PRIVATE PIANO LESSON · THE RECORDING CLUB

Poseidon Ho

Everything from your first lesson — and the path to accompanying any singer.

Lesson: **June 6, 2026**

Goal: **Accompany a singer by ear**

Method: **C major → the five chords → all twelve keys**

Commitment: **One hour a day · ~3 months to all keys**

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Your goal, and how we'll get there

You've followed sheet music for years, but without a foundation underneath it. What you actually want is to sit at the piano, hear a singer, find where they are, and follow them — playing the chords that hold the song up. That is an entirely learnable skill, and it has a logical path.

In our first lesson we built the base of that path in C major: the scale and correct fingering, the five chords most songs are built from, inversions to keep your hands smooth, and the circle of fifths that connects all twelve keys through the single most important motion in Western music — *the V resolving to the I*. Then we made it real by learning "Let It Be" by ear. This document is the complete review of everything we covered, with research-backed detail and the exact exercises to practice.

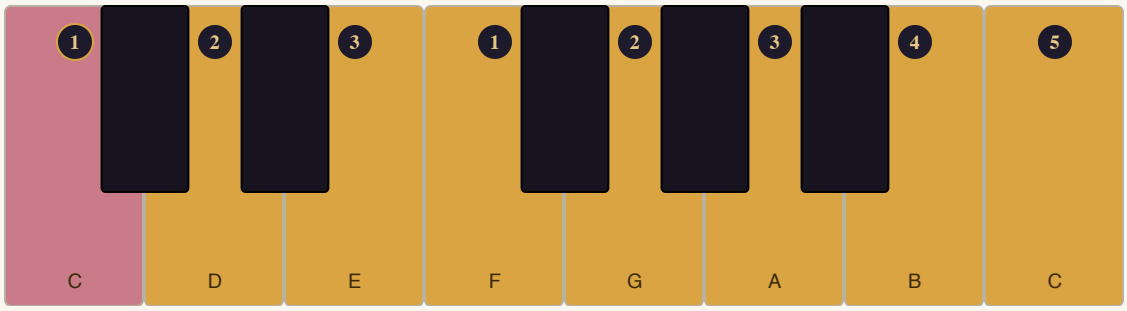
> "*You've got it when your brain doesn't hesitate at all and it's completely natural*."
>
> GREG — ON KNOWING A CHORD IS TRULY LEARNED

The C Major Scale & Fingering

C major is the ideal starting point — every note falls on a white key, so you can put all your attention on hand position and fingering mechanics without worrying about black keys at all. The seven notes are **C – D – E – F – G – A – B**, and when you land back on C an octave up, you've completed one of the most important musical shapes in Western music.

Why start here and not somewhere "easier"? There is nothing easier — but there is something more logical. C major lets your logical mind absorb the underlying pattern (whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, whole step, half step) before the physical layout of the keyboard adds any complexity. Once you own this scale in your body, every other key is just C major rotated slightly around the circle of fifths.

Greg's instruction is direct: **thumb on C, fingers 1–2–3, then the thumb crosses under to continue 1–2–3–4–5**. That's the entire right-hand pattern. Get this right now and you will never have to unlearn it. Every professional pianist, every jazz player who can chase a vocalist through a key change mid-phrase, built that skill on exactly this fingering foundation. This is not a beginner exercise you'll discard — it is the motor pattern that makes fluid playing possible.



The Notes

C major contains seven distinct pitches, all white keys on the piano:

Scale Degree	Note	Finger (RH)	Finger (LH)
1 (root)	C	1 (thumb)	5 (pinky)
2	D	2 (index)	4 (ring)

Scale Degree	Note	Finger (RH)	Finger (LH)
3	E	3 (middle)	3 (middle)
4	F	1 (thumb — crosses under)	2 (index)
5	G	2 (index)	1 (thumb)
6	A	3 (middle)	3 (middle — crosses over)
7	B	4 (ring)	2 (index)
8 (octave)	C	5 (pinky)	1 (thumb)

The interval structure — **whole, whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half** — is why E–F and B–C feel slightly "closer" on the keyboard (they are; those are the only half steps). This same pattern, starting from any note, produces any major scale. C just happens to use no sharps or flats.

Right Hand: The Thumb Crossunder

The right hand ascends as two groups: **1–2–3** (C–D–E), then the thumb quietly slides under the palm to land on F while the middle finger is still holding or releasing E. From there: **1–2–3–4–5** (F–G–A–B–C). The key word is *under* — the thumb does not jump over; it travels beneath the other fingers in a controlled, low-wrist motion.

Coming down, the pattern reverses: play C–B–A–G–F with fingers 5–4–3–2–1, then the middle finger (3) crosses *over* the thumb to land on E, continuing 2–1 for D–C.

Right-hand fingering in full:

- **Ascending:** 1–2–3 | 1–2–3–4–5
- **Descending:** 5–4–3–2–1 | 3–2–1

Left Hand: The Finger Crossover

The left hand works in mirror image. Ascending: **5–4–3–2–1** (C–D–E–F–G), then the middle finger (3) crosses *over* the thumb to land on A, continuing **3–2–1** (A–B–C). So where the right hand uses a thumb-under move, the left hand uses a finger-over move when going up.

Descending, the left hand reverses: 1–2–3 (C–B–A), then thumb passes under the middle finger to land on G, continuing 1–2–3–4–5 (G–F–E–D–C).

Left-hand fingering in full:

- **Ascending:** 5–4–3–2–1 | 3–2–1
- **Descending:** 1–2–3 | 1–2–3–4–5

Hand Shape, Wrist, and Posture

Your fingers should form a slight natural curve — as if you are holding a tennis ball loosely. Nails short enough that the fingertips, not the nails, contact the keys. The wrist stays roughly level with the keyboard, neither drooping below nor floating high above it. A relaxed wrist is not a limp wrist — it has enough tone to support the hand but remains free to make small adjustments.

The critical bad habit to avoid: **locking the wrist and forcing the thumb crossunder with arm tension**. The thumb slides under through wrist flexibility, not brute force. If you feel tightness in your forearm, you are fighting the keyboard rather than flowing through it.

Sit at a height where your forearms are roughly parallel to the floor, with your elbows at about keyboard level. Shoulders down and loose — scale practice should not feel like a workout.

Why Correct Fingering Matters Now

Greg was emphatic about this: *do it right from the start so you never have to relearn it.* The reason is neurological. Your brain builds motor patterns through repetition, and it does not distinguish between "practice" and "real playing." Every time you run through this scale with

wrong fingering, you are reinforcing a habit that will cap your speed, fluency, and ability to improvise. Standard fingering is the standard because it produces the most even tone and the smoothest passage work — not as an arbitrary rule, but as a biomechanical solution refined over centuries.

For accompanying a singer specifically: you need to be able to play scales and arpeggios as *background knowledge in your hands*, so you can focus your ears entirely on the vocalist. The scale is not the destination — it is the vocabulary that will eventually let you find notes on the fly and predict chord movements without looking down.

> **For accompanying a singer:** When you accompany a singer, your job is to *listen*, not to think about where your fingers go. The C major scale drills the note geography of the key into your muscle memory so it becomes automatic. Every chord you will play in C — the I (C–E–G), IV (F–A–C), V (G–B–D), and the rest — is built from notes in this scale. Once your hand knows the scale without conscious thought, you can redirect your attention to what the singer is doing: where they land, what phrase they're building, whether they're pulling toward the V or settling on the I. The scale is how you get your hands out of the conversation so your ears can lead.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Raising the wrist too high or locking it stiff when executing the thumb crossunder — the wrist must stay relaxed and level, not rigid.
- Allowing the thumb to 'jump' laterally above the keys rather than sliding smoothly underneath the third finger while maintaining contact with the key surface.
- Playing the crossunder unevenly — a small rhythmic hiccup or volume bump right at the F. The thumb landing on F should be indistinguishable in volume and timing from every other note.
- Practicing too fast before the pattern is clean. Speed that amplifies errors writes errors into muscle memory; slow practice at an even, deliberate tempo is the only way to build a reliable pattern.
- Collapsing the knuckle joint of the thumb so it plays with the side of the nail rather than the tip — this produces a dull, uncontrolled attack and blocks the crossunder.
- Practicing only ascending — the descending fingering (middle finger crossing over on the way down in the right hand) is equally important and equally likely to fall apart under pressure.
- Bending or twisting the wrist outward when the left hand's third finger crosses over the thumb ascending to A — the left hand crossover should feel like the finger reaching forward, not the wrist rotating.

EXERCISES

Slow Single-Hand Scale with Count

10 min

Engrave the correct fingering pattern for each hand individually before adding coordination complexity.

1. Sit at the piano with both hands resting naturally on your lap. Take one breath.
2. Place your RIGHT HAND so the thumb (finger 1) rests lightly on middle C. Curve all five fingers gently as if resting on a soft ball.
3. Say aloud 'one' and press C. Say 'two' and press D. Say 'three' and press E.
4. Without pausing, slide the thumb under your middle finger and press F while saying 'one' again. Do not rush — the thumb should arrive on F exactly as E releases, not before.
5. Continue: 'two' on G, 'three' on A, 'four' on B, 'five' on the high C.
6. Now descend, starting from the top: 'five' on the high C, 'four' on B, 'three' on A, 'two' on G, 'one' on F. Then middle finger crosses over the thumb to land on E ('three'), 'two' on D, 'one' on C.
7. Repeat this 5 times with the right hand, keeping a slow, even pulse — roughly one note per second.
8. Set the right hand aside. Place LEFT HAND with pinky (finger 5) on middle C.
9. Ascending: '5' on C, '4' on D, '3' on E, '2' on F, '1' (thumb) on G. Then middle finger (3) crosses over the thumb to land on A, '2' on B, '1' on the high C.
10. Descending: '1' on C, '2' on B, '3' on A, then thumb passes under to G ('1'), '2' on F, '3' on E, '4' on D, '5' on C.
11. Repeat 5 times with the left hand at the same slow pace.
12. Pass/fail check: every note sounds the same volume. No hiccup or accent at the crossunder or crossover point.

Target: 5 clean ascending + descending repetitions per hand, no rhythmic bump at the finger cross, at approximately 60 BPM (one note per beat).

Isolation Drill: The Thumb Crossunder at F

8 min

Remove hesitation at the single hardest moment in the right-hand scale — the thumb-under move from E to F.

1. Place your right hand on the piano with finger 1 on C, finger 2 on D, finger 3 on E.
2. Play C–D–E slowly. On E, let the thumb travel silently underneath so it is hovering just above F before E has fully released.
3. Play F with the thumb. Notice: the thumb should land on F with the same weight and tone as the other fingers — not harder, not lighter.
4. Lift all fingers and return to C. Repeat this four-note fragment (C–D–E–F) 10 times without stopping.
5. Now extend one step: play C–D–E–F–G (fingers 1–2–3–1–2). The thumb is already positioned after the crossunder, so G is straightforward.
6. Repeat the five-note fragment (C–D–E–F–G) 10 times.
7. Add the return: C–D–E–F–G–F–E (the last E uses finger 3 crossing back over). Play 10 times.
8. Pass/fail check: play the crossunder passage while watching your wrist. If the wrist visibly jumps or twists at F, slow down further until it disappears.

Target: 10 consecutive repetitions of C–D–E–F–G–F–E with no audible accent on F and no visible wrist movement at the crossunder point.

Hands Together, Eyes Closed

15 min

Build spatial confidence — knowing where every white key is without looking, which is what real accompanying requires.

1. Practice each hand separately at 60 BPM (one note per beat) until you can do 3 consecutive clean passes without thinking about the fingering.
2. Place both hands on the keyboard: right thumb on middle C, left pinky on middle C (they share the same starting note, an octave apart if you prefer — right thumb on the C above middle C, left pinky on middle C).
3. Play ascending together at 60 BPM. The right hand's sync point with the left hand occurs at E (both hands have their 3rd finger on E simultaneously) and again at the top C.
4. Play descending together. Aim for matching rhythm, not matching volume.
5. Once you can do 3 passes with eyes open and no errors, close your eyes.
6. Play one complete ascending and descending scale with eyes closed. Trust the muscle memory you've built.

7. Open eyes. Were you still on the right notes? If not, identify which note felt uncertain and go back to the single-hand slow drill for that segment.
8. Repeat eyes-closed passes until you can do 3 in a row cleanly.
9. Pass/fail check: with eyes closed, your final note lands accurately on C (confirmed by opening eyes).

Target: 3 consecutive clean hands-together, eyes-closed passes at 60 BPM. Every note even, no pauses at the crossunder or crossover.

Greg's 'No Hesitation' Speed Check 12 min

Test whether the scale is truly internalized — the brain should not pause before any note, including the crossunder and the crossover. This is Greg's exact criterion: 'you've got it when there's NO hesitation.'

