



Types of Scales

a selection

Scales are defined by the sequence of tones and semitones that make them up. For example, the well-known **major scale** always progresses in the sequence T-T-S-T-T-T-S (where T means tone and S means semi-tone).

The ancient church modes

Ionian mode	T-T-S-T-T-T-S	(equivalent to C-C on the white notes of the piano) (<i>N.B. equivalent to a tonal major scale</i>)
Dorian mode	T-S-T-T-T-S-T	(equivalent to D-D on the white notes of the piano)
Phrygian mode	S-T-T-T-S-T-T	(equivalent to E-E on the white notes of the piano)
Lydian mode	T-T-T-S-T-T-S	(equivalent to F-F on the white notes of the piano)
Mixolydian mode	T-T-S-T-T-S-T	(equivalent to G-G on the white notes of the piano)
Aeolian mode	T-S-T-T-S-T-T	(equivalent to A-A on the white notes of the piano)
Locrian mode	S-T-T-S-T-T-T	(equivalent to B-B on the white notes of the piano)

The scales of modern tonality

Major scale	T-T-S-T-T-T-S	(<i>N.B. equivalent to the Ionian mode</i>)
Natural minor scale	T-S-T-T-S-T-T	(<i>N.B. equivalent to Aeolian mode</i>)

Western harmonic conventions require the sharpening of the seventh degree of the minor scale, leading to the **Harmonic minor** scale. The interval between the sixth and seventh degrees of this scale is a minor third/augmented second. While some composers have used this interval to advantage in melodic composition, other composers, having felt it to be an awkward leap, particularly in vocal music, considered a whole step between these two scale degrees more conducive to smooth melody writing, leading towards the **Melodic minor** scale, where either the *unsharpened* seventh was used, or the *sixth scale degree raised*. Traditionally, these two options are referred to as the ascending melodic (where both sixth and seventh are sharpened, i.e. as in the equivalent major scale) and descending melodic minor scales (identical to the natural minor).

Pentatonic scales

A pentatonic scale is a musical scale with five pitches per octave in contrast to an heptatonic (seven note) scale such as the major scale. The most common pentatonic scales are:

The **Major pentatonic scale** uses degrees 1, 2, 3, 5 & 6 of the heptatonic major scale.

The **Minor pentatonic scale** uses degrees 1, 3, 4, 5 & 7 of the heptatonic natural minor scale.