

# Dramatically Improve How Your Chords Connect With The Emotion Of Your Song

The best chords for your songs are the ones that support your expressive goal. As you develop your songwriting and composition, you will need good ways to:

- find chords that complement the emotional register of lyrics that you have written, or that a collaborator/bandmate has written
- find chords that match the emotion you want to express before you've even started on the words
- find chords that complement a melody you've already written

**How can we describe/evaluate the qualities of a chord progression, in order to decide if it matches your creative goal?**

- How the transition between chords feels in terms of movement or stability
- How it feels in terms of completion, momentum, tension
- What emotional atmosphere this translates to

For example - reflective or nostalgic lyrical material might suit a progression that has a more static/hypnotic quality

Dramatic lyrical material might suit a progression that has more movement and tension.

Creating and then choosing to meet or to violate expectations with your chord choices will also alter the emotions created by the music.

All the chords we will use today

<b>I</b>	<b>iim</b>	<b>bIII</b>	<b>iiim</b>	<b>IV/ ivm</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>bVI</b>	<b>vim</b>	<b>bVII</b>	<b>viio</b>
C	Dm	Eb	Em	F/ Fm	G	Ab	Am	Bb	Bo

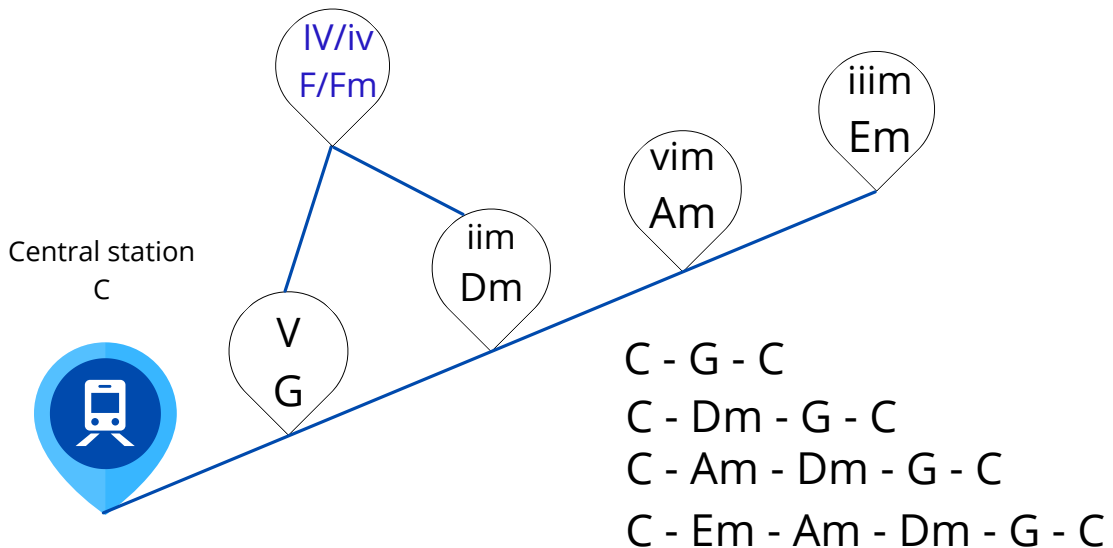
This set of chords can be grouped into two subsets, chords in the key of C major, and some borrowed chords.  
 Here are the chords in the key of C major:

<b>I</b>	<b>iim</b>	<b>iiim</b>	<b>IV</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>vim</b>	<b>viio</b>
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bo

