

# Memorizing Musical Modes

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## ***Part 1 Remembering Mode Names***

***Can you name the 7 Greek modes in order from memory? If not, try this...***

Here are the seven Greek modes derived from the major scale

1. Ionian
2. Dorian
3. Phrygian
4. Lydian
5. Mixolydian
6. Aeolian
7. Locrian

Learn the names, then use the following technique to memorize the order.

### ***How to Memorize***

Using the first letters of each of the greek mode names remember this little Harry Potter spell (don't worry - it's not going to turn your Gibson into a power broomstick).

**IoDoPhLyMiAeoLo**

Sounds like : I-O Do Fly Me A-O Lo

It may be difficult word to say, but keep repeating it and you may have trouble getting it out of your head.

Next, “break the spell” and verbalize the list of Greek modes from your memorized words. Remember that “Fly Me” contains three modes: PHrygian, LYdian & MIXolydian. It works for me. If it works for you, then... Magic! (the sort of magic I am talking about is how the brain actually remembers using this kind of trick).

### ***Modes Relative to the Major Scale.***

Here are definitions of the modes based on major scales.

Ionian - Same as the major scale

Dorian - A scale with a flattened 3rd and 7th Example: Scarborough Fair

Phrygian - A scale with a flattened 2nd, 3rd, 6th & 7th

Lydian - A scale with a sharpened 4th

Mixolydian - A scale with a flattened 7th Example: Norwegian Wood

Aeolian - Same as a natural minor scale. A scale with a flattened 3rd, 6th & 7th

Locrian - A scale with a flattened 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th & 7th

## Part 2 Ionian & Aeolian

I wanted to make this series in easily digestible bites that can be taken with lunch while sitting at a desk (also - the way I wrote this). Lunch is optional, but for today's bite let's look at the two most easily recognizable modes, Ionian (major scale) and Aeolian (natural minor scale).

### Ionian Mode

The Ionian mode is what we know as the major scale. I assume that we have enough social conditioning in the western world to know "do re mi ..." and what it sounds like. Think of Ionian as the "do re mi" scale. This is the root scale from which the other scales are derived. To play in ionian mode we start to play on the root note of the scale. If you play the same sequence of notes but starting to on a different note you are playing in a different mode.

To visualize the intervals of ionian mode using a guitar, choose a guitar string. For this example, I will use 2nd string B. Play notes on the string while fretting each of the following frets: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, then 13 for the octave. This is the C ionian scale played on a single string. Notice that the intervals are not equal. In terms of whole-note intervals (2 fret jump) and half-note intervals (1 fret jump), notice on the guitar string that they are:

Whole, Whole, Half, Whole, Whole, Whole, Half

### Aeolian Mode

Playing notes of the major scale starting on the 6th note of the major scale and ending on the octave, gives us the Aeolian mode. This scale is also known as the Natural minor scale. It is relative to the Ionian scale that it is derived from. If this scale is written on a clef in standard music notation, the key signature has the same number of sharps or flats as its "relative" major key.

To visualize the intervals of aeolian mode, let's use the 2nd string B again and play frets 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, then 13 for the octave. This time the intervals are:

Whole, Half, Whole, Whole, Half, Whole, Whole.

I like to remember these intervals by the rhythm sound that they make when saying them out loud.

### Ionian and Aeolian Mode Compared

Check the example below of the C-major (ionian) scale and its relative A-natural-minor (aeolian):

C-major (ionian) scale

C D E F G A B C  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

A-natural-minor (aeolian) scale\*

- - - - - A B C D E F G  
- - - - - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

\* There are two other common minor scales, harmonic and melodic minor that we will look at later.

## Part 3 Mixolydian

In Part 2 we looked at the Ionian & Aeolian modes. The scales played in these modes are the major and natural minor scales respectively. This time we look at Mixolydian mode.

### Prerequisites

For this tutorial we will assume that you already know how to play a two octave G major scale in the first position (using open strings), or at the second position (transposable, using all fretted notes). If you have any hesitation playing at least one of these scales ascending and descending, I suggest that you master them first, because they are a good foundation for what follows. You should also know the C scale at either 1st or 2nd position.

Mixolydian - a major scale with a flattened 7th.

The reason I recommended knowing the G & C major scales is because you can think of the mixolydian G scale like a hybrid of the G and C scales. The C scale has no sharps or flats and the 5th note in the C scale is G. If you start to play the notes of a C-scale starting on G, you are playing a G-mixolydian scale. Compare the G-mixolydian with the G-aeolian (G-major) scale and you will notice that the 7th note in a mixolydian scale is flatted.

Take a look at the three scales below to compare them. The notes have been aligned for easy comparison.

#### G Major Scale

G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

#### C Major Scale

	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	-			-	-			

(underlined Csus4 chord notes)

#### G Mixolydian Scale

G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
-		-		-		-	

(underlined G7 chord notes)

### Where used?

Modes can be used in different ways. Here's one way:

Since the 7th note of G-mixolydian scale is the "dominant 7th" found in the G7 chord, this chord and scale work well together. Also, in a Csus4 where the 3rd(E) is replaced by the 4th(F), this G Mixolydian scale works well since F is the 7<sup>th</sup> note of the G mixolydian scale

When you get chance, try recording the strummed chords mentioned above and improvise using the G-mixolydian. See you in the next episode with the Dorian scale.

## Part 4 Dorian

Although we can look at modes in different ways, Dorian can be viewed as a close relative to other minor scales. Let's compare A-minor scales, they are relative to C-major scale (no sharps or flats in the key signature), with Dorian. This allows us to examine the properties of these scales

A-aeolian (natural) minor that we looked at in part 2

A B C D E F G A  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

A-harmonic minor (sharp 7th)

A B C D E F G# A  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

A-melodic minor (sharp 6th & 7th, usually played ascending with descending natural minor)

A B C D E F# G# A  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

{Going off on a tangent here, the melodic minor is like a major scale with a flatted 3rd. Key signature for the A-major scale has 3-sharps C#, F# and G#. Notice that one of the sharps is missing in the scale above. A melodic minor has all but one of those - the C#}.

A-dorian minor (sharp 6th. Second mode of the G scale)

A B C D E F# G A  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Notice the note G in both the A-dorian minor and A-natural minor scales are not sharpened. This means that both scales will work with the Am7 chord. However, Dorian has a little sweetener, the major 6th note.

That little sweetener can help to convey mixed emotions in a melody such as the sea shanty, "What shall we do with a drunken sailor".

Now lets compare Dorian and Minor Pentatonic

A-dorian minor  
A B C D E F# G A  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Minor Pentatonic  
A C D E G A

### Where Used - Some Ideas

\* Try mixing other notes of the Dorian into your pentatonic runs for a little more interest.

\*\*Try using the above G Mixolydian scales over Am7 and D7 chords. These are IIIm7 and V7 chords so you can, of course, transpose them to other keys.