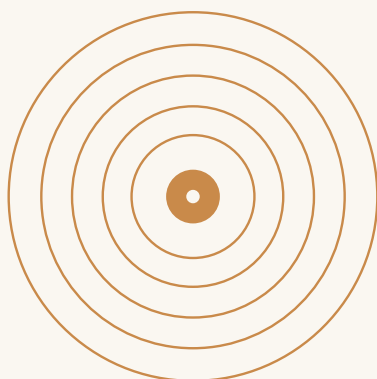


A SONGWRITING ANALYSIS



Writing Like Failure

Modal Weight, Chromatic Approach, and the Aeolian Aesthetic

Brandon Page

D R W U

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01

Writing Like Failure: Modal Weight, Chromatic Approach, and the Aeolian Aesthetic

Brandon Page

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Counting method and data sources: All modal identifications, BPM ranges, characteristic degree placements, and density targets are derived from 17 MIDI runs generated through systematic analysis of Failure's catalog. Theory reports, chord maps, fresh-ear analyses, critique files, and vocal maps for all 17 runs are aggregated in the `source-texts/` folder of this book project. Chromatic approach tone positions were verified against bar-by-bar chord maps. Density event counts (notes per bar