

What is Em?

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When jamming over a one chord vamp it is easy to run out of chordal ideas. One way to prevent this is to learn a lot of different versions and embellishments to the same chord. This study is an exploration of what is possible given an E minor chord. The shapes and concepts laid out here are applicable over any minor chord. One distinct advantage when working with the Em chord is that all of the open strings are compatible with the chord.

The notes that make up any minor chord are derived from the major scale of the root of the chord. For any minor triad the series of notes are: 1- \flat 3-5. The flat sign in front of the "3" in this sequence indicates that the third note of the E major scale needs to be lowered in pitch by one half-step.

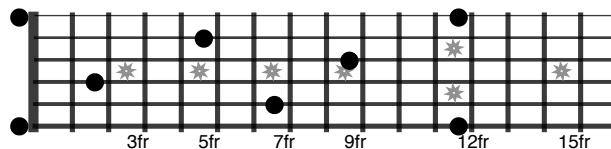
E major scale

E - F \sharp - G \sharp - A - B - C \sharp - D \sharp - E
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (1)

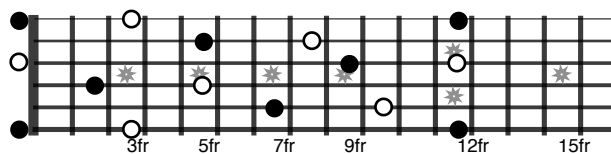
E minor triad: E - G - B

Locating all of these three notes on the guitar will show result in a picture that is at first chaotic, but by isolating groupings of pitches that contain these three notes, many Em chords will emerge. Remember that the open strings (non-fretted) 1, 2, and 3, can also be included along with any fretted strings.

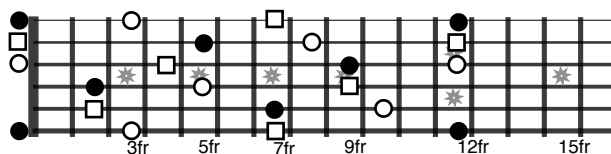
E notes



E + G notes

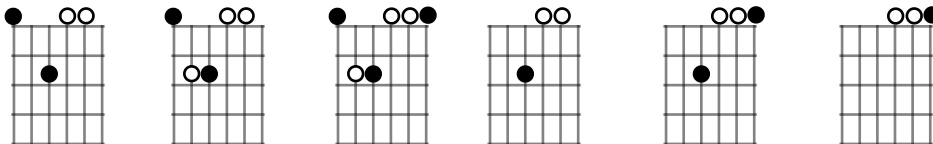


E + G + B notes

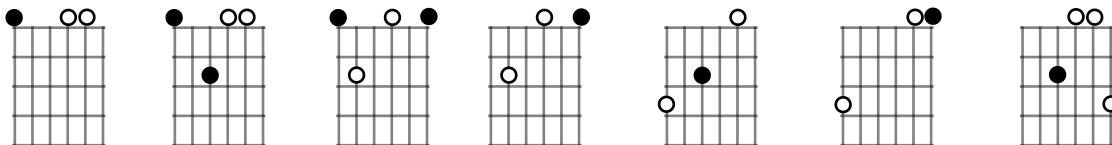


Triads: The most logical place to begin is with triads. These can be organized on different string groups, but the usefulness of any chord depends on the harmonic context in which the chords are to be used and the function the chord would satisfy. In other words, if you are accompanying someone (a singer), you'd likely use different chord voicings than if you were providing some horn-like stabs in a funk band that had a horn section and/or keyboardist.

