

## USING PARTIAL CAPOS IN ALTERNATE TUNINGS

Three of the four guitars I used to record **Two Steps Forward, One Step Back** were tuned to DADGAD intervals, that is the string above the bass string, the 5<sup>th</sup> string, is a fifth above the bass note, the next string, the 4<sup>th</sup>, is a fourth above that (an octave above the bass string), the 3<sup>rd</sup> string is a fourth above the 4<sup>th</sup> string, the 2<sup>nd</sup> is a second above the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the 1<sup>st</sup> string is a fourth above the 2<sup>nd</sup> (or an octave above the 4<sup>th</sup> string). When the bass note is D, the strings then are tuned D, A, D, G, A and D, but if the bass note is C then the strings are tuned C, G, C, F, G and C (the 5<sup>th</sup> string here, G, is a fifth above the bass C, the 4<sup>th</sup> string is a fourth above that, or an octave above the bass string, and so on.) So, when the bass string is an A it follows that applying the same intervals yields a tuning of AEADEA. I commonly refer to these tunings (you'll see why in a moment) as "C-gad" or "A-gad."

To tune to DADGAD from standard tuning, EADGBE, just drop the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> 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. You may need slightly heavier strings for the dropped pitch strings but it's not absolutely necessary. I strongly advise, however, that if you're going to dedicate a guitar to DADGAD tuning that you take it to a luthier or professional repair person and get it set up specifically for DADGAD strings. Packages of DADGAD or "true" medium strings that provide a medium gauge 6<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> string while keeping the light gauge middle strings are readily available. I generally buy all my strings as singles and then make custom gauge string sets to suit the tuning.

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#B tuning, the same intervals but down a fourth from standard tuning, and there may be little need to swap out strings since the down-tuned strings for AEADEA are all down a full step. There are also "light gauge" baritone strings available.

An often-used shorthand for "DADGAD" intervals describes them by the numbers, 54424, which represent the intervals between adjacent strings, not the string themselves. Thus 54424 also describes my "C-gad" and "A-gad" tunings. Tunings with these 54424 intervals are properly referred to as suspended fourth or sus4 tunings. In DADGAD this means that rather than having the major third of open D tuning (the 3<sup>rd</sup> string tuned to F#), the tuning contains a major fourth (a G). Thus the tuning does not form an "open" chord per se but a suspended one that "wants" to resolve down to a D major chord with its F# major third.

On **Two Steps Forward, One Step Back** I also use a suspended second or sus2 tuning with the intervals 54245, specifically Dsus2 or DADEAE. This suspension substitutes a minor second for the major third so, in the key of D, it "wants" to resolve up to the D major chord. You might find it useful to up-gauge the 3<sup>rd</sup> string since it gets tuned down a step and half from the standard tuning 'g' and also use the light gauge 1<sup>st</sup> string since it remains at standard pitch.

Over both the sus4 and sus2 tunings, I often use partial capos as a third hand to modify the base “tuning.” Why? Because it’s fun and freeing to have different “open” string pitches, easy open-string melody notes, but still knowing the fret board above the capo because *the intervals between the strings does not change*. So, what’s a partial capo?



**Figure 1.** Shubb Full and Partial Capos. Upper left: full or 6-string capo (Shubb C1). Upper right: modified “4-string outer” banjo capo (Shubb C5b-r). Lower left: Esus4 “E-gad” 3-string capo (Shubb C7b). Lower right: a “cut” (modified) Esus4 “E-gad” capo (Shubb C7b) that capos only two middle strings. The hinge side “hump” of the Esus4 allows the capo to clear the outer string so on the “middle-2” capo I’ve cut away some of the neck-side rubber pad and filed the brass down to clear two outer strings. Note the added rubber on the neck side of the banjo capo, and to the neck side of the “middle-2” capo to better fit the curve of the neck.

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 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 can be used to capo only five strings and the most frequent use of this is to have a deeper bass string when capoed further up the neck. For example, in DADGAD, a full capo placed 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 former trio, *Papilio*, the first track on *First Flight*, *Amanda*, uses this tuning and capo position.

What kinds of partial capos are there? 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 capo, too often referred to, erroneously, as a “drop D” capo, and the Esus4 capo, which is wrongly called a “DADGAD” capo. The first, as the name suggests, is either 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. 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. Properly, the capo should be called a “drop E” capo!

An Esus4 capo is called an Esus4 capo because, in standard tuning and used over the neck at the second fret, that is the chord that the capo forms. The Shubb version of this capo has a short rubber clamp that capos only three strings, with a hump at the hinge side to clear an outer string. Put on from the bass side of the neck these would be the 5<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 at the second fret it covers the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> strings forming an “A” chord by leaving the two bass and the high string open to the nut. So why is it erroneously called a “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 5<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> strings by a full step. In effect—but not really—you’ve “lowered” the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> strings by applying the capo. Now the open string intervals are exactly the same as DADGAD intervals. Of course, that’s the reason that DADGAD is also called Dsus4 tuning! The difference, *and this is important*, is that the bass string is still an E, it’s *not* a D. So while you may have the same open string intervals when you play a typical D major chord fingering—in DADGAD this is 004200 (note that these finger/fret positions are above the nut *or* the capo since the capo is 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 who 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 plain words, partial capos change the open base tuning but don’t change the intervals between the strings.

A second kind of partial capo that I use is most commonly 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. I haven’t used one of these on either of my recordings yet. The “middle-2” capo that I use on *Shadow Dancers* (see Figure 1) is a good example of a “cut” capo, though I’m cutting an already partial capo. Most frequently I use the easily available Esus4 or “E-gad” capo or a modified banjo capo that bars only the outer four strings (my “4-outer” capo, see Figure 1, upper right): 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 add extra rubber on the backside of the

capo near the hinge side to better match 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 a bit better at clamping that outside string, especially the thinnest string on the treble side.

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

Composition	Capo	Tuning	Position	Result
Locked 'n Loaded	Esus4	DADGAD	004440	DAF#BC#D
Snowbound	4-Outer	CGCFG	002222	CGDGAD
Shadow Dancer	Middle-2	DADGAD	004400	DAF#BAD
Arachnophobia	(none)	DADEAE		
Summerfall	4-outer	AEADEA	002222	AEBEF#B
(The World) Outside My Window	Esus4	DADGAD	004440	DAF#BC#D
Climbing the Walls	Esus4	DADGAC#	002220	DAEABC#
A King of the World	Esus4	DADGAD	004440	DAF#BC#D
Salsa Falsa	Esus4	DADGAD	002220	DAEABD
Heliotropic	4-outer	CGCFG	002222	CGDGAD
In Any Other Year	Esus4	DADEAE	003330	DAFGCE
Venus on the Half Shell	4-outer	AEADEA	002222	AEBEF#B
Tuesdays With Lucy	Esus4	DADGAD	022200	DBEAAD
Home-Stayed	Esus4	CGCFG	004440	CGEABC
Over the Edge	Esus4	DADGAD	003330	DAFB <sup>b</sup> CD
The Year That Never Was / Circular Reasoning	Esus4	DADGAD	004440	DAF#BC#D

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 2<sup>nd</sup> fret. Similarly, 003330 means put the Esus4 capo on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.