Key of F**, slowly, and take your time.

How to use it (it's quick!)

The 4stringlab visual language

root of the chord · I (major) · vi (minor) · ii (minor) · V7

Each dot is a note and the letter inside is its name. The color tells you the role: the **root** of each chord is **orange**; the other notes follow the chord's color — I green, vi blue, ii purple, V7 wine.

The top note (the highest, in bold below the shape) is the "voice" the ear hears as melody — it's what tells the paths apart.

The **"5fr"** mark (the fret number + "fr") shows which **fret** the shape starts on. No mark — or with the thick line on top — means the shape sits right at the **start of the neck**.

A **barre** is when one finger (usually the index) presses **several strings at once**, like a bar. Some paths use a barre.

Open or fretted strings? When the shape uses **open strings**, the sound is open and rings — nice for letting it sustain. When all the strings are **fretted**, you can mute and control the rhythm better with your right hand. Both are useful — choose to fit the strum.

One or two paths per key. C, G, D, A, E and F are the **most-used** keys on the ukulele and in music in general — so you'll play in them a lot. That's why they come with **2 paths**, to compare the sounds: one lower and one higher/brighter. In the less common keys, **1** easy path is enough.

↻ **"Repeated shape" stamp.** Every now and then a sequence of shapes reappears in another key — when that happens, the green stamp points to where it comes from. It's free study: you just move what you already know.

The plan (no suffering)

1. Pick **one key** (start with F or C). Play it slowly until you memorize it.
2. Watch the **transition**: which finger stays put? which one moves?
3. Coming out without stumbling? **Jump to the next key** (cycle of fifths) and stack up several keys up your sleeve.

Why this progression moves you

The fall to the relative minor

I–vi–ii–V7–I has a nostalgic quality — it's the harmonic backbone of countless romantic ballads, from '50s pop to Brazilian music.

It starts at home (**I**). Then comes the **vi**: the same "family" as the key, only **minor** — it's the **relative minor**, and that fall gives you the bittersweet little chill. The **ii** prepares, the **V7** creates the peak tension, and the **I** resolves. Tension and longing in five chords.

The detail that works the magic: the vi

Notice that, from **I** to **vi**, almost nothing changes in your hand — they share notes. That's why the "fall" sounds so smooth and natural. It's the heart of this progression; feel that chord.

The arrival home (V7→I): two colors

With the **3rd of the V7** (the leading tone) on top, it **steps up a half-step** to the tonic — a bright ending.

With the **7th of the V7** on top, it **steps down a half-step** to the 3rd of the I — a smooth, jazzy resolution.

One or two paths per key

C, G, D, A, E and F are the **most-used** keys — the ones you'll play in most. That's why they come with **two paths** (one lower, one higher/brighter): try both and choose the color you like best. In the other keys, one easy path is enough.

Inside the progression

for those who want to understand the magic

This is one of the most fundamental progressions in Western music — the **circle progression**. It's in everything, from the Baroque (Bach chorales) to jazz, pop, rock and Brazilian music.

The secret is in the bass: the motion of fifths

The progression opens with **I→vi** — a smooth fall to the relative minor. Then the cycle kicks in: the roots of **vi→ii→V7→I** descend **a fifth at a time** (A→D→G→C). It's the strongest, most natural motion in tonal harmony — the ear loves it.

The engine: the tritone of the V7

The **V7** (e.g. G7) carries an unstable interval, the **tritone** (between B and F). It "begs" to resolve: the **B rises** a half-step to C (the tonic) and the **F falls** a half-step to E (the 3rd of C). That's why arriving on the final I sounds so satisfying and "closed."

Why ii instead of IV — and where you've heard it

Many songs use I–IV–V–I. Swapping the **IV** (F) for the **ii** (Dm), its "substitute," creates a longer, more elegant path to the dominant — the color of **jazz and bossa**.

You've already heard it in: *All My Loving* (Beatles), *Só Tinha de Ser com Você* (Tom Jobim), *Blue Moon*, *Manhã de Carnaval* (Luiz Bonfá).

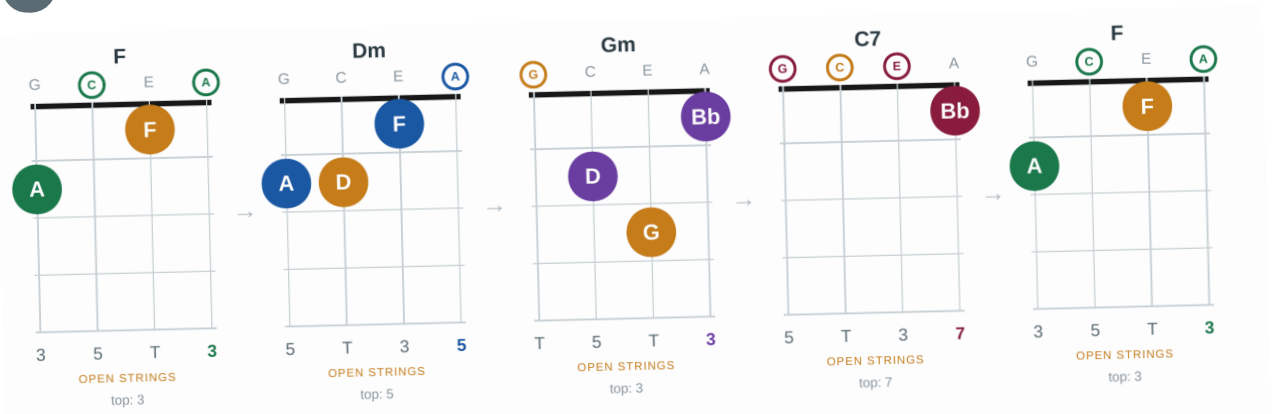
To go further (once you've mastered it). You can add **tensions** (9, 13): CM7(9) – Am9 – Dm7(9) – G13 – C6/9; swap the V7 for its **tritone substitute**: C – Am – Dm – **Db7** – C (that delicious chromatic bass of choro and jazz); or make the **bass walk** with inversions: C – Am/G – Dm/F – G7/F – C. That's exactly what we work on in the **other 4stringlab materials**.