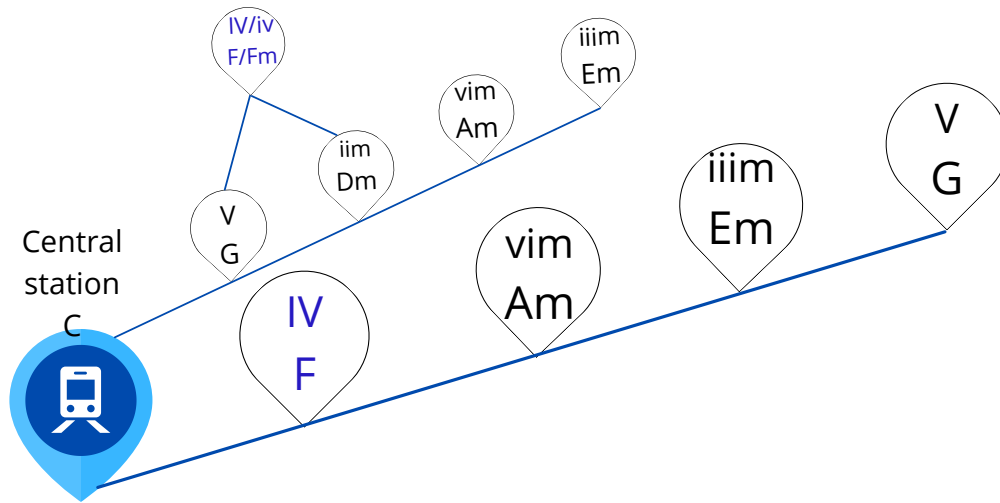
Here are the borrowed chords:

<b>bIII</b>	<b>ivm</b>	<b>bVI</b>	<b>bVII</b>
E <sub>b</sub>	F <sub>m</sub>	A <sub>b</sub>	B <sub>b</sub>

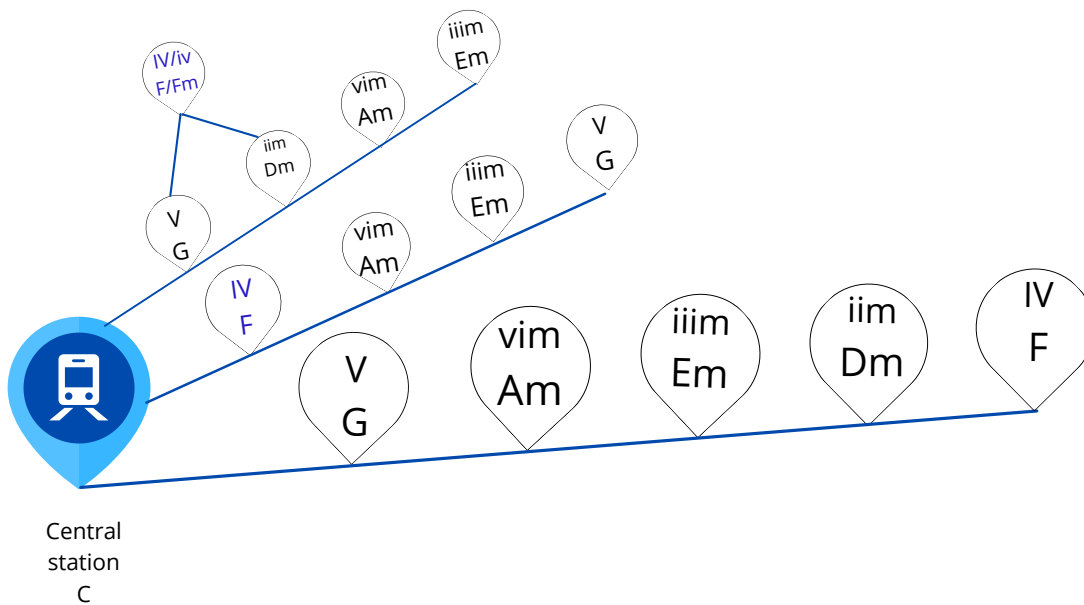
1. Our first 'train line' including a variation you can add via F and F<sub>m</sub>, and some of the chord sequences you can generate from it.



