

Diatonic Modes

There are seven scale modes corresponding to each of the seven degrees of the diatonic scale. The first degree "Ionian" mode is the major scale commonly recognized as the "do - re - mi" scale. Each of the other modes begins on one of the other degrees of the scale but maintains the whole step and half step relationships based on the first degree.

The modal names come from the original ancient Greek naming convention and were popularized in medieval times as the basis of various "chant" song forms.

As long as you keep in mind which degree is the tone center of the mode, you can use any diatonic scale pattern to improvise in a particular mode.

The modes and their harmonic structure are as follows:

		TONE	KEY	
Ionian	First	Tonic	Major	Standard major scale especially used in jazz and ballads over major seventh chords.
Dorian	Second	Super Tonic	Minor	Popular mode for improvised rock including many songs by Santana using first degree minor to fourth degree major such as Am to D (diatonic G).
Phrygian	Third	Mediant	Minor	Spanish flavor and often used in heavy metal.
Lydian	Fourth	Sub Dominant	Major	Used in jazz improvisation and is characterized by a major seventh with an augmented fourth.
Mixolydian	Fifth	Dominant	Major	Excellent for three chord rock, boogie and jazz progressions using sevenths. Characterized by first degree major chord with flatted seventh.
Aeolian	Sixth	Sub Mediant	Minor	The "relative" minor of the first degree major key, especially used over a first degree minor to a fourth degree minor chord progression such as "Am" to
Locrian	Seventh	Leading Tone	Diminished	Rarely used except in jazz where it would be the choice for improvisations over "half diminished" chords such as "Bm7-5".