

LEVEL 01 · 8 WEEKS · POWER CHORDS

AC/DC

Beginner.

AC/DC is built from a small vocabulary of power chords played with relentless rhythmic discipline. The notes are simple. The timing is not. This course teaches the chords and then teaches the timing that makes them sound like AC/DC.

DURATION

8 weeks

SCOPE

Power chords · Downstroke
rhythm

FORMAT

Self-paced

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

PREMISE & setup.

THE PREMISE

AC/DC is built from a small vocabulary of power chords — usually no more than four or five across an entire song. The difficulty is not in the chord shapes. It is in the timing, the consistency of the downstroke, and the spaces between hits.

This course removes lead playing entirely. No solos. No pentatonic. Only the rhythm guitar — the part Malcolm played. Work in short daily sessions. Twenty focused minutes against a metronome will produce more progress than two hours of unstructured playing. If the timing slips, stop and reset rather than playing through it.

The course assumes the setup outlined in *The Gilmour Method*. A Fender Player II and a Mustang ML 25 is more than enough — AC/DC's tone is a cranked amp and a bridge pickup, not exotic equipment.

SETUP — REFERENCE RIG FOR THIS COURSE

GUITAR

Fender Player II (MIM)

Bridge pickup throughout. Neck-and-bridge combined acceptable for cleaner sections.

AMPLIFIER

Fender Mustang ML 25

Switch to a British amp model — '65 Brit, '70s Brit, or the Plexi-style preset. The clean Fender models used in the Gilmour course do not produce AC/DC's tone.

STRINGS

9s or 10s, nickel-wound

The 9s from the Gilmour setup will work. 10s give a slightly fuller chord but are not required at this level.

ROOM

Low to moderate volume

Loud playing hides timing errors. The rhythm must be tight at conversational volume before being played at full volume.

AMP STARTING POINT — LEVEL 01

British amp model · Gain 4–5 · Bass 5 · Mid 7 · Treble 6 · Presence 6
Reverb off or minimal · No delay · Bridge pickup

The mid-forward EQ is critical. Most modern presets default to scooped settings — these will not work for AC/DC. Cut the gain back if the tone becomes fuzzy; the gain here is lower than most players assume.

03 — REFERENCE

THE POWER CHORD *vocabulary.*

A power chord is the root note and the fifth — two notes, sometimes doubled with the octave for a fuller sound. There is no third, which is what gives power chords their neutral, neither-major-nor-minor character. The entire course operates inside this vocabulary.

Fretboards are drawn with the low E string at the top. Fret numbers run left to right. The root note is marked R; the fifth is marked 5; the octave (when used) is marked R again.

E5 — OPEN

The lowest power chord. Strum the low E string open, the A string at fret 2, and the D string at fret 2. Mute everything else.

A5 — OPEN

Open A on the 5th string, then D and G strings at fret 2. The low E is muted with the side of the index finger.

D5 — OPEN

Open D, A on the G string at fret 2, D on the B string at fret 3. The two lowest strings are muted.

G5 — MOVABLE

The movable shape. Index finger on the root, ring finger on the 5th and octave. Slide this shape anywhere on the low E string.

C5 — MOVABLE (A STRING)

Same shape, rooted on the A string instead of the low E. Use this to play C5, D5, F5 — anything between the A and D strings.

NOTATION KEY

- T downstroke
- ^ upstroke
- P.M. palm mute
- ‡ rest / silence
- > accent

The rhythm notation used in the weekly figures. Read left to right, one beat at a time.

04 — COURSE

EIGHT *weeks.*

Each week sits on a single page where possible. Read it once, work through it daily for seven days, then move on. Do not skip ahead. The rhythmic control built in weeks one to three is what makes weeks six to eight work.