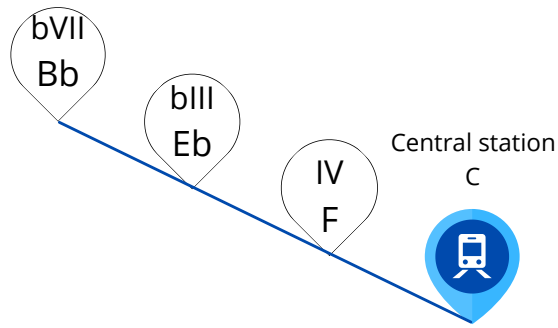
2. A slightly different route.



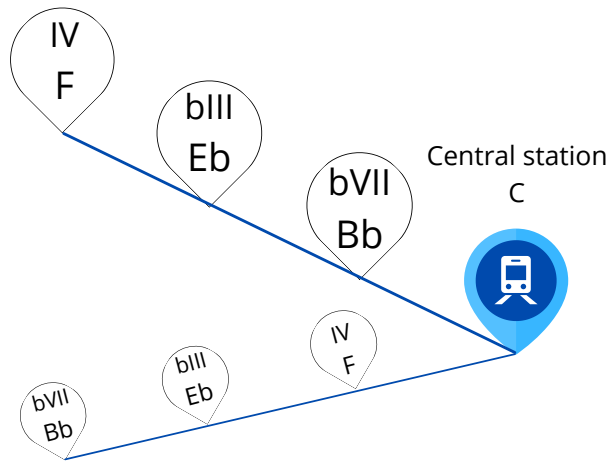
3. The third route.



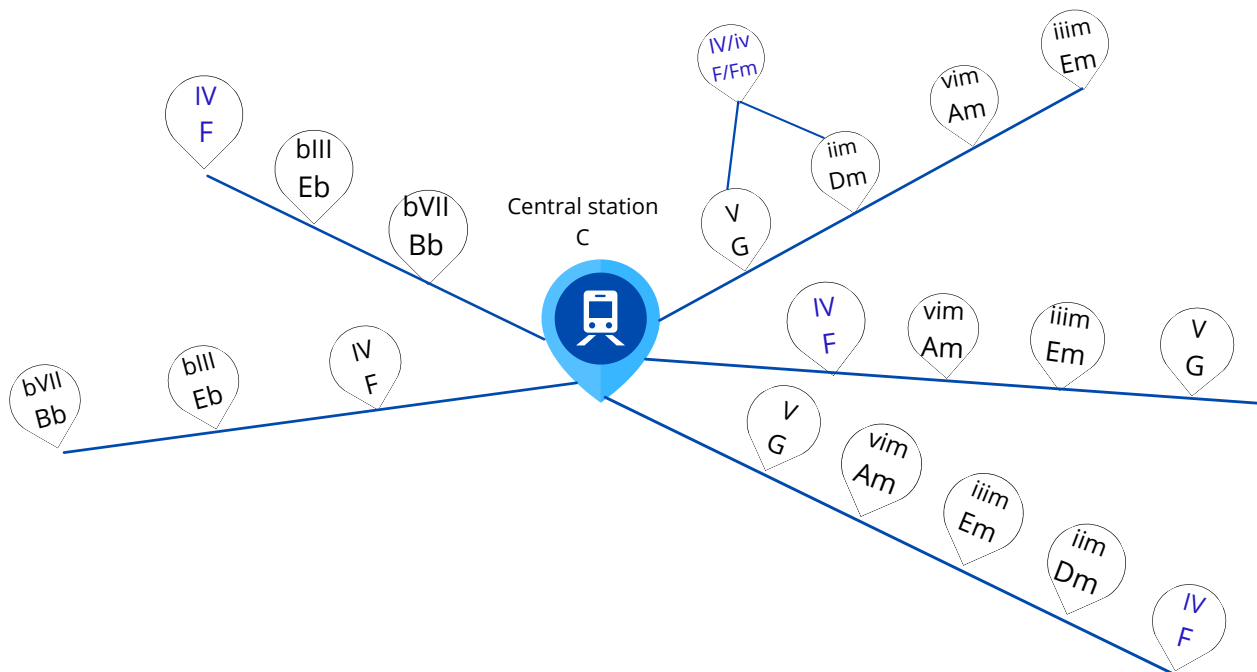
4. Our first route using borrowed chords. Note the different mood this creates.