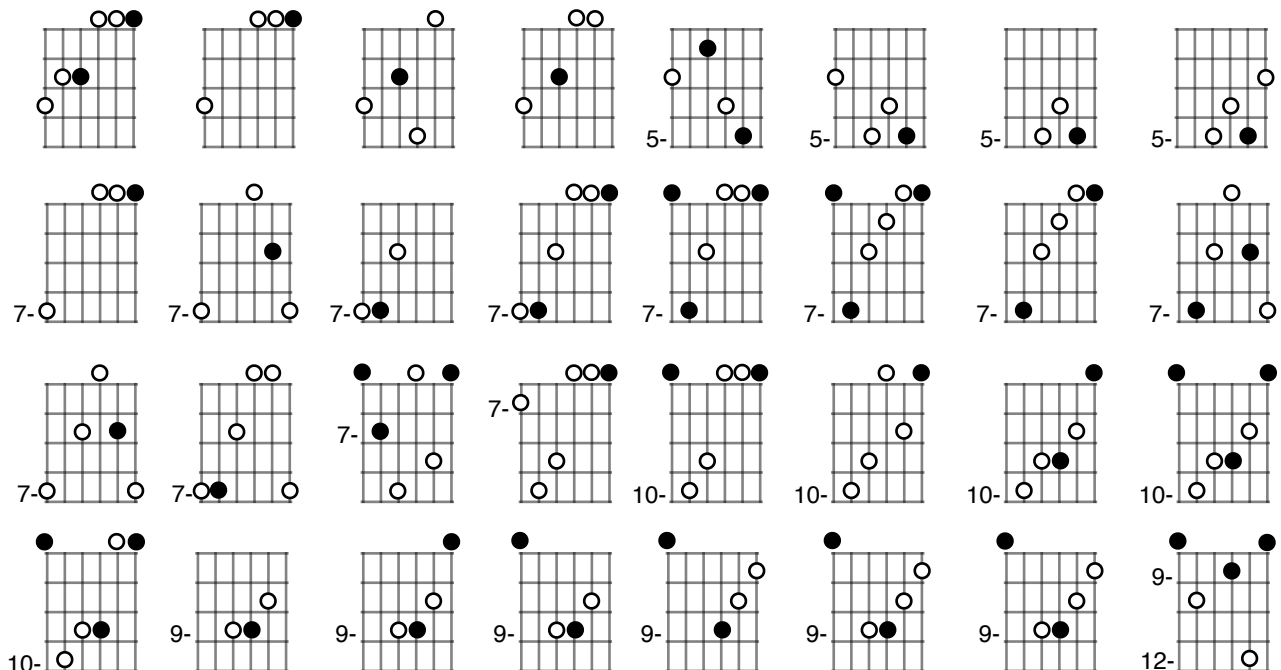
The solid black dots show the location of the E notes.

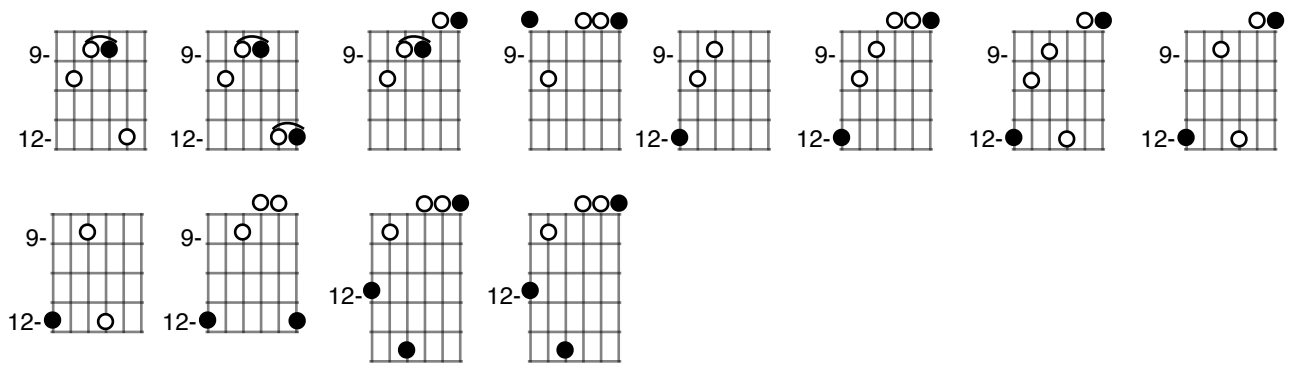


These forms are all very obvious, but the point being made is an important one: Just because you can play a chord by strumming all 6 strings doesn't mean you should! Conserve your resources! Play notes on different string sets that aren't necessarily right next to each other. This will oftentimes create a unique sounding chord voicing. This is a good reason to learn to use your fingers to pluck strings, or to learn an effective fretting hand muting technique.



