

DADGAD TUNING AND USING PARTIAL CAPOS

All four of the guitars I used to record **One Size Does Not Fit All** (pictured on the recording cover) were tuned to DADGAD intervals, that is the string above the bass string, the 5th string, is a fifth above the bass note, the next string, the 4th, is a fourth above that (an octave above the bass string), the 3rd string is a fourth above the 4th string, the 2nd is a second above the 3rd, and the 1st string is a fourth above the 2nd (or an octave above the 4th string). With the bass note at D, the strings then are tuned D, A, D, G, A and D, but if the bass note is a C then the strings are tuned C, G, C, F, G and C (the 5th string here, G, is a fifth above the bass C, the 4th string is a fourth above that, or an octave above the bass string, and so on.) So, when the bass string is tuned to B \flat applying the same intervals yields a tuning of B \flat FB \flat E \flat FB \flat . Shorthand could describe the intervals by the numbers: 54424.

DADGAD, also called open Dsus4 tuning, is easier to pronounce than EADGBE, intervals 44434 (which is why everyone calls it “standard tuning”), but try pronouncing CGCFG or, worse, B \flat FB \flat E \flat FB \flat ! Worse yet is the tuning you get when you put a full capo on the second fret of a DADGAD-tuned guitar, EBEABE—try pronouncing that one a few times and the men in the white coats may show up to haul you away! So, I commonly refer to these tunings (you’ll see why in a moment) as “C-gad” or “B \flat -gad.” To tune to DADGAD from “standard” tuning, EADGBE, just drop the 1st, 2nd, and 6th string pitches by one whole step, that is tune the bass E down to D, and similarly tune the two high strings down one whole step.

For many guitars, and guitarists, that visit DADGAD infrequently, this can be done with light gauge strings but if you’re going to spend a lot of time playing in DADGAD or will dedicate a guitar to always be in this tuning, then I suggest up-gauging (is there such a word?) the down-tuned strings to remedy potentially “floppy” strings and any intonation issues that might develop. In other words, if your light gauge strings have a 0.012” and 0.016” high strings then you might want to try 0.013” and 0.017” strings in their place. Similarly, a 0.053” or 0.054” string can be increased in size to a 0.056” string. I strongly suggest, however, that if you’re going to dedicate a guitar to this tuning that you take it to a luthier or other professional repair person and get it set up specifically for DADGAD.

Semi-baritone and baritone guitars with strings tuned to lower pitches often have larger bodies and longer scale lengths so also need strings appropriately gauged to them. For CGCFG (the DADGAD-equivalent from a whole-step down standard tuning of DGCFAD), you might start with a medium gauge set and see if that works, up-gauging the down-tuned strings to a 0.014”, 0.018” and 0.060” gauges *only* if necessary. Baritone strings are relatively widely available these days for BEADF \sharp B tuning, same intervals down a fourth from standard tuning, and there should be little need to swap out strings since the down-tuned strings for B \flat FB \flat E \flat FB \flat are all only down ½ step and the others go up a ½ step.

That being said (or written I guess), only *Elfin Flight* on **One Size Does Not Fit All** is actually played *in* DADGAD tuning. Why? Because I often use partial capos placed over some strings at different frets to modify the base tuning. So, first off, what’s a partial capo?



Figure 1. *Shubb Full and Partial Capos.* Upper left: a full or 6-string capo (Shubb C1). Upper right: an Esus4 “E-gad” capo (Shubb C7b). Lower left: a modified banjo capo (Shubb C5b-r). Lower right: a modified, “cut” 5-string capo (Shubb C8b). The hinge side “hump” of both the Esus4 and the modified 5-string (drop E, with end cut to clamp only four inner strings) allow the capo to clear the outer string. Note the added rubber on the neck side of the banjo capo (a radius version shown here) to fit the neck better—without the added rubber, these capos tend to tip or pull forward on the hinge side and will not clamp the outer string properly.

