

How to Construct Modes

Modes can be derived from a major scale. The true application of a mode is one in which the notes and harmony are derived primarily from a mode. Modal scales are used, however, over the chord of the moment in a non-modal tune, although it would not be a modal melody in the strictest definition. There are seven basic modes and you may derive them utilizing a major scale as reference.

The names of the 7 modes are:

Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian, and Locrian

Each scale or mode has distinctive note relationships which give it its unique sound.

The simplest way to construct modes is to construct a seven note scale starting from each successive note in a major scale. By referencing the diatonic notes in the original major scale (ionian mode), all seven modes can be created from each of the major scale notes.

- Ionian is scale degree 1 to 1 (one octave higher or lower)
- Dorian is 2 to 2
- Phrygian is 3 to 3
- Lydian is 4 to 4
- Mixolydian is 5 to 5
- Aeolian is 6 to 6
- Locrian is 7 to 7

However, there is a better way to construct any mode:

To construct any mode, think of the scale degree it is associated with. For example, dorian can be associated with the second degree of a major scale. As we have seen, modes may be constructed by building a diatonic 7 note scale beginning on each successive major scale degree. But you need to be able to construct on any note any of the seven modes without first building a major scale. Here's how to do it easily.

If you need to play an Ab dorian scale, for example , think "*of what major scale is Ab the 2nd degree ?*" and, if you are familiar with major scales in all keys, you would say Gb. Thus, play Ab to Ab an octave above (or below) with the notes of the Gb major scale, and you will have the Ab dorian scale.

A good exercise is take a single note and construct each mode on that note, thus making it a static root. For example, G Ionian, G Dorian, G Phrygian, G Lydian, G Mixolydian, G Aeolian, and G Locrian.

G Ionian is the G major scale.

G dorian uses the notes of an F major scale (G is the 2nd degree of the scale).

G Phrygian uses the notes of an Eb major scale (3rd degree).

G Lydian uses the notes of a D major scale (4th degree).

G mixolydian uses the notes of a C major scale (5th degree).

G Aeolian uses the notes of a Bb major scale (6th degree).

G Locrian uses the notes of an Ab major scale (7th degree).