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of F

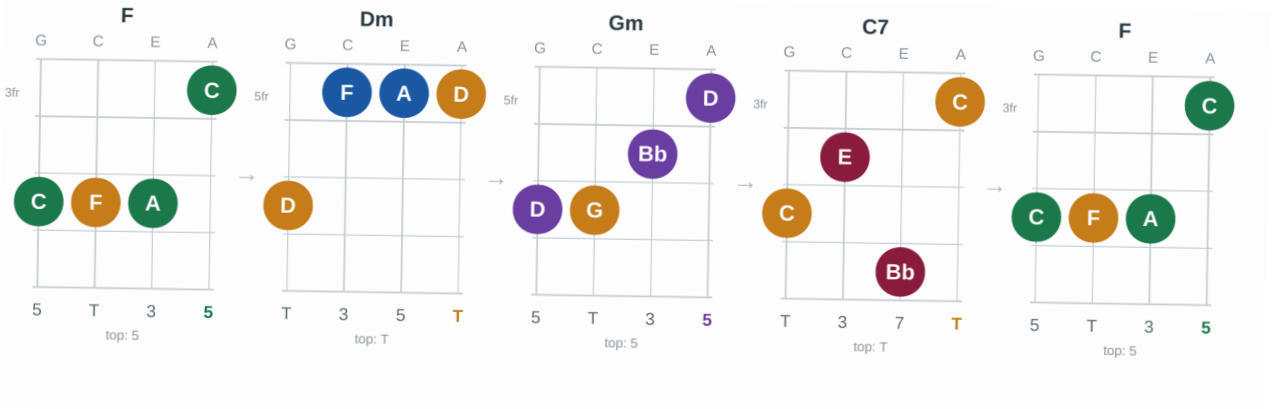
F – Dm – Gm – C7 – F

1 3rd On Top



This one is more relaxed because it uses chords from the **key of C major**, the one everyone plays most. Notice how the move from **F** to **Dm** is smooth — you just add one finger. The tricky one may be **Gm**, where each finger has to land on its own string. The open strings can make a steady strum harder.

2 High Position



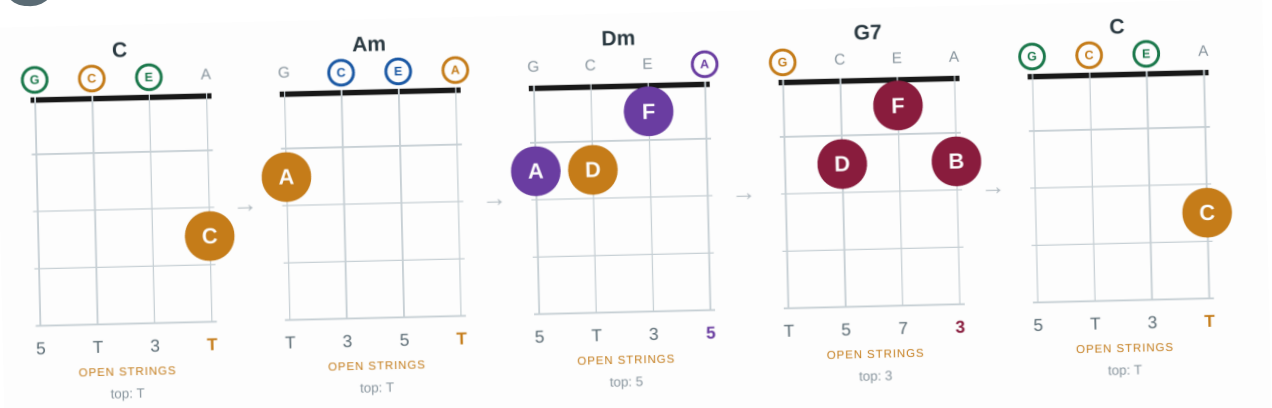
A suggestion: the first time through, skip this one and go to the **key of C major**. Come back here after you've been through all 12 keys — it matters more to have several keys under your fingers.

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of C

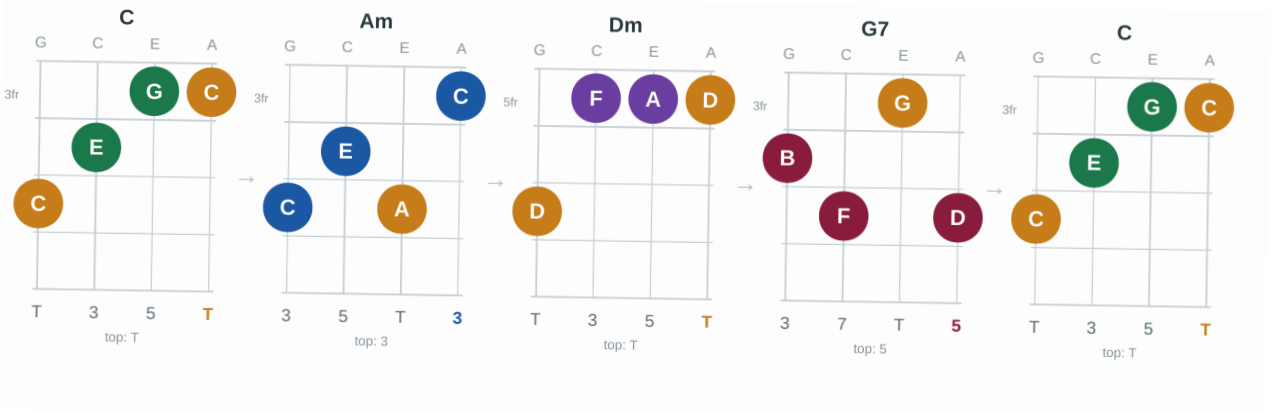
C – Am – Dm – G7 – C

1 Root On Top



This is the best-known sequence on the ukulele — chances are you already know how to play it. It has an **open** sound that rings out nicely — just let the open strings ring. And your fingers move very little from one chord to the next.

