

CHORD CRASH

Course



But-the-Pieces Plan: 6 Week Chord Crash Course

Overview

This 'But-the-Pieces' lesson plan is designed to take late beginner/early intermediate piano students from barely knowing what a chord is, to knowing all the major and minor chords, and having an understanding of inversions and how they're formed.

But-the-Pieces Plans cover aspects other than repertoire. These plans will work well one on one with a student, or in partner, buddy, overlapping or small group lessons. Wherever there would be a modification for working with multiple students, this has been noted. All other activities will work with multiple students sitting side by side at one piano or at separate keyboard without much alteration.

Quick Look Lesson Plan

WEEK	FOCUS	ACTIVITY	NOTES:
Week 1	Major chords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keyboard mapping • White key chord crawls • Jump tests 	
Week 2	Major chords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keyboard mapping • White key chord crawls • Jump tests • Four chord pattern 	
Week 3	Minor chords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keyboard mapping • Chromatic chord crawls • Jump tests • Four chord pattern 	
Week 4	Minor chords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chromatic chord crawls • Jump tests • Four chord pattern • Don't Minor My Major 	
Week 5	Chord inversions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keyboard mapping • COF chord crawls • Jump tests (minor) • Four chord pattern 	
Week 6	Chord inversions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White key chord crawls • Jump tests (major & minor) • Four chord pattern • Inversion Diversions 	

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Week 1

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
5 min	Keyboard Mapping (major chords)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your student knows a major chord (C major for example) ask her to lay out the chord on the piano using erasers, pencils or other small tokens. Just make sure it's something that won't slip between the keys! • Ask her to count the number of keys between the bottom two notes, and the number between the top two notes. • Take the tokens off the piano and ask her to lay out a new chord (one she doesn't know) using this pattern. • Practice this with lots of different chords and challenge her to find them as quickly as possible.
10 min	Major Chord Crawls (white keys)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your student to play the white key major chords going from C to C and back down. • Encourage her to take her time and carefully count out the pattern before playing each chord. • Do this with each hand separately, then try hands together if possible. • Get your student to try this a few times with the backing track or iReal Pro app.
5 min	Jump Tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about the patterns each chord makes on the piano. It make be helpful to give each pattern a name, e.g. snowmen, chocolate sandwiches, oreos and brownies. (I usually just refer to the B and B flat as the "weirdos" or "odd ones".) • Use the Chord Pattern Grids to further reinforce this relationship and place them on the stand. • Ask your student to jump to different chords at random as quickly as possible: "Give me an A major!" If you have two students have them test each other.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

White Key Chord Crawls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign practice using the backing tracks or get your student to download the iReal Pro app. • Give her several options and different speeds so that she can push herself forward and keep practice interesting.
Jump Tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a parent or sibling to call out chords at random for your student to play on the piano. • Challenge her to see how many she can get in a minute!

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Week 2

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
5 min	Keyboard Mapping (major chords)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review this exercise from last week and get your student to lay out a few chords Make sure she still understands the patterns and how to count them out.
5 min	Major Chord Crawls (white keys)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turn on the backing track and check how smoothly your student can move through the chords. Help her to fix any fingering issues or technique problems. Extra practice is often needed moving to and from B major – do some extra drills here if necessary. If she's getting pretty good at this, up the tempo a little and/or challenge her to play with both hands together.
5 min	Jump Tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place the Chord Pattern Grids on the stand. Turn on a timer for 60 seconds. Point to chords at random on the sheet and count how many your student can play correct in one minute. If you have two students get one to be the pointer while the other plays, and then switch. If your student is getting good at this, switch to the plain white version of the Chord Pattern Grids and repeat the exercise.
5 min	Four Chord Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play a I-V-vi-IV pattern in C for your student. Use octaves in the left hand and chords in root position in the right hand. Teach your student the right hand chord pattern first and then the left hand pattern. For most students it's simplest to start with single notes in the left hand rather than octaves. Put this hands together if you can, but don't worry if you need to leave this for next week.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

White Key Chord Crawls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign practice using the backing tracks or get your student to download the iReal Pro app. Give her several options and different speeds so that she can push herself forward and keep practice interesting.
Four Chord Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign practice of the I-V-vi-IV pattern either hands separately or together. Encourage your student to experiment with adding pedal at home (we'll refine this next week).

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Week 3

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
2 min	Jump Tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place the plain white Chord Pattern Grids on the stand. Turn on a timer for 60 seconds. Point to chords at random on the sheet and count how many your student can play correct in one minute. If you have two students get one to be the pointer while the other plays, and then switch.
5 min	Major Chord Crawls (chromatic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the black key chords. Ask your student to try her chord crawls with these black key chords added in, moving chromatically from C to C and back down. Get your student to try this a few times with the backing track or iReal Pro app.
5 min	Keyboard Mapping (minor chords)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask your student to lay out a major chord on the piano using erasers, pencils or other small tokens and then play this same chord in a different octave. Move the middle token down to create a minor chord and ask your student to play this chord. Repeat this with a few different chords and discuss the difference between major and minor sounds and the pattern of semitones/half steps in minor chords.
8 min	Four Chord Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the I-V-vi-IV pattern from last week. Help your student to develop this further by putting the hands together or adding octaves in the left hand. Play the chord progression and ask your student to watch your foot – when is the pedal change happening? Ask her to play again, doing her best to create smooth pedalling and even tempo.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Chromatic Chord Crawls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign practice using the backing tracks or the iReal Pro app. Give her several options and different speeds so that she can push herself forward and keep practice interesting.
Four Chord Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign practice of the I-V-vi-IV pattern hands together with the pedal. Ask her to try out different rhythmic patterns towards the end of the week when this starts to feel comfortable.

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Week 4

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
5 min	Four Chord Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the I-V-vi-IV pattern with pedalling. Help your student to develop this further by using different rhythmic patterns. You may like to use the Pop Ninja patterns as a jumping off point. If your student is ready, transpose this pattern into G major and then other keys. (Working around the circle of fifths is the simplest approach.)
2 min	Jump Tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place the plain white Chord Pattern Grids on the stand. Turn on a timer for 60 seconds. Point to chords at random on the sheet and count how many your student can play correct in one minute. If you have two students get one to be the pointer while the other plays, and then switch.
3 min	Major Chord Crawls (chromatic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check in with the chromatic chord crawls and help your student with any technique issues. Challenge your student to up the tempo!
10 min	Don't Minor My Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefly review the minor chord keyboard mapping from last week. Explain and play the Don't Minor My Major game. This game further reinforces the patterns of semitones/half steps in the chords and the relationship between the major and minor chords. Full instructions can be found in the game pdf.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Chromatic Chord Crawls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign practice using the backing tracks or the iReal Pro app. Give her several options and different speeds so that she can push herself forward and keep practice interesting.
Four Chord Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign practice of the I-V-vi-IV pattern hands together with the pedal. Ask her to try out different rhythmic patterns and experiment in different keys.

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Week 5

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
5 min	Four Chord Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the I-V-vi-IV pattern with pedalling. Transpose this pattern into more keys and explore more rhythmic patterns. (Working around the circle of fifths is the simplest approach.) Encourage your student to try different metres too – turning it into a waltz, a march or a polka.
5 min	Jump Tests (minor chords)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place the minor Chord Pattern Grids on the stand. Turn on a timer for 60 seconds. Point to chords at random on the sheet and count how many your student can play correct in one minute. If you have two students get one to be the pointer while the other plays, and then switch. If your student is getting good at this, switch to the plain white version of the minor Chord Pattern Grids and repeat the exercise.
5 min	Major Chords (circle of fifths)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check in with the chromatic chord crawls and help your student with any technique issues. Discuss the circle of fifths and refer to a circle of fifths graphic if you have one in your studio. Play the major chords around the circle of fifths with the backing track so your student can hear how this sounds. Ask your student to try this new pattern, first with each hand separately, then hands together.
5 min	Keyboard Mapping (major inversions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask your student to lay out a major chord on the piano using erasers, pencils or other small tokens and then play this same chord in a different octave. Move the bottom token to the top to create a first inversion and ask your student to play this new version of the chord in a different octave. Repeat for the second inversion. Repeat this with a few different chords and discuss the similarities and differences in the sounds of root position, first inversion and second inversion chords.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

COF Chord Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign practice using the backing tracks or the iReal Pro app. Give her several options and different speeds so that she can push herself forward and keep practice interesting.
Four Chord Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign practice of the I-V-vi-IV pattern hands together with the pedal in different keys. Ask her to try out different metres and experiment with changing the order of the chords.

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Week 6

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
2 min	Four Chord Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask your student to play her favourite version of the chord pattern, drawing from all the rhythmic patterns, metres, keys and different orders of the chords that she has been trying.
3 min	Jump Tests (major & minor chords)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place the plain major and minor Chord Pattern Grids on the stand, side by side. Turn on a timer for 60 seconds. Point to chords at random on the sheets and count how many your student can play correct in one minute. If you have two students get one to be the pointer while the other plays, and then switch.
5 min	Major Chords (circle of fifths)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check in with the circle of fifths chord crawls and help your student with any technique issues. Challenge your student to up the tempo and switch between the chromatic and circle of fifths versions of the drill.
10 min	Inversion Diversions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the inversion keyboard mapping exercise from last week. Explain the Inversion Diversions game (using the keyboard card versions) and play the game together. Help your student to identify the chords more quickly by noticing the big and small gaps, and re-arranging the notes in her head in order to identify the chord.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Inversion Chord Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get a parent or sibling to call out chords at random in different inversions for your student to play on the piano. Challenge her to see how many she can get in a minute!
Four Chord Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask your student to come up with her own progression using any mixture of chords. Give her tips such as using chords that are close together on the circle of fifths, but allow her to get creative!