

Modes (Church Modes, Pentatonic, Whole Tone)

The word 'mode' comes from the Latin for 'manner, or method' but musical modes all originated in ancient Greece, so they have Greek names. The modes were named after various regions, perhaps to represent the people who lived there, because Greek musical theorists were philosophers too, and associated the arts with aspects of morality.

Basically a mode is a type of scale, as in 'doh re mi fa so la ti do.' Alter just one of those notes and you can call your scale a "mode". Long before people started thinking about pieces of music having "keys", each mode is believed to have begun on a different note of the scale, conferring its own character to the set of notes running, for example, C to C (Lydian mode) or E to E (Dorian mode) and so on.

The seven main categories of mode have been part of musical notation since the middle ages. So, the list goes: Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian and Locrian. Some of them are major modes, some are minor, and some are ambiguous. Some modes are sadder or holier than others.

Below are tips on learning and memorizing the modes:

As far as the order, we used the following "I Don't Play Loud Music At Lunch."
Each Beginning letter is the next mode.

Plus if you know that the Ionian is equivalent to today's Major scale with the following relationship

W W H W W W H, then you move the first scale size to the end and you have the relationship for the next mode. Then repeat.

Ionian = today's Major scale W W H W W W H

Dorian W H W W W H W

Phrygian H W W W H W W

Lydian W W W H W W H

Mixolydian W W H W W H W

Aeolian W H W W H W W (also today's natural minor scale)

Locrian H W W H W W W

The easiest way is to picture the keyboard and beginning with the Dorian from d to d, the Phrygian from e to e, all on the white keys, in order to the Ionian from c to c, simply see the structure based on the step order these sequences produce.

Beginning note of major scale		C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	Major Scale
1st	Ionian	w w h w w w h								
2nd	Dorian	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	
		w h w w w h w								
3rd	Phrygian	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E	
		h w w w h w w								
4th	Lydian	F	G	A	B	C	D	E	F	
		w w w h w w h								
5th	Mixolydian	G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
		w w h w w h w								
6th	Aeolian	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A	
		w h w w h w w								
7th	Locrian	B	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	
		h w w h w w w								

I never understood them either until I began relating them to the sol-fa syllables. Mi-fa and ti-do are the only half-steps, then the modes are re-re (Dorian), mi-mi (Phrygian), fa-fa (Lydian), so-so (Mixolydian), la-la (Aolian), ti-ti (Lycrian).

Begin on the white keys of the piano, and only white keys

Dorian (d minor, raising 6th degree)

Phrygian (e minor, lower the second degree)

Lydian (F major, raise 4th degree)

Mixolydian (G major, lower 7th degree)

Aeolian (nat. minor)

Locrian (b minor, lower second, lower fifth)

Ionian (major)

The order of modes is the same as in the word DiPLoMA (Dorian, Phy, Lydian, Mixo, Aeo....). Dorian is simply second scale degree of a major scale to second scale degree an octave higher, Phrygian third to third, etc..... So a Dorian mode starting on G would use key sign for F (1 flat). A key sign of 2 sharps, for example, would have a Dorian mode as E to E.

I finally found that making a table was the real key. The columns are: name, final, range, and comparison. I only use the white keys (D for Dorian, etc.). The last column compares the mode to a major or minor scale. After we make a table together in class I'm specific that they need to memorize this system. Once they know the system they can go back to it in their minds and figure out any mode. They can determine the pattern of whole and half steps for any mode using the final and going up an octave. I use Amazing Grace to teach the idea of the range of plagal modes. If it's in G, the range is d to d but the tonic is still G.

MODES SIMPLIFIED

A MODE is just a scale within a scale

C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C

G A B C D E F# G A B C D E F# G

LYDIAN

Starts on the 4th note of a major scale.

Ionian (same notes as major scale)
starting on the 1st degree of the major scale

Dorian
starting on the 2nd degree of the major scale

Phrygian
starting on the 3rd degree of the major scale

Lydian
starting on the 4th degree of the major scale

Myxolydian
starting on the 5th degree of the major scale

Aeolian (sometimes called "natural minor")
starting on the 6th degree of the major scale

Locrian
starting on the 7th degree of the major scale

How to Construct Major and Minor Pentatonic Scales

A pentatonic scale, as the name implies, has only five notes. It's build from either the major or natural minor scale. Pentatonic scales are great place to start for song writing and improvising.

Major Pentatonic Scale:

In this tutorial instead of using note names I'll refer to scale degree numbers 1 - 7 of the major and minor scales. This makes it easy to transpose the scale into different keys and will help give you a broader view of the concepts.

The major pentatonic scale is scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 of the regular major scale. In other words, it's a major scale without degrees 4 and 7. When you remove degrees 4 and 7 from the major scale there are no more half steps; for this reason pretty much any note in the major pentatonic scale sounds good over a major chord progression.

Since I'm a sucker for examples let's throw a few out there. In these written examples you can see the gaps where note degrees 4 & 7 are omitted for the major pentatonic scale.

C major pentatonic scale:



Notes: C - D - E - G - A

G major pentatonic scale:



Notes: G - A - B - D - E

Eb Major Pentatonic Scale



Notes: Eb - F - G - Bb - C

Minor Pentatonic Scale:



The minor pentatonic scale is 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 of the natural minor scale. That is, a natural minor scale without degrees 2 and 6. Sometimes it's easier to think of a major pentatonic scale that starts and ends on degree 6.

E minor pentatonic scale:

Notes: E - G- A - B - D

Since there are twelve major pentatonic scales and twelve minor pentatonic scales you might be a little overwhelmed with trying to learn them all separately. However, understanding relative keys will cut those 24 scales in half so that once you learn twelve you've learned them all.

Whole Tone Scale

In music, a **whole tone scale** is a scale in which each note is separated from its neighbours by the interval of a whole tone. In twelve-tone equal temperament, there are only two complementary whole tone scales, both six-note or hexatonic scales:



the whole tone scale on C : {C, D, E, F#, G#, A#, C}, and



the whole tone scale on B : {B, Db, Eb, F, G, A, B}.

The whole tone scale has no leading tone and because all tones are the same distance apart, "no single tone stands out, [and] the scale creates a blurred, indistinct effect". This effect is especially emphasized by the fact that triads built on such scale tones are augmented. Indeed, one can play all six tones of a whole tone scale simply with two augmented triads whose roots are a major second apart. Since they are symmetrical, whole tone scales do not give a strong impression of the tonic or tonality.