2 High Position



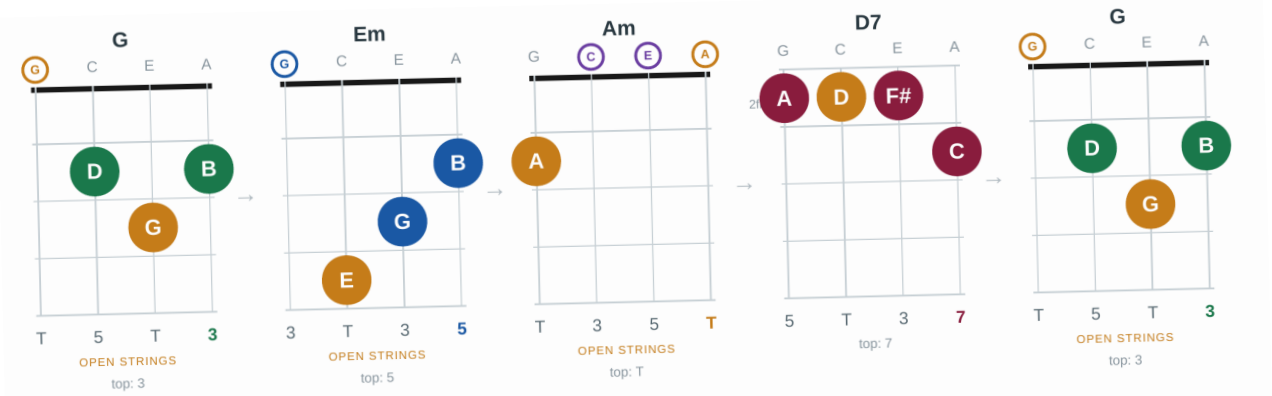
On the **C** chord, use a half-barre at the **3rd fret**. And use a barre at the **5th fret** for **Dm**.

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of G

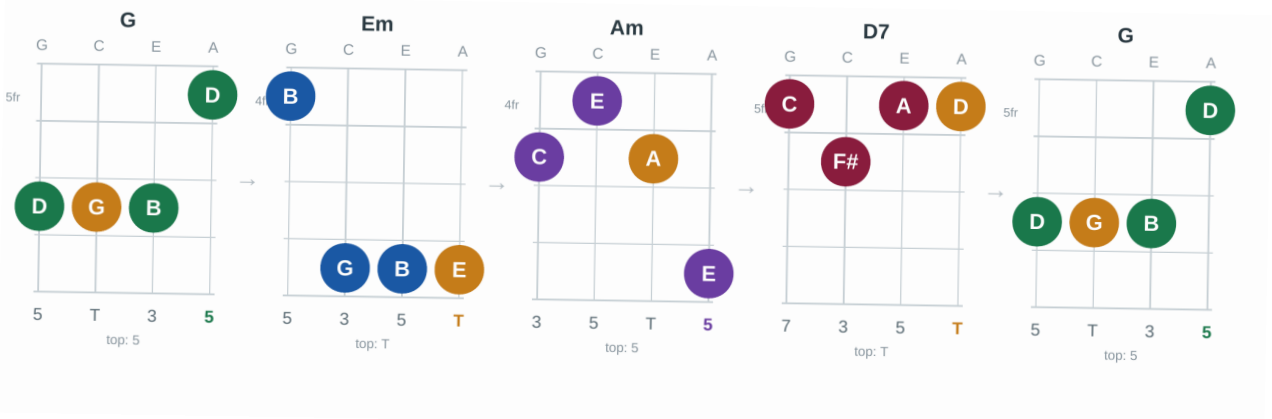
G – Em – Am – D7 – G

1 3rd On Top



Use a barre at the **2nd fret** for **D7**. And the challenge with **Em** is getting each finger to land on its own string at exactly the same time. Keep at it — you've got this.

2 High Position



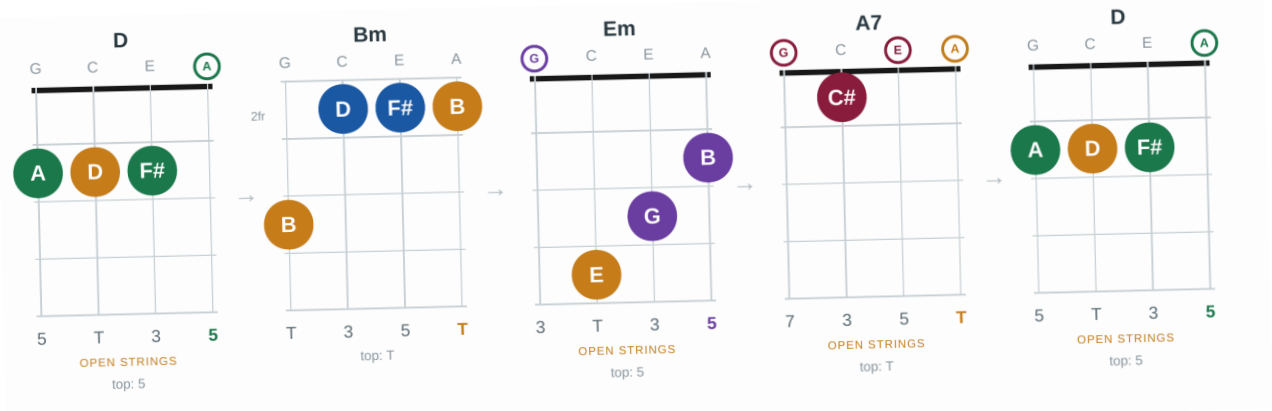
Up in this region of the neck the frets are quite small and your fingers need to stand more upright — that's the challenge here. My suggestion: play the first sequence on this page (with the 5th on top) and move straight on to the next key. Come back to this one at the end of the 12 keys and take on the challenge calmly.