1. Set a metronome to 80 BPM. Play the complete right-hand scale ascending and descending, one note per beat.
2. Notice any moment where you had to 'think' before a note or where your hand hesitated slightly. Make a mental note of which note it was.
3. If there was hesitation anywhere: go back to the Isolation Drill or Slow Single-Hand drill for that exact note. Repeat 10 times, then return to this drill.
4. If you completed the scale with no hesitation at 80 BPM: increase to 90 BPM and repeat.
5. Add the left hand once the right hand passes 90 BPM with no hesitation.
6. Run hands together at 72 BPM. Same criterion: no hesitation anywhere.
7. Pass/fail check: a scale pass 'counts' only if you felt no moment of uncertainty from start to finish. Keep a tally — you need 5 passing repetitions in a single session before moving on to chords or a new key.
8. Final test: play the scale and immediately name the note your 3rd finger lands on in the first group (answer: E). Then play it again and name the note your thumb lands on after the crossunder (answer: F). If you had to think about those answers, the scale is not yet in the body — keep drilling.

Target: 5 consecutive passing repetitions at 80 BPM (right hand) or 72 BPM (hands together), defined as zero hesitation and zero wrong notes.

Sources: C Major Scale on the Piano — Piano-Keyboard-Guide.com · Major Scale Fingerings — PianoGroove Jazz Piano Lessons · Piano Technique: Playing the C Major Scale — Anselmo Academy · The C Major Scale — Complete Piano Lesson & Practice Guide — VitaPiano · Major Scales — HelloMusicTheory

The Five Core Chords (I · ii · IV · V · vi)

You've spent years reading notes off a page — now you're going to understand *why* the chords work, which is a faster path to accompanying a singer than any amount of sheet music ever was.

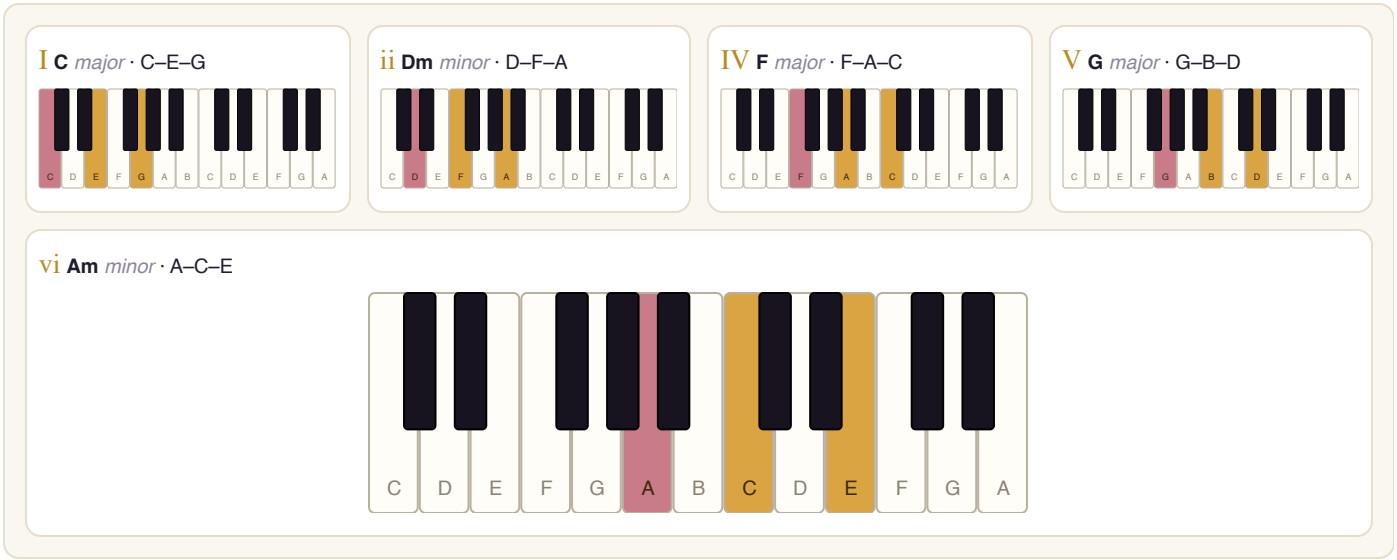
A **triad** is three notes stacked in thirds: root, third, fifth. In C major you build every chord by starting on a scale note and skipping one note at a time upward. C-(skip D)-E-(skip F)-G. That's a C major triad. Do the same from D and you get D-F-A. From G you get G-B-D. Seven scale degrees, seven triads, all using only white keys.

The quality of each triad — major, minor, or diminished — falls out automatically from the major scale's interval structure. You don't choose it; the scale determines it. The universal pattern in every major key is: **Major – minor – minor – Major – Major – minor – diminished**. In C that gives you:

Degree	Chord	Notes
I	C major	C – E – G
ii	D minor	D – F – A
iii	E minor	E – G – B
IV	F major	F – A – C
V	G major	G – B – D
vi	A minor	A – C – E

Degree	Chord	Notes
vii°	B diminished	B – D – F

Greg told you most songs use the 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 — that's I, ii, IV, V, and vi. Those five chords cover the vast majority of popular music. Learn them cold in C first; everything else follows from this foundation.



How a Triad is Built: Stacking Thirds

A third is the interval from any note to the note two letter names away (skipping one). In C major, C to E is a third; E to G is another third. Stack them and you have a triad: **root – third – fifth**.

The crucial detail is that thirds come in two sizes:

- A **major third** = 4 half-steps (C to E: C, C#, D, D#, E)
- A **minor third** = 3 half-steps (E to G: E, F, F#, G)

Swap the order of those two thirds and you change the chord's quality entirely.

Major triad = major third on the bottom + minor third on top (C–E is major 3rd; E–G is minor 3rd → C major) **Minor triad** = minor third on the bottom + major third on top (D–F is minor 3rd; F–A is major 3rd → D minor) **Diminished triad** = two minor thirds stacked (B–D is minor 3rd; D–F is minor 3rd → B diminished, with a diminished — shrunken — fifth B to F)

The Seven Diatonic Triads in C, Spelled Out

I — C major: C – E – G The home base. Stable, resolved, final-feeling. This is the tonic — where all tension wants to land.

ii — D minor: D – F – A Often called the subdominant substitute. It shares two notes with F major (F and A), so it functions similarly to IV. Very common in pop; gives a slightly darker, more introspective flavor than IV.

iii — E minor: E – G – B The least common of the seven. Shares two notes with C major (E and G) and two with G major (G and B), which makes it ambiguous — it can point toward home or toward the dominant. Greg mentioned it appears sometimes but is not in the core five.

IV — F major: F – A – C The subdominant. Creates departure and anticipation. The "speaking words of wisdom" move in Let It Be goes I → V → IV → I (C → G → F → C), and the IV is what gives that line its openness before the resolution.

V — G major: G – B – D The dominant. This is the engine of Western harmony. The note B (the major third of G) pulls upward to C; the note F (when G appears as a seventh chord, G–B–D–F) pulls downward to E. That magnetic pull from V back to I — the 5-to-1 motion Greg described — is the primary tension-and-release mechanism in all of tonal music.

vi — A minor: A – C – E The relative minor. Built on the 6th degree, all of its notes live inside the C major scale — that scale-sharing is the relative-minor relationship. The A minor chord itself shares two of its three tones (C and E) with the C major chord, so it sounds closely

related but emotionally darker — melancholic, introspective. The I–V–vi–IV and I–vi–IV–V progressions (C–G–Am–F and C–Am–F–G) underpin hundreds of pop songs from "Let It Be" to "No Woman No Cry" to nearly every ballad from the 1960s onward.

vii° — B diminished: B – D – F Rarely appears as a standalone root-position triad in popular music. Greg's insight is exact: it's almost always functioning as an incomplete dominant — the notes B, D, and F are three of the four notes in G7 (G–B–D–F). Play it and your ear immediately expects resolution to C. When you hear a "vii chord" in a pop song, treat it as V with the root missing.

Why These Five Dominate Popular Music

The I (tonic), IV (subdominant), and V (dominant) form the three harmonic pillars of tonal music. They've been the backbone of folk, blues, rock, and pop for centuries. Add vi (relative minor) and ii (subdominant substitute) and you have every harmonic color that most listeners expect and respond to.

The two most common chord families in pop:

- **I – IV – V** (three-chord songs: "La Bamba," nearly all 12-bar blues)
- **I – V – vi – IV** (C–G–Am–F: "Let It Be," "No Woman No Cry," "With or Without You," hundreds more)

The ii appears constantly as a IV substitute or in ii–V–I motion (D minor → G major → C major), which is — as Greg noted — the core of the circle of fifths at work: each chord is the V of the next.

> **For accompanying a singer:** A singer doesn't announce the key or the chord. They sing a note and move. Your job is to hear where they are, know what key you're in, and place a chord underneath that supports rather than clashes. The five core chords give you a small, closed vocabulary that covers the vast majority of what a singer will do. If you know I, ii, IV, V, and vi in C cold — note names, sound, feel, and finger positions — you can get under almost any singer in C without hesitation. The V chord is especially critical: its pull toward I mirrors the natural arc of a melodic phrase ending. When the singer resolves, so does the V. When they lift off again, IV or ii gives them space. The vi gives you the minor shade when the emotion turns inward. Knowing these five by ear, not just by reading, is the entire foundation of real-time accompaniment.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Leaving gaps between chord changes — the brain hesitates because the next chord hasn't been fully memorized; the fix is isolating that specific transition and repeating it 5–10 times, not replaying the whole progression.
- Building the iii chord (E–G–B) and confusing it for a root-position I or V chord because it shares notes with both; remember iii is the least stable and least common of the seven.
- Treating B diminished (B–D–F) as a standalone chord to memorize separately — it is almost always V in disguise (an incomplete G7); hear it as 'wants to go to C.'
- Playing all chords in root position with large hand leaps — inversions exist precisely to minimize motion; if you jump a sixth to get to the next chord, there is almost certainly a closer voicing.
- Confusing chord quality: D minor is D–F–A (minor third D–F on the bottom), NOT D–F#–A (which would be D major and is not diatonic to C major).

EXERCISES

Name-and-Play: All Seven Triads in Order

10 min

Internalize the note spelling and sound of every diatonic triad in C major before touching inversions.

1. Sit at the keyboard with your right hand, fingers 1-3-5 (thumb-middle-pinky).
2. Say aloud: 'C major: C, E, G' — then place and play the chord. Hold it two full beats.
3. Say aloud: 'D minor: D, F, A' — move to D and play. Hold two beats.
4. Continue up the scale: E minor (E–G–B), F major (F–A–C), G major (G–B–D), A minor (A–C–E), B diminished (B–D–F).
5. Then come back down: B diminished, A minor, G major, F major, E minor, D minor, C major.
6. Each time you play, say the chord name AND the three note names aloud. Speaking and playing together locks both into memory faster.
7. Pass/fail check: you can name all seven chords and their notes without looking at any reference, and you can play each one without hesitation.

Target: Complete two full cycles (up and down) with zero hesitations and no errors in note names. Aim to reach this within the first two practice sessions.

Isolation Drill: The Two Hardest Transitions

15 min

Eliminate the hesitation Greg described — the moment of freezing before a chord change — by targeting only the transitions that cause it.

1. Play I (C–E–G), then immediately move to V (G–B–D). Notice whether you hesitate. If yes, this is your isolation target.
2. Play only that pair — I then V — 10 times in a row without stopping. Count the reps out loud.
3. Then play V (G–B–D) then IV (F–A–C) — the 'speaking words of wisdom' motion from Let It Be. Repeat 10 times.
4. Now play I → V → IV → I as a four-chord loop. Repeat 8 times.
5. Identify any other transition where you freeze (commonly V → vi, i.e., G major → A minor). Isolate and repeat that pair 10 times before putting it back in the sequence.
6. Pass/fail check: the target transition plays without any perceptible pause between chords — no gap, no stumble.

Target: Each isolated pair plays 10 times cleanly with no hesitation. The I–V–IV–I loop runs 8 consecutive times without stopping.

The Five Core Chords Loop (I ii IV V vi)

20 min

Build the specific vocabulary Greg prescribed — the 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 — as a playable rotation in both directions.

1. In root position, right hand only, play each chord and hold for two slow beats (count '1, 2' aloud): C major, D minor, F major, G major, A minor.
2. Repeat the sequence in reverse: A minor, G major, F major, D minor, C major.
3. Now try a common pop loop: I → V → vi → IV (C major → G major → A minor → F major). Hold each chord two beats. Repeat 4 times.
4. Then try I → IV → V → I (C → F → G → C). Repeat 4 times.
5. Add the left hand: play only the root note of each chord in the left hand (C, F, G, A, or D — whichever chord you are on) while the right hand plays the triad.
6. Pass/fail check: the I–V–vi–IV loop runs 4 times continuously without stopping, left and right hand together.

Target: Both loops (I–V–vi–IV and I–IV–V–I) played 4 times each with both hands, no stopping, at a slow, steady tempo (roughly 60 BPM).

Let It Be Verse: Chord Recognition by Ear

15 min

Apply the five core chords to an actual song Greg worked with you on — connecting theory to real accompaniment.

1. Listen to the verse of 'Let It Be' once, following along in your head with the chord names: I (C) → V (G) → vi (Am) → IV (F), then I (C) → V (G) → IV (F) → I (C).
2. Sing or hum 'When I find myself in times of trouble' while playing only the root note of each chord in the left hand, changing on the beat where the chord changes.
3. Now add the right-hand triads: I (C–E–G) → V (G–B–D) → vi (A–C–E) → IV (F–A–C) for the first line.

