

Ten Minute Tech

Modes explained in (hopefully) a simple way!

The image shows a musical score for the C Major scale on guitar. The top staff is a treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The notes are C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, and C5. The bottom staff shows the fretboard with strings T, A, and B. The A string has frets 3, 5, and 7. The B string has frets 3, 5, 7, and 9. The T string has frets 4 and 5. The scale is played across these frets in a sequence of six measures.

C Major Scale

Modes, very simply, are scales built from different starting points of the same scale.

Musicians nearly always use the C Major scale to explain music theory because it has no sharps or flats. (It is all the white notes on the piano.)

The C Major scale is-
C D E F G A B (C)

There are seven notes in a scale, not including the octave- sometimes people say there are eight notes in a scale but we don't usually count the second C, because that is the start of C major in another octave (hence why it is in brackets above).

Use this scale to improvise over these major chords-
Major 7, Major 6, Major 9,

Diatonic chord- C Maj 7

A word of note- I have written these scales out so that you will play all the modes in the key of C Major starting and finishing on the same strings (all start on the A string and finish on the G string).

This is so that you may see how the modes are similar or different from each other. For example the Phrygian shape is almost exactly the same as the Minor shape but the second note is a fret lower- This means that we only need adjust 1 finger to get a completely different sound!

This will hopefully help you learn them quicker but be aware that there are many different "shapes" (ie ways to play the same modes) and some are more practical than others. Eg. we could play the scale on the next page (D Dorian) by simply playing the scale on THIS page starting on the second note and playing an extra note at the end.

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D Dorian scale

If we play the C Major scale but start on the second note of the scale- D, and finish on a D- we have a different sounding scale.

This can be done for every note of the scale.

The D Dorian scale is-

D E F G A B C (D)

Use this to improvise over-

Minor 7, Minor 6

Diatonic chord- D Min 7

A second note- It is perfectly normal for all of this to sound like double-dutch to you! Don't worry. Only by playing them, messing around with them, and developing as a musician will these start to really make sense!

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T
A
B 7 8 10 7 9 10 7 9 9 7 10 9 7 10 8 7

E Phrygian Scale

If we start on the third step of the Major scale we get the Phrygian scale. In this case- E Phrygian.

The E Phrygian Scale is-
E F G A B C D (E)

Use this to improvise over-
Minor 7 or Dominant 7th for a very Spanish sound.

Diatonic chord- E Min 7

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T
A
B

8 — 10 — 12 9 — 10 — 12 9 — 10 10 — 9 — 12 10 — 9 — 12 10 — 8

F Lydian Scale

The fourth step of the Major scale.

The F Lydian Scale is-

F G A B C D E (F)

Use this to improvise over-

Major 7, Major 7 b5, (amongst others)

Diatonic chord- F Maj 7

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T						
A			12 — 14		14 — 12	
B	12 — 14 — 15	12 — 14 — 15			14 — 12 — 15	14 — 12

A Minor Scale

(Also referred to as the A Natural minor or the Aeolian Scale).

This is the relative Minor. (see separate download on relative Major/Minor) It is the sixth step of the Major scale.

The A Minor scale is-

A B C D E F G (A)

Use this to improvise over-

Minor, Minor 7

Diatonic chord- A Min 7

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The image shows a musical score for the B Locrian Scale. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The scale is written as a sequence of eighth notes: B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B. The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with strings T, A, B and frets 14, 15, 17, 14, 16, 16, 14, 17, 15, 14, 17, 15, 14.

B Locrian Scale

This is the seventh (and final) step of the Major scale.

The B Locrian Scale is-

B C D E F G A (B)

Use this to improvise over-

minor 7 b5 chords (also known as a half-diminished chords)

Diatonic chord- B Min 7 flat 5 or B Half-diminished