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of D

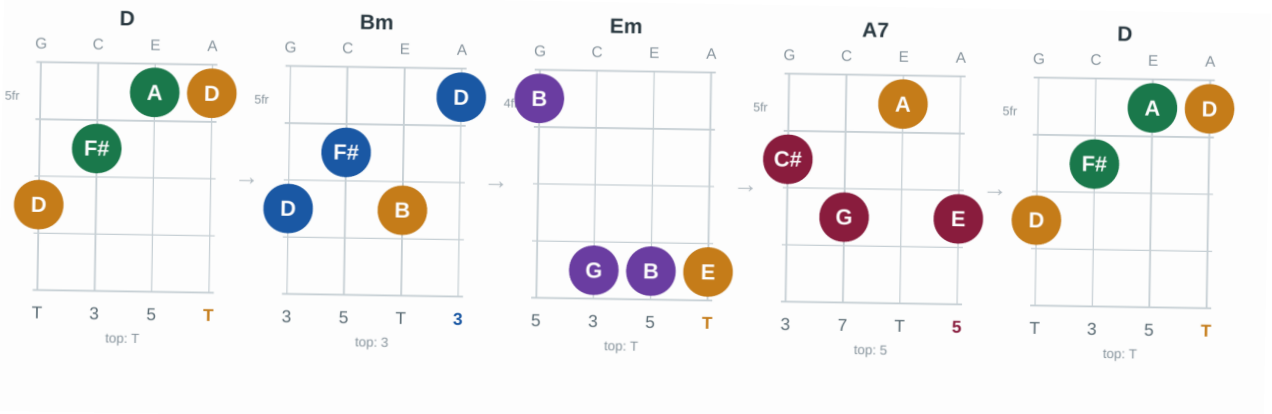
D – Bm – Em – A7 – D

1 5th On Top



On **Bm**, it's easier with a barre at the **2nd fret**. **Em** already showed up earlier.

2 High Position



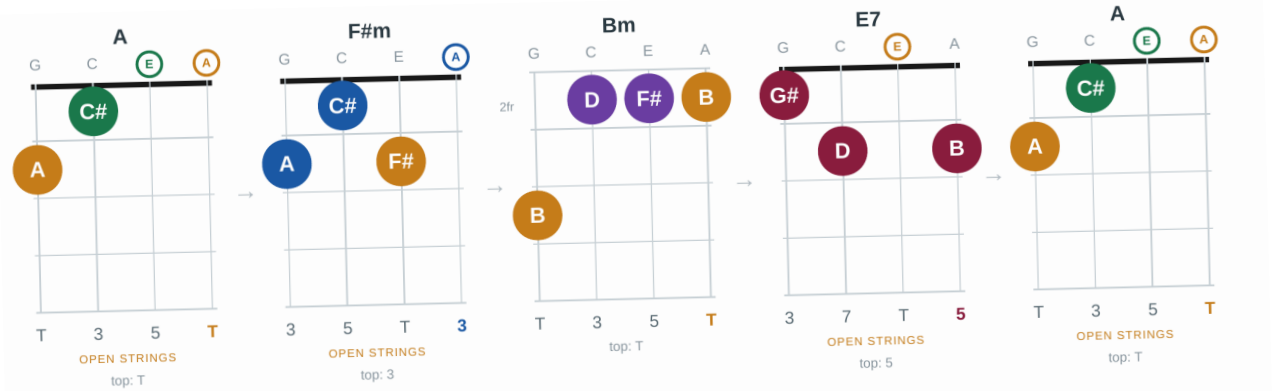
Again: the first time through, skip this one and go to the next key. Come back here after you've been through all 12 keys.

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of A

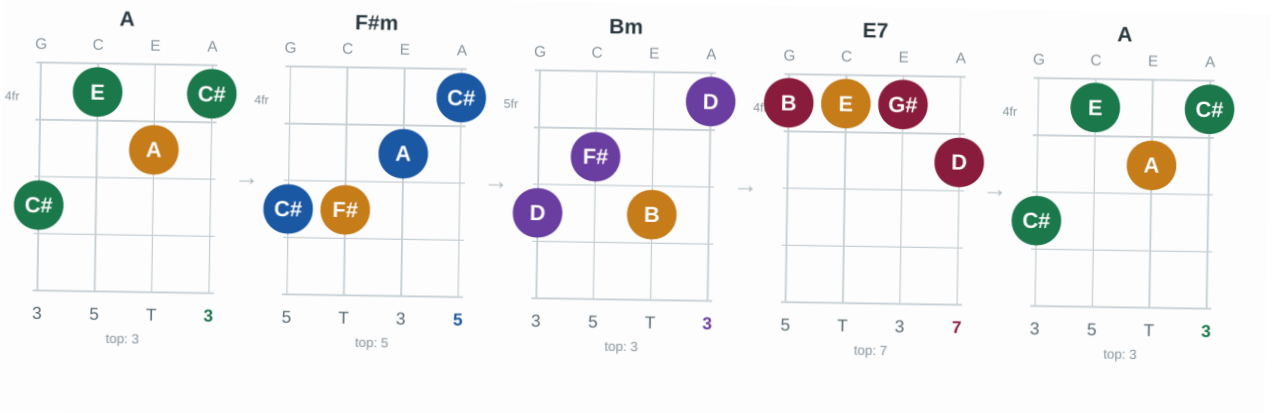
A – F#m – Bm – E7 – A

1 Root On Top



Notice that the **Bm** in this sequence is the same one you already used in the **key of D major** — that makes things much easier.