A partial capo is exactly what it sounds like, a capo that only clamps some of the strings at any fret. A full capo is long enough to be placed so as to cover all six strings, at least at most frets, but a partial capo only covers some strings and allows others to “ring through” to the nut. That’s not to say that a full capo can’t be used as a partial capo—most clamp-type capos (but not U-shaped, slip-over-the-nut-type full capos, e.g. Paige capos) can be used to capo only five strings and the most frequent use of this is to have a deeper bass string when capoed up. For example, in DADGAD, a full capo placed—and most clamp-type capos can do this—to cover only the five higher strings at the fifth fret would yield an open, strummed, tuning of DDGDCG. Having the octave double D in the bass can be useful. For those who know

my trio, ***Papilio***, the first track on the **First Flight CD, Amanda**, uses this tuning and capo position.

What kinds of partial capos are there? All things considered, from the standpoint of commercially available manufactured products, there are remarkably few but it’s easy to make, or “cut,” your own. Two of the most common commercially available partial capos are the 5-string, all too often referred to as a “drop D” capo, and the Esus4, wrongly called a “DADGAD” capo (see Figure 1). The first, as the name suggests, is shorter than a full capo so it only capos five strings from the outside of the neck, or it’s configured to skip the outer string and clamp the other five. Most often used on the second fret it allows the player to use the “lower” bass string, at least relative to the capo, to *imitate* tuning the bass string down a full step. So if you play a D chord in standard tuning with one of these capos on the second fret you get the fuller sound of having the nice bass, **but** while you are playing a D chord it **sounds** as an E chord. Calling the capo a “drop D” is, simply, wrong. More properly it should be called a “drop E” capo!

An Esus4 capo is called an Esus4 capo because, in standard tuning and used at the second fret, that is the chord that the capo forms. The Shubb version of this capo has a short rubber clamp, with a hump at the hinge side to clear an outer string, which capos only three strings. Put on from the bass side of the neck these would be the 5th, 4th and 3rd strings leaving the bass and two high strings open to the nut. The chord it forms, at the second fret in standard tuning, is an E suspended fourth or an Esus4 chord. If the Esus4 capo is applied from the treble side of the neck it covers the 2nd, 3rd and 4th strings, leaving the two bass and the high strings open to the nut. If applied at the second fret in standard tuning it forms an A chord. So why is it erroneously called the “DADGAD” capo?

Think about what happens when you tune a guitar to DADGAD from EADGBE standard tuning. You tune the low E, and the high B and E, down a full step or a whole tone to D, A and D respectively. When you use an Esus4 capo from the bass side of the neck at the second fret on standard tuning you raise the 5th, 4th and 3rd strings by a full step. In effect—but not really—you’ve “lowered” the 6th, 2nd and 1st strings by applying the capo. Now the open string intervals are exactly the same as DADGAD intervals. There’s a reason, too, that DADGAD is also called Dsus4 tuning! The difference, and this is important, is that the bass string is still E, not D. So while you may have the same open string intervals when you play a typical DADGAD D major chord fingering (004200, note that these frets are above the nut *or* the capo since it’s acting as a movable nut), what sounds is actually an E major chord. This is why I tend to call these capos the “E-gad” capo (which describes both what it actually does and my frustration at those that persist calling it a “DADGAD” capo).

One other difference between an actual “I-tuned-my-strings” to an open tuning (say DADGAD) and using a partial capo to achieve the effect of “it-sounds-like-I-tuned-my-strings” to an open tuning, (E-gad or EBEABE open in this example) is that as soon as you barre across the strings above the capo then you’re back at standard tuning because the intervals between the strings *has not changed*. When the strings are actually tuned to the intervals then a barre across the strings maintains the intervals. In other words, partial capos changes the open base tuning but do not change the intervals between the strings.

The second kind of partial capo that I use is frequently called a “cut” capo, although this term could apply to any capo that has been made from any other capo. I do use a “cut” capo, a “drop E” 5-string capo with the tip cut off so that the capo now bars only the inner four strings (my “4-inner” capo) regardless of which side of the neck it’s applied from (see Figure 1, lower right). However, I don’t use one of these on **One Size Does Not Fit All**. The capo I use most frequently, even more than the easily available Esus4 or “E-gad” capo, is a modified banjo capo that bars only the outer four strings (my “4-outer” capo, see Figure 1, lower left): the four bass strings from one side or the four treble strings from the other.

