

Guitar Scales & Modes

The only shapes you need, and why the chords decide

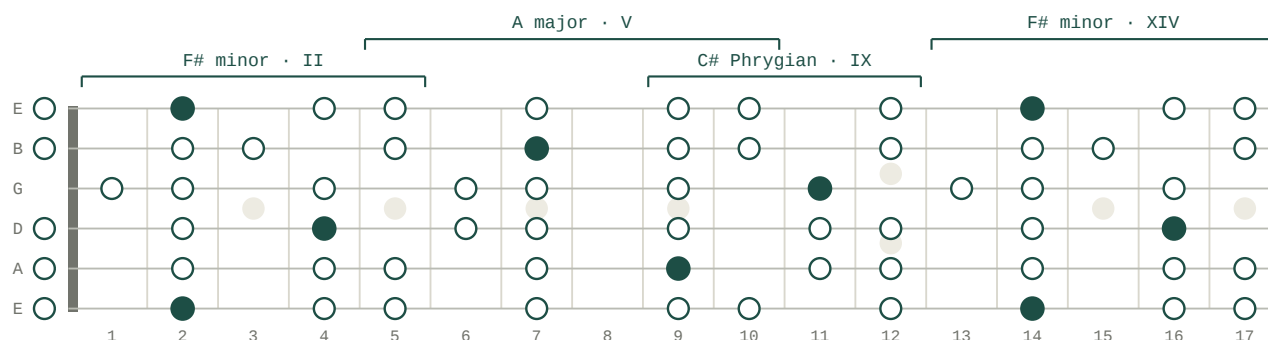
These are the only scale shapes you need to learn. Learn them and you can play through all major, minor and modal music.

Play F# minor, A major and C# Phrygian and you are playing exactly the same seven notes: F# G# A B C# D E. Not similar notes — the same ones. So what makes one sound wistful, one bright, and one like a flamenco guitarist walking into the room?

It is the CHORDS that decide. The harmony underneath tells your ear which note is home, and once your ear picks a home the other six arrange themselves around it and the flavour appears. Change the chords and the same seven notes change character completely, without you moving a finger differently.

(Scales such as diminished or whole-tone are real, but genuinely rare in rock and blues. Leave them.)

One neck, one set of notes, four doors in



The seven notes of F# minor / A major / C# Phrygian, everywhere they fall. Filled dots are the root. The four brackets are the shapes overleaf, in position — not four different scales, four windows onto the same thing.

How to practise this so it sticks

1. Learn one shape properly before starting the next.

Up, down, eyes shut, no buzzes, in time with something.

2. Always practise a scale against a chord.

A scale on its own is a finger exercise. A scale over a chord is music, and it is the only way to hear what the scale is FOR.

3. Move the shape.

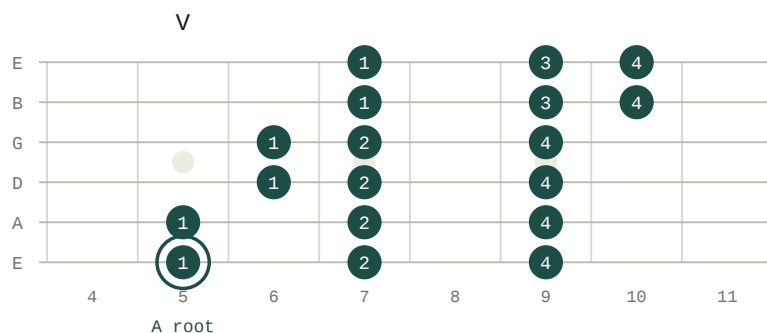
Major shape rooted at the 5th fret, then the 3rd, then the 8th. Say the key out loud each time. That is how the neck stops being a fog.

4. Then throw the shape away and use your ear.

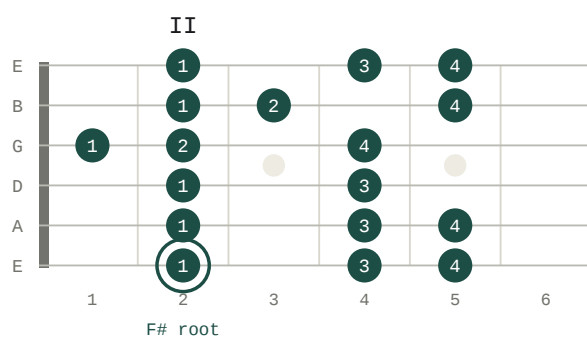
The shapes exist so you stop thinking about where the notes are. If you are still thinking about the shape while you play, it is not learned yet.

The Shapes

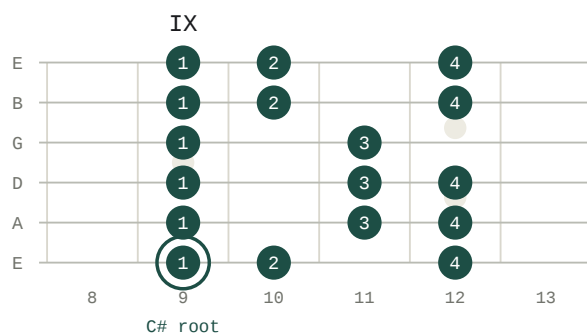
All movable — the root is on the 6th string, so move it and you change key



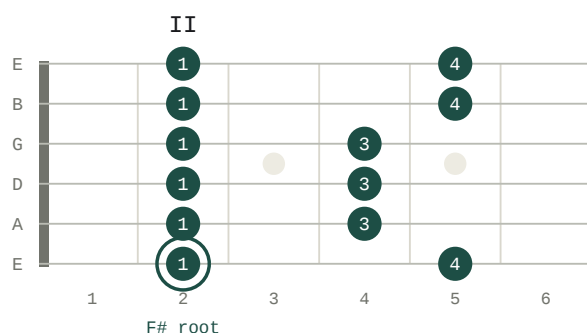
MAJOR SCALE · A B C# D E F# G# · shown as A major



NATURAL MINOR SCALE · F# G# A B C# D E · shown as F# natural minor



PHRYGIAN MODE · C# D E F# G# A B · shown as C# Phrygian



MINOR PENTATONIC · F# A B C# E · shown as F# minor pentatonic

The numbers are FINGERS, not scale degrees. Move the ringed root to another fret and you are in another key with the same shape under your hand.

The Chords Underneath

Same seven notes in all three. The harmony is what makes them sound different

Play each shape against its progression, four beats to a bar, round and round. This is the part of the lesson that does the work: the scale is not the sound, the relationship between the scale and the chord is the sound.

F# minor

| F#m | Bm | C# | F#m :|

chords of the key: F#m G#dim A Bm C#m D E

C# major is very often borrowed in place of C#m — it pulls home much harder.

A major

| A | D | Bm | E :|

chords of the key: A Bm C#m D E F#m G#dim

The same chords as F# minor. A different one is home, so it is a different key.

C# Phrygian

| C# | D | E D | C# :|

the pattern is i - bII - bIII bII - i

In A, where it sits under open chords: | A | Bb | C Bb | A :|

And the one thing to take away

It is not the notes. Every one of these shapes contains the same seven notes as the others. It is the chords that decide which note your ear calls home — and that is what you are actually hearing when you hear a key, a mode, or a mood.