Music plays a lot of different roles in our lives. But at the end of the day music is about emotion. The best way to connect with your listeners on a human level is through honest, emotionally rich work.

Conveying the right emotions when you write songs isn’t easy. But some chord progressions can evoke powerful feelings right away. Today I’m sharing five distinct moods you can create in your songs using emotional chord progressions.

Epic chord progressions

From the hero’s journey to music that reflects the power of nature, epic chord progressions turn your songs emotional intensity up to eleven. Our first progression is the active ingredient in a huge number of hit tracks—for a good reason. Each chord adds a new layer to its satisfying emotional arc - This progression can be heard across many musical genres, from John Denver’s Take Me Home Country Roads to The Cure’s A Letter To Elise

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C: I C Major  V G Major  vi B minor  IV F Major
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But epicness can occur wherever there’s heightened emotion. One progression that never fails to tug at the heartstrings is the unique cycle of chords found in Pachelbel’s canon:

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1 C: I C Major  V G Major  vi A minor  iii E Minor
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5 C: IV F Major  I C Major  IV F Major  V G Major
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Pop artists from Vitamin C to Oasis and Belle & Sebastien have brought this stately yet epic emotional chord progression into modern music:
Sad chord progressions

Sadness is an unavoidable part of life. But it’s also the basis for lots of great music.

What sounds sad changes from person to person, but there’s a few emotional chord progressions that signal sadness right away.

Some chord progressions have strong associations with a specific era. This one is sometimes called the “50s progression.”

\[
\begin{align*}
C: & \quad \text{I} & \text{vi} & \text{IV} & \text{V} \\
\text{C Major} & \quad \text{A minor} & \text{F Major} & \text{G Major}
\end{align*}
\]

It’s especially common in doo-wop music and classic love songs from the era of pop crooners:

Here’s another one that’s sure to give you the blues:

\[
\begin{align*}
a: & \quad \text{i} & \text{i_2} & \text{IV} & \text{VI} \\
\text{A minor} & \quad \text{A minor / G} & \text{D Major / F#} & \text{F Major}
\end{align*}
\]

Don’t let the inverted chords in this progression fool you—it’s based on a simple descending bass line.

Minor chords and downward motion combine with a slow tempo to create an atmosphere of loss and despair:

Cool chord progressions

Coolness is impossible to define. If you could it wouldn’t be cool anymore!

Luckily, there are some chord progressions that can bring a sense of coolness to your tracks.

From slowed down jams to meditative tracks, many “cool” chord progressions are inspired by complex jazz harmonies.
Here's an example:

This chord progression appears in Chris Isaak’s windswept country torch song Wicked Game.

The major IV chord is borrowed from the parallel major, providing an unexpected yet stable resting place for the moody harmonic sequence:

This next one has been a staple chord progression in pop music over the past two decades.

By turning the V chord into a minor, it subtly surprises listeners to create an interesting mood:

Coldplay uses this progression in multiple songs, including Clocks:

**Weird chord progressions**

Every once in a while, it helps to build a song on a weird chord progression.

Borrowing chords from other keys is a great way to play on your listener’s expectations and put them in a weird place:

This progression uses an unexpected major chord to add some nice tension. The Arcade Fire use this progression for their song The Suburbs:
Happy chord progressions

Happy means something different to all of us. But in musical terms, predictable progressions with major chords reflect contentment and happiness.

There’s nothing more straightforward than a simple progression based on I, IV and V:

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
C: & I & IV & V \\
C Major & F Major & G Major & G Major 7 \\
\end{array}
\]

But simple progressions like this feel amazing when used well.

To make things more exciting you can try a progression with a little more tension like this:

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
C: & I & II7 & IV & I \\
C Major & D Major 7 & F Major & C Major \\
\end{array}
\]

In this example II7 acts as a predominant chord for a gospel style cadence.

This extra tension produces an expectant sound that can feel like giddy excitement that builds as the progression develops.

Another progression that can sound unexpectedly happy is the 12-bar blues.

I know what you’re thinking. Why is a blues progression doing here in the happy chord progression session?
This progression was born from the blues and is now featured in countless songs from many genres.

Instead of “happy” or “sad,” this progression is a blank musical slate that’s easy to create with.

The verse sections of The Beatles’ Can’t Buy Me Love are great examples of the 12 Bar Blues progression in action: