Method 1 – How to Recognize
By James Hober

Now we're going to dive into the details of Ted Greene's V-System Method 1. In particular, we're going to discuss how to recognize which voicing group a given four note chord belongs in.

Let's Start with Some Definitions

Traditionally, the notes of a chord are referred to as "voices," as if each note were sung by a section of a choir. For guitar chords, it's common to refer to the lowest note as "the bass." Ted also referred to the other three notes in the chord by their choral voice names.

The voices are:

> **S** for Soprano, the highest sounding note in the chord,
> **A** for Alto, the second highest note in the chord,
> **T** for Tenor, the third highest note in the chord,
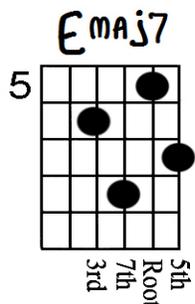> **B** for Bass, the lowest note in the chord.

We're also going to use a couple of terms that are unique to Ted's Method 1: Chronological Voice Formula and Chord Tone Path.

A **Chronological Voice Formula** is a particular ordering of the four voices, like ASTB or TABS. The Chronological Voice Formula does not change the fact that S is always the highest note in a chord, B is always the lowest and the inner voices are always A and T. The Chronological Voice Formula is the **chronological** order in which we encounter the voices as we walk the Chord Tone Path.

The **Chord Tone Path** is a way of mentally walking through the tones in a chord. We just look at the chord and mentally step from chord tone to chord tone. In this way, our mind follows a path through the chord. As you'll see, we can do this visually, with a fretboard grid, a diagram, or staff notation. And of course, you can also do this with your guitar, holding the chord on the fingerboard, looking at your hand, and thinking it through.
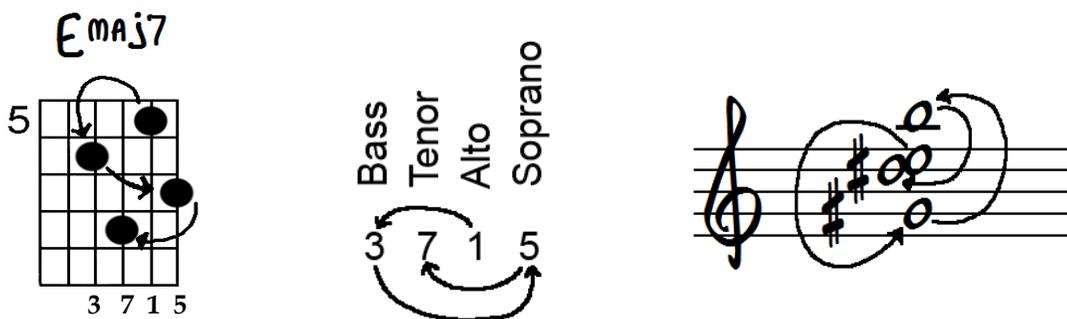
An Example, Please

Let's take a first inversion Emaj7 chord on the top four strings:

Strings:	4	3	2	1	
Voices:	B	T	A	S	(for Bass, Tenor, Alto, Soprano)
Notes:	G#	D#	E	B	
Chord tones:	3	7	1	5	

We want to find out what voicing group this chord is in: V-1, V-2, or V-3, etc.
The Chord Tone Path we're going to use is: 1 → 3 → 5 → 7 (root to 3rd to 5th to 7th).

Here are three ways to visualize the Chord Tone Path (fretboard grid, diagram, and staff notation):

The arrows show the path your eyes travel (or your mind travels) as you inspect the chord. We are not moving tones, creating inversions, or in any way changing the chord. We're just studying the chord in a special way. That way is to mentally follow the Chord Tone Path and notice in what chronological order we encounter the voices.

Now let's mentally follow the Chord Tone Path through the chord:

> 1 is in **A** (i.e. the root of the chord is in the Alto).
> 3 is in **B** (i.e. the third of the chord is in the Bass).
> 5 is in **S** (i.e. the fifth of the chord is in the Soprano).
> 7 is in **T** (i.e. the seventh of the chord is in the Tenor).

Look at the above vertically. We have spelled **ABST** for our Chronological Voice Formula. Now we look up **ABST** in the following table created by Ted:

The Master Formula Table

V-1   BTAS, SBTA, ASBT, TASB
V-2   TABS, STAB, BSTA, **ABST**
V-3   ABTS, SABT, TSAB, BTSA
V-4   STBA, ASTB, BAST, TBAS
V-5   BATS, SBAT, TSBA, ATSB
V-6   (V-1 with B an octave lower)
V-7   (V-2 with B an octave lower)
V-8   TBSA, ATBS, SATB, BSAT
V-9   (V-2 with S an octave higher)
V-10   (V-2 with both B and T an octave lower, or A and S an octave higher)
V-11   (V-4 with S an octave higher)
V-12   (V-3 with B an octave lower)
V-13   (V-1 with both B and T an octave lower, or A and S an octave higher)
V-14   (V-1 with S an octave higher)

ABST is an entry in V-2. Voila! We find that our example Emaj7 is a V-2 chord. That's it! To classify a chord, you simply mentally walk the Chord Tone Path, noting the order of the voices you encounter, and look up that order (like ABST) in the table.

Sordid Details Following

Now let's refine what we mean by the Chord Tone Path. In the above example, the Chord Tone Path had four steppingstones: 1, 3, 5, and 7. To be more specific, we always move left to right in the Ascending Chromatic Order of Chord Tones.