2 High Position



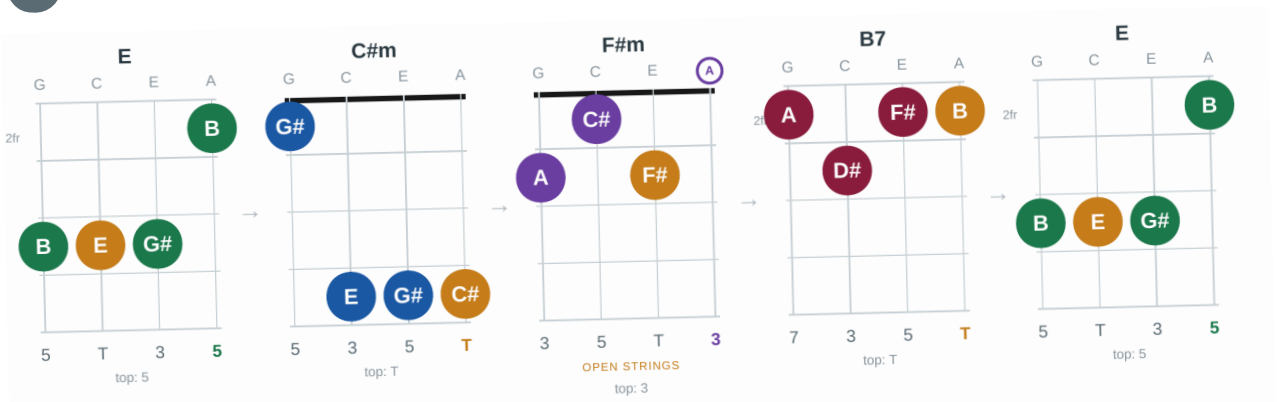
Here, use a barre at the **4th fret** for **A**. To move to **F#m**, keep your ring finger on the 4th string (the C#). For **Bm**, just slide that same finger up one fret (to the D).

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of E

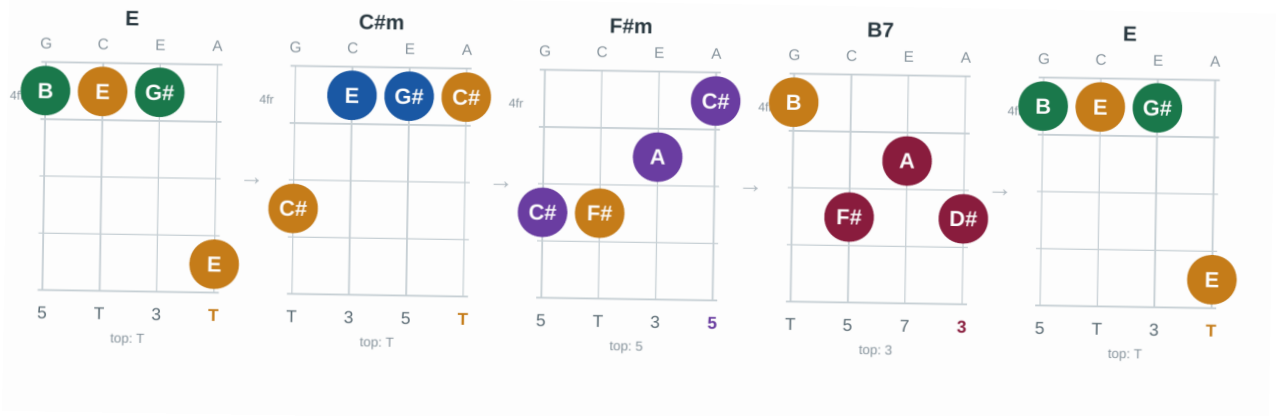
E – C#m – F#m – B7 – E

1 5th On Top



E may be the challenge here. If it's easier, use the high-position **E**: a barre at the **4th fret** stretching your pinky to the **7th fret** of the 1st string — I find that option easier, but try it and see which one works for you. **C#m** has the same shape as the Em that showed up in the second sequence of the **key of G**.

