Tissimo

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The modes

Play the white keys from C to C and you get the major scale. Start on any other white key and you get a different scale with its own mood. These seven scales are the **modes**.

SEVEN SCALES ON THE WHITE KEYS

Every mode uses the same seven notes, but the two **half steps** (E–F and B–C) land in different places. That is all that changes — and it changes everything. Two of them you know already: Ionian is the **major** scale (Handout 9), Aeolian the **natural minor** (Handout 25).

Ionian	C to C	W W H W W W H	**= major**
Dorian	D to D	W H W W W H W	minor, raised 6th
Phrygian	E to E	H W W W H W W	minor, lowered 2nd
Lydian	F to F	W W W H W W H	major, raised 4th
Mixolydian	G to G	W W H W W H W	major, lowered 7th
Aeolian	A to A	W H W W H W W	**= natural minor**
Locrian	B to B	H W W H W W W	minor, lowered 2nd + 5th
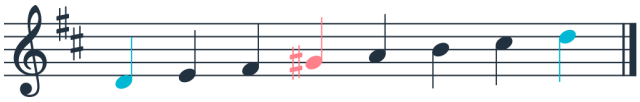
SAME HOME NOTE, ONE NOTE CHANGED

Now build each mode on **D**. Each one is just major or minor with **one note moved**, its **characteristic note** — the note that gives the mode its color. Each scale below wears its parent's key signature, so that note is the only accidental.

MAJOR FAMILY

D Lydian
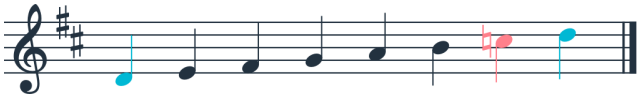
= D major with a **raised 4th**, G♯ · bright, floating



HEAR IT Beethoven marked the slow movement of his String Quartet Op. 132 "in the Lydian mode."

D Mixolydian

= D major with a **lowered 7th**, C♮ · major, but relaxed
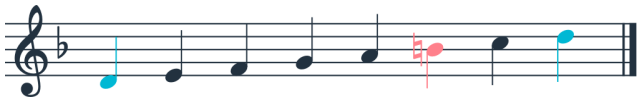


HEAR IT the American fiddle tune "Old Joe Clark," and countless folk and rock songs. No leading tone, so it never quite pulls home.

MINOR FAMILY

D Dorian
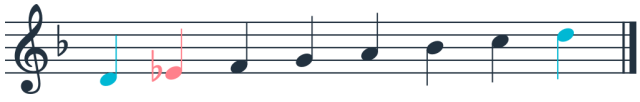
= D minor with a **raised 6th**, B♮ · minor, but hopeful



HEAR IT the English folk song "Scarborough Fair" and the sea shanty "Drunken Sailor." On the piano: white keys D to D.

D Phrygian

= D minor with a **lowered 2nd**, E♭ · dark, Spanish



HEAR IT the half step just above home is the sound of flamenco guitar. (Locrian, the seventh mode, lowers the 2nd *and* the 5th; it is rarely used as a home.)

Try it Hold a low D with the left hand and play the white keys from D up to D: that is Dorian. Now play it again with B♭ — plain D minor. Hear the difference one note makes? Try the same over a low G (Mixolydian) and over F (Lydian). Satie's Gymnopédie No. 1 (**Handout 75**) sways on a G chord using the notes of D major — G with a raised 4th, C♯: a Lydian color. Leave out the two notes that make major's half steps (F and B in C) and you get the pentatonic scale (**Handout 73**).

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