Nashville numbers · what they are

Nashville session players write chord charts with numbers instead of chord names. Each chord is numbered by where it sits in the key: 1 is the home chord, 4 is the chord built on the 4th note of the scale, and so on.

The numbers are the same in every key. Call out a new key and the whole band plays from the same chart.

THE CHORDS IN G MAJOR

Number	Chord in G	Roman numeral	Quality
1	G	I	major
2m	Am	ii	minor
3m	Bm	iii	minor
4	C	IV	major
5	D	V	major
6m	Em	vi	minor
7°	F#°	vii°	diminished

See these chords on the neck, with finger numbers: Chords in a key.

HOW TO READ A NUMBER

1 A number on its own is a major chord.

6m An m after the number: minor.

7° A small circle: diminished.

5^{7} A small 7: add the 7th. In G, 5^{7} is D7.

$2m^{7}$ Minor with a 7th. In G, $2m^{7}$ is Am7.

NUMBERS OR ROMAN NUMERALS?

They name the same chords: 1–4–5 is I–IV–V. Roman numerals show minor chords in lower case (ii, iii, vi); Nashville numbers add an m (2m, 3m, 6m), which is quicker to write and easier to read on a gig.

Songs in a minor key: most players still number from the relative major, so the song's home chord is 6m (Em when the chart is in G). Some number from the minor chord as 1m. Agree on which before you start.

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Common progressions · in G

Written in numbers, so they work in any key. The second column shows them in G.

Numbers	In G	Where you hear it
1 – 4 – 5	G – C – D	Rock and roll, country, folk, blues
1 – 4 – 1 – 5	G – C – G – D	Classic country, bluegrass
1 – 5 – 6m – 4	G – D – Em – C	Pop: the "four-chord song"
1 – 6m – 4 – 5	G – Em – C – D	1950s doo-wop, oldies
6m – 4 – 1 – 5	Em – C – G – D	Pop and rock with a minor feel
1 – 5 – 6m – 3m – 4 – 1 – 4 – 5	G – D – Em – Bm – C – G – C – D	Pachelbel's Canon, pop ballads
$2m^7$ – 5^7 – $1maj^7$	Am7 – D7 – Gmaj7	Jazz standards
1 – 4 – 1	G – C – G	Gospel and soul: 4 to 1 is the "amen" sound

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Reading a chart · in G

A Nashville chart is the numbers, one bar at a time. These two symbols are enough to read a simple song.

TWO SYMBOLS

One number = one bar Play that chord for the whole bar: 4 beats in 4/4 time.

Split bar Numbers underlined together share one bar. Two chords: 2 beats each.

A SIMPLE VERSE

1 G	**4** C	**1** G	**5** D
1 G	**4** C	**1 5** G D	**1** G

Small letters: the chords in G. Bar 7 is a split bar: G for 2 beats, then D for 2.

12-BAR BLUES

1^7 G7	**1^7** G7	**1^7** G7	**1^7** G7
4^7 C7	**4^7** C7	**1^7** G7	**1^7** G7
5^7 D7	**4^7** C7	**1^7** G7	**5^7** D7

The same 12 bars in every key: only the letters change.

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