

E Phrygian mode 3 of the C major scale

E Phrygian is the dark one: it sits a half step above its root at every turn, and that b2 gives it a tense, Spanish, slightly ominous flavor that no other church mode has.

[Open this scale in the fretboard explorer](#)

THEORY

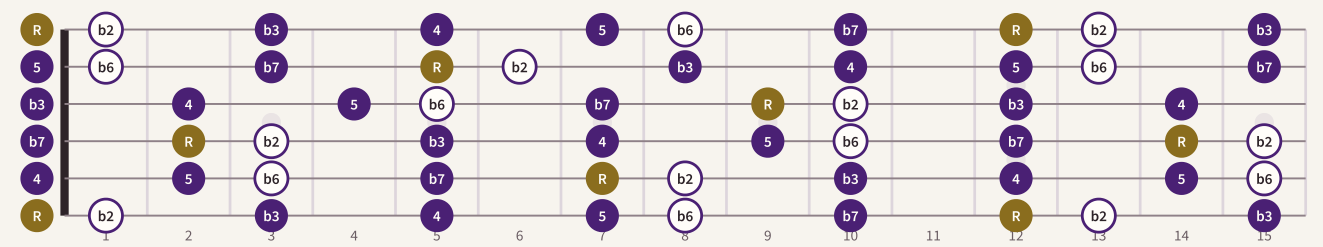
Formula: 1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7

Degree	1	b2	b3	4	5	b6	b7
Note	E	F	G	A	B	C	D
In skeleton	yes		yes	yes	yes		yes

Phrygian is the third mode of C major, so it uses the plain white-note collection E F G A B C D, but heard from E. Compare it to E natural minor and only one note changes: F# drops to F, the b2. That single half step above the root does almost all the work, because the very first step of the scale already sounds unstable and wants to fall back to E. The b6 (C) adds a second half-step pull, from C down to B, which deepens the dark color. Phrygian shows up in flamenco and other Spanish traditions, in metal riffing built on E and F power chords, and in film scores whenever a composer wants menace without leaving a familiar scale.

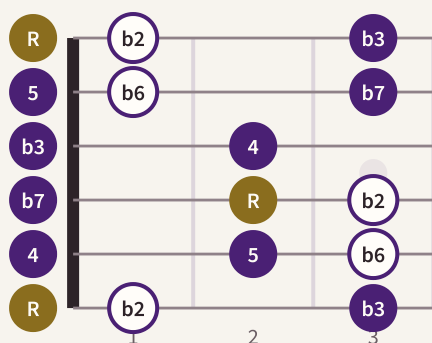
To get the sound in your ears, loop a two-chord vamp of Em to F major (or E5 to F5 if you want the metal version), two bars each, and let every phrase resolve back to the Em bar. For reference listening, try Wherever I May Roam by Metallica, Symphony of Destruction by Megadeth, and White Rabbit by Jefferson Airplane: all lean hard on that root-to-b2 movement.

WHOLE NECK (FRETS 0 TO 15)

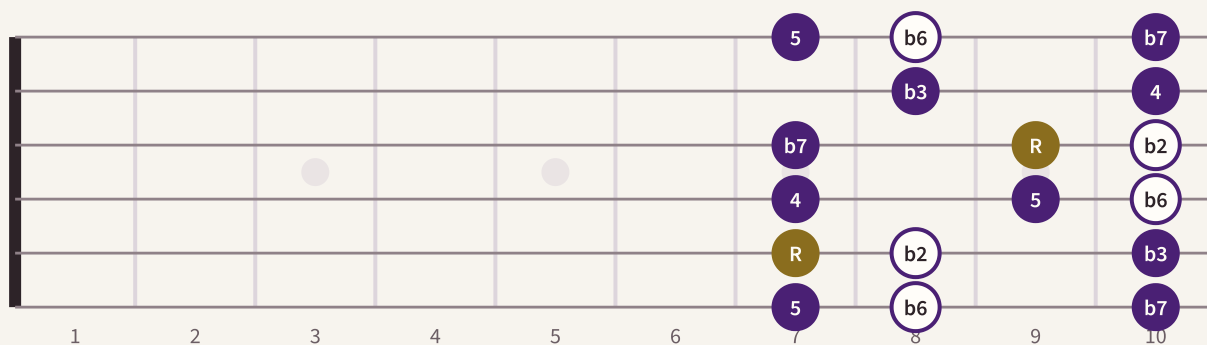


Gold dot = root. **Solid** = E minor pentatonic, the skeleton you already know. **Hollow** = the color tones this mode adds.

