

# A Guide To Scales

When performing in different ensembles, bassists are often required to navigate through lead sheets or chord charts which may only feature the melody of a composition along with its related chord changes. As the bassist, you will be expected to improvise bass lines and possibly take a solo. To accomplish these tasks successfully, you must be able to quickly identify which notes you have available to play over particular chord types as well as the notes you probably should not employ on certain chord changes. In other words, you need to have a fundamental understanding of basic chord/scale theory. For example, if you are presented with a chord symbol of CMaj7, chord/scale theory suggests that you could potentially utilize the notes within the C major scale because it is one of the scales you have available to play on major sounding chord types when no alterations are present in the harmony. If you also possess the ability to analyze the function of that chord change within the chord progression, that will assist you in distinguishing between which scales will work more appropriately over that chord. If you are playing over a CMaj7 chord and it is functioning as a major I chord in the progression, the major scale or Ionian mode would be the most suitable choice. However, if you are playing on a CMaj7 chord and it is functioning as a major IV chord in the progression, the Lydian mode would be a more proper selection. The function of each chord change in relation to the chord progression dictates which scales or modes can be used in that specific application.

In this reference guide, you will find chord types grouped into five different families of chords including major, minor, dominant, half-diminished, and diminished. Beneath each chord type is a list of the most preferred scales played by musicians over each individual chord.

This scales guide does not consist of a completely inclusive listing of every scale musicians will associate with these chord types, but it does include the most favored scales used by musicians on these chord changes.

## Major Family

### Major 7: CMaj7

Ionian  
Lydian

### Major 7#5: CMaj7#5

Lydian Augmented

### Major 7b5: CMaj7b5

Lydian Augmented  
Lydian

### Major 6: C6

Major Pentatonic

## Minor Family

i Function -

Minor 7: Cm7

Dorian  
Minor Pentatonic  
Blues Scale  
Aeolian  
Phrygian

ii Function -

Minor 7: Cm7

Dorian  
Minor Pentatonic

iii Function -

Minor 7: Cm7

Phrygian

vi Function -

Minor 7: Cm7

Aeolian

Minor Major 7: CmMaj7

Melodic Minor (Jazz Minor)  
Melodic Minor #4 (Jazz Minor #4)

## Dominant Family

Dominant 7: C7

Mixolydian  
Lydian ♭7  
Minor Pentatonic  
Blues Scale  
Half-Step/Whole-Step Diminished

Dominant 7#5: C7#5

Whole Tone  
Altered Dominant (Super Locrian)

Dominant 7 $\flat$ 5: C7 $\flat$ 5

Whole Tone

Altered Dominant (Super Locrian)

Lydian  $\flat$ 7

Half-Step/Whole-Step Diminished

Dominant 7 $\flat$ 9 or 7 $\sharp$ 9: C7 $\flat$ 9, C7 $\sharp$ 9

Half-Step/Whole-Step Diminished

Dominant 7 $\flat$ 5 $\flat$ 9, 7 $\flat$ 5 $\sharp$ 9, 7 $\sharp$ 5 $\flat$ 9, 7 $\sharp$ 5 $\sharp$ 9: C7 $\flat$ 5 $\flat$ 9, C7 $\flat$ 5 $\sharp$ 9, C7 $\sharp$ 5 $\flat$ 9, C7 $\sharp$ 5 $\sharp$ 9

Altered Dominant (Super Locrian)

Dominant 7sus4: C7sus4

Mixolydian

Dominant 7sus4 $\flat$ 9: C7sus4 $\flat$ 9

Dorian  $\flat$ 2

Phrygian

## Half-Diminished Family

Minor 7 $\flat$ 5: Cm7 $\flat$ 5

Locrian  $\sharp$ 2

Locrian

## Diminished Family

Diminished 7: Cdim7

Whole-Step/Half-Step Diminished