5. Another route using borrowed chords.



6. All the routes we have explored so far:



## Your Turn

If you already have lyrics written, choose a set of lyrics or a song idea that you'd like to choose chords for. Write at least five words to describe the emotional register or mood you want to create, based on the lyrics. The words you choose are just for your reference - no one else needs to see them, so they don't have to be polished. Now create a chord progression, or progressions that will go with that mood, by going through all the routes in the way demonstrated, and picking your favourites.

If you don't have any lyrics, or any ideas for a mood/emotion/story you'd like to create some chords for, pick from the examples below. Before you start, some extra ways to think about the chord choices you're exploring:

1. Duration of each chord, or of the chord progression.
2. You can try using the major version of the minor chords in the key, and vice versa.
4. Variation within sections - If choosing chords for a four line section with one time around per line, you could change out the second or third chord for something else to inject variety.
5. Deceptive cadence.
6. Jumping back.
7. Variations of common chords, extended chords, altered chords.
8. Register, timbre - how many strings of the guitar are in use and whether the chord is voiced using lower notes or higher notes.

Your Chosen Words

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Example mood/emotion signifiers that you can use if you don't have any ideas to hand.

1. Languid, slow, carefree, leaning back, gentleness, nostalgia.
2. Apprehension, foreboding, motion, tension, acceleration, agitation.
3. Ambiguity, uncertainty, confusion, holding back, loneliness, regret.
4. Confidence, momentum, expansion, happiness, elation, excitement.

**Example:**

I might have a lyric that describes a calm-after-the-storm mood. Relaxation, release, ease, rest, warmth, recovery, expansion could all be words that come to mind in terms of what the lyrics suggest. (If you can only think of two words and you get stuck, try a thesaurus). (

Do you feel that one of these progressions would be a better match than the other when you hear them played? Which one?

1. **C / Ddim / Fm / Am / Bdim**
2. **C / Cadd6 / E / F**

There are going to be many decent choices for congruent chord progressions so go for a good enough, ball park match for now - you can always revisit this.

If some chords in our group are new to you, there are chord diagrams at the back.

Write in your favourite progressions here and any notes that you want to on the routes you're trying out:

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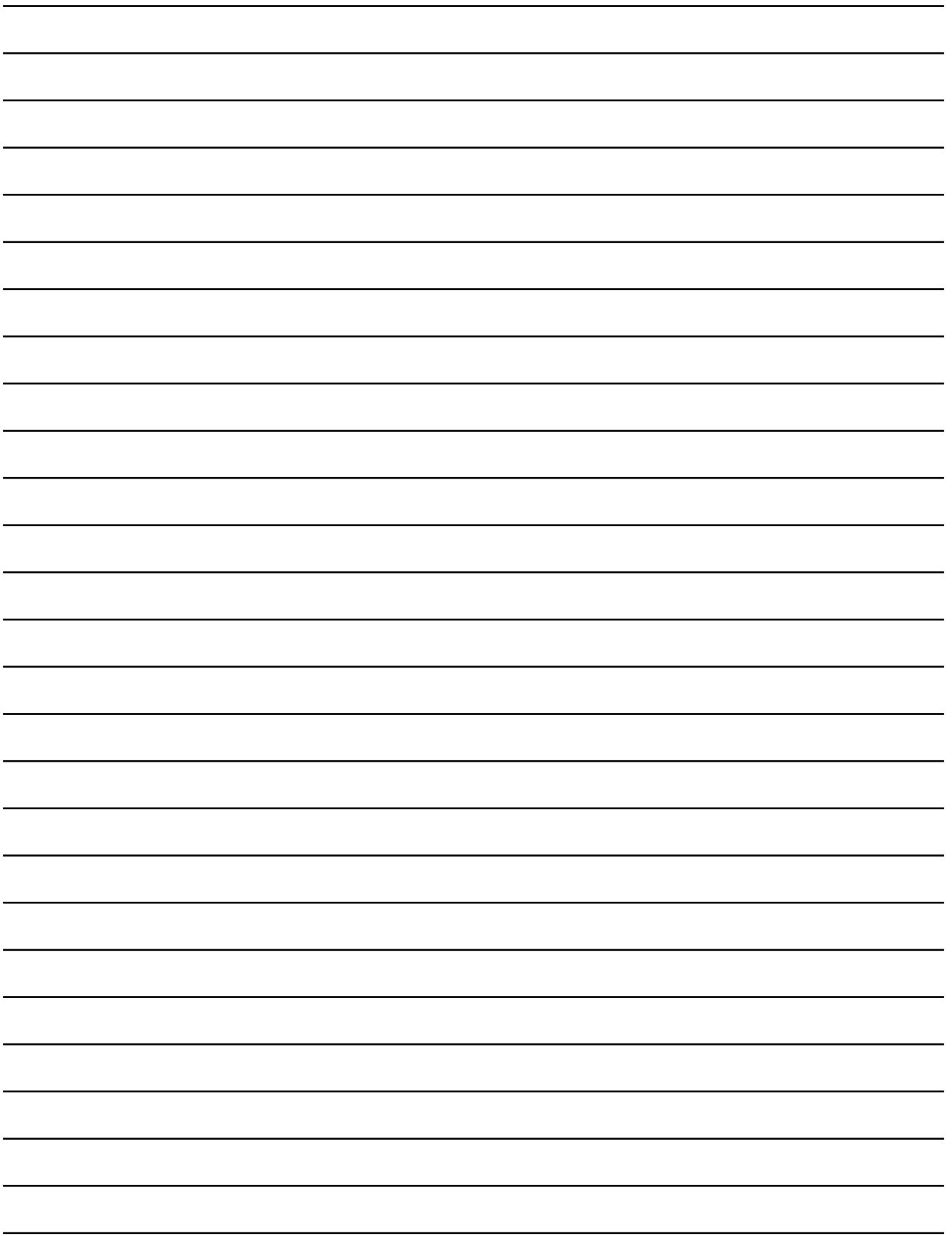
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## 2. Minor Chord Routes

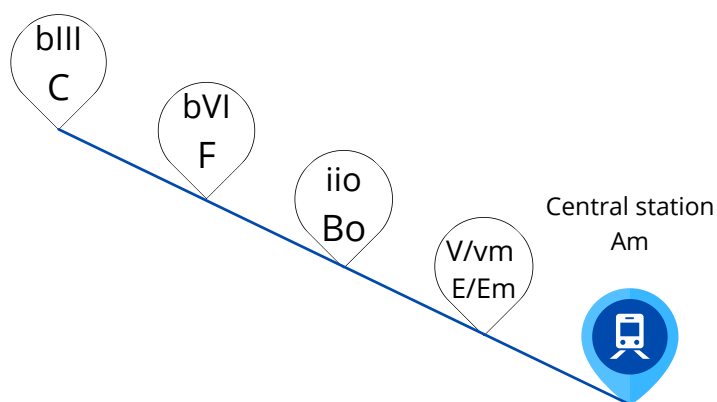
If we reorder the same group of chords but we start with the vi minor chord and re-label that as i minor, we get a new set of possibilities. That vi minor chord now takes on the role of home base and when we organise other chords around that, a whole group of new relationships and new musical scenes are created.

