

Power Chords vs. Barre Chords

We all know that they are different, but which one do you play in a given piece? Well, the options are left quite open, but many times it actually depends on personal ability. While power chords are MUCH easier to play than many barre chord formations, the power chord tends to muddy up a passage and doesn't offer a bright consistent tone. This is the main reason that power chords are used in heavier music. As you know, power chords are most frequently used with distortion, but that isn't always the case.

In this series, we are going to alternate between power chords and barre chords, allowing you to hear the difference between the two. This should be a simple run of power/barre chords, so even if you haven't mastered difficult barre chords, this exercise should work just fine for you.

Exercises

In this power chord exercise, the first bar is all quarter notes. All you have to do is play them as you see them. The second bar is using eighth notes. The '5' notes that each chord is a power chord. The '5' notes that that in addition to the root, you are also using the 5th.

	A5	G5	B5	F5
T				
A				
B	7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5	5 5 5 5 3 3 3 3	9 9 9 9 7 7 7 7	3 3 3 3 1 1 1 1

	A5	G5	B5	F5
T				
A				
B	7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5	5 5 5 5 3 3 3 3	9 9 9 9 7 7 7 7	3 3 3 3 1 1 1 1

2.

Now we start introducing some barre chords instead of the power chords.

	A	G	B	F
T	5 5 5 5	3 3 3 3	7 7 7 7	1 1 1 1
A	6 6 6 6	4 4 4 4	8 8 8 8	2 2 2 2
B	7 7 7 7	5 5 5 5	9 9 9 9	3 3 3 3
B	5 5 5 5	3 3 3 3	7 7 7 7	1 1 1 1

	A	G	B	F
T	5 5 5 5	3 3 3 3	7 7 7 7	1 1 1 1
A	6 6 6 6	4 4 4 4	8 8 8 8	2 2 2 2
B	7 7 7 7	5 5 5 5	9 9 9 9	3 3 3 3
B	5 5 5 5	3 3 3 3	7 7 7 7	1 1 1 1

3.

In this exercise, the first bar is all power chords using quarter notes on the A string instead of the E string this time. The second bar uses eighth notes.

	C5	D5	E5	F5
T				
A	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	9 9 9 9	10 10 10 10
B	3 3 3 3	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	8 8 8 8

	C5	D5	E5	F5
T				
A	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	9 9 9 9	10 10 10 10
B	3 3 3 3	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	8 8 8 8

4.

Now we play barre chords instead of power chords using the same format as above:

	C	D	E	F
T	3 3 3 3	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	8 8 8 8
A	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	9 9 9 9	10 10 10 10
B	3 3 3 3	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	8 8 8 8

	C	D	E	F
T	3 3 3 3	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	8 8 8 8
A	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	9 9 9 9	10 10 10 10
B	3 3 3 3	5 5 5 5	7 7 7 7	8 8 8 8

As you can see, there is quite a difference between hearing the sound of the power chord vs. the barre chord. Most often you'll find barre chords for acoustic as power chords don't provide the full tonal quality that most acoustic guitarists need.

	Video Reference: Much more material is covered in our Strumming School DVD. Please refer to Chapter 2 "Power Chords vs. Barre Chords" on the DVD for additional information.
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