2 High Position



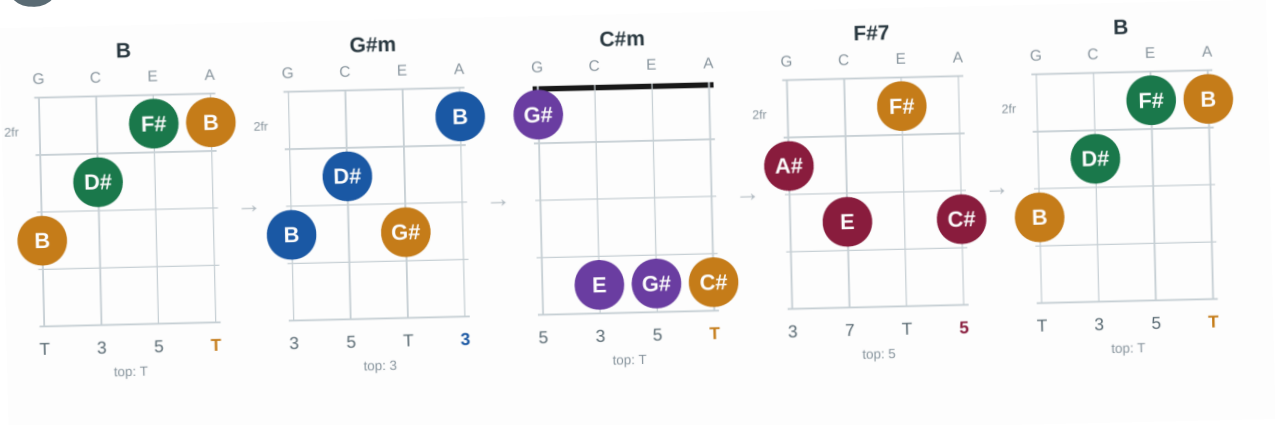
A higher, brighter version, in a barre. With **every string fretted**, you can mute and control the rhythm with your right hand.

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of B

B – G#m – C#m – F#7 – B

1 Root On Top



Notice the shapes are starting to repeat — all of these chords have already appeared in another key. See which fingers stay put in the change from **B** to **G#m**. Always look for economy of movement.

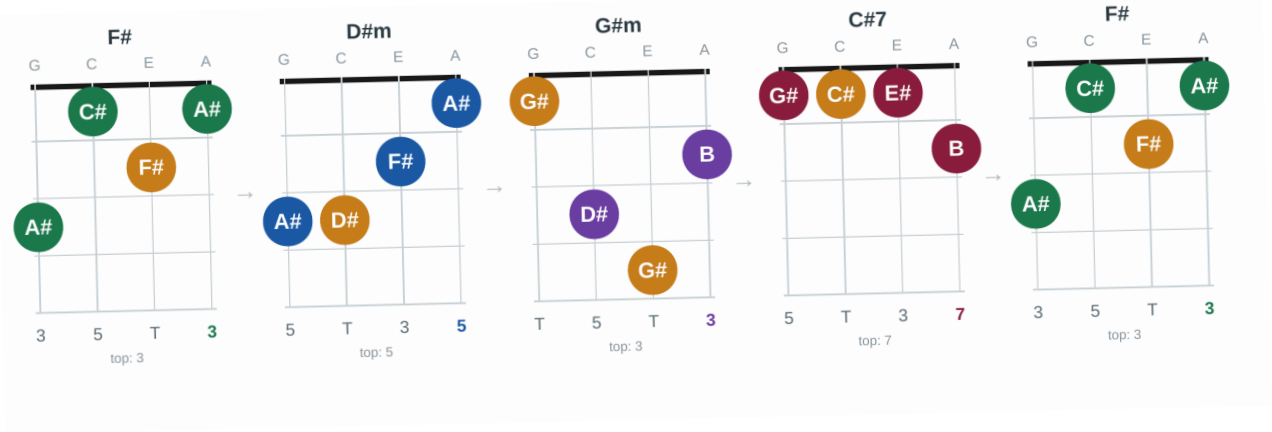
> ↻ **Repeated shape:** same sequence of shapes as the **Key of D** (Path 2) — just moved along the neck. You already know this one!

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of F#

F# – D#m – G#m – C#7 – F#

1 3rd On Top



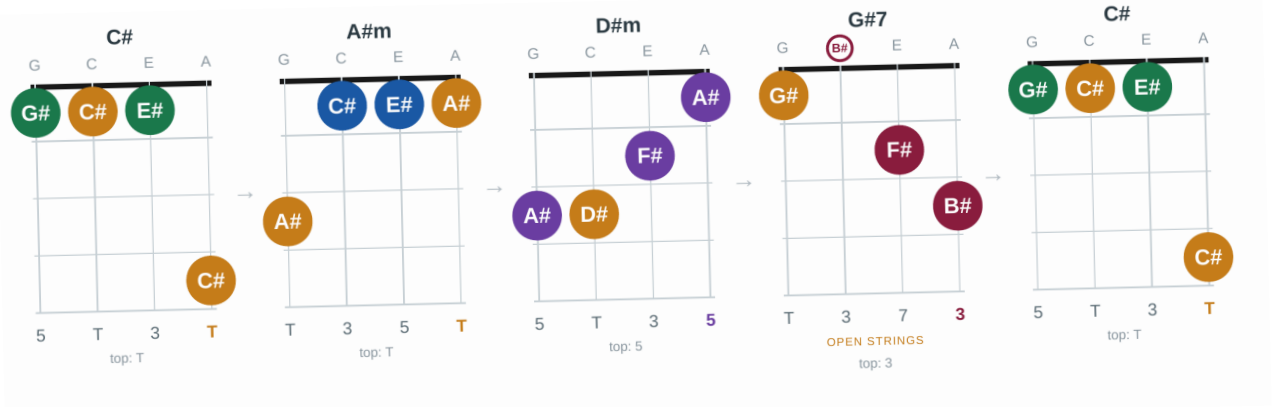
F# works best with a barre at the **1st fret**. The chord that may give you the most trouble is **G#m** — if it's easier, import the **G#m** you used in the **key of B**. You can leave the harder chords for later, once your fingers are better trained.

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of C#

C# - A#m - D#m - G#7 - C#

1 Root On Top



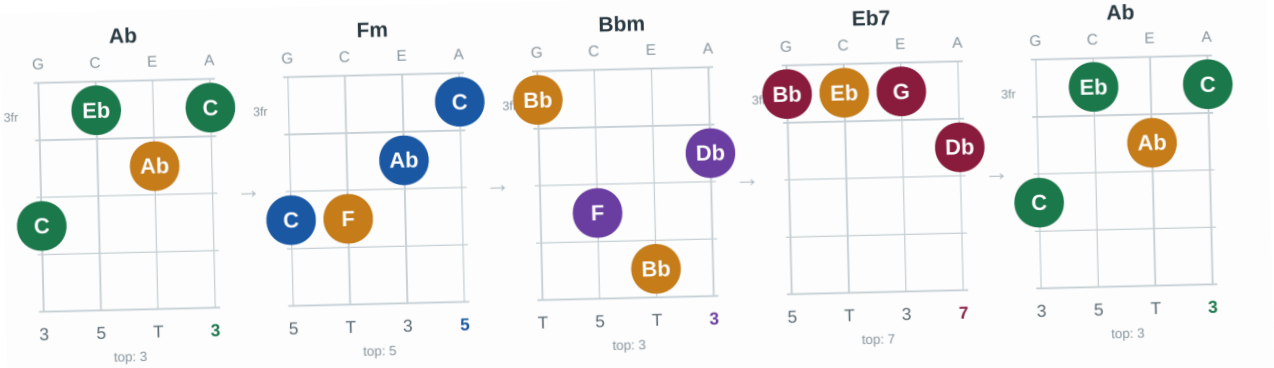
This sequence in **C# major** isn't technically hard: almost all the shapes have been covered already. The nice part is being able to play the same songs here that you played in **C major** (a very common key). Bumping a song up from C to C# gives a really nice effect.

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of Ab

Ab – Fm – Bbm – Eb7 – Ab

1 3rd On Top



You might ask: why learn such a tricky key? These chords show up in the **key of Fm**, which is quite common. On top of that, songs in **C** or **F** sometimes "borrow" chords from the key of **Ab** — so mastering them helps you play richer harmonies in the keys you already use.

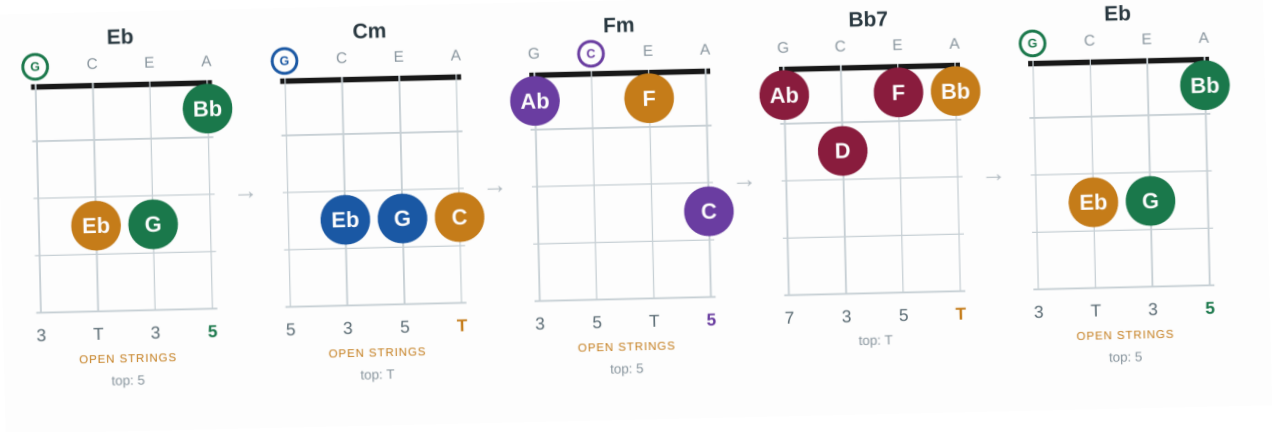
> ↻ **Repeated shape:** same sequence of shapes as the **Key of F#** (Path 1) — just moved along the neck. You already know this one!

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of Eb

Eb – Cm – Fm – Bb7 – Eb

1 5th On Top



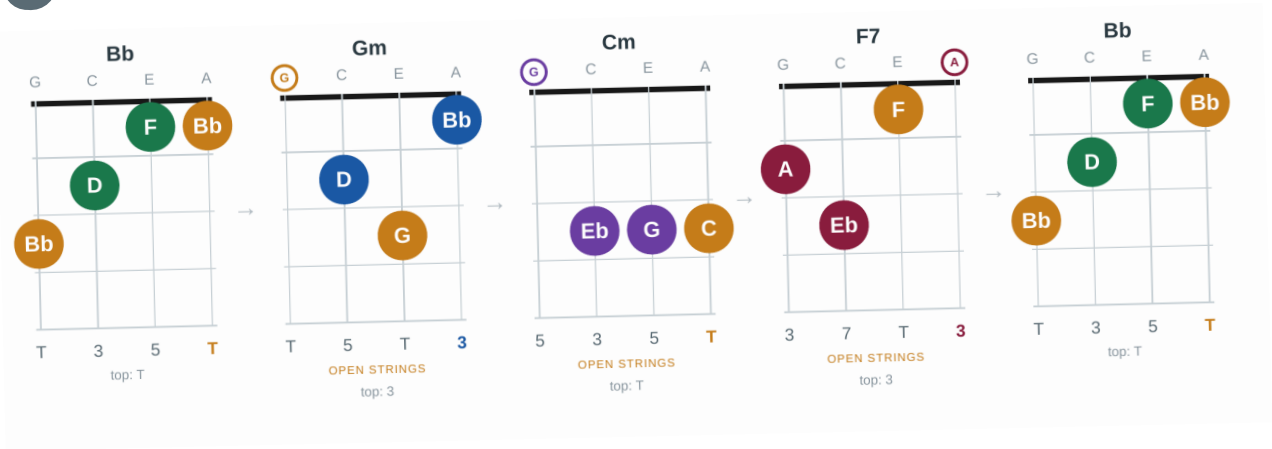
Again, important chords that can show up in keys like **Cm**. There are lots of sambas and jazz standards in this key.