For reasons we don't need to get into right now, having the V chord as a dominant rather than a minor often gives these progressions that start on the minor an extra bit of momentum, even though strictly speaking the V chord occurs as a minor chord in the key.

Chords in the key of A minor

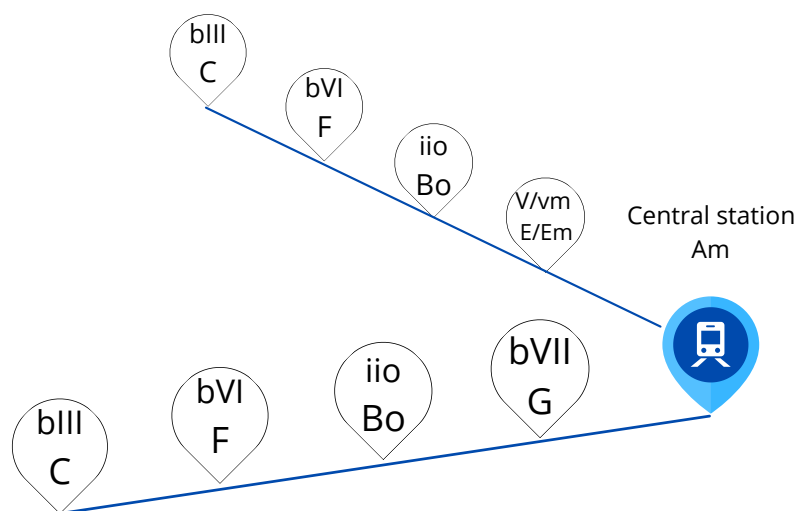
<b>im</b>	<b>iio</b>	<b>bIII</b>	<b>ivm</b>	<b>vm/V</b>	<b>bVI</b>	<b>bVII</b>
Am	Bo	C	Dm	Em/E	F	G