WEEK 1 **The downstroke** BUILD THE FOUNDATION HIT

CONTENT

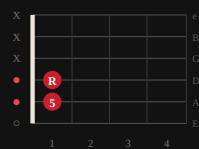
- E5 power chord — open position
- Downstrokes only, no upstrokes
- Quarter notes at 80 BPM, against a metronome

DRILLS

- Four hits per bar. Four bars. Stop. Restart.
- Each hit must arrive on the click, not before, not after
- Listen for ring-out — every chord should sustain for the full beat

FIGURE 1.1 · E5 POWER CHORD

OPEN POSITION · LOW STRINGS ONLY



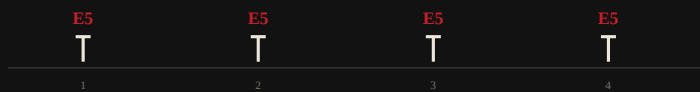
Low E string open. Index finger on the A string at fret 2 — that's the root. Ring finger on the D string at fret 2 — the octave. Mute the top three strings with the side of the index finger.

Three strings ringing, three muted. Strum all six — the muted strings stay silent.

E5

FIGURE 1.2 · THE DOWNSTROKE PULSE

E5 · 80 BPM · QUARTER NOTES



CONSTRAINT

No upstrokes. The picking hand returns to the starting position above the strings between hits — it does not stay below. This is the difference between a downstroke pulse and strumming.

✓ **OUTCOME**

A steady, even pulse on one chord. This is the foundation everything else is built on.

WEEK 2

Two chords, clean changes

MOVE BETWEEN SHAPES WITHOUT DROPPING THE PULSE

CONTENT

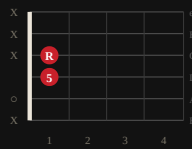
- E5 to A5 — alternating each bar
- Then E5 to D5 — alternating each bar
- Same downstroke pattern as Week 1

DRILLS

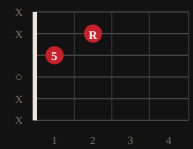
- Four hits on E5, four hits on A5, repeat. 80 BPM.
- The chord change happens during the silent return of the picking hand — not during the hit
- If the change is rushed, slow the metronome to 70 BPM

FIGURE 2.1 · NEW CHORDS THIS WEEK

A5 · D5 · OPEN POSITIONS



A5



D5

CONSTRAINT

The pulse is not allowed to slow during the change. If it does, the chord change is too late — start preparing the new shape on beat four of the previous bar.

WEEK 3

Three chords — the Highway to Hell shape

APPLY THE CHANGE PATTERN TO A REAL PROGRESSION

CONTENT

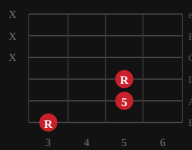
- A5, D5, G5 — the three chords behind *Highway to Hell*
- Two hits per chord, then move
- Tempo: 75 BPM (the original is faster — slow it down)

DRILLS

- A5 (x2) → D5 (x2) → G5 (x2) → D5 (x2), repeat
- Each chord rings fully before moving
- Increase to 85 BPM only when the pattern is clean for 60 seconds straight

FIGURE 3.1 · THE MOVABLE G5 SHAPE

ROOTED ON LOW E · SLIDE ANYWHERE



G5

Index finger on the root (low E, fret 3). Ring finger barres the 5th and octave (A and D strings, fret 5).

Slide the same shape up the neck — fret 5 becomes A5, fret 7 becomes B5, fret 8 becomes C5.

CONSTRAINT

Don't try to play along to the recording yet. The recording is at full tempo with a full band. The point this week is the change, not the performance.

👉 **OUTCOME**

A recognisable AC/DC progression at a controlled tempo. The first time the course sounds like something.

WEEK 4

Eighth notes — the gallop

DOUBLE THE PULSE WITHOUT LOSING ACCURACY

CONTENT

- Eighth-note downstrokes on a single chord (E5)
- Eight hits per bar instead of four
- All downstrokes — no upstrokes yet

DRILLS

- Start at 70 BPM eighth notes (slow)
- Count: "1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and"
- Build up by 5 BPM only when the pulse is even

FIGURE 4.1 · EIGHTH-NOTE DOWNSTROKES

E5 · ALL DOWNSTROKES



CONSTRAINT

The picking hand will tire. That is the point — Malcolm Young's downstroke endurance was the foundation of his sound. Build it slowly. Stopping when the wrist tightens is correct; pushing through it teaches tension.

