



Improvisation: Mixolydian Rock Groove

At first, modes can seem scary, especially with names like "Mixolydian", "Locrian", "Phrygian", etc. In this lesson, we will demystify what modes are. The [rock groove featured in this lesson](#) consists of a chord progression over which you'll improvise using the D Mixolydian scale. You'll find that as long as you're playing in D Mixolydian, you don't need to worry about switching up your notes over the chord changes, because the notes in the correct mode will sound good over all the chords. Instead you can focus on melodic ideas, articulation, technique, emotion/feel, dynamics, rhythm, tone, phrasing, space/rest, and listening.

Objective:

- Gain an aural and theoretical understanding of the Mixolydian mode through improvisation and analysis

Materials:

- Computer with a browser such as Chrome, Safari or Firefox, to access the Berklee PULSE website ([Request a PULSE demo account](#))
- Projector, PA system
- Preferred instrument
- PULSE Mixolydian mode video (above)
- [D Mixolydian Groove Notation Mixer](#)

Instructional Activity Ideas:

The available time in your curriculum will determine how much you incorporate from the following suggested activities. This is meant as a cumulative experience based on musicianship concepts and training presented inside the Berklee PULSE Music Method site.

1. What is a "mode"?

- Modes have seven notes, and are built using a pattern of half steps and whole steps, just like the major and minor scales. Each mode has a "characteristic note," a note that sets it apart from the other modes.

2. The Ionian mode vs. the Mixolydian mode

- The Ionian mode, also known as the major scale, is built using the following pattern of steps: W W H W W W H (whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, whole step, half step).
 - If we were to build an Ionian mode starting on the note D, the scale would include D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, and D.

- The Mixolydian mode is similar to the Ionian mode, but lowers its 7th scale degree by a half step. The Mixolydian scale is built using the following pattern of steps: W W H W W H W (whole step, whole step, half step, whole step, whole step, half step, whole step).
 - If we were to build a Mixolydian mode starting on the note D, the scale would include D, E, F#, G, A, B, C, and D.
- Analyze and listen to the examples of a D major scale vs. D Mixolydian scale below:

D Major Scale



D Mixolydian Scale

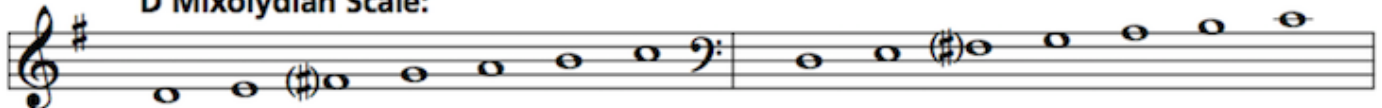


3. Improvise using the D Mixolydian mode

View the [full recording of the D Mixolydian Rock Groove](#) in our Notation Mixer to complete the following exercise.

In this exercise, you will be improvising over a Mixolydian groove using the D Mixolydian mode! You will find that as long as you're playing in the right notes in the D Mixolydian mode, you don't need to worry about the chord changes. Instead you can focus on melodic ideas, articulation, technique, emotion/feel, dynamics, rhythm, tone, phrasing, space/rest, and listening.

D Mixolydian Scale:



Use the chart and Steps 1-4 below to tell you your key, tonic, and sharps/flats you need to play based on the instrument you are using.

1. Instrument	2. Key	3. Tonic	4. Sharps/Flats
C instruments	D Mixolydian	D	F#
Bb instruments	E Mixolydian	E	F#, C#, G#
Eb instruments	B Mixolydian	B	F#, C#, G#, D#

Step 1. Instrument– Choose which key to play in based on what instrument you play.

- C instruments: bass, piano, guitar, violin, trombone, flute, voice
- Bb instruments: trumpet, soprano sax, tenor sax
- Eb instruments: alto sax, bari sax

Step 2. Key – This tells you what key you are in.

Step 3. Tonic – This tells you the note that sounds like “home base” when you are improvising. It is the first note of the mode, so the key you are in is named after the tonic.

Step 4. Sharps/Flats – This tells you which sharps or flats to play. Please note, in the context of modal improvisation, making something “flat” just means to bring it down a half step (ex. B becomes Bb).

[Create a Berklee PULSE demo account](#) to learn improvisation techniques from Berklee College of Music faculty members in our three improvisation units:

- Improvisation [Level 1](#), [Level 2](#), and [Level 3](#)