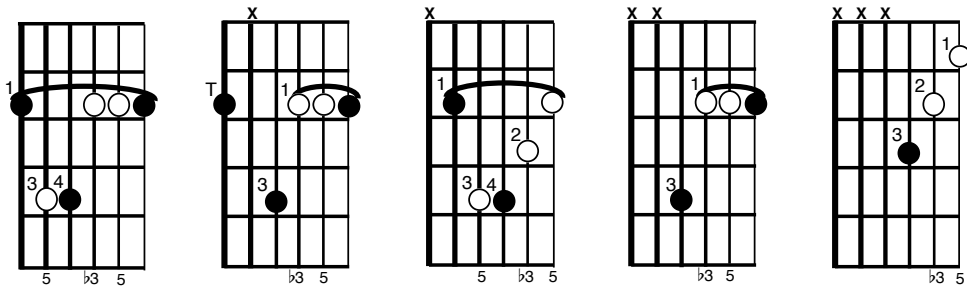
All chords exist in every position on the fingerboard. Here are some additional Em chords in a variety of positions. This is not a complete list, but it does suggest just how many ways there are to play this triad over the entire fingerboard.



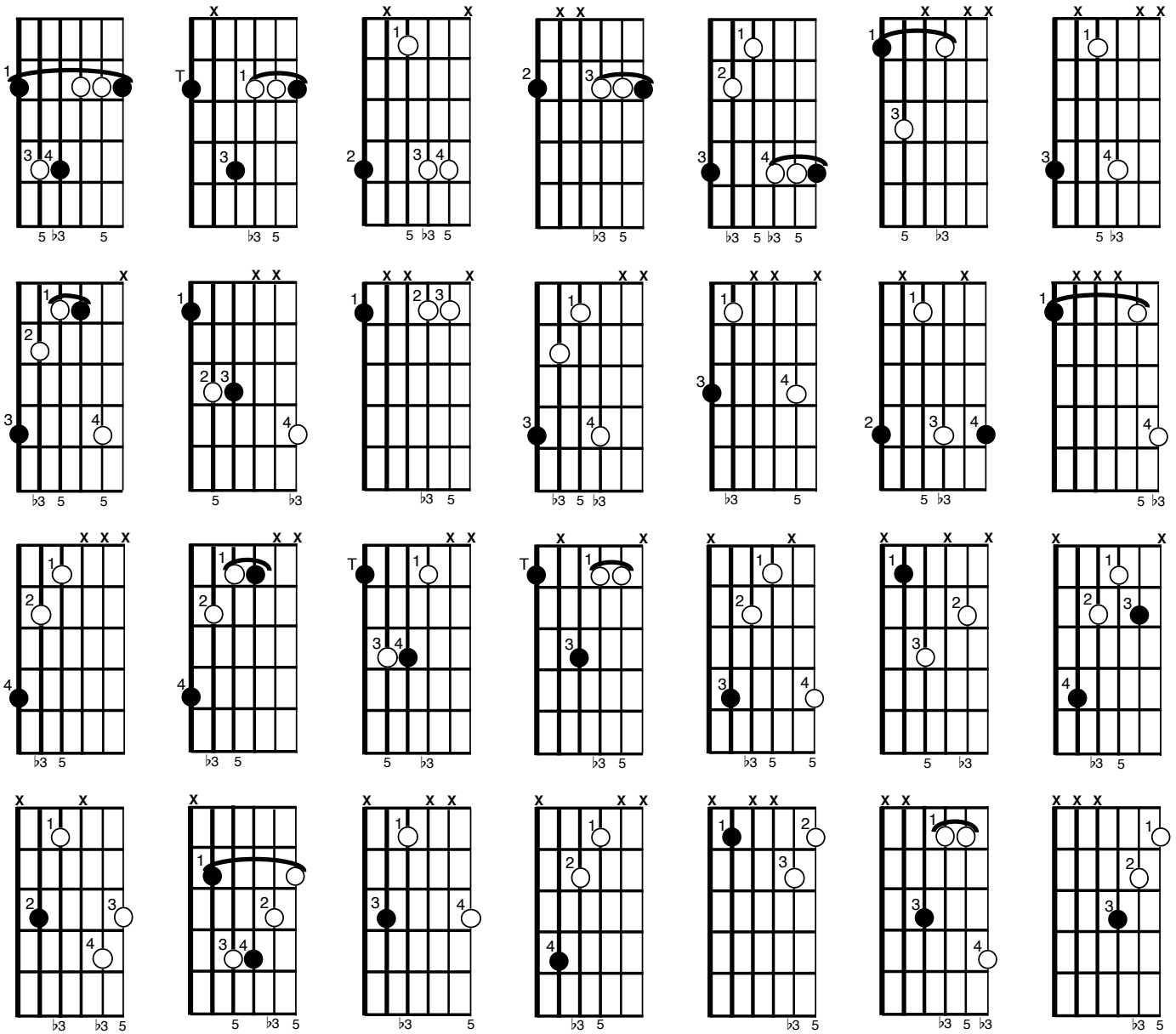


In all of the following minor triads the solid black dot would be an E-note. In order to place these forms at the appropriate location on the fingerboard you must know where all of the E-notes are.