☑ **OUTCOME**

The pulse gains weight. Each hit is committed, not skimmed.

WEEK 5

Syncopation — the held chord

HIT AND HOLD — LET THE REST DO THE WORK

CONTENT

- The *Back in Black* rhythm — E5, then a held silence, then D5 → A5
- Counting rests as carefully as hits
- The space between chords is the rhythm

DRILLS

- Hit E5 on beat 1, mute, then hit D5 → A5 on the off-beat
- The off-beat hit is the difficult one — it's where the pulse swings
- Tempo 70 BPM, no faster until the rest sits exactly between hits

FIGURE 5.1 · BACK IN BLACK PATTERN

SIMPLIFIED — FOCUS ON THE REST



CONSTRAINT

The rest is part of the riff, not a gap. Mute the strings with the picking hand during the rest — silence is active, not accidental.

☑ **OUTCOME**

The rhythm starts to feel like AC/DC instead of generic rock — because of what is not played, not what is.

WEEK 6

Palm muting and the chug

INTRODUCE DYNAMIC CONTRAST

CONTENT

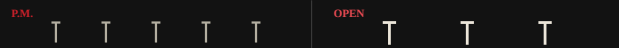
- Side of the picking hand rests lightly on the bridge
- Muted chords ring shorter and feel tighter
- Alternate two bars muted with two bars open

DRILLS

- E5 with palm mute — eighth notes — for two bars
- Then E5 open — quarter notes — for two bars
- The contrast is the goal, not the muting itself

FIGURE 6.1 · MUTE, THEN RELEASE

E5 · PALM MUTED → OPEN



CONSTRAINT

Light pressure on the bridge. Heavy pressure kills the chord entirely. The chord should still ring, just shorter and tighter than the open version.

WEEK 7

Song study — Highway to Hell verse

APPLY TECHNIQUE INSIDE A REAL SONG

MATERIAL

- *Highway to Hell* — verse and chorus only
- *T.N.T.* — the main riff (A5 with the "oi" gaps)

APPROACH

- Learn the chord sequence first, no rhythm
- Then add the rhythm, slow, against a metronome
- Only play along to the recording when the rhythm is solid alone

FIGURE 7.1 · THE HIGHWAY TO HELL VERSE

POWER-CHORD REDUCTION · PER BAR



Repeat the four-bar pattern for the full verse. The chorus uses the same chords in a slightly different order.

CONSTRAINT

Do not attempt the solo. Do not attempt the bridge. The rhythm guitar in the verse and chorus contains everything practised in weeks one through six — finishing the song is not the point this week. Recognising the earlier weeks inside it is.

✔ OUTCOME

Recognition that the earlier weeks were not exercises — they were the song.

TASK

- Pick one song: *Highway to Hell*, *Back in Black*, or *T.N.T.*
- Play the rhythm guitar from start to finish, along with the recording
- Record the attempt. Listen back. Re-record once.

RULES

- Power chords only — no open chords, no leads
- The pulse must not slow during chord changes
- Rests must sit where they should — silence is part of the song
- If the picking hand tires, that is acceptable. Slowing the pulse is not.

CONSTRAINT

Do not multitrack. Do not edit. The recording is one continuous take, judged against the original on three things: chord accuracy, timing accuracy, and consistency. The notes are easy. The consistency is the test.

✔ **OUTCOME**

A complete AC/DC rhythm part, played start to finish, recognisable as the song.

End state — Level 01

You do not yet know many songs. What you have is the engine that drives them.

- Clean E5, A5, D5, G5, C5 power chord shapes
- Even downstroke pulse at 80–100 BPM
- Eighth-note downstrokes for short bursts
- Chord changes that do not drag the pulse
- Controlled palm muting
- One AC/DC song played end-to-end

*Most of AC/DC's catalogue is built from these same materials. Level 02 will not add many new chords. It will add open-string riffs (*Thunderstruck*), syncopated boogie patterns (*You Shook Me*), and stadium-tempo endurance. The vocabulary expands slowly. The discipline does not.*