The Caged System

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Guitar Tuition
The Caged System

The Caged System is a tool that helps us find all the notes of a given key across the length of the fretboard. It is called the “CAGED” system as it uses the open chord shapes of C, A, G, E & D major to help us achieve this.

To start of, we will look at how we can use the Caged system to play one chord in 5 different positions.

Finding the notes

We will begin by learning how to play a C major chord in different places on the fret board. The notes of the C major triad are C, E & G. We will begin by writing out the notes of C major triad found on the low E string:

![Diagram of C major chord on the fretboard]

Now lets do the same thing on all other strings:

![Diagram of C major chord on all strings]

So far, so good. But how can we visualise the fretboard so we can find these notes when playing and use this knowledge to play a chord in different positions?

We think C.A.G.E.D!

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Let us now look at the first group of notes.

We can see here that we have an open position C chord. We will come back to this shape at the end of this segment.

A shape

The name CAGED tells us that the next shape we will use is based on an A shape barre chord. It is called an A shape barre chord because it is based on the open A chord with the first finger acting as the nut, however the chord being played is C major.

If we look at the diagram below, we can see that this shape can be found from the 3rd fret (C) on the A string.
The Caged System

G shape

The next shape is based on a G major chord with the root note found on the low E string. Notice how this shape relates to an open G chord.

If we look at the diagram below, we can see that this shape can be found from the 8th fret (C) on the E string:

E shape

The E shape barre chord should be familiar to you by now as this shape in generally the first type of barre chord that guitarists tend to learn.

In this instance, we can build a C major chord from the C found at the 8th fret of the low E string, using the E shape barre chord.

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D shape

Based on the open D major chord, this shape comes from the root note found on the D string.

To play a C major, we can build this chord from the C note located at the 10th fret of the D string.

C shape

At this point, the Caged pattern starts again, however we will now use the C major shaped barre chord.

Here it can be found constructed from the C note found at the 15th fret of the A string:
So looking at the diagram below, we can see how these shapes lock together to cover the fretboard.

Root notes

To be able to use this effectively, you should learn where the root notes are for each chord shape and which finger is used to play it.

C shape - Root on A string, little finger.
A shape - Root on A string, first finger
G shape - root on E string, ring finger
E shape - root on E string, first finger
D shape - root on D string, first finger

So now you can play a C major chord anywhere on the guitar, try doing this with different keys starting from the lowest possible shape available and remember to just follow the Caged pattern, i.e. if the lowest shape is based on the E shape, the next will be a D shape, then a C shape, etc.

The next step is to learn how to use these shapes to play scales.
The Caged System & The Major Scale

Now we will look at how we can use the Caged System to play a major scales in each of the five positions.

In this section, we will be working in the key of G major.

E shape - Position 1

Even though I tend to describe this as the E position or shape, some people will refer to it as position 1 as this pattern is commonly the first one people learn. As a result of this, you may even hear people describe the Caged system as EDCAG.

This fingering starts with the middle finger playing the lowest root note available, which in this pattern is on the low E string. Notice that the chord shape is highlighted in red.

Here is how this pattern is played in G major:
In this position, the root note can be found on the D string:

* Play this note using the 4th finger when ascending and the 3rd finger when descending.

Here is G major in the D shape position. When practicing this pattern, I suggest starting on the lowest root note available and playing all the scale tones above and then below it, like this:
This position has the root note on the A string:

Here is G major in the C shape position. When practicing this pattern start from the root note found on the A string, beginning on the little finger:
Here we find the root note again on the A string:

Here is G major in the A shape position. The pattern starts from the lowest root note available, beginning on the middle finger:
In this final shape, the root note is found on the low E string and starts on the little finger:

Here is G major in the G shape position:
Now that you have learnt to play the G major scale in all 5 positions, practice playing them one after the other. You will see how they all connect so that you can play this scale anywhere on the neck.

When you have mastered that, try playing the CAGED positions in the same way in other major keys.