

# A Crash Course in Chord Scales

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Jazz harmony is extracted from beginning scales on different pitches to evoke different sounds.

**Base Major Scale - Ionian Mode** Cma7 Beginning on scale degree 2 - Dorian Mode D-7

*This means you should play Ionian mode over a ma7 chord* *play Dorian mode over a -7 (minor 7) chord*

**3. Phrygian Mode** E7(b9,#9) **4. Lydian Mode** Fma7(#11) **5. Mixolydian Mode** G7

*This mode is uncommon, but can be played over a 7 chord w/ altered extensions.* *play Lydian over a ma7(#11) chord can be used in place of Ionian sometimes* *play Mixolydian over a 7 chord*

**6. Natural Minor - Aeolian Mode** A-7(b6) **7. Locrian Mode** B-7(b5)

*This mode is uncommon. Can be played in place of Dorian, if the song is in a minor key.* *play Locrian over a half-diminished chord, aka -7(b5)*

**The three most common Modes are 1. Mixolydian, 2. Ionian, 3. Dorian**

## Reading Changes

Cma7 C7 C-7 C-7(b5) C°7 C7(b9,#9,#11,b13)

Compared to a C Major Scale, a ma7 chord has no alterations. A dominant (7) chord will have a flat 7. A minor 7 (-7) chord has a flat 3 & 7. A half-diminished (-7b5) chord has a flat 3, 5, & 7. When fully diminished, the 7 is flatted twice. Any information in parenthesis is a specific alteration to a mode, usually referring to the upper extensions of a chord\*, such as the 9, 11, & 13.

Notice that it is often the 3 & the 7 altering when the chord changes.

\*If one were to keep stacking a chord in thirds after 1, 3, 5, & 7, the 2, 4, 6 would wind up on top of the chord. Since they are now above 7, we refer to them as 9, 11, & 13.

## Guide Tones

We call the 3 & 7 **Guide Tones** for this reason. They help *guide* us from one sound to another.

This progression is the most common progression in Jazz Harmony, the II-V-I. Notice that all of these chords use modes from the same major scale.

We use brackets and arrows when analyzing jazz harmony to indicate these relationships.

7 Chords are interchangeable with a 7 chord a tritone away, because their guide tones are the same notes!

When a II-V-I is using a **Tritone Substitution**, we show it with a dotted bracket & arrow.

Solid and dotted brackets and arrows can be mixed and match for some interesting paths to I

## However, there is a difference between analyzing and improvising!!!

Analyzing is important, because you need to know *why* chords move the way they do. If you know how chords *function*, they become easier to *condense and simplify* when you're improvising!

Why is Mixolydian the most common mode in jazz?

Because when improvising, it is standard practice to **superimpose\*** mixolydian over a II-V

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play G mixolydian for the whole bar

resolve to C ionian

Dorian & Mixolydian in a II-V progression stem from the same base scale, so mixolydian can be played over both!

### Some FAQs

If I can superimpose Mixolydian over Dorian, why not just play Ionian for the whole progression?

It's all coming from the same base scale, right?

You could do that, but there would be no sense of tension and release in your playing. V7 chords build tension that want to return to Ima7. If you imply Ima7 over the whole thing, your playing will lack direction and motion.

Why not superimpose Dorian over Mixolydian?

Again, because the V7 chord has more tension. A II-7 moving to Ima7 would be less interesting to the listener. Also, several other things can be superimposed over Mixolydian, increasing your ability to build tension that is ultimately resolved when returning to Ionian.

Why not stay in Mixolydian?

If you build tension without resolving it, the listener will soon decide you don't know how to. You can delay a resolution by playing Mixolydian over the first bit of Ionian, but it must resolve eventually!

**Just like any form of art, the artist creates conflict and then resolves it!**

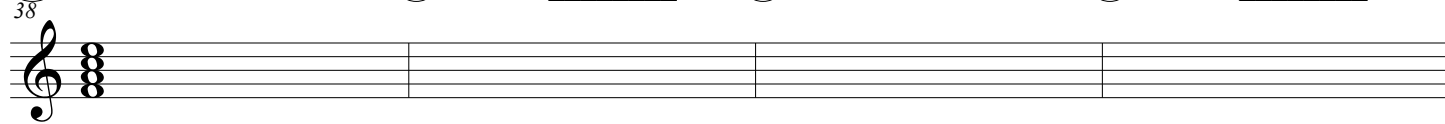
| V --> I | Dominant --> Tonic | Tension ---> Release | Conflict ---> Conclusion | Life ---> Death | Dark ---> Light |

\*Superimposition refers to playing taking a sound from one mode/chord and playing it OVER another sound/chord.

# Test Your Knowledge

Build the chords indicated by the changes, and write the mode to use over each chord.

- EX F $\flat$ ma7 Ionian      ① B $\flat$ -7 \_\_\_\_\_      ② E $\flat$ ma7 \_\_\_\_\_      ③ A $\flat$ 7 \_\_\_\_\_



- ④ D $\flat$ ma7 \_\_\_\_\_      ⑤ D-7 \_\_\_\_\_      ⑥ G7 \_\_\_\_\_      ⑦ Cma7 \_\_\_\_\_



- ⑧ A $\flat$ -7(b5) \_\_\_\_\_      ⑨ G7 \_\_\_\_\_      ⑩ F $\sharp$ ma7(#11) \_\_\_\_\_      ⑪ F $\sharp$ 7 \_\_\_\_\_



Provide the appropriate brackets and arrows for the following chord progressions.  
Write in the Guide Tones in the staff below.

EX G-7 C7 F $\sharp$ ma7      ⑫ C-7 B7 B $\flat$ ma7

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⑬ F $\sharp$ -7 B7 B $\flat$ ma7      ⑭ A-7 A $\flat$ 7 D $\flat$ ma7

⑮ B-7 E7 A7      ⑯ A-7 A $\flat$ 7 Gma7

⑰ G-7 C7 Bma7      ⑱ B-7 B $\flat$ 7 Ama7

(19) Define: - Modes

- Guide Tones
- Tritone Substitution
- Superimposition
- Upper Extensions

(20) Explain how analyzing jazz  
differs from improvising jazz.