4. For the 'speaking words of wisdom, let it be' line play: I (C) → V (G) → IV (F) → I (C).
5. Repeat the whole verse sequence 3 times without stopping. If you lose your place, stop only at a chord boundary — never mid-chord — then resume.
6. Pass/fail check: the verse plays through 3 times without losing the chord sequence, even if the timing is imperfect.

Target: Three full verse cycles of Let It Be with correct chord changes, both hands, no reference to notes or chord names.

Sources: Diatonic Chords You Need To Know — Learn Jazz Standards · Diatonic Chords — The Complete Guide — Piano With Jonny · Learn the Chords in C Major — Musiversal · Diatonic Chords in Major — Puget Sound Music Theory

Chord Inversions

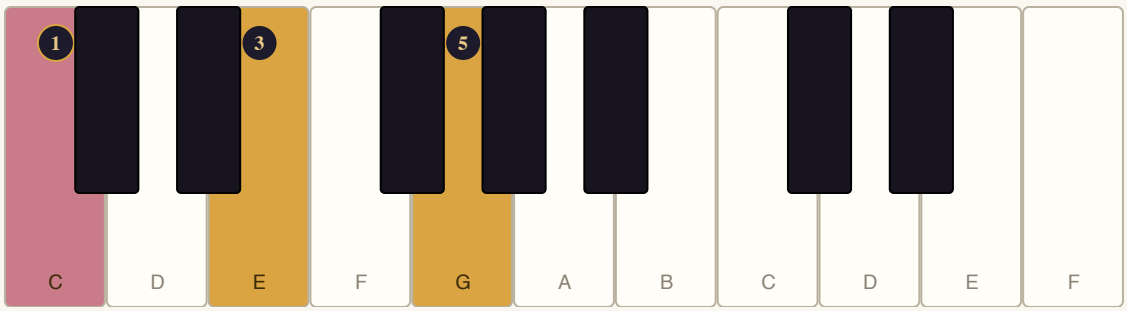
You already know the five core chords in C major (C, Dm, F, G, Am). Right now, if you play them all in root position — lowest note always the letter the chord is named after — your right hand leaps around the keyboard like it's playing hopscotch. That's unnecessary work, and it sounds lurchy behind a singer.

Inversions solve this. Every triad has three possible arrangements depending on which note sits on the bottom. For C major (the notes C, E, and G) those arrangements are:

- **Root position:** C–E–G (C is lowest)
- **First inversion:** E–G–C (E is lowest)
- **Second inversion:** G–C–E (G is lowest)

All three contain the same three notes — they just stack differently. Because the notes are the same, the chord sounds recognizably like a C major chord in every position. What changes is color and how far your hand has to travel to reach the next chord.

Greg's rule — *move as little as possible* — is the entire point. When you can get from C major to F major by shifting one finger rather than jumping a fifth, you do that. The result is a smooth, connected sound that locks in with the singer instead of crashing around underneath them. That smoothness is the difference between an accompanist and someone who happens to be playing chords at the same time as a vocalist.



The Three Positions, Spelled Out

Root Position: C–E–G, fingered 1–3–5

Your thumb (finger 1) sits on C, middle finger (3) on E, pinky (5) on G. This is the home base — the "natural" stack where the chord's name note is on the bottom. It sounds stable and grounded. The gap between each finger is a third (C to E = 4 half-steps — a major third; E to G = 3 half-steps — a minor third; a major third under a minor third is exactly what makes it a *major* triad), so your hand sits in a relaxed, slightly arched position.

First Inversion: E–G–C, fingered 1–2–5

Take the C from the bottom and move it up an octave. Now E is lowest. Finger 1 (thumb) on E, finger 2 (index) on G, finger 5 (pinky) on C. Notice the gap changed: E to G is a minor third (3 half-steps), G to C is a perfect fourth (5 half-steps). Your hand stretches slightly more toward the top. In popular-music notation this is written **C/E** — "C major over E bass."

An alternate fingering Greg mentioned — **1–2–4** — works well here when the chord that follows demands your pinky to be free or when 1–2–5 feels like too much stretch for your hand size. Try both; use whichever lets you release tension.

Second Inversion: G–C–E, fingered 1–3–5

Now G is on the bottom. Thumb on G, middle finger on C, pinky on E. The gaps are a perfect fourth (G to C = 5 half-steps) then a major third (C to E = 4 half-steps). Written **C/G** in slash notation. This voicing has a slightly suspended, less resolved sound — classical composers used it right before a final cadence precisely because it creates tension that wants to release.

Voice Leading: The Logic of Minimum Motion

Voice leading is the art of connecting chords so individual notes move as short a distance as possible. Think of each note in your chord as a voice in a choir — a good arranger doesn't make the soprano jump an octave when she can stay on the same pitch or step one note.

Example: C major → F major in C

Root position to root position:

- C → F (up a fourth)
- E → A (up a fourth)
- G → C (up a fourth)

Every note jumps a fourth. Your whole hand lifts and lands.

Root position C → second inversion F (F/C, voiced C–F–A):

- C → C (stays put — common tone)
- E → F (moves up one half-step)
- G → A (moves up one whole step)

Your hand barely moves. The C is shared between both chords; only two notes shift, by the smallest possible intervals.

This is the core skill Greg taught you. Before you play a chord, ask: *where is the next chord, and what inversion puts its notes closest to where my fingers already are?*

The "Let It Be" Verse in Practice

Greg showed you the I–V–IV motion ("the one to the five four"). In C:

Chord	Root-position notes	Smooth voicing
I (C)	C–E–G	C–E–G (root pos.)
V (G)	G–B–D	G–B–D (root pos.)
IV (F)	F–A–C	C–F–A (2nd inv., F/C)

By using second inversion on the IV chord, the C in your C major chord stays in place as the bottom note of the F/C — zero motion on the bottom voice, tiny motion on the top two.

The Mental Habit: Predict, Then Move

Greg's phrase "reset your hand position, predict where you're going" means this: before you lift off a chord, your brain should already know the inversion of the next chord that requires the least travel. This is not improvised — you work it out slowly in practice, repeat it until it's automatic, then you no longer hesitate. The moment of hesitation is the signal you haven't fully learned it yet. When it's truly in your hands, there is no gap.

For accompanying a singer: A singer doesn't stay in one register, doesn't always start on the root note of a chord, and doesn't wait for you to find your place. If your accompaniment lurches between root-position chords, the big jumps in your bass voice compete with the vocal melody and make the harmonic rhythm sound bumpy. Inversions eliminate that. By keeping your voicing tight — moving one or two notes by a step rather than leaping a fourth or fifth — you create a stable, low-motion sonic bed that the singer can lean against. You also stay physically prepared: a small shift between chords means your hands are always in position, never scrambling. That's what lets you follow the singer in real time rather than reacting to them after the fact.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Playing every chord in root position, causing unnecessary large jumps between chords
- Using 1–3–5 fingering universally without adjusting for the wider span in first inversion (E–G–C), leading to tension and slowness
- Lifting the entire hand off the keys between chords instead of pivoting from the shared common tone
- Practicing inversions in isolation without immediately connecting them to a real chord progression
- Stopping to think about the inversion name mid-song — inversions must be practiced until the physical shape is memorized, not calculated in real time
- Ignoring the bottom note of the inversion — the bass note changes the harmonic color and the singer hears it; C/E sounds different from C/G, so pick intentionally

EXERCISES

Three-Position Drill on C Major

10 min

Memorize the physical hand shape and fingering for all three C major positions before moving to other chords.

1. Sit at the piano with your right hand over middle C.
2. Play root position: thumb (1) on C4, middle finger (3) on E4, pinky (5) on G4. Hold for 2 beats. Say aloud: 'C–E–G, root.'
3. Without lifting your wrist, release and place thumb (1) on E4, index (2) on G4, pinky (5) on C5. Hold 2 beats. Say aloud: 'E–G–C, first inversion.'
4. Release and place thumb (1) on G4, middle finger (3) on C5, pinky (5) on E5. Hold 2 beats. Say aloud: 'G–C–E, second inversion.'
5. Reverse back down: second → first → root, saying the note names each time.
6. Repeat the full up-and-down cycle 10 times without stopping. Eyes on your hand, not the keys.
7. Pass/fail check: you can play all three positions and name every note without pausing to count.

Target: 10 clean up-down cycles with zero hesitation and correct note names on every chord

C → F Voice-Leading Study

15 min

Experience the difference between root-to-root jumping and smooth inversion-based voice leading on the most common two-chord move in 'Let It Be.'

1. Play C major root position (C–E–G, fingering 1–3–5), then jump to F major root position (F–A–C, fingering 1–3–5). Notice how far your hand moved.
2. Now play C major root position again. This time move to F major in second inversion: thumb (1) on C4, middle finger (3) on F4, pinky (5) on A4. Notice that your thumb did not move at all — C is the shared common tone.
3. Alternate between these two chords 10 times slowly, keeping your thumb anchored on C as the pivot point.
4. Add G major root position (G–B–D, fingering 1–3–5) before the F: C → G → F (second inversion). This is the 'Let It Be' I–V–IV motion.
5. Play the three-chord loop 10 times at a slow, steady pace (roughly 60 BPM quarter notes). Stop only if a finger lands on the wrong key — reset and restart the loop.
6. Pass/fail check: 10 consecutive loops with no wrong notes and no pause between chords.

Target: 10 consecutive I–V–IV loops at 60 BPM with no wrong notes and no hesitation between chords

Common-Tone Freeze Exercise

20 min

Train the habit of identifying and physically anchoring the shared note between two chords before moving.

1. Choose any two adjacent chords from your five C major chords (e.g., C and Am, or F and G).
2. Play the first chord. Before releasing, ask: 'Is any note in this chord also in the next chord?' Say the note name aloud.
3. If yes: keep that finger down (or return to that exact key) while the other fingers shift to complete the next chord.
4. If no shared note: choose the inversion of the next chord whose notes are physically closest to your current hand position.
5. Work through these pairs in order: C→Am, Am→F, F→G, G→C. For each pair, identify the smoothest inversion before playing.
6. Repeat each pair 10 times. Only move to the next pair after 10 clean transitions.
7. Pass/fail check: For each pair, you can name the shared common tone (or the nearest-motion inversion) before you play it.

Target: All four chord pairs with 10 clean transitions each, common tone identified verbally before each move

Hesitation Test: The 5-Second Rule

15 min

Apply Greg's pass/fail criterion — no hesitation — to a four-chord loop in real time.

1. Set a metronome or phone timer to 60 BPM.
2. Decide in advance which inversion of each chord you will use for the loop: C (root), Am (root or first inversion), F (second inversion, F/C), G (root).
3. Play the loop for 8 measures (four chords per measure, one chord per beat) at 60 BPM.
4. If you hesitate — even for a fraction of a beat — stop the metronome, identify which chord caused the hesitation, and practice just that one transition 10 times.

5. Resume the full loop. Repeat until you complete 8 measures with zero hesitations.
6. When 60 BPM is clean, move to 70 BPM. Repeat the test.
7. Pass/fail check: 8 measures at 70 BPM with no hesitations and no wrong notes.

Target: 8 measures of C–Am–F–G loop at 70 BPM with zero hesitations

Sources: Chord Inversions — Hello Music Theory

The Circle of Fifths

You already know C major cold — all white keys, and the five core chords (I, ii, IV, V, vi) that underpin most pop and rock. The circle of fifths is the logical system that tells you how to move from C to every other key, in what order, and why some keys feel "close" and others feel distant.

Think of it as a clock with 12 positions. C sits at 12 o'clock. Moving clockwise, each key is a perfect fifth higher than the last: C → G → D → A → E → B → F#/Gb → Db → Ab → Eb → Bb → F, and then back to C. Each clockwise step adds exactly one sharp to the key signature. Moving counterclockwise subtracts a sharp (or adds a flat): C → F → Bb → Eb → Ab → Db → Gb.

The critical insight Greg gave you: **adjacent keys on the circle share all but one note.** F major is one step counterclockwise from C — it has just one different note (Bb instead of B). That is why Greg said to go to F next after C: minimum new information, maximum musical mileage. C# is seven positions away and has seven sharps — all seven notes are different from C major. Distance on the circle equals difficulty of translation.

The circle is also a harmony engine. The chord that is one step clockwise from your home key is always the V (dominant) chord — the chord that creates maximum tension before resolving home. That 5→1 pull is the engine of Western music.

The Clockwise Order: Ascending Fifths

Starting at C (12 o'clock) and moving clockwise, the 12 major keys in order are:

C – G – D – A – E – B – F#/Gb – Db – Ab – Eb – Bb – F (and back to C)

Each step is a perfect fifth interval (7 semitones). Going clockwise adds one sharp per step; going counterclockwise adds one flat per step.

