

## Introduction to the Modes

by Dennis Winge

There are so many advantages to learning the modes. Doing so enables you to:

1. Compose or analyze melodies
2. Easily recognize or compose chord progressions
3. Know what scale to use over a progression when improvising
4. Understand how you can play in many different modes without learning tons of new scales

In layman's terms, a mode is a *perspective* of a scale. In the key of A the notes are:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a	b	c#	d	e	f#	g#

So if we are in, let's say, the 3rd mode of this scale means that C# is the new key (really it's C#m but more on that later) and the notes are now:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c#	d	e	f#	g#	a	b

We simply took the notes in A and rearranged them according to the 3rd note's perspective, and we're not really in the key of A anymore, harmonically speaking, because the note a is not the root, c# is.

The modes are

I. Ionian; II. Dorian; III Phrygian; IV. Lydian V. Mixolydian VI. Aeolian VII. Locrian

Do yourself a huge favor and write out the major in all 12 keys using 12 sheets of paper, one for each key. Then underneath that write the rewrite the same notes of that key from the point of view of each mode. The first few modes of key of A will look like:

A - Ionian

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a	b	c#	d	e	f#	g#

B - Dorian

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B	c#	d	e	f#	g#	A

C# - Phrygian

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c#	d	e	f#	g#	a	b

Notice that for even though in C# phrygian the notes are the same as the A Major Scale, we don't say "A phrygian" that would imply that the notes are a - bb - c - d - e - f - g which is the same notes as the key of F. If you can understand this one point right here, you grasp the essence of the modes. (Once you write out each key and each mode, go back and look at the 3rd mode of the key of F to confirm what I just wrote).

It may be helpful to think of each mode as its own scale. Now, instead of 12 scales there are really 84 scales (12 keys x 7 modes). You should think of each of the 84 as its own separate identity because even though any one of them shares the same notes with 11 others, each scale is unique in that only that scale has that particular "tonic" (root) and that particular structure.

For example, the fifth mode of the key of A is called E mixolydian and the notes are

E - Mixolydian

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e	f#	g#	a	B	c#	D

G# - Locrian

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g#	a	b	c#	D	e	f#

Even though the 2 scales share the same notes, they sound completely different *when played against their respective root notes*. So in order to really hear the difference, play them against a drone. Take your looper machine and record an E drone, or search for E-drone on YouTube. Then play the scale over it and hear the effect. After you've done that for a while, search or create a G# drone and play those same notes. The emotional character of the scale is now vastly different.

There are many other aspects to be discussed about modes, but for now, just spend time with any one of the 84 scales, find or create the appropriate drone, and explore how to play it on your instrument. And I know I said to think about each mode as its own scale, but you don't have to re-invent the wheel for finding a good fingering for the scale. Just find the mode on your 12 sheets, then use the major scale fingering of the mode at the top. (I call this the "parent scale" which means the Ionian key that shares the same notes as your key/ mode.)

For example if you're in B - Lydian, look at the top of the page and you will see F# at the top. Get a B drone and play the F# major scale fingering you already know and you'll hear what B Lydian sounds like. And, if you can, think of B as the root, not F#.

The only way to really understand this is to do what I have suggested:

- write out the 84 scales
- pick one and play it over the tonic's drone
- use the fingering of the "parent scale" to find your way around

Going back to the 84 scales, 12 of them will share the same notes, and 12 of them will share the same modal characteristics. For example A-aeolian will share the same characteristics as the 11 other "aeolian" scales. There are basic shortcuts you can take to learn the 'intervallic characteristics' of each mode, but that is a subject for another day.

Have fun and explore those modes!