

Fretting Chords: How To Get A Clean Sound

Everybody has trouble making 3-string and 4-string chords at first. Here are some tips that might help:

1. Get up on the tips of your fingers so they are coming almost straight down on the fingerboard. This will help you avoid muting adjacent strings. Keep the nails on your left hand short so they don't interfere with the fretting.

2. Make the chord and strum the strings very slowly - one at a time - and listen to the tone. Adjust your finger positions to achieve a clean tone - no muting and no buzzing.

3. Get up as close to the frets as possible but not over the fret. If you can't get right behind the fret that's OK but get as close as you can.

4. Only use as much pressure as you need to get a good sound. Too little pressure makes a buzz. Too much pressure tires your hand and can actually bend the string off pitch.

5. Once you get a good tone with all four strings, remember the feel in your left hand.

6. Here's a good exercise: Make the chord, take your hand off the fretboard just a little (no more than 1/2 inch) then make the chord again - repeat this several times.

7. Another good exercise is make a D7 chord and then make a C chord. Go Back and forth several times, always insisting on a clean tone. Just strum or pinch the chord or pick a simple pattern.

8. And finally, go back and forth between D7 and C using a metronome. Start really slow at first and then gradually bring up the speed. You may need to start very slow, but play the chord exactly on the beat. If you can't get to the chord in time, slow the metronome down until you can.

Note:

If you are doing everything correctly and you still have a buzz – especially if you have a buzz or unwanted ringing sound with just the open banjo – it could be that a part is loose or the action needs to be adjusted. Here are some possibilities:

1. Too low of an action will cause a buzz.
2. Too high of an action will make it hard to fret chords. Also, it will effect the intonation.
3. A loose bracket or truss rod will have a rattle or buzz.

If it's not something simple have a banjo technician look at your banjo. If you tighten anything too tight you could strip out threads or break something. I know this from experience. 😊