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# ***Natural Minor Scales and Minor Key Soloing***

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# Soloing Review Tips

## KEY POINTS TO DETERMINE SOLOING AVENUES:

**1. Determine the key signature** - Most of the time you will be soloing in minor key or major key. Knowing the key is the first step. Even when you are noodling around on the guitar, always know what key you are playing. Many guitarists make the mistake of just looking solely at the key – that won't give you all the needed information.

**2. Analyze the chord progression** - It's the chords that give you the complete roadmap to what you can utilize for soloing and improvisation. Analyzing the chords is critical to get the full lead guitar picture. Knowing the key is only part of the equation. The chords provide the road map for what scales, modes, and arpeggios you will want to utilize. The chords also point to the strong notes to land on, resolve to, and emphasize.

Remember that you can mix soloing techniques. Mix what *“relates to all”* with treating each chord as a *“separate event”*. Treat each chord as a *“separate event”*, then switch it up and play what *“relates to all”*.

At times you can also use both major and minor scale elements as well as modal playing. In those examples you can throw a bunch of different soloing applications into the soup.

A critical key in unlocking all the potential of these scales and modes is in learning their interval structure and listening to the mood of each one and how it sounds over a given chord. This way you will know when it is appropriate to apply each in a given soloing or improvisation scenario.

## Two goals of lead guitar playing:

**1. Compliment the song** – in the end, no matter how great a solo is, it's the song that will be remembered. Play for the song, not for yourself.

**2. Draw people into your solo** – you want the listener to latch onto what you are playing and to be on the edge of their seat wondering, “what will they play next?”

Take the listener on a musical journey with ups and downs, great emotion, and passion. Play from the heart while telling a story, and always be aware of melody.

Remember to experiment, it's okay to bend and break the “rules”. Nothing is etched in stone. Work on developing your own style and pulling from all your musical influences.

Keep up all that hard work on that guitar and keep honing your skills and refining your art - YOU CAN DO IT!

## KEY POINTS:

**It's the the chords that give the complete roadmap to all the soloing and improvisation options.**

**Take the listener on a musical journey - draw them into your solo and have them latch onto what you are playing.**

**Even when you are just noodling around on the guitar, always know what key you are playing in.**



# Key signature & chord analyzing

In blues and rock you will often solo over progressions that are in either major key or minor key. In blues usually its major key and often using dominant chords. But you want to have the tools to be able to solo over both major and minor key.

Knowing the key is important, and a good place to start. But to go deeper you have to analyze the chords that make up the progression to get the complete roadmap for soloing options.

In the examples on the coming pages we shall study a minor key example and how to systematically analyze the chords to determine soloing options. Use these examples as templates when examining chords and progressions to determine soloing options. Always start with what are the chords and what is the key.

Soon these techniques will become more automatic. But at first doing it in a very systematic and methodical way will get you used to these principles. Remember there are many lead avenues to choose from, so explore them all and see what sounds best to your ears.

**KEY POINT:** Analyze the chords to determine what solo avenues to take – it's the chords that give the complete roadmap to the various soloing avenues – the key signature is only part of the equation.

It's important to understand why these principles and techniques work so that you can solo and improvise over any progression. Armed with this knowledge and practicing in a musical context will give you the lead guitar confidence to solo over any progression.

**KEY POINT:** Remember that as soon as you hear that very identifiable I-IV-V blues, swing, or shuffle, it is wide open as there will be many different soloing avenues to try.

## Key Points To Determine Soloing Avenues:

**1. Determine the key signature** - often you will be soloing in minor key or major key. Knowing the key is the first step. Even when you are just noodleing around on the guitar, always know in what key you are playing.

**2. Analyze the chord progression** – it's the chords that will give you the complete roadmap to what you can utilize for soloing and improvisation. Analyzing the chords is critical to get the full lead guitar picture.

The points listed throughout these materials are guidelines to get you started, not rules forged in stone. Often in jams you have to use your discretion. You want to learn the principles and techniques so you have a solid jump off point to get creative and then start bending the rules.

## Minor Pentatonic & Blues Scales - four great applications:

1. Over all chords in minor key (except a major V chord).
2. Over any minor type chord when treating each chord as a separate event.
3. Over all the chords in major key I-IV-V blues jams, swings, and shuffles.
4. Over all the chords in rock jams or jams using power or 5th chords, (except major sounding jams and ballads).

## Soloing in minor key:

When playing over all the chords in minor key, what “relates to all”, you can always use Natural Minor Scales, (Aeolian Mode), UNLESS there is a major IV chord or a minor ii chord, in those cases use the Dorian Mode.



# The Natural Minor Scale (Aeolian Mode)

The Natural Minor Scale, or Aeolian Mode, is a seven-note scale often used in blues, rock, and many other musical genres. **Aeolian is considered a minor mode and is always the 6th mode in any major key.**

Aeolian produces a sad, dark, and mournful sound that is different than minor pentatonic and Dorian. It adds melodic half steps and additional lick and string bending opportunities. The scale degrees are 1, 2, b3, 4, 5, b6, and b7.

Play this mode over minor chords when treating each chord as a “*separate event*”. Also utilize Aeolian over ALL the chords in a minor key jam UNLESS the IV chord is major or the ii chord is minor.

For example - if you want to play A Aeolian over a jam track, remember that Aeolian is the 6th mode. To play in A Aeolian ask yourself what major scale's sixth note is an A? The answer is C. The sixth note of a C major scale is an A note.

To play in A Aeolian start on the sixth note in a C major scale and play from the A note to the A note and you have A Aeolian. As you can see below, C major and A Aeolian are both constructed from the same notes.

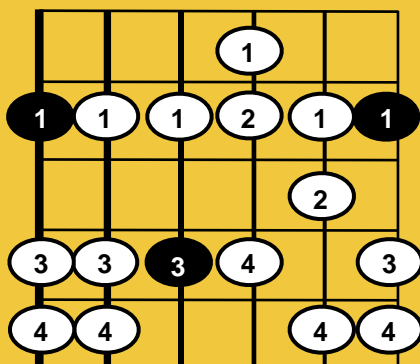
**C Major scale – C, D, E, F, G, A, B**  
**A Aeolian scale - A, B, C, D, E, F, G**  
**major and relative minor**

Aeolian sounds great when played over minor type chords when treating each chord as a “*separate event*”.

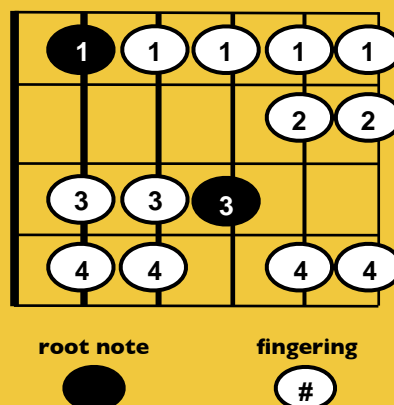
Remember, it's all about MOOD and EMPHASIS when playing in the modes. Which note you start on and emphasize give you the different moods and sound textures of each mode.

Below are two common shapes for Aeolian. One has the low root note on the low E-string and the other has the low root on the A-string. Find these patterns fast by using your first finger on the low root. Start with these, but continue to learn Aeolian across the whole neck.

**Low E-string root  
(first finger)**



**A-string root  
(first finger)**



## KEY POINTS:

**Aeolian is always the 6th mode of any major key.**

**Starting on and emphasizing the 6th note of any major scale produces the Aeolian Mode.**

**Aeolian is also called Natural Minor or Pure Minor.**

**Remember, it's all about MOOD and EMPHASIS when playing in the modes.**





# Minor Key Soloing

You want to be comfortable soloing in both minor key and major key. If a progression is in minor key you can usually solo with Minor Pentatonic & Blues Scales over ALL the chords, (with a few exceptions).

So minor pentatonic over minor key should be a default setting. As soon as you hear minor key, one option is to solo over all the chords with Minor Pentatonic & Blues Scales as they “relate to all”.

Also if it's a major key bluesy I-IV-V, one option is to solo over all the chords with Minor Pentatonic & Blues scales. An exception to this rule is if it's a minor key progression with a major V chord. You have to be careful over that major V, one option is to use Harmonic Minor Scale over just that V chord.

A minor mode will also work over all the chords in minor key. Usually it's Aeolian, (Natural Minor), or Dorian. To determine which one you have to analyze the chords. For now just memorize the below key point for soloing in minor key over all the chords:

**KEY POINT:** When playing over all the chords in minor key you can always use the AEOLIAN mode, UNLESS there is a IV major chord or II minor chord, then use the DORIAN mode. (Exception - If there is a V major chord then use Harmonic Minor over just that V chord).

Aeolian mode is the same thing as Natural Minor or Pure Minor.

## Use Minor Pentatonic & Blues Scales (4 applications):

1. Over all the chords in a minor key, (few exceptions).
2. Over all chords in major key I-IV-V blues, shuffles, and swings.
3. Over any minor type chord when treating each chord as a “separate event”.
4. Over all the chords in rock type jams, or jams using power or 5th chords, (as long as the jam is not ballad/major sounding, if so then use major pentatonic or possibly full major scales).
5. Use the same key Pentatonic Scale over different chords. More on this later - just know for now that at times you can play different key pentatonic scales over the same chord, not just the root one.

## Minor Pentatonic & Blues Scales - four great applications:

1. Over all chords in minor key (except a major V chord).
2. Over any minor type chord when treating each chord as a separate event.
3. Over all the chords in major key I-IV-V blues jams, swings, and shuffles.
4. Over all the chords in rock jams or jams using power or 5th chords, (except major sounding jams and ballads).

## Soloing in minor key:

When playing over all the chords in minor key, what “relates to all”, you can always use Natural Minor Scales, (Aeolian Mode), UNLESS there is a major IV chord or a minor ii chord, in those cases use the Dorian Mode.



# Minor Key Soloing Theory

In rock and blues you will often be soloing in minor key. So let's take a little extra time to dig deeper into some minor key soloing theory.

Let's first discuss minor key soloing with what "*relates to all*". When soloing in minor key, minor pentatonic and blues should be your default setting. In a minor key progression, you can utilize minor pentatonic and blues over all the chords as it "*relates to all*", (unless there is a major V chord).

When soloing in minor key usually a minor mode also "*relates to all*", usually Aeolian or Dorian. To know which one to play over all the chords there is one principle that you need to memorize:

**\*\*When playing over all the chords in minor key, use the AEOLIAN mode...UNLESS the IV chord is major or the ii chord is minor, then use the DORIAN mode.**

So in minor key over all the chords think minor pentatonic & blues as well as Aeolian unless you see a major IV or minor ii chord. An exception to this rule is if there is a major V chord, then you can try using the Harmonic Minor Scale over just the major V chord.

There is only a one note difference between the Dorian and Aeolian modes - the sixth. Aeolian has a b6 while Dorian has a major 6th:

**AEOLIAN MODE: 1, 2, b3, 4, 5, b6, b7**

**DORIAN MODE: 1, 2, b3, 4, 5, 6, b7**

If you hit the wrong sixth note over the corresponding chord it will sound sour, so it's super important you play the right mode over all the chords.

Remember we are talking about playing over all the chords in a minor key progression, playing what "*relates to all*".

One critical key in unlocking all the potential of these scales and modes is in learning their interval structure and memorizing the key points listed throughout this eBook. This way you will know when it is appropriate to apply each in a given soloing or improvisation scenario.

Another key is listening and studying the relationships between chords and scales and understanding which mood or emotion you want to apply. It's all about the sounds and what emotion and mood you want to get across in your playing.

That's the beauty of the modes, each have their own unique mood.

## KEY POINTS:

**When soloing in minor key you can often use a minor mode over all the chords. Use Aeolian Mode UNLESS the IV chord is major or the ii chord is minor, then use the Dorian Mode.**

**Analyze the chords to determine the soloing avenues. It's the CHORDS that give the full roadmap to the various soloing options.**



# Minor Key Example: Bm-Em-F#m

Let's examine this minor key chord progressions to determine soloing options. Use the lesson below as a template as you practice these techniques and practice your soloing skills over jam tracks. Remember to get the complete soloing picture, you have to analyze the chords.

At first try what you know and don't worry if you don't understand every option at this point - go with what you know for now, and build more as you go through more lessons and continue practicing.

This is a minor blues I-IV-V progression in the key of Key of B minor. Once choice is we can solo over what "*relates to all*". And since this is a 12-bar progression there is plenty of time to solo over each chord independently, or treat each chord as a "*separate event*". Let's examine both soloing options.

## 1. What relates to all the chords:

Since we are in minor key, with no major V chord, we can solo with Minor Pentatonic & Blues scales over all the chords. Memorize the four key minor pentatonic application points listed on the previous page.

**-Try B Minor Pentatonic & Blues** over all the chords. We instantly know since we are in minor key, with no major V chord, we can solo with Minor Pentatonic & Blues scales over all the chords as those scales relates to all. So whether we are playing over the Bm chord, the Em chord, or the F#m chord one option is we can play B minor Pentatonic & Blues scales over all the chords.

**-Try B Aeolian over all the chords.** Usually in minor key we can play a minor mode over all the chords. In minor key a minor mode usually relates to all. We are in minor key and when analyzing the chords the IV chord is minor, (Em), this tells us we can also play B Aeolian mode, (B Natural Minor), over all the chords. So whether we are playing over the Bm chord, the Em chord, or the F#m chord we can play B Aeolian scales over all the chords as it "*relates to all*". B minor is the relative minor of D major. So play all your D major scales but start on and emphasize the B notes making it B Aeolian (B Aeolian = D major).

**-Mix B Aeolian and B Minor Pentatonic & Blues** over all the chords for some killer sounds.

## 2. Treat each chord like a separate event:

What this means is you treat each chord independently. With a 12-bar progression you have a lot of time on each chord. This is perfect for treating each chord as a separate event.

-Over the Bm chord try B Minor Pentatonic & Blues, B Aeolian, B Dorian, or B minor arpeggios. (But then when the chords change to Em you then abandon all the B minor lead work and switch to scales, modes, or arpeggios that relate to the Em chord.)

-Over the Em chord try E Minor Pentatonic & Blues, E Aeolian, E Dorian, or E Minor arpeggios. (Then when the chord changes again to F#m you abandon all the Em work and switch to what relates to the F#m chord.)

-Over the F#m chord try F# Minor Pentatonic & Blues, F# Aeolian, F# Dorian, or F# minor arpeggios.

-Listen for the changes and time your scale changes so you don't get caught playing the wrong scale over the wrong chord. This technique takes time to get proficient. Chip away at it - start off slow with small phrases over each chord and build from there.





I hope these lessons help you along in your guitar journey. As a teacher my goal is to educate, empower, and inspire students to help them reach their guitar and musical goals.


I wish you the best in all your musical endeavors. Please feel free to email me any questions. Keep up all the hard work on that guitar and remember that your guitar playing is an evolution. It takes time, patience, and dedication. Go after your dreams like your life depends on it..... because it does! Take care, rock on, and swing for the fences!

David Taub

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