You can make a 4-outer capo from a standard capo by cutting off the tip but you end up with the same problem encountered by using easily available banjo capos: the capo has a tendency to “tip or pull forward” on the hinge side making it difficult to get a good clamp on the outside string. To fix this shortcoming, I super-glue some extra rubber on the back side of the capo near the hinge side to better conform to the neck radius. I have also found, that for certain guitars, modifying a radius version of the banjo capo works better than the standard flat version—it just seems to be better at clamping that outside string, especially the thinnest string on the treble side. See Figure 1 for details.

So, why do I use partial capos? Simple. Using different partial and “cut” capos I can achieve a pretty wide variety of apparent “tunings” without having to tune any strings at all. Even better, if I bar across the strings or fret all of the strings that are not capoed above the capo, guess what? Yep, I’m back in the good ole DADGAD-intervals that I know so well. What this means is that all of the chord fingerings that I know from playing in DADGAD can be used with partial capos and will sound like the chord played above a full capo *if* all of the un-capoed strings are covered!

Here’s an example, one of my favourite chords in DADGAD is one of those rare 6-note chords, an Em9/11 (sort of), played 224000 so the notes are E, B, F#, G, A and D (numbers refer to frets, with 0 an open string). If I put a 4-outer capo on the 3rd fret on the high four strings (open strings DAFB^bCD) and play this chord *above the capo*, in other words 224000 above the capo becomes 557333 above the nut with the capo serving as a “third hand,” then the chord is still coherent, though it is, and now sounds, as a Gm9/11 (sort of).

Here’s all of the transcriptions in this book, the capo used, the base tuning, the strings capoed, and resulting open string “strum” notes:

Composition	Capo	Tuning	Position	Result
<i>Gratiarum Actio Redux</i>	4-outer	CGCFG	002222	CGDGAD
The Walking Fly	Esus4	DADGAD	003330	DAFB ^b CD
Deep in the Night	4-outer	B ^b FB ^b E ^b FB ^b	007777	B ^b FFB ^b CF
Hillary Got Trumped	Esus4	DADGAD	055500	DDGCAD
Counting Sheep	4-outer	CGCFG	004444	CGEABE
Elfin Flight		DADGAD		
My Father’s Hands	4-outer	CGCFG	005555	CGFB ^b CF
Nowhere To Go	Esus4	DADGAD	055500	DDGCAD
Moncton	4-outer	CGCFG	003333	CGE ^b AbB ^b E ^b
Whirled Peas	4-outer	B ^b FB ^b E ^b FB ^b	007777	B ^b FFB ^b CF
Icefield	4-outer	CGCFG	003333	CGE ^b AbB ^b E ^b
Oot ‘n About	4-outer	DADGAD	002222	DAEABE
Monster	4-outer	B ^b FB ^b E ^b FB ^b	003333	B ^b FD ^b G ^b AbD ^b
A Tip of the Hat	4-outer	CGCFG	003333	CGE ^b AbB ^b E ^b
Odds & Ends	4-outer	B ^b FB ^b E ^b FB ^b	007777	B ^b FFB ^b CF

The position code tells you where to place the capo, e.g. 002222 means put the 4-outer capo on the high four strings at the 2nd fret. Similarly, 003330 means put the Esus4 capo on the 3rd fret in the “A” position. See? It’s easy...

One final benefit of using partial capos is that, as alluded to above, the capo becomes a “third hand” that allows you to form chords or chord voicings that are simply impossible to obtain in any other way. Note that I prefer, as Figure 1 shows, to use Shubb capos because 1) they’re easy to cut or modify, 2) tension on them is adjustable to suit the guitar and the fret you want to use them on, and 3) they don’t stick out from the neck so far that they impede the movement of the fretting hand, letting the fretting hand fret above the capo on the same fret or move easily between playing below and above the capo.