1. We start with a route that returns via the V or vm chord each time.

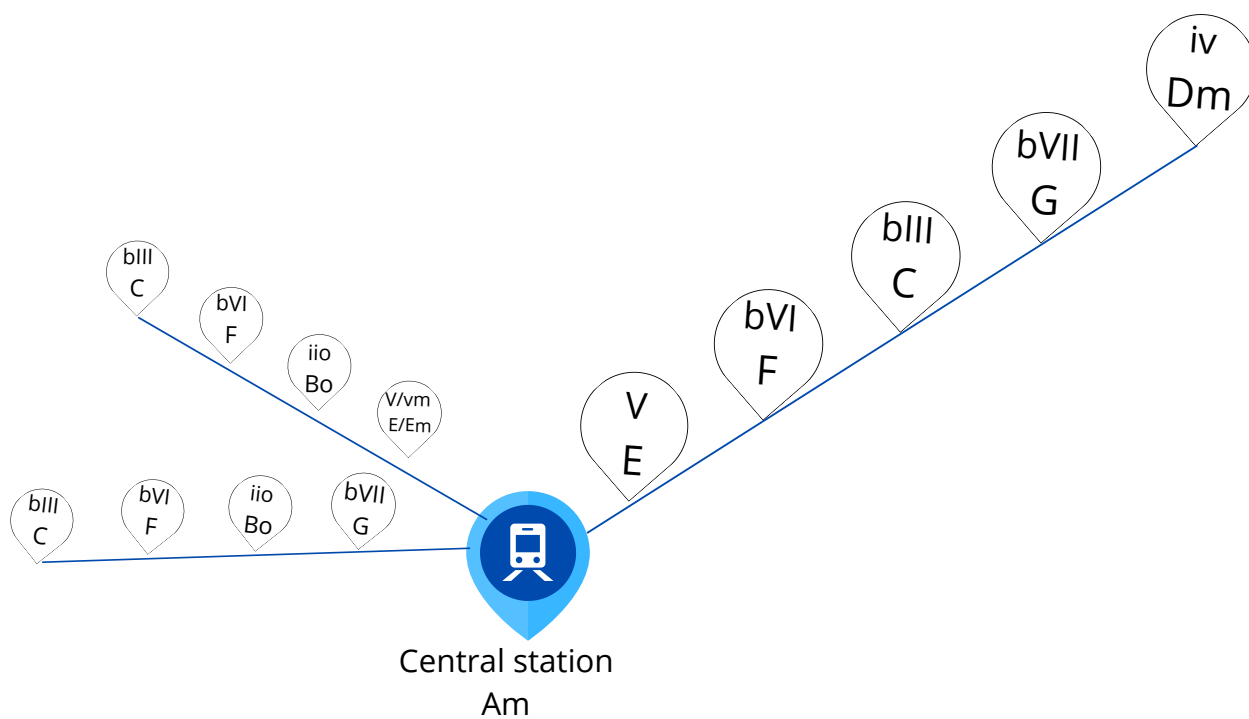




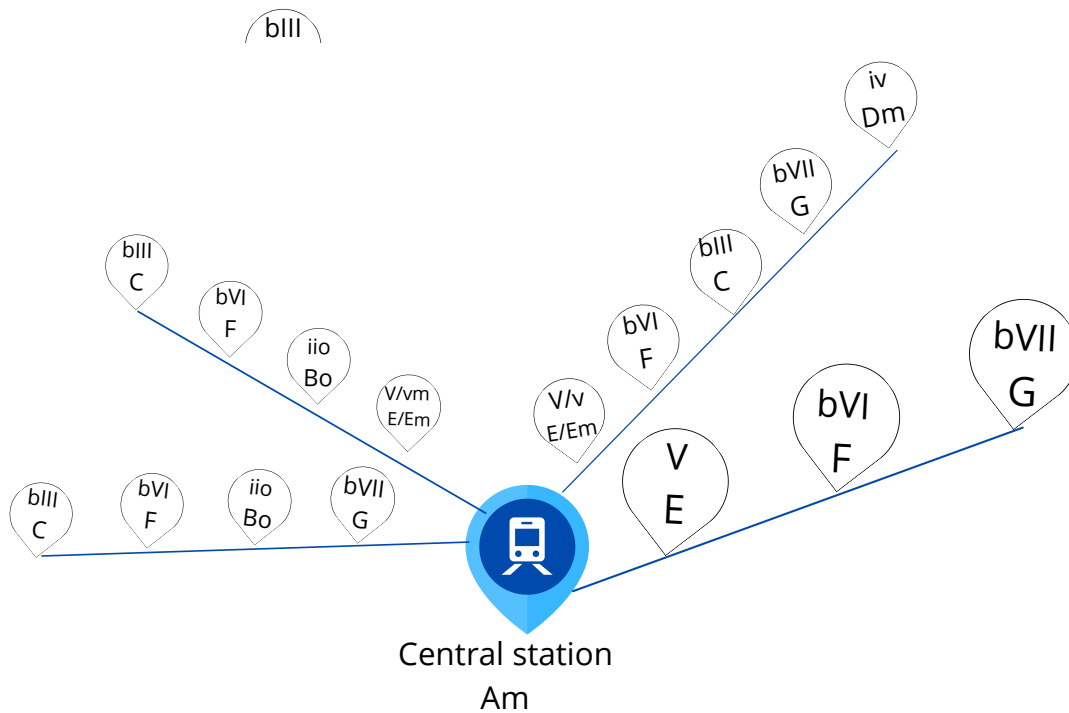
2. Our second route returns via the bVII chord each time.



3. Here, including more of the major chords alters the flavour somewhat.



4. And a fourth route.



## Your Turn

1. Repeat the previous activity of writing five emotion / mood signifiers or using the examples provided, and playing though the minor branch chord progressions, shortlisting your favourites from this new configuration.

Your Chosen Words

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