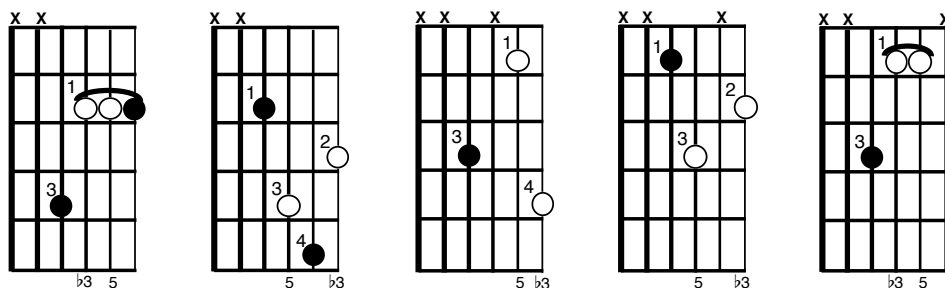
Minor Triads - common voicings



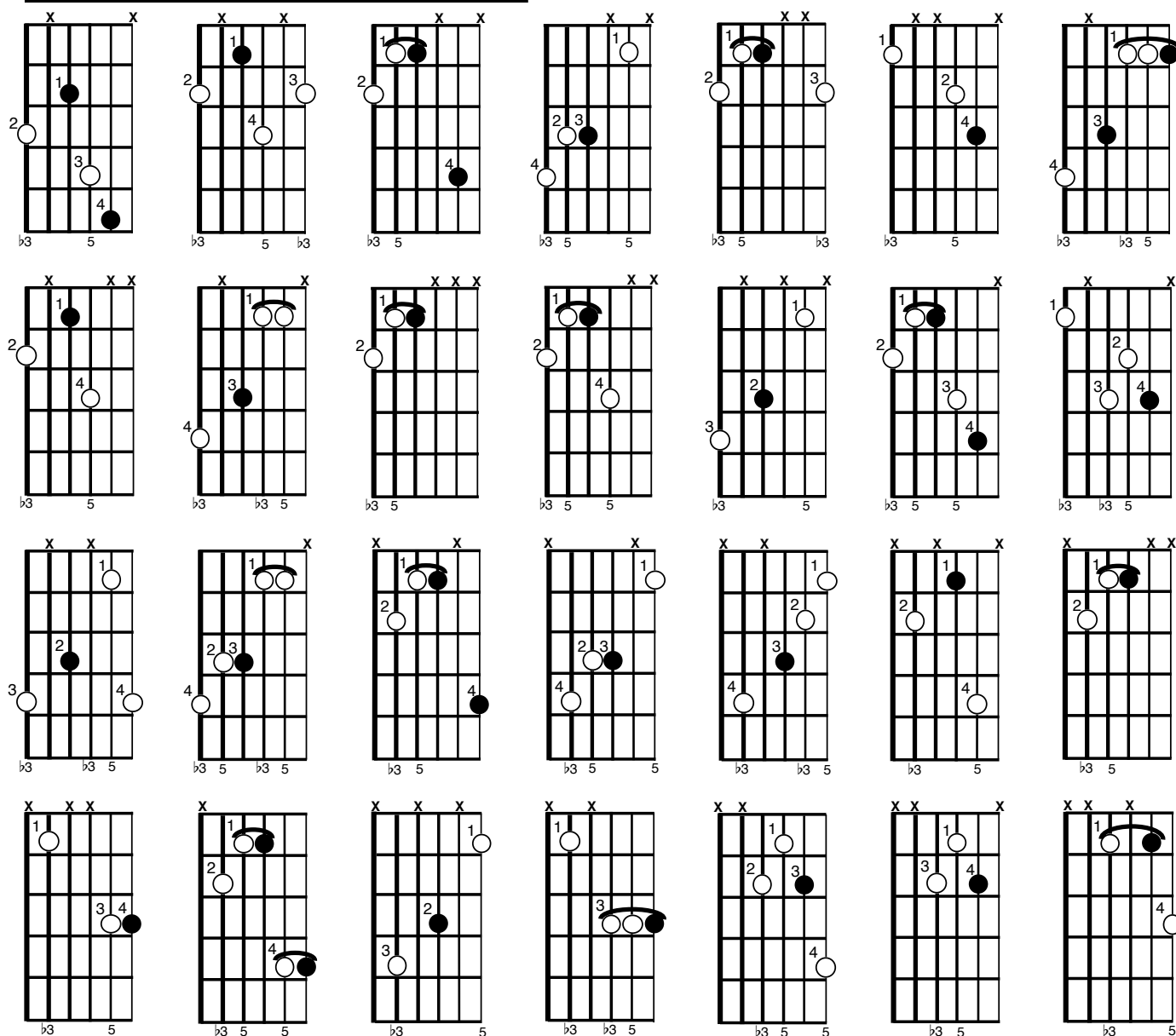
Minor Triads - root position



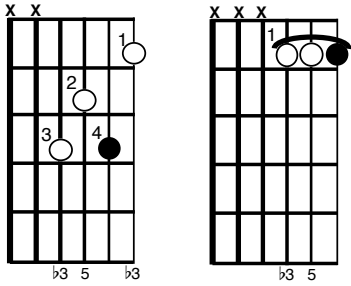
Minor Triads - root position (cont.)