The **Ascending Chromatic Order of Chord Tones** is:

1	b2	2	b3	3	4	b5	5	#5	6	b7	7	(circle back to root)
root	b9	9	#9		11	#11			13			

The important idea here is that the 9th is treated as the 2nd, the 11th as the 4th, and the 13th as the 6th for the purpose of following the Chord Tone Path. Always use the lower octave equivalents!

So for a /9 chord (which is how Ted indicated an add9 chord), the Chord Tone Path would be 1 → 2 → 3 → 5. It would NOT be 1 → 3 → 5 → 9 because that would land you in the wrong voicing group.

What if your chord doesn't have a root, like C9 (no root)? No problem. We still move from left to right in the Ascending Chromatic Order of Chord Tones: 2 → 3 → 5 → b7.

Whirling Dervish

Actually, it doesn't matter which chord tone you start with, as long as you move left to right through the Ascending Chromatic Order of Chord Tones. If you get to the end (chord tone 7) and have chord tones left, you just circle around back to the beginning (chord tone 1). In other words, for the Emaj7 chord, you could have followed a Chord Tone Path of

> 1 → 3 → 5 → 7 or
> 3 → 5 → 7 → 1 or
> 5 → 7 → 1 → 3 or
> 7 → 1 → 3 → 5.

The Chord Tone Path is circular! You can rotate it. Also, notice that the four Chronological Voice Formulas in each row of Ted's Master Formula Table are rotations of each other. That's why a rotated Chord Tone Path will still land you in the same voicing group.

It's up to you which of the four Chord Tone Paths you choose. In the above example, you might like 1 → 3 → 5 → 7 because it starts from the root. Or you might like 3 → 5 → 7 → 1 because the 3rd is in the bass and you want to start with the bass. Most people will find 1 → 3 → 5 → 7 easiest. But rotate if you like.

High-Octane

So far we can only land in V-1, V-2, V-3, V-4, V-5, or V-8. That's because those are the only voicing groups that show Chronological Voice Formulas in the Master Formula Table. So we need to make another refinement. Watch out for an interval greater than an octave between adjacent voices, i.e. between B and T, or between T and A, or between A and S. If you find one of these, you will land in one of the other (less commonly played) voicing groups.

Summary

To classify a reachable chord with four distinct notes into one of the fourteen voicing groups:

1)   Pick any starting chord tone. For simplicity, you can pick the root or lowest chord tone.
2)   Mentally walk the Chord Tone Path (for example, 1 → 3 → 5 → 7) through the chord, observing which voice (S, A, T, or B) each chord tone is in, and spell out the Chronological Voice Formula (for example, ABST).
3)   Look up the Chronological Voice Formula in Ted's table:

<u>Mini Master Formula Table</u>

V-1   BTAS, SBTA, ASBT, TASB
V-2   TABS, STAB, BSTA, ABST
V-3   ABTS, SABT, TSAB, BTSA
V-4   STBA, ASTB, BAST, TBAS
V-5   BATS, SBAT, TSBA, ATSB
V-8   TBSA, ATBS, SATB, BSAT

4)   Is there less than an octave between each pair of adjacent voices? If so, you're done!

       Otherwise:

5a)   Is the extra octave between B and T? If so, then...
              If you looked up V-1, you have a V-6.
              If you looked up V-2, you have a V-7.
              If you looked up V-3, you have a V-12.

5b)   Is the extra octave between T and A? If so, then...
              If you looked up V-1, you have a V-13.
              If you looked up V-2, you have a V-10.

5c)   Is the extra octave between A and S? If so, then...
              If you looked up V-1, you have a V-14.
              If you looked up V-2, you have a V-9.
              If you looked up V-4, you have a V-11.

Pesky Things to Watch Out For

The highest sounding note of the chord remains the soprano, the lowest the bass, and the middle ones the alto and tenor. That never changes. We are not modifying the chord! We are simply examining it. The Chronological Voice Formula is the **chronological** order in which we visit the voices as we **mentally** walk the Chord Tone Path. This gives us different orderings of the letters SATB, but it never changes the fundamental fact that the soprano is the highest sounding note of the chord, etc.

Remember to treat 9ths as 2nds, 11ths as 4ths, and 13ths as 6ths when mentally walking the Chord Tone Path. If you mistakenly think in terms of the higher chord tones, rather than their lower octave equivalents, you'll end up in the wrong voicing group.

Ted mostly played chords with fretted notes only. That way he could easily transpose his progressions and arrangements. When he did include an open string, most commonly it would be an open E or A bass note. Does the V-System work with chords that use open strings? Sometimes. When considering a chord with one or more open strings, be careful about which notes constitute the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. The highest sounding note may not be on the highest string.

Now What?

Does the thought of looking things up in tables make you want to light your guitar on fire and sacrifice something you really love? Oh, wait. That's been done. Instead, better check out my *Method 1 for the Table-Challenged*. Even if you are not table challenged, sometimes the Master Formula Table is not near at hand. The memory tricks in *Method 1 for the Table-Challenged* can help you recognize the voicing group of a chord without the table.

If you want to think about Method 1 from a slightly different angle, check out *Method 1 by Letter Name*.

To make sure you really understand *Method 1 – How to Recognize*, challenge yourself with Quiz #1.

—James