

Modes

Modes refer to a set of scales, each with a distinct, intervallic step pattern. Therefore, they all have a very unique sound. There are seven basic modes: ionian, dorian, phrygian, lydian, mixolydian, aeolian, and locrian. One of the easiest ways to conceptualize these scales is to think of the keys of a piano. Starting on C, the first mode (ionian) consists of all the white keys within the octave. This is also the major scale. Continuing in this fashion, dorian begins on D and contains all of the white keys within that octave. All of the modes can be constructed in this way. However, unless a musician wants to limit themselves to playing or composing only in the key that is easily visualized on a piano, it is important to know the step patterns themselves so that one can construct every mode in every key. They are as follows:

Ionian	--	W W H W W W H	(major)
Dorian	--	W H W W W H W	(minor, #6)
Phrygian	--	H W W W H W W	(minor, b2)
Lydian	--	W W W H W W H	(major, #4)
Mixolydian	--	W W H W W H W	(major, b7)
Aeolian	--	W H W W H W W	(natural minor)
Locrian	--	H W W H W W W	(minor, b2, b5)

It is recommended that the musician become fluent in the construction of these scales as they lend themselves quite easily to unique and interesting composition and improvisation.