POSITION 1 (FRETS OPEN TO 3)

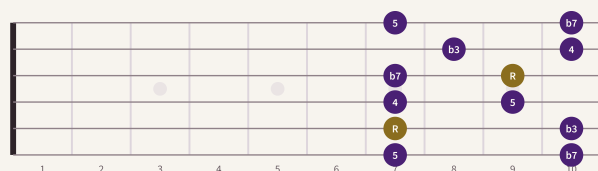


POSITION 2 (FRETS 7 TO 10)

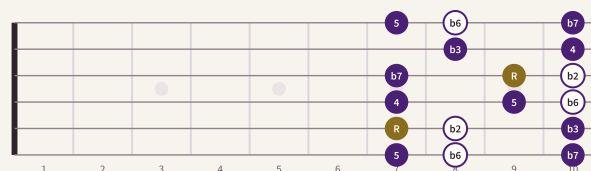


THE PENTATONIC INSIDE

Inside E Phrygian sits the E minor pentatonic scale you probably already know: E G A B D. Phrygian adds exactly two color tones to that skeleton, F (the b2) a half step above the root E, and C (the b6) a half step above the 5th, B. A practical way to think about it: play your familiar E minor pentatonic shapes, then decorate them with F right next to E and C right next to B. Land on those two added notes on purpose, then resolve them down by a half step, and the pentatonic box turns Spanish immediately.



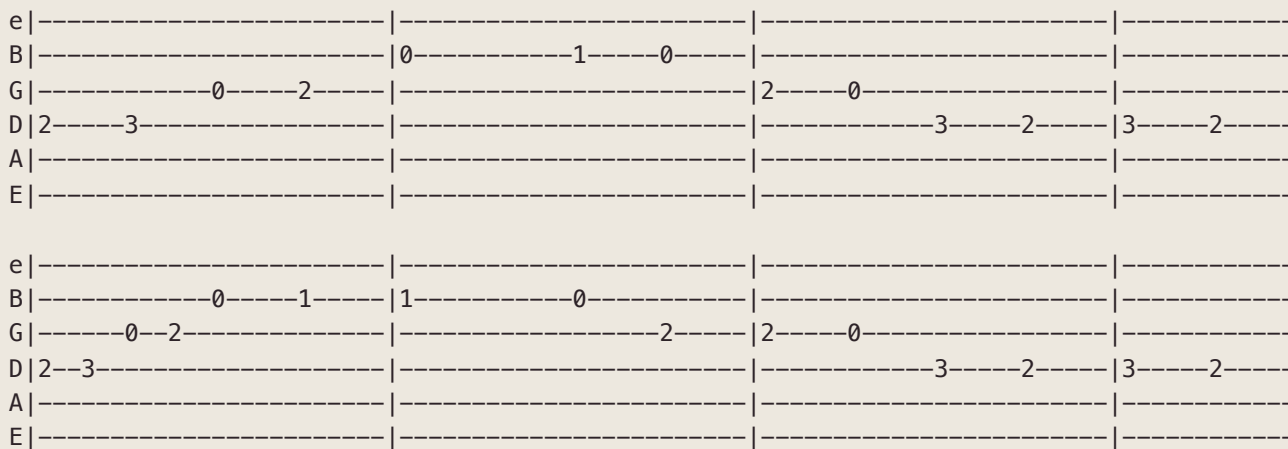
E minor pentatonic alone



E Phrygian: the skeleton plus the color tones

ETUDE (72 BPM)

Also generated as `3-phrygian-etude.gp` : open it in the course player for playback, tempo control, and looping.



PRACTICE PLAN

1. Learn the etude slowly

Play the etude one bar at a time at 60 bpm with a metronome, quarter note gets the click. Say the note names out loud as you play, and give extra weight to every F and C so you feel where the color lives. Move on once you can play all 8 bars from the page, cleanly, three times in a row at 60.

2. Memorize the two positions

Map E Phrygian in open position (frets 0 to 3) and in seventh position (frets 7 to 10), playing each shape ascending and descending from E to E at 70 bpm in quarter notes. Close the book and play each shape from memory, naming the root, the b2, and the b6 as you pass them. Move on when you can play both shapes from memory without hesitation on three consecutive days.

3. Sequences and speed

In each position, run the scale in groups of three (E F G, F G A, G A B, and so on, up and back down) and then in groups of four, using strict alternate picking. Start at 80 bpm in eighth notes and add 4 bpm whenever a pass is clean twice in a row. Move on when groups of four are clean at 112 bpm in both positions.

4. Improvise over the vamp

Record or loop two bars of Em and two bars of F at 90 bpm, then solo over it using only E Phrygian. Start with the pentatonic skeleton for one chorus, then spend a chorus deliberately landing F and C on beat 1 and resolving each down a half step. You are done when you can take four choruses in a row that clearly sound Spanish, not just minor, and end every phrase on a note that agrees with the chord underneath.