Key Signatures: Exact Sharp and Flat Counts

Sharp keys (clockwise from C):

Key	Sharps	Which sharps
C	0	—
G	1	F#
D	2	F#, C#
A	3	F#, C#, G#
E	4	F#, C#, G#, D#
B	5	F#, C#, G#, D#, A#
F#	6	F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#
C#	7	F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#, B#

Flat keys (counterclockwise from C):

Key	Flats	Which flats
F	1	Bb
Bb	2	Bb, Eb
Eb	3	Bb, Eb, Ab
Ab	4	Bb, Eb, Ab, Db
Db	5	Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb
Gb	6	Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Cb

Notice that F#/Gb and C#/Db are **enharmonic pairs** — the same pitches spelled two different ways. B/Cb, F#/Gb, and C#/Db are the three enharmonic crossover points at the bottom of the clock.

Memorizing the Order of Accidentals

Order of sharps: F – C – G – D – A – E – B (mnemonic: *Father Charles Goes Down And Ends Battle*)

Order of flats: B – E – A – D – G – C – F (the exact reverse — mnemonic: *Battle Ends And Down Goes Charles' Father*)

Sharps and flats are always added in these fixed orders. When G major gets its one sharp, it is always F#. When D major gets its second sharp, it is always C#. You never have to guess — the order is invariant.

Why F Is the Closest Key to C (and C# the Farthest)

F major is one step counterclockwise from C. Its scale is F – G – A – Bb – C – D – E – F — the same seven notes as C major except for one: B becomes Bb. Six out of seven notes are shared. Your hand position, chord shapes, and ear barely have to adjust.

C# major, seven steps clockwise, has a completely different set of pitches: C# – D# – E# – F# – G# – A# – B#. Every single note has a sharp. Your C major knowledge translates almost nothing directly.

Greg's practice path — C, then F, then Bb, then Eb (counterclockwise) — exploits this principle deliberately. Each new key costs you exactly one changed note.

The V-to-I Engine: How the Circle Drives Harmony

In every major key, the V chord (built on the 5th scale degree) is harmonically unstable — it wants to resolve to the I chord. This is the most fundamental motion in Western tonal music.

On the circle, the V chord of any key lives **one step clockwise**. In C major: the note one fifth up is G, and G major is G's home key. So the G major chord (V of C) resolves home to C. Move counterclockwise on the circle = resolve.

Greg's insight — "the one could be the five of another key" — is exactly this: C major is simultaneously the home key of its own songs AND the V chord of F major. That is how music moves between keys: you reinterpret a familiar chord as the dominant of the next key and resolve it. Jazz uses this constantly. In "Let It Be," the chords C, G and F sit as three adjacent positions on the circle (F–C–G), one reason the song feels so natural under the hand.

Greg's Practice Path Around the Circle

Greg's prescribed sequence: **C → F → Bb → Eb → Ab → Db → Gb → B → E → A → D → G → back to C**

This is the counterclockwise (flat) direction first, adding one new flat per key. At each new key, your only new task is: identify the one changed note, update your scale fingering, rebuild the five core chords (I, ii, IV, V, vi) in that key. At 1 hour/day, Greg estimated 3 months to be comfortable in all 12. That is roughly one new key every 7–10 days — an aggressive but achievable pace for a fast learner.

> **For accompanying a singer:** Singers do not think in key signatures — they think in comfort zones. A singer may say "can you drop it a step?" or simply start on a note that feels right and expect you to follow. The circle of fifths is your real-time navigation tool for exactly this situation. If a singer starts on an unexpected note, you can quickly identify which key they are in by finding the closest match on the

circle to your current key. Modulations in songs almost always move one or two steps around the circle — not to distant, unrelated keys. A chorus that is a whole step higher than the verse is moving clockwise two positions. Knowing the circle means you are never more than one or two keystrokes of mental math away from the right chord set. You do not need to panic-read sheet music; you reason from the circle.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Confusing clockwise (adds sharps) with counterclockwise (adds flats). Remember: moving right/clockwise = sharps; moving left/counterclockwise = flats. C to G is clockwise and G has one sharp (F#). C to F is counterclockwise and F has one flat (Bb).
- Forgetting that the ORDER of sharps is fixed: F–C–G–D–A–E–B. D major's two sharps are always F# and C# — never G# or any other pair. Students often guess the wrong sharps for a key.
- Treating the circle as a memorization chart rather than a functional tool. The point is not to recite the order — it is to know that G is the V of C, and C is the V of F, so a G chord in a C song is always pulling toward home, and a C chord in an F song is doing the same thing.
- Skipping inversions when moving between keys. The voice-leading principle Greg taught — move as little as possible — applies across keys too. When you shift from C to F, most of your chord shapes can be slightly modified rather than rebuilt from scratch. Students who ignore this play with unnecessary jumps.
- Learning all 12 keys in a random order instead of around the circle. The circle path (C → F → Bb → Eb…) is pedagogically optimal because each key differs by only one note from the previous. Jumping from C to C# means relearning everything at once.

EXERCISES

Build the Circle on Paper, Then Play It

20 min

Internalize the 12-key clockwise order and the one-flat/one-sharp rule before touching the keyboard.

1. Draw a clock face with 12 positions. Write C at 12 o'clock.
2. Moving clockwise, fill in the remaining 11 keys in perfect-fifth order: G (1 o'clock), D (2), A (3), E (4), B (5), F# (6), Db (7), Ab (8), Eb (9), Bb (10), F (11).
3. Next to each key, write the number of sharps (clockwise side) or flats (counterclockwise side) it has.
4. For the flat side (F through Gb), write the specific flats: F=Bb, Bb=Bb+Eb, Eb=Bb+Eb+Ab, and so on.
5. At the keyboard, play just the tonic note of each key in clockwise order — C, G, D, A, E, B, F#, Db, Ab, Eb, Bb, F — saying the key name aloud as you play it. Do this until you can complete the circle without hesitation.

Target: Complete the full 12-key cycle on the keyboard from memory, naming each key aloud, in under 60 seconds with no errors.

One-Note Difference: C to F Scale Comparison

15 min

Hear and feel the single note that separates adjacent keys — the core lesson of how the circle works.

1. Play a C major scale right hand, saying each note aloud: C–D–E–F–G–A–B–C. Use the correct fingering: thumb (1) on C, fingers 1-2-3, thumb crosses under for 1-2-3-4-5.
2. Now play an F major scale, starting thumb on F: F–G–A–Bb–C–D–E–F. Note that F major's fingering differs from C major — the thumb crosses under after the 4th finger (on Bb), so the right hand runs 1–2–3–4–1–2–3–4. The ONLY different note is Bb instead of B. Say 'Bb' out loud when you hit it.
3. Play C major again, then immediately F major, back and forth 5 times. Each time you hit the Bb in F major, exaggerate it slightly — make your ear register the difference.
4. Repeat this exercise one step further counterclockwise: compare F major (Bb) with Bb major (Bb + Eb). Play Bb major: Bb–C–D–Eb–F–G–A–Bb. The one new note is Eb.
5. Each session, add one new key counterclockwise. Stop when you reach a key where you hesitate on the new accidental — that is your current frontier. Practice that transition until there is zero hesitation.

Target: Play C and F major scales back-to-back with no hesitation at the Bb, at a steady tempo of at least 60 bpm (one note per beat).

V-to-I Resolution Drill Around the Circle

15 min

Physically feel the tension-and-release of dominant-to-tonic motion, and understand how the circle maps it.

1. In C major, play the G major triad (G–B–D, root position, right hand fingers 1-3-5). Hold it for 2 beats.
2. Resolve it to C major triad (C–E–G). Notice the pull — the B in G major (the leading tone) wants to rise to C, and the D wants to rise to E. Say out loud: 'G is the five of C.'
3. Now move one step counterclockwise: you are in F major. Play C major (C–E–G) as the V chord of F. Resolve it to F major (F–A–C). Say: 'C is the five of F.'
4. Continue counterclockwise: in Bb major, F major (F–A–C) is the V chord. Play F, resolve to Bb (Bb–D–F). Say: 'F is the five of Bb.'
5. Do 4 total V-to-I resolutions per practice session, each in a consecutive counterclockwise key. Use root-position triads only until the resolutions are fluent, then experiment with inversions to minimize hand movement.

Target: Complete V-to-I resolutions in C, F, Bb, and Eb consecutively — no hesitation between the dominant and tonic chord — at 60 bpm or faster.

'Let It Be' Chord Map Using the Circle

20 min

Apply the circle to real music by mapping the I–V–IV progression from the lesson onto the circle visually.

1. On your circle diagram (from Exercise 1), locate C at 12 o'clock. Identify G (one step clockwise = V) and F (one step counterclockwise = IV). These three chords are neighbors on the circle.
2. At the piano, play in C major: C major triad (C–E–G), then G major triad (G–B–D), then F major triad (F–A–C), then back to C. This is the I–V–IV–I progression, matching the 'speaking words of wisdom, let it be' line Greg showed you.
3. Use left-hand root notes (single notes: C, G, F) while the right hand plays the triads. This is your first two-hand accompaniment pattern.
4. Play the full 4-chord loop — C, G, F, C — 10 times in a row at a comfortable slow tempo (50–60 bpm), counting 4 beats per chord.

5. Once fluent, sing or hum the melody of 'Let It Be' while playing the chords. The goal is to keep the chords moving without stopping to think, so your attention is free to listen to the vocal.

Target: Play the C–G–F–C loop 10 consecutive times with no hesitations, hands together, while simultaneously humming the melody.

Sources: Circle of Fifths — Hello Music Theory · Circle of Fifths: The Key to Unlocking Harmonic Understanding — Berklee Online · The Circle of Fifths: The Clock of Key Signatures — Liberty Park Music · Circle of Fifths Theory — NHME

V → I: Tension & Release

Every song you will ever accompany — pop, jazz, folk, R&B — is built on one foundational pull: the V chord wanting to resolve to the I chord. This is not a style preference or a historical accident. It is the gravitational core of all Western tonal music for the past 400 years.

Greg introduced this in your first lesson as "the primary thing." He showed you how the five core chords in C major (C, Dm, F, G, Am) are not random; they are in constant conversation with each other. The G major chord (V) is the restless one — it *needs* to go home to C (I). F major (IV) is transitional. C (I) is home.

This lesson digs into *why* that pull is so powerful, names the specific notes responsible for it, and shows you how this same 5-to-1 motion is the mechanism that lets music move between all 12 keys. Once you feel this in your fingers and ears, you will hear every song differently — and accompanying a singer will become a matter of tracking where "home" is and whether the harmony is pulling toward it, resting in it, or moving away from it.

The Three Harmonic Functions

Every chord in a key has a job — a *function*. There are three:

- **Tonic (T):** Home base. Stable. The I chord in C major is C-E-G. The vi (Am, or A-C-E) also has tonic flavor.
- **Dominant (D):** Maximum tension. The V chord, G major (G-B-D), pulls powerfully back to I. The V7 (G7 = G-B-D-F) is even stronger.
- **Subdominant (S):** Transitional. The IV chord, F major (F-A-C), moves away from home and sets up the dominant.

The classic motion is **T → S → D → T**, or in C: **C → F → G → C**. Greg's "Let It Be" verse ("speaking words of wisdom, let it be") uses a compressed version of this: I–V–IV–I (C–G–F–C).

The Leading Tone: B Wants to Be C

Inside the G major chord (G-B-D), the note **B** is scale degree 7 in C major. It sits a half step below the tonic C — which is the closest any note can be without *being* the tonic. That closeness creates a powerful magnetic pull upward. This note is called the **leading tone**, and its job is to lead you home.

When you play G → C, that B moves up to C. Your ear hears it resolve and sighs with relief. Centuries of music training your ear to expect exactly this.

The V7 Chord: A Tritone That Demands Resolution

Add one more note to G major and you get **G7 = G-B-D-F**. The F is the minor seventh of the chord, and it creates something remarkable: a **tritone** (an interval of three whole steps, also called a diminished fifth) between B and F. The tritone is the most dissonant interval in Western music — it was historically called *diabolus in musica* ("the devil in music").

Here is what that tritone does when G7 resolves to C major:

- **B** (the leading tone) moves **up** a half step to **C**
- **F** (the chordal seventh) moves **down** a half step to **E**

Both notes resolve by half step, in opposite directions, into the C major chord (C-E-G). Two half-step pulls at once — that is why G7→C feels so *inevitable*. The V7-to-I progression is the single most powerful cadential motion in tonal music, and it underpins every genre you will ever play.

Authentic Cadence: The Full Stop

When G (or G7) resolves to C in root position, it is called an **authentic cadence**. A *perfect* authentic cadence (V in root position → I in root position, melody landing on C) is a full stop — a musical period at the end of a sentence. A *half cadence* ends *on* the V chord without resolving, leaving the phrase open and asking a question. You can hear both in "Let It Be": the verse's first phrase ends open on the IV and its second phrase resolves to I, and the chorus resolves to I as well.

"The One Could Be the Five of Another Key"

Greg made a crucial remark: *"The one could be the five of another key."* This is the key to understanding the circle of fifths.

In C major, G is the V (the five). But G is also the I (the one) of G major. So: C is stable, but it can become the IV of G major, making G major suddenly feel like home. Or you can treat the D major chord as V7 of G (D7 = D-F#-A-C, which resolves to G) — this is called a **secondary dominant**, written V/V (pronounced "five of five"). In C major: D7 → G → C is two stacked 5-to-1 motions in sequence.

This is exactly how music moves around the circle of fifths. Each adjacent key is one step — a twelfth of the way — around the circle from the next. F is close to C (one flat, only one different note: Bb instead of B); G is close to C in the other direction (one sharp, F# instead of F). The further you travel around the circle, the more notes change and the more distant the key feels.

When you accompany a singer who drifts into a new tonal area, what you are sensing is a new "home" asserting itself — a new I chord — and you will navigate there by following the 5-to-1 pull that lands you on it.

> **For accompanying a singer:** A singer navigates melody intuitively, often without knowing why certain notes feel tense or settled. Your job at the piano is to *provide* the harmonic context that makes their melodic choices make sense. The V-to-I pull does this automatically: when you land on I at the end of a phrase, you give the singer's melody a place to breathe and land. When you sit on V (half cadence), you signal that the phrase is not finished — the singer feels that openness and keeps going. In "Let It Be," the moment the harmony arrives on C (I) under "let it be," the emotional release comes precisely from that V-to-I resolution. You are not just playing chords — you are shaping the emotional arc of the singer's line.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Playing G-B-D as a block chord every time without listening to which inversion puts B closest to where your hand already is — this causes unnecessary jumps and breaks the flow.
- Treating all five core chords as equally stable. They are not: G (V) is always restless; C (I) is always home. Feel the difference before you play the next chord.
- Resolving the V7 (G7) but not moving the B up to C — leaving B hanging or jumping away from it breaks the leading-tone resolution your ear expects.
- Hesitating before the V-to-I move. Greg's test: if you think before landing on I, you do not own it yet. Drill until the resolution is reflexive.
- Confusing the tritone interval (B-to-F in G7) as something to avoid. It is the *source* of the tension — lean into it, then let it resolve.

EXERCISES

V-I Resolution Drill in C Major

10 min

Build muscle memory and ear recognition for the G-to-C resolution, both with triads and with G7.

1. Sit at the piano and play C major (C-E-G) in root position with your right hand, fingers 1-3-5. Hold it for two beats and feel 'home.'
2. Move to G major (G-B-D) in second inversion (D-G-B, fingers 1-2-4 or 1-2-5). Hold it for two beats. Notice the restlessness — especially the B wanting to rise.
3. Resolve back to C major root position (C-E-G). Listen to the B moving up to C. Say 'five resolves to one' aloud as you do it.
4. Now play G7 in second inversion: D-F-G-B (or simplify to just B-F-G as a three-note shell). Hold it — feel the tritone between B and F.
5. Resolve to C (C-E-G). Notice both B moving up to C and F moving down to E.
6. Repeat the entire cycle — C, G (or G7), C — 10 times without stopping. Aim for no hesitation before the landing on C.

Target: 10 consecutive repetitions with zero hesitation before the C chord. You pass when it feels like a reflex, not a decision.

Half Cadence vs. Authentic Cadence: Question and Answer

8 min

Train your ear and hands to distinguish an open phrase (ending on V) from a closed phrase (ending on I).

1. Play this four-chord phrase slowly: C (I) → F (IV) → G (V). Stop on G. Hold it for 4 beats. Notice the unresolved feeling — this is a half cadence, a musical question.
2. Now play the same phrase but add the resolution: C → F → G → C. Land on C and hold. This is an authentic cadence — a musical answer.
3. Alternate: play the 'question' version (ending on G), pause, then play the 'answer' version (ending on C). Really listen to the difference.
4. Sing a simple two-note phrase (any two notes) over the 'question' version — land somewhere that feels unresolved. Then sing the same phrase over the 'answer' version and let your voice land on C. Notice how the harmony under you shapes where your melody wants to go.
5. Repeat 5 times, alternating question and answer.

Target: You can predict aurally (before playing) which version will sound open and which will sound closed. Singing over both versions seals the connection between harmony and melody.

Five-of-Five: Stacked Dominants in C

12 min

Experience how two chained V-to-I motions navigate two steps around the circle of fifths.

1. Play D major (D-F#-A) in root position, right hand. This is the V of G — the 'five of five' in the key of C.
2. Now play D7 (D-F#-A-C). Feel the tritone between F# and C. This chord is desperate to go to G.
3. Resolve D7 to G major (G-B-D). Feel that resolution. You have just moved one step around the circle.
4. Now treat G major as a new V. Play G7 (G-B-D-F) and feel it pulling toward C.
5. Resolve G7 to C major (C-E-G). You have moved another step around the circle and arrived home.
6. Play the full chain slowly: D7 → G (or G7) → C. Say aloud: 'five of five, to five, to one.' Repeat 8 times.
7. Listen specifically to the F# in D7 resolving up to G, then the B in G7 resolving up to C. Each dominant has its own leading tone pulling to the next key's tonic.

Target: 8 clean repetitions of D7 → G7 → C with no hesitation. You should begin to hear this as a single flowing motion rather than three separate chords.

"Let It Be" Verse Cadence Analysis

10 min

Apply V-to-I awareness to the song Greg already taught you, identifying where the phrase closes and where it stays open.

1. Play the verse chord loop Greg taught you: C (I) → G (V) → F (IV) → C (I). Play it slowly four times, one chord per measure.
2. On the third pass, label each chord aloud as you play it: 'one... five... four... one.'
3. Notice that when you arrive back on C at the end of the loop, that is an authentic cadence — the phrase closes.
4. Now play C → G → F and stop on F without resolving. Notice that F (IV) does NOT create the same pull as G (V). The subdominant feels transitional, not urgent.

5. Return to the full loop: C → G → F → C. This time, focus your attention specifically on the G → C move and feel the V-to-I resolution each time the phrase closes.
6. Sing 'let it be' (four syllables) over the last two chords (G → C) and feel how the harmonic resolution reinforces the lyric's sense of acceptance and rest.

Target: You can point to the exact beat where V resolves to I in the verse loop every time, and you can sing the phrase in tune over it without stopping.

Sources: Phrases, Cadences, and Harmonic Function — Fundamentals, Function, and Form (Milne Publishing / SUNY Geneseo) · The Essentials of Functional Harmony — Beyond Music Theory · Dominant Seventh Chord — Wikipedia · Hearing Secondary Dominants — Musical U

Playing by Ear & Accompanying a Singer

This is the whole point. Everything Greg taught you in the first lesson — the C major scale, the five core chords, inversions, the circle of fifths — was infrastructure for this one skill: sitting down with a singer and making them sound great in real time, without sheet music.

Accompanying a singer is different from performing a solo piece. Your job is not to be interesting — it is to be *useful*. You find the key, you lock in the chords, you leave space for the voice, and you respond to what the singer is doing in the moment. The piano supports and guides; the singer leads.

The good news for someone with your analytical mind: this is a systematic skill. There is a logical process for every step — finding the key, locating the starting note on the keyboard, choosing an inversion so your hands barely move, deciding when to play a block chord versus an arpeggio. You will learn these steps in C major first, exactly as Greg prescribed, then translate them to every other key using the circle of fifths and the Nashville number system.

"Let It Be" is an ideal first accompaniment song because the I–V–IV–I progression you already worked on in the lesson is the backbone of the verse. By the time you finish this phase of practice, you will be able to sit down with any singer performing a pop or folk song, ask them what key they are in, and be playing along within seconds.

Step 1: Find the Key and the Singer's Starting Note

When a singer tells you they want to sing a song, ask one question: **"What key are you in?"** If they know — great. If they do not, hum along with them as they warm up, find the note on the keyboard by matching your voice to theirs (sing it, then find the key on the piano that matches what you sang), and use that as your root.

Matching pitch on the keyboard: Play each white key in the middle octave (C–D–E–F–G–A–B) slowly while humming the note the singer just sang. When the piano note and your hummed note feel like they lock together — same pitch, no "wobble" — you have found it. That note is either the tonic (the "1") or another note in the scale. Sing down to where the melody feels like it wants to rest; that resting point is the tonic, and it defines the key.

The starting note of the melody may not be the tonic. In "Let It Be," the verse melody does not begin on the tonic C — it enters on another tone of the scale. Once you know the key is C, you know your five chords: C major (I), Dm (ii), F major (IV), G major (V), Am (vi).

Step 2: The Two Accompaniment Textures You Need First

Block chords (both hands, or RH only): Play all chord tones simultaneously. In C major, root position: C–E–G with fingers 1–3–5. This is the clearest, most direct sound. Use it on strong beats or when you want to mark the chord change firmly.

Broken / arpeggiated chords: Play the notes of the chord one at a time, in sequence. In C major: C, then E, then G, rolling upward. This creates a flowing, less percussive texture that leaves more air for the singer's voice. The Piano With Brenda approach puts this concretely: LH plays root + 5th (C and G), RH plays 3rd + 1st an octave up (E and C) in sequence — eight notes across the measure.

Shell voicing (the practical daily driver): Left hand plays the root alone (C in the bass); right hand plays the triad (C–E–G or an inversion). This split gives you a bass line, harmonic support, and the clearest possible texture for the singer to sit on top of. Start here. It is what Greg's "move as little as possible" principle is built for.

Step 3: Inversions for Smooth Voice Leading

This is where Greg's lesson on inversions pays off directly for accompanying a singer.

Root position — C–E–G (1–3–5): use when you are starting a song or when you need a stable, clear landing.

First inversion — E–G–C (3–5–1): the chord's 3rd is in the bass. Fingering: 1–2–5. Sounds slightly lighter, less final.

Second inversion — G–C–E (5–1–3): the 5th is in the bass. Fingering: 1–2–4 or 1–3–5. Sounds unstable — the ear wants to resolve. The I chord in second inversion (G–C–E) sounds very much like it is pulling toward the V.

The voice-leading rule Greg gave you: move as little as possible between chords. Compare what happens without thinking versus what happens when you use inversions:

- C major (root position: C–E–G) → G major (root position: G–B–D): your right hand makes a big leap (a fifth up, or a fourth down to the lower G).
- C major (root position: C–E–G) → G major (first inversion: B–D–G): your right hand barely moves — C moves down to B, E slides down to D, G stays on G. That is voice leading.

In "Let It Be" (the "speaking words of wisdom" phrase, I–V–IV–I = C–G–F–C): play C in root (C–E–G), then G in first inversion (B–D–G), then F in second inversion (C–F–A), then C in root (C–E–G). The top note of each chord barely moves — G stays near G, A is one step away. The progression sounds smooth and connected rather than blocky.

Step 4: Keeping Steady Time and Leaving Space

Greg's core directive: the singer leads, you support. Two practical rules:

1. **Lock to a pulse before the singer comes in.** Establish your tempo internally — tap your foot, breathe the rhythm — before you play the first chord. Do not wait for the singer to set tempo; give it to them.
2. **Leave space.** "Your accompaniment should just be in the spaces, but then let the melody soar." On long held notes by the singer, you can sustain a chord and do nothing, or you can add a very simple fill — a single note pickup, a brief arpeggio — but the default is *less, not more*. Silence is not failure.

Step 5: The Nashville Number System — Transposing to Any Key

Once you know a song's number pattern, you can play it in any key by just reassigning what "1" means.

"Let It Be" verse phrase "speaking words of wisdom": **I–V–IV–I** = numbers **1–5–4–1** (the full verse runs 1–5–6m–4 | 1–5–4–1). That pattern is the same in every key:

Key	1	4	5
C	C major	F major	G major
F	F major	Bb major	C major
G	G major	C major	D major
Bb	Bb major	Eb major	F major

When a singer says "I need to go down a step from C," you move to Bb. Your 1 is now Bb, your 4 is Eb, your 5 is F. Same muscle memory for the shape of the progression — new key on the circle of fifths. This is exactly what Greg meant by "the one could be the five of another key": once you see the numbers, transposing is just arithmetic on the circle.

> **For accompanying a singer:** Every choice in this topic — inversions, shell voicings, broken chords, leaving space — exists to serve one person: the singer. Block chords that never invert create jarring leaps that the ear notices as "piano doing its own thing." Voice-led inversions create a seamless harmonic carpet the singer can walk on without thinking. The Nashville number system means that when a singer says mid-rehearsal "this is too low, can we try a step up," you can respond in real time without stopping to figure out new chord

names. And the habit of playing less — shells, arpeggios, space — keeps your sound out of the same register where the voice lives, so the two never fight for the same sonic territory.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Starting to play before establishing a steady internal pulse — rushing the first chord before the tempo is set.
- Playing root-position block chords for every chord change, causing the right hand to make large, choppy jumps.
- Putting too many notes in the same octave as the singer's voice, which muddies the texture and buries the melody.
- Treating the tonic (1-chord) as the singer's starting note — the melody often begins on the 3rd or 5th, not the root.
- Stopping or stumbling at a chord change instead of holding the previous chord steady until the new one is ready — steady silence beats a hesitant wrong chord.
- Transposing by memorizing new letter names instead of using numbers — if you think in Roman numerals or Nashville numbers, any key is the same pattern.
- Playing the same accompaniment texture the entire song regardless of dynamics — block chords for the big chorus, arpeggios for the quiet verse.

EXERCISES

Pitch Matching — Find the Note

10 min

Train your ear-to-hand connection: hear a pitch and find it on the keyboard within 5 seconds.