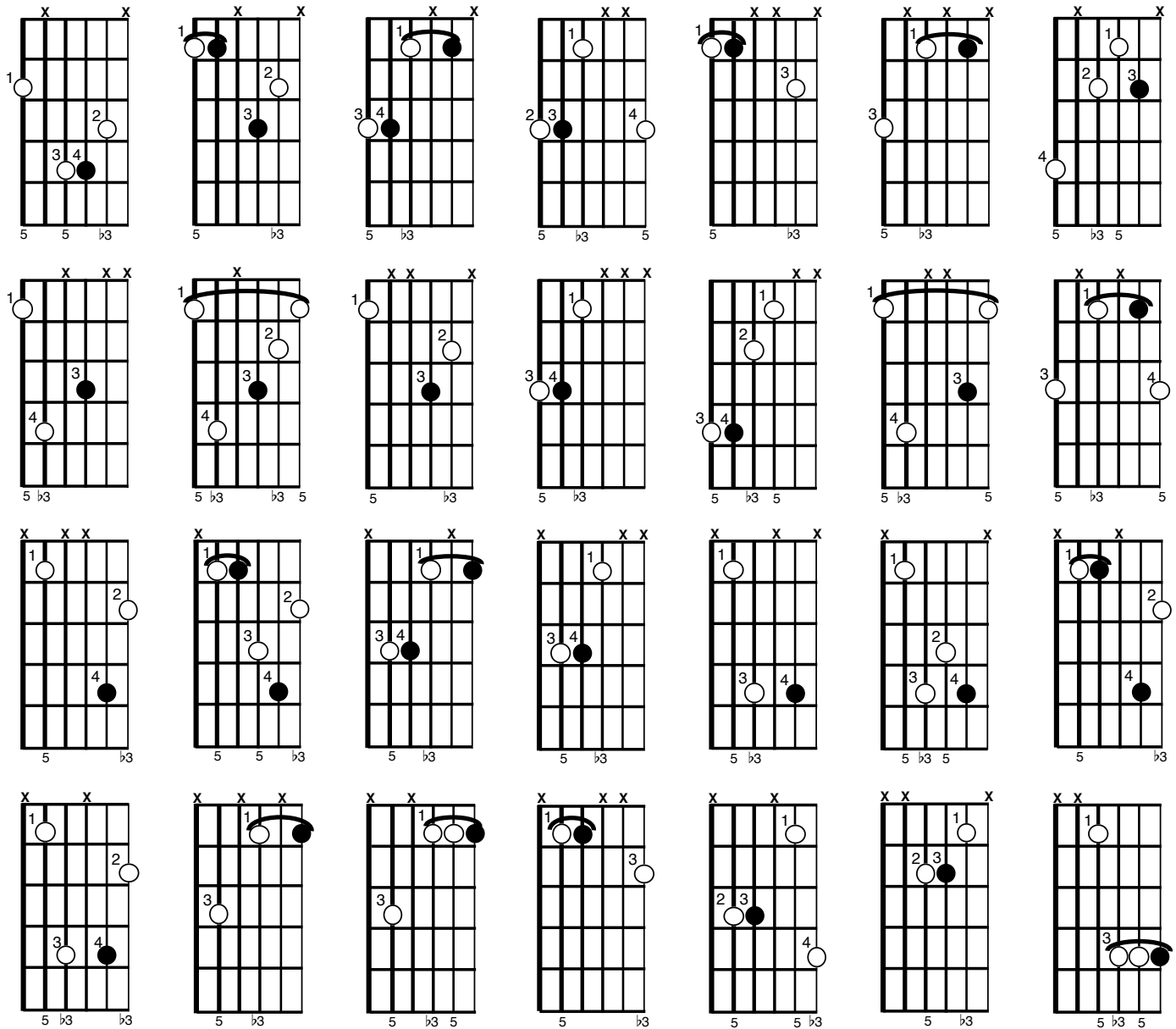
Minor Triads - 3rd in bass (1st inversion)



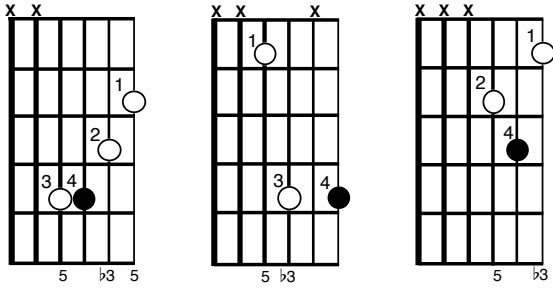
Minor Triads - 3rd in bass (1st inversion) cont.



Minor Triads - 5th in bass (2nd inversion)



Minor Triads - 5th in bass (2nd inversion) cont.



Minor Triads - stretchy forms