A CIRCLE PROGRESSION

Key of Bb

Bb – Gm – Cm – F7 – Bb

1 Root On Top



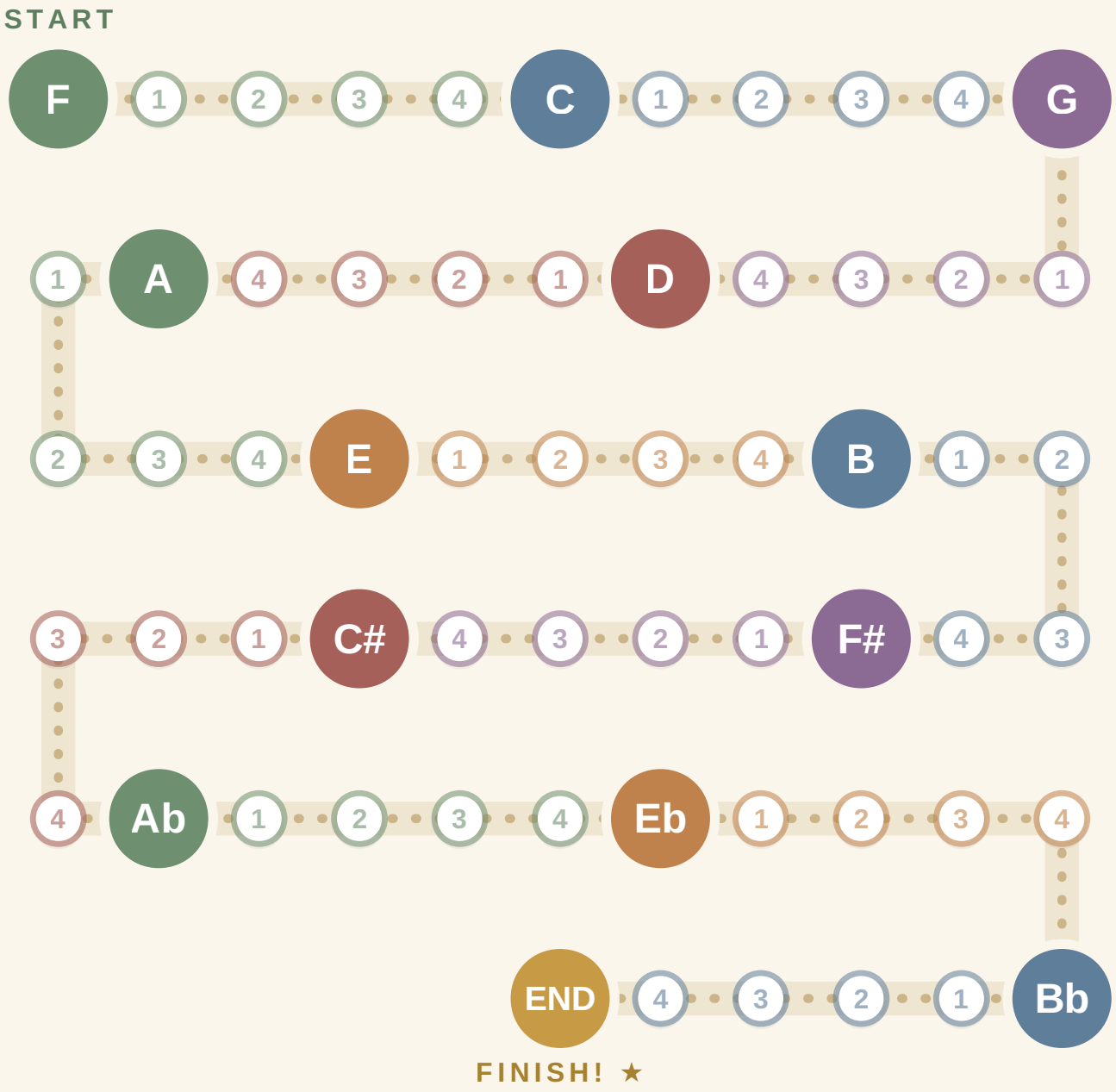
By this point you already know every shape shown in this key — which is also widely used across many styles.

Your trail

From the start (F) to the finish (Bb) — one square at a time

Follow the board in the order of the **cycle of fifths** (F → C → G → D...), starting with the **most-used** keys. Neighboring keys are close relatives — they share chords and shapes — so each new one costs less than the last.

1. I know the chord **names**
2. I **played** the whole sequence once
3. I know it **by heart**
4. I play it **flawlessly,** from memory



Enjoyed it? This is just the beginning

From doo-wop to jazz, always with the same logic

You learned the fall to the relative minor. At 4stringlab that's one step on a staircase running from pop to jazz — and you already know how to read the map.

1	Movable shapes by top note — the foundation of the method
2	I–vi–ii–V7–I — the circle progression *(this material)*
3	Diatonic cycle of fifths in all 12 keys
4	Jazz ii–V–I major — seventh chords and b9
+	Minor keys, secondary dominants, tritone sub and more

Next step

Mastered the 12 keys? Enrich them: add tensions (9, 13) or try the V7 substitute — the “Inside the progression” page shows the way.

All the materials and the videos for each sequence at **4stringlab.com.br**