1. Sit at the piano. Hum any comfortable note — do not look at the keys first.
2. Now slowly play every white key in the middle octave (C4 through B4) one at a time, humming your note continuously.
3. When you hit the key that matches your hummed pitch — same sound, no beating or wobble — stop. That is the note.
4. Confirm: play that note and hum simultaneously. If it feels like one sound rather than two, you have it.
5. Repeat 10 times with different starting pitches. Then try with black keys (sharps and flats).
6. Pass/fail check: you can identify a hummed pitch on the keyboard within 5 seconds, 8 times out of 10.

Target: 8/10 correct within 5 seconds per attempt

Shell Voicing — Root in LH, Triad in RH

15 min

Build the foundational accompaniment split: bass note in left hand, chord in right, for all five chords in C major.

1. Left hand: place thumb (1) on C3 (the C below middle C). This is your bass note for the I chord.
2. Right hand: play C–E–G (root position, fingers 1–3–5) starting at C4 (middle C).
3. Hold both simultaneously for four slow beats. Listen for the blend.
4. Now move only the left hand to D3, right hand to D–F–A (Dm, fingers 1–3–5). Four beats.
5. Continue through all five chords Greg assigned: C (I), Dm (ii), F (IV), G (V), Am (vi). Stay in C major; every note is a white key.
6. Run the progression I → IV → V → I (C → F → G → C) using shell voicing. Repeat 5 times without stopping.
7. Pass/fail check: you can play I–IV–V–I with shell voicing in a steady pulse (no hesitation at chord changes) for 3 consecutive repetitions.

Target: 3 consecutive clean repetitions of I–IV–V–I with no hesitation at chord changes

Voice-Led Inversions — Let It Be Progression

20 min

Play the I–V–IV–I progression of 'Let It Be' using inversions so the right hand moves as little as possible.

1. Start with C major in root position, RH: C–E–G (fingers 1–3–5), LH: C bass note.
2. Move to G major in first inversion: RH plays B–D–G (fingers 1–2–5). Notice: the G stays on G, E moves down one step to D, C moves down one step to B. Minimal motion.
3. Move to F major in second inversion: RH plays C–F–A (fingers 1–2–4 or 1–3–5). The top note A is only one step from G.
4. Return to C major root position: RH C–E–G.
5. Play this four-chord loop — C (root) → G (1st inv.) → F (2nd inv.) → C (root) — slowly and evenly, four beats per chord.
6. Hum 'Let It Be' over the top as you play. The melody should float naturally over the chords.
7. Speed target: comfortable at 60 BPM (one chord per beat) with no hand jumps larger than a 2nd between chord changes.
8. Pass/fail check: a singer (or voice memo of yourself humming) fits over the progression without clashing notes.

Target: Loop runs smoothly at 60 BPM with no hesitation; right hand moves by step or stays on common tones between every chord change

Transpose One Song — C to F Using Numbers

15 min

Use the Nashville number system to move 'Let It Be' (I–V–IV–I) from C major to F major without re-learning every chord.

1. Write out the number pattern: 1–5–4–1.
2. In C major: 1=C major, 5=G major, 4=F major. Play it through once to confirm you know it cold.
3. Now reassign: In F major, 1=F major, 5=C major, 4=Bb major.
4. F major chord (root position): F–A–C, RH fingers 1–3–5.
5. C major chord (first inversion for smooth motion): E–G–C, RH fingers 1–2–5.
6. Bb major chord (second inversion for smooth motion): F–Bb–D, RH fingers 1–2–4.
7. Play the progression 1–5–4–1 in F major using these voicings: F (root) → C (1st inv.) → Bb (2nd inv.) → F (root).
8. Repeat 5 times at a slow, even tempo. Notice that the fingering shapes are the same as C — only the starting position shifts.

9. Pass/fail check: you can play I–V–IV–I in both C and F without stopping to think, at a consistent tempo.

Target: Play I–V–IV–I in C and F back-to-back, three times each, with no pauses between chords

Sources: 5 Tips on Piano Accompaniment for Singers — Piano With Jonny · Piano for Singers: 4 Piano Accompaniment Strategies that Work — Piano and Voice with Brenda · The Nashville Number System for Piano: A Beginner's Guide — Pianote · Nashville Number System: A Complete Guide — Savvy Pianist

"Let It Be" — Full Chart & Analysis

You already know C, G, Am, and F from the core five chords Greg showed you. "Let It Be" is built almost entirely from those four, making it the ideal first real song — not a drill, an actual piece of music you can play for someone tonight.

The song lives in **C major** and cycles through the same two four-chord patterns across verse and chorus. You will recognize these patterns immediately: they are the same I–V–vi–IV and I–V–IV–I movements Greg described, now attached to melody you already know.

Your goal here is not just to learn the song. It is to train your ear and hands to move between these specific chords with **zero hesitation**, so that when a singer is in front of you and starts "When I find myself…" you find the right chord before you consciously think about it. That reflex is built by isolating the transitions Greg prescribed — especially the I–V–IV–I ("speaking words of wisdom, let it be") — and repeating each one 5–10 times until hesitation disappears entirely.

Once you own these four chords in C, you will have a master template you can transpose to any key via the circle of fifths. Every song that uses I–V–vi–IV — and there are hundreds — will feel familiar from this one song forward.

The Four Chords: Spellings Confirmed

All chords are in the key of C major. Every note is a white key.

Chord	Function	Roman Numeral	Notes (root position)	RH Fingering
C major	Tonic	I	C – E – G	1 – 3 – 5
G major	Dominant	V	G – B – D	1 – 3 – 5
A minor	Submediant	vi	A – C – E	1 – 3 – 5
F major	Subdominant	IV	F – A – C	1 – 3 – 5

All four share the same root-position fingering shape (1–3–5), which is a significant advantage for a beginner: same hand geometry, different starting note.

The Progression, Line by Line

Verse — "When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me"

Beat	1	2	3	4
Chord	**C**	**G**	**Am**	**F**
Roman	I	V	vi	IV

Verse — "Speaking words of wisdom, let it be"

Beat	1	2	3	4
Chord	**C**	**G**	**F**	**C**
Roman	I	V	IV	I

Chorus — "Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be"

Beat	1	2	3	4
Chord	**Am**	**G**	**F**	**C**
Roman	vi	V	IV	I

Chorus — "Whisper words of wisdom, let it be"

Beat	1	2	3	4
Chord	**C**	**G**	**F**	**C**
Roman	I	V	IV	I

Voice Leading: Moving as Little as Possible

Root position is where you start learning each chord. But when you play four different root-position chords in a row, your hand jumps all over the keyboard — which is slow, and sounds choppy to a singer. Greg's instruction was: **move as little as possible, reset your hand position, predict where you're going.**

The technique is **inversions**: playing the same three notes in a different order so that the transition between chords is smaller.

Inversion spellings for all four chords

C major:

- Root position: C – E – G (RH 1–3–5)
- 1st inversion (C/E): E – G – C (RH 1–2–5)
- 2nd inversion (C/G): G – C – E (RH 1–3–5)

G major:

- Root position: G – B – D (RH 1–3–5)
- 1st inversion (G/B): B – D – G (RH 1–2–5)
- 2nd inversion (G/D): D – G – B (RH 1–3–5)

A minor:

- Root position: A – C – E (RH 1–3–5)
- 1st inversion (Am/C): C – E – A (RH 1–2–5)
- 2nd inversion (Am/E): E – A – C (RH 1–3–5)

F major:

- Root position: F – A – C (RH 1–3–5)
- 1st inversion (F/A): A – C – F (RH 1–2–5)
- 2nd inversion (F/C): C – F – A (RH 1–3–5)

Smooth voicing for the verse (I–V–vi–IV)

Play these specific voicings in sequence and notice how small the hand movements become:

1. **C major** root position: C – E – G
2. **G major** 2nd inversion (G/D): D – G – B — your hand moves up a step; the G is a common tone between C and G chords
3. **A minor** root position: A – C – E — G major and A minor share no common tones, so this is the one spot in the phrase where the whole hand shifts — aim for the nearest A–C–E
4. **F major** 1st inversion (F/A): A – C – F — the A and C stay in place from Am; only F moves

This is voice leading in action. The singer hears smooth, connected harmony instead of a series of lurches.

The "Speaking Words of Wisdom" move: I–V–IV–I

This is the phrase Greg specifically called out. Practice this four-chord loop in these voicings:

1. **C** root: C – E – G
2. **G/D** (2nd inv): D – G – B
3. **F/C** (2nd inv): C – F – A — every voice steps down from G/D (D→C, G→F, B→A), so the hand barely moves and the C settles on the bottom
4. **C** root: C – E – G — back home

The C at the bottom of F/C anticipates the C of the final tonic. You are already pointing toward home before you land on it.

Why This Progression Works: The Theory

The V–I motion (G → C) is the primary tension-and-release mechanism in all of Western music, as Greg described. In "Let It Be," each phrase actually ends with the gentler IV→I "plagal" cadence ("let it be" = F → C); the strong V→I (the G just before each "let it be") drives the phrase from inside it. The IV chord (F) has a gentler pull toward I than V does — it resolves without the same urgency. The vi chord (Am) shares two notes with C major (C and E), making it feel like home with a shadow over it — bittersweet rather than resolved.

The I–V–vi–IV pattern is one of the most common progressions in pop music because it cycles through the primary harmonic functions — tonic (I), dominant (V), subdominant (IV), plus the tonic-substitute vi in a satisfying loop. Once you hear it in "Let It Be," you will start hearing it everywhere.

> **For accompanying a singer:** A singer needs two things from you: the right starting pitch and a harmonic foundation that tells them where the music is going. "Let It Be" gives you both in a single song. The I chord (C major) establishes the tonal center — when you play it, the singer knows instantly what key they are in. The V chord (G major) creates tension that pulls back to C, which tells the singer they are about to resolve. The IV chord (F major) creates a softer push. Your job is not to play loud or fill space — it is to make the chord changes clean and predictable so the singer can relax into the harmony. When your I–V–IV–I is smooth and unhesitating, the singer feels supported even if they cannot name a single chord you played.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Playing all four chords in root position: the hand jumps around, transitions are slow, and the sound is blocky. Learn the inversions from day one.
- Landing on the chord a half-beat late because you are thinking about the note name instead of having the shape memorized. The fix is Greg's 5–10 repetition drill until the shape is automatic.
- Releasing the previous chord before the next one is ready: this creates gaps a singer will hear as uncertainty. Keep the previous chord held until the new voicing is fully formed under your fingers.
- Forgetting that G major contains B and D — not Bb or Db. All four chords in C major are all white keys. If a note feels like it should be black, you are in the wrong position.
- Treating the chorus Am–G–F–C as a completely new pattern when it is the same four chords rearranged. Recognize it as the same vocabulary in a different order.
- Skipping the no-hesitation test: playing the chord correctly once does not mean you have it. Greg's standard is zero hesitation, completely natural — which requires many more repetitions than most beginners expect.

EXERCISES

▸ Four Chords, Root Position — Lock In the Shapes

15 min

Memorize the note names and hand shape for all four chords before introducing movement between them

1. Sit at the piano with your right hand in position over middle C.
2. Play C major (C–E–G) with fingers 1–3–5. Say the note names aloud: 'C, E, G.' Hold for 4 counts.
3. Lift your hand, move to G major (G–B–D) with fingers 1–3–5. Say 'G, B, D.' Hold for 4 counts.
4. Move to A minor (A–C–E) with fingers 1–3–5. Say 'A, C, E.' Hold for 4 counts.
5. Move to F major (F–A–C) with fingers 1–3–5. Say 'F, A, C.' Hold for 4 counts.
6. Repeat the full loop (C → G → Am → F → C) 10 times without stopping to think about note names. You should be able to name the notes without looking at your hand.
7. Pass/fail test: Play any chord Greg (or a metronome) calls out within 2 seconds with correct fingering and no wrong notes.

Target: 10 clean loops with note names spoken aloud; any chord on command in under 2 seconds

▸ The 'Speaking Words of Wisdom' Loop — I–V–IV–I with Inversions

20 min

Train the specific four-chord phrase Greg isolated as the key move in the song, using inversions for smooth voice leading

1. Learn each inversion separately before combining: C root (C–E–G, RH 1–3–5), then G 2nd inversion G/D (D–G–B, RH 1–3–5), then F 2nd inversion F/C (C–F–A, RH 1–3–5), then C root again.
2. Play C → G/D slowly. Notice that both chords have a G — you are holding or barely moving the top of the chord. Say 'common tone G' when you make this move.
3. Play G/D → F/C slowly. The D moves down one step to C; the G moves down one step to F; the B moves down one step to A. This is maximally smooth — every voice moves by one step.
4. Play F/C → C root. The C on the bottom stays; F moves down to E; A moves down to G. You are home.
5. Now chain the full loop: C → G/D → F/C → C. Play it 5 times in a row without stopping. If you hesitate before any chord, isolate that single transition and repeat it 10 times before continuing.
6. Add lyrics internally: as you play C sing or think 'speaking,' G/D = 'words of,' F/C = 'wisdom,' C = 'let it be.' The lyric cues train the chord-to-lyric reflex a singer depends on.
7. Pass/fail test: Play the loop 5 times in a row with zero hesitation, smooth transitions, and correct voicings — no pauses, no stumbles.

Target: 5 consecutive clean loops of C → G/D → F/C → C with zero hesitation; transitions imperceptible to a listener

▸ Full Verse — Play Through Both Lines in Sequence

20 min

Connect the I–V–vi–IV verse pattern and the I–V–IV–I cadence into a complete musical phrase

1. Play through the verse line 1 using the smooth voicings: C root → G/D (2nd inv) → Am root → F/A (1st inv). Each chord gets one slow beat. Repeat 5 times.
2. Play verse line 2: C root → G/D → F/C → C root. Repeat 5 times.
3. Now connect both lines without stopping: C–G/D–Am–F/A, then immediately C–G/D–F/C–C. This is the full verse. Repeat 5 times.
4. Sing or hum the melody of the verse while playing the chords. The melody does not start on the tonic C — like many songs it enters on another note of the scale, which is exactly why you find the key first, not the first note. You are accompanying yourself.
5. Record yourself on your phone for 30 seconds. Listen back. Do the chord changes sound smooth, or do you hear gaps? Gaps mean you need more reps on the specific transition that caused them.
6. Pass/fail test: Play the full verse twice through with no stops, no hesitations, and chords landing exactly on the beat.

Target: Two full verse repetitions, no stops, chords on the beat; smooth enough that a singer could follow without being thrown off

▸ Chorus Entry — The vi Chord Pivot

20 min

Master the chorus opening (Am–G–F–C) which starts on the vi chord, a common singer's entry point that can feel disorienting at first

1. Play Am root position (A–C–E, RH 1–3–5) alone 10 times and listen to its quality. It shares C and E with C major but has a darker, minor color. This is vi — the relative minor.

2. Play the chorus loop slowly: Am root → G/D (2nd inv) → F/C (2nd inv) → C root. Say each Roman numeral aloud: 'six, five, four, one.'
3. Notice that the G/D → F/C transition is the same move you already drilled in Exercise 2. You are reusing material — that is the point of the circle of fifths logic Greg described.
4. Play the chorus line 5 times consecutively. Then immediately follow it with the 'whisper words of wisdom' cadence (C → G/D → F/C → C) without stopping.
5. Now play the entire song form: verse line 1, verse line 2, chorus line 1, chorus line 2. That is 16 chords total. Do it 3 times without stopping.
6. Pass/fail test: Play the full song form (both verse lines + both chorus lines) 3 times through with no hesitations — the same standard Greg set: completely natural, zero thinking required.

Target: 3 consecutive full-form run-throughs (verse + chorus) with no hesitations at any transition

Sources: PianoChord.org — C Major Chord · PianoChord.org — F Major Chord · PianoChord.org — G Major Chord · PianoChord.org — A Minor Chord

How to Practice (One Hour a Day)

Greg gave you a precise goal and a precise timeline: one hour a day, and roughly three months to get the core chords working fluently in all twelve keys. That timeline is realistic — but only if the hour is deliberate, not just time spent at the keys.

Most adult learners default to "play-through practice": starting at the beginning, running until something breaks, then starting again. This feels productive but wires in mistakes. The research on motor skill learning — most famously K. Anders Ericsson's work on expert practice — is unambiguous: the only repetitions that matter are ones where you are attending, correcting, and pushing just past the edge of what you can do cleanly.

For you specifically, this maps onto what Greg prescribed: **find the spot where you hesitate, isolate it, repeat it 5–10 times slowly and correctly, then reintegrate it into context.** The hesitation — that slight mental pause before you grab a chord — is the brain reaching for a decision it hasn't automated yet. Your goal is to drill each decision until it disappears entirely. When you can move from C major (C–E–G) to A minor (A–C–E) to F major (F–A–C) to G major (G–B–D) and back without any internal computation, you have actually learned it. Until then, you have only encountered it.

Your financial-analysis brain is an asset here: treat each practice block as a hypothesis test. The metric is zero hesitation, not "I sort of know it."

Why Deliberate Practice Is Different From Playing

Psychologist K. Anders Ericsson studied expert musicians, chess players, and athletes for decades and identified a consistent pattern: elite performers do not simply log more hours — they spend those hours in a specific mode. Deliberate practice has three characteristics: it targets a **specific weakness**, it provides **immediate feedback**, and it operates at the **edge of current ability** (not in the comfortable middle). Mindless repetition at full speed through familiar material does essentially nothing for skill acquisition. Worse, it can reinforce errors.

For a piano student at your stage, this means the following non-negotiables:

1. Never run through a mistake. The moment you fumble a chord change — say, the move from G major (G–B–D) to E minor (E–G–B) — stop immediately. Do not keep playing. Rewind to two beats before the error and play it again slowly. This is not optional. Every time you play through a mistake, you are rehearsing the mistake.

2. Isolate the exact failure point. If you hesitate every time you move from F major (F–A–C) to G major (G–B–D), that two-chord transition is your practice unit — not the whole progression. Drill just those two chords: set up F in root position (fingers 1–3–5 on F–A–C), then move to G. Work economy of motion: which notes are shared? None — F major (F–A–C) and G major (G–B–D) have no common tones, so all three fingers step up a whole step together: thumb F→G, middle finger A→B, pinky C→D. Feel the whole shape move as one parallel block. That voice-leading insight — moving as little as possible — is the whole game.

3. Slow is not slow enough. Most beginners think they are practicing slowly when they are still going faster than their current wiring supports. The test: can you predict the next chord *before* your fingers land? If you are figuring it out as you arrive, you are too fast. Halve the

tempo. Then halve it again. Speed is not added — it emerges automatically once the neural pattern is solid.

4. Chunk small, connect later. A chord progression is not learned as a whole. It is learned as small units (two to four chords) that are eventually stitched together. In "Let It Be" (key of C), the verse is essentially I–V–vi–IV: C major (C–E–G) → G major (G–B–D) → A minor (A–C–E) → F major (F–A–C). Learn C→G first. Then G→A minor. Then A minor→F. Then connect C→G→A minor. Then add the F. Each stitching step is its own session, possibly its own day.

5. Hands together only after hands separate works. For scale practice (C major right hand: thumb on C, fingers 1–2–3, thumb crosses to start 1–2–3–4–5), verify the right-hand fingering is automatic before adding the left. Mixing two uncertain things produces chaos, not learning.

6. Interleave keys rather than blocking them. Once you are learning F major alongside C major, do not drill 20 minutes of C and then 20 minutes of F. Instead, alternate: practice the I–IV–V–vi in C, then immediately in F (where the IV is now B-flat major: B ♭–D–F), then back to C. This "interleaving" feels harder in the moment and is harder in the moment — but produces significantly better retention than blocked practice. The slight confusion is the learning.

7. The mastery test is zero hesitation. This is Greg's criterion and it is exactly right. You can test yourself: close your eyes, call out a chord name, and play it. If you have to think — even for a fraction of a second — you are not done. The chord is learned when your hand moves before the analytical mind can comment on it. This is the difference between knowledge and motor memory.

8. Sleep and spacing. Motor memory consolidates during sleep. A 60-minute session six days a week beats a three-hour Saturday session by a wide margin. The night's sleep after a focused practice session is when the neural consolidation actually happens. Consistency, not marathon sessions, is the mechanism.

The 60-Minute Daily Session Template

Block	Duration	Content
Warmup — C major scale	8 min	Right hand only, slow; then left hand; then hands together. Thumb-cross drill: isolate the moment the thumb passes under on the way up (E to F).
Chord block — current key	12 min	Play all five core chords (I, ii, IV, V, vi) in root position, then each in one inversion. Name the chord aloud before playing it.
Error-isolation work	15 min	Identify the one chord transition that produced any hesitation in the chord block. Drill that two-chord move: 5–10 reps slowly, then 5 reps at normal tempo, then 5 reps with eyes closed.
Song/repertoire ("Let It Be")	15 min	Apply the chords to the song. Work the actual verse progression (I–V–vi–IV in C). If a spot breaks, invoke the error-isolation rule immediately.
New key preview	5 min	Spend 5 minutes on the next key in the circle (C → F: the same chord pattern (I, ii, IV, V, vi), with one note changed — B becomes B ♭). Just root-position I and IV today.
Free play / ear training	5 min	Noodle. Pick a note the singer would sing (imagine it), find it on the piano, build a chord under it. No rules. This is the goal in miniature.

Total: 60 minutes. On days where energy is low, cut the song block to 10 minutes but never cut the error-isolation block — that is the highest-value work.

> **For accompanying a singer:** Accompanying a singer is a real-time error-detection task. The singer will vary tempo, breathe unexpectedly, and occasionally drift pitch. Your job is to have the chord changes so deeply automatic that your hands can respond to the singer's actual sound — not to what you planned to play. If you have to think about the chord, you cannot simultaneously be listening to the voice. The "no hesitation" mastery test Greg described is not a nice-to-have; it is the literal prerequisite for playing with another person. Every hour of deliberate practice buys you one less cognitive load in the room, until the chords cost you nothing and your entire attention can go to the singer.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Playing through mistakes at full speed instead of stopping and isolating the error — this is the single most common and most damaging habit.
- Practicing at a tempo that is slightly too fast: if you cannot predict the next chord before your hands land, you are going too fast.
- Running through the whole song from start to finish every day instead of targeting the two or three bars that actually need work.
- Adding both hands before either hand is solid — mixing two uncertain things multiplies confusion, it does not average it out.
- Treating 'I've played it once correctly' as 'I've learned it' — the standard is 5–10 clean reps in a row with no hesitation, not one lucky pass.
- Practicing only C major for weeks before touching F — blocking one key delays the circle-of-fifths transfer that makes all the other keys easier.
- Skipping the free-play block because it feels unstructured — that block is where the goal (accompanying a singer) gets rehearsed in miniature.
- Sitting down without a specific target for the session — decide in the first 30 seconds what the one thing you will fix today is.

EXERCISES

Thumb-Cross Isolation Drill (C Major Scale)

10 min

Eliminate the hesitation or stumble at the thumb-crossover point (E to F ascending, C to B descending) so the scale flows without any bump in speed or evenness.

1. Sit at the keyboard and place your right hand in C position: thumb (1) on middle C, index (2) on D, middle (3) on E.
2. Play C–D–E slowly and cleanly with fingers 1–2–3.
3. As your middle finger plays E, pass your thumb UNDER to land silently on F — practice this crossing motion alone 5 times before playing any sound on F.
4. Now play C–D–E–F–G with fingers 1–2–3–1–2, very slowly. Focus entirely on the thumb arriving on F without any accent or hitch.
5. Repeat 8 times ascending only. Do not continue to the octave until these 5 notes feel effortless.
6. Now add the full octave: 1–2–3–1–2–3–4–5 ascending (C–D–E–F–G–A–B–C), then reverse: 5–4–3–2–1–3–2–1 descending.
7. Pass/fail test: play the scale at a moderate walking pace. If any note is louder than its neighbors (a bump), you have found the crossing point — return to step 3.

Target: 8 consecutive ascending-descending octaves with no audible bump at the thumb crossover, at a steady walking tempo (approximately 60–80 bpm per note).

Two-Chord Error-Isolation Drill

8 min

Take any chord transition that produced a hesitation in the session and drill it to zero hesitation in under 10 minutes.

1. Identify the specific two-chord move that caused any delay — for example, F major (F–A–C, fingers 1–3–5) moving to G major (G–B–D, fingers 1–3–5).
2. Play the first chord (F major) and hold it for 3 full seconds. Look at your hand position.
3. Before lifting any finger, identify which finger is moving the least distance to reach the next chord. For F→G: your thumb moves one key to the right (F to G), middle finger moves one key right (A to B), pinky moves one key right (C to D). All fingers move the same direction — minimal motion.
4. Move to G major. Play it and hold for 3 seconds. Do NOT rush.
5. Alternate: F major (3-second hold) → G major (3-second hold) → F major → G major. Do this 5 times.
6. Reduce the hold to 1 second each. Do 5 more reps.
7. Play at normal chord rhythm (no pause). Do 5 reps.
8. Test: close your eyes, play F→G→F→G four times from memory. Any hesitation means return to step 2.

Target: F major to G major (or whichever pair you are drilling) 4 times in a row with eyes closed and zero conscious deliberation. Time the whole drill: should take 6–8 minutes.

Five-Chord Root-Position Naming Drill (C Major)

12 min

Internalize the five core chords — I (C–E–G), ii (D–F–A), IV (F–A–C), V (G–B–D), vi (A–C–E) — so that hearing the chord name triggers an automatic hand shape, with no search.

1. Write the five chord names on a notepad in front of you: C major, D minor, F major, G major, A minor.
2. Say 'C major' aloud, then play it (fingers 1–3–5 on C–E–G). Hold 2 seconds. Release.
3. Say 'G major' aloud, then play it (1–3–5 on G–B–D). Hold 2 seconds. Release.
4. Continue through all five in order: C major → D minor (D–F–A) → F major (F–A–C) → G major (G–B–D) → A minor (A–C–E). Always say the name before playing.
5. After one pass in order, shuffle the notepad list (or have someone call them randomly) and play the chords in random order. Still say each name aloud before playing.
6. Do 3 random-order passes.
7. Final test: someone calls a chord name (or you pick randomly), you play it within 1 second of hearing/reading the name, with the correct notes. No searching.

Target: All 5 chords played correctly within 1 second of the name being called, in any random order, 10 times in a row with zero errors.

Let It Be Verse — Chunk-and-Connect Method

15 min

Learn the I–V–vi–IV progression (C–G–Am–F) used in the 'Let It Be' verse well enough to play it in a repeating loop without any hesitation, at a tempo where a singer could actually sing over it.

1. Play only C major (C–E–G) → G major (G–B–D) back and forth until zero hesitation. Minimum 10 reps. This is Chunk 1.
2. Play only G major (G–B–D) → A minor (A–C–E) back and forth until zero hesitation. Minimum 10 reps. This is Chunk 2.
3. Play only A minor (A–C–E) → F major (F–A–C) back and forth until zero hesitation. Minimum 10 reps. This is Chunk 3.
4. Connect Chunks 1 and 2: play C → G → Am → G → C → G → Am. 5 reps.
5. Add the F: play the full loop C → G → Am → F → C → G → Am → F. 10 reps.
6. Sing (or hum) the melody line of 'Let it be, let it be' over your chord loop. If your hands falter when you add the voice, the chords are not automatic enough yet — return to step 5.
7. Pass/fail test: play the four-chord loop for 60 seconds continuously while counting 1–2–3–4 aloud (simulating a singer's pulse). No chord gets dropped or delayed.

Target: 60 continuous seconds of C–G–Am–F in a steady loop while counting aloud, with no missed or delayed chord. This is the minimum for accompanying a singer on this song.

Sources: pianoscales.org — How to Practice Piano · Bulletproof Musician (Noa Kageyama, Juilliard) — Practice Blog · pianoscales.org — Piano Scale Fingerings

"Let It Be" — your chord chart

Key of C. Four chords: C (I), G (V), Am (vi), F (IV). Play the left-hand root, the right-hand triad, and let each chord ring.

When I find myself in times of trouble	**C** I **G** V **Am** vi **F** IV
Mother Mary comes to me	**C** I **G** V **F** IV **C** I
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be	**C** I **G** V **F** IV **C** I
Let it be, let it be (chorus)	**Am** vi **G** V **F** IV **C** I
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be	**C** I **G** V **F** IV **C** I

Your hour, structured

BLOCK	TIME	FOCUS
Warm up	10 min	C (then F) scale — slow, even, watch the thumb-under
Chords	15 min	I ii IV V vi and their inversions; smooth voice-leading
Song	20 min	"Let It Be" — isolate any fumble, repeat 5–10× to no-hesitation
Ear	10 min	Find a melody and its starting note by ear; name what you hear
Free play	5 min	Play freely. Enjoy it.

Your roadmap — C to all twelve keys, and beyond

Greg gave you a gift most piano students never get: a logical, principled entry point. C major is not a beginner's compromise — it is literally the cleanest possible canvas to build theory on before adding the complexity of black keys. The plan from here is ruthlessly efficient.

The structure is three months at roughly one hour a day. Month 1 locks in C major so deeply that scales, the five core chords (I, ii, IV, V, vi), and their inversions become automatic — no hesitation. Month 2 moves around the circle of fifths in both directions, picking up F, G, Bb, and D — the four keys that share the most notes with C and that appear in the vast majority of pop, folk, and singer-songwriter repertoire. Month 3 cleans up the remaining eight keys and shifts focus from mechanical accuracy to musical instinct: faster chord recall, smooth voice leading across any key, and a first full singer accompaniment from beginning to end.

Beyond the three months, the next layer of skills — seventh chords, rhythm comping patterns, sustain pedal, ear training, and the Nashville Number System — transforms solid chord knowledge into genuine accompaniment. That is the difference between knowing what chord comes next and sounding like a musician. Each skill in that layer is designed specifically to serve a singer: you will be able to hear a vocalist start a phrase, identify the key, and lock in a supportive harmonic frame under them in real time.

C Major Five-Chord Drill — Zero Hesitation

Five consecutive clean loops at 60 bpm with no hesitation before any chord, no looking at hands

Internalize I, ii, IV, V, vi in C major as automatic muscle memory with no pause between chords

1. Sit at the keyboard with a metronome set to 50 bpm.
2. Play each chord in root position (fingers 1-3-5, right hand): C major (C-E-G), D minor (D-F-A), F major (F-A-C), G major (G-B-D), A minor (A-C-E). Hold each for two beats.
3. Loop the sequence I → IV → V → I ten times without stopping. Note every chord where your hand hesitates even slightly.
4. Isolate the hesitation chord: play just the transition into that chord (the preceding chord, then that chord) five to ten times in a row.
5. Return to the full loop. Repeat until you can play all five in sequence with zero hesitation for five consecutive loops.
6. Raise the metronome to 60 bpm and repeat the test.

Inversion Voice-Leading Drill — C to F to G

Full I-IV-V-I loop in smooth inversions at 60 bpm, hand staying roughly in one zone of the keyboard with no leaps

Move through the I-IV-V progression in C using the smoothest possible inversions so no finger travels more than a step

1. Learn the target voicings: C major root position (C-E-G, fingers 1-3-5), F major second inversion (C-F-A, fingers 1-2-5), G major first inversion (B-D-G, fingers 1-2-5).
2. Notice that C stays in place moving from C major to F major second inversion — your thumb does not move at all.
3. Practice the transition C major → F major second inversion twenty times. The top two fingers shift up by a step each; the thumb is stationary.
4. Practice the transition F major second inversion → G major first inversion twenty times. Every finger moves, but only by a small interval (no more than a minor third).
5. Chain all three: C (root) → F (2nd inv) → G (1st inv) → C (root). Loop ten times at 50 bpm, then ten times at 60 bpm.
6. Apply to the 'Let It Be' chord changes: the chorus (vi–V–IV–I = Am–G–F–C) — choose the inversion of each chord that minimizes hand movement from the previous chord.

Circle of Fifths Key Transfer — C to F to G

Play I-IV-V-I in C, F, and G back to back at 55 bpm with correct note spellings and no key confusion

Translate the five core chords into F major and G major using the circle-of-fifths logic, not memorization

1. Write out the F major scale: F-G-A-Bb-C-D-E-F. Note that Bb is the only new note compared to C major.
2. Build the five chords in F by stacking thirds on each scale degree: I = F major (F-A-C), ii = G minor (G-Bb-D), IV = Bb major (Bb-D-F), V = C major (C-E-G), vi = D minor (D-F-A).
3. Notice: C major (which you already know) is the V chord of F. Play V → I in F: C major resolving to F major. Feel the same pull you know from G7 → C in C major.
4. Write out the G major scale: G-A-B-C-D-E-F#-G. Build the five chords: I = G major (G-B-D), ii = A minor (A-C-E), IV = C major (C-E-G), V = D major (D-F#-A), vi = E minor (E-G-B).
5. Play I-IV-V-I in F major ten times at 50 bpm. Then play I-IV-V-I in G major ten times at 50 bpm.

6. Alternate between C, F, and G: play I-V-I in C, then I-V-I in F (the V is C — same chord!), then I-V-I in G. The shared chords are the bridge.

▸ **Nashville Number System Transposition Test — 'Let It Be' in Two Keys**

Prove to yourself that the number system makes instant transposition possible by playing the same song in two different keys from one set of numbers

Successful transposition into at least two of the three keys (C, F, G) within 30 seconds each, using the number chart only — no pre-written chord names

1. Write the 'Let It Be' verse chord chart in numbers: 1 – 5 – 6m – 4 (repeat). Write the chorus: 6m – 5 – 4 – 1.
2. Play the chart in C major: 1=C, 5=G, 6m=Am, 4=F. Play through verse and chorus twice.
3. Without rewriting anything, play the same chart in G major: 1=G, 5=D, 6m=Em, 4=C. Every number maps to its new chord in G.
4. Compare the sound: same song, same emotional arc, different key. This is exactly what you will do when a singer says 'can we do this a step lower'.
5. Try it in F major: 1=F, 5=C, 6m=Dm, 4=Bb. Play verse and chorus.
6. Pass/fail test: given any key name, play the full 'Let It Be' verse (1-5-6m-4) in that key within 30 seconds, using inversions for smooth voice leading.

The full path

Month 1: C Major — Build the Foundation Completely

The five diatonic chords Greg taught you in C major, spelled out:

Numeral	Chord	Notes	Quality
I	C major	C – E – G	Major
ii	D minor	D – F – A	Minor
IV	F major	F – A – C	Major
V	G major	G – B – D	Major
vi	A minor	A – C – E	Minor

Root-position right-hand fingering for all triads: fingers 1–3–5 (thumb, middle, pinky). The exception Greg mentioned — 1–2–4 — comes into play with certain inversion shapes where the second finger lands on a whole step.

Inversions in C: When you move from C major (C–E–G) to F major, do not leap to F–A–C in root position. Instead, use F major in second inversion: C–F–A. The note C stays in place, and your other two fingers each move up by a small step. Then moving to G major in first inversion — B–D–G — requires only a minimal shift again. That is voice leading: move as little as possible. Greg's phrase "predict where you're going" means choosing the inversion of the next chord that is physically closest to your current hand position.

Month 1 benchmark: play I – IV – V – I in C in root position, then in smooth inversions, at 60 bpm with zero hesitation before any chord. Apply to the "Let It Be" verse and chorus.

Month 2: The Circle of Fifths — Four New Keys

The circle of fifths runs clockwise in sharps (C → G → D → A → E → B…) and counterclockwise in flats (C → F → Bb → Eb → Ab…). The rule is: each step clockwise adds one sharp; each step counterclockwise adds one flat.

The Month 2 priority keys and their scales:

- **F major** (1 flat: Bb): F – G – A – Bb – C – D – E – F. Right-hand fingering: 1–2–3–4 on F–G–A–Bb, then the thumb crosses *under* after the 4th finger, continuing 1–2–3–4 on C–D–E–F (written 1–2–3–4–1–2–3–4). This is Greg's first prescribed next key — it shares six of seven notes with C major.
- **G major** (1 sharp: F#): G – A – B – C – D – E – F# – G. Right-hand fingering: 1–2–3–1–2–3–4–5. F# is the only new note.

- **Bb major** (2 flats: Bb, Eb): Bb – C – D – Eb – F – G – A – Bb. Right-hand fingering starts with finger 2 (not thumb) on Bb: 2–1–2–3–1–2–3–4.
- **D major** (2 sharps: F#, C#): D – E – F# – G – A – B – C# – D. Right-hand fingering: 1–2–3–1–2–3–4–5.

For each new key, build the same five chords (I, ii, IV, V, vi) you already know from C. The relationships are identical — only the note names change.

The V→I principle in practice: In G major, the V chord is D major (D–F#–A) pulling to G major (G–B–D). In F major, the V chord is C major (C–E–G) pulling to F major (F–A–C). Notice that C major — the I chord you know cold — *is the V chord of F major*. This is Greg's key insight: "the one can be the five of another key." Every key you learn in Month 1 gives you instant raw material in adjacent keys.

Month 2 benchmark: call out any of the four new keys and play I – V – IV – I in inversions without stopping to think.

Month 3: Remaining Keys + Musical Instinct

The seven remaining keys to close out the circle: Eb, Ab, Db/C#, Gb/F#, B, E, A. Approach each one with the same three-step method: (1) learn the scale with correct fingering, (2) build the five diatonic chords, (3) practice I–IV–V–I in smooth inversions. Prioritize keys that singers actually use: Eb, Ab, and E are enormously common in pop and R&B.

Month 3 also introduces the first full singer accompaniment: sit with a vocalist, agree on a key, start from the I chord, follow the melody by ear, and land the chord changes on time. This is the real test.

Future Skills: The Accompaniment Layer

Seventh chords add color without adding complexity. In C: Cmaj7 (C–E–G–B), Dm7 (D–F–A–C), G7 (G–B–D–F). The G7 is the dominant seventh — its tritone (B to F) creates maximum tension that resolves beautifully to C. This is the most important color chord in all of Western harmony.

Slash/inversion chords in lead sheets (e.g., G/B, C/E) are simply voicing instructions — they tell you which inversion to use. Once you know inversions, these are free.

9th extensions: Add D on top of Cmaj7 to get Cmaj9 (C–E–G–B–D). In an accompaniment context, drop the root and play E–G–B–D with your right hand — sophisticated, spacious, and singer-friendly because it does not clutter the vocalist's range.

Rhythm and comping: A simple pattern that works in almost any ballad — play the chord on beat 1, sustain or repeat softly on beat 3. For uptempo pop: root on 1, chord on 2 and 4. These patterns give the singer rhythmic support without overpowering them.

Sustain pedal: Press at the moment of each chord change and release just before the next. This is the single fastest way to make chord-playing sound musical rather than mechanical.

Ear training: Learn to recognize intervals. A perfect fifth (C to G) is the V→I distance you already know. A major third (C to E) is the sound that tells you a chord is major. Train these by singing intervals while playing them.

The Nashville Number System: Instead of writing "C – F – G – Am," write "1 – 4 – 5 – 6m." When a singer says "take it up a half step," you read the same chart and play every chord one half step higher. Nothing else changes. This is how professional session musicians accommodate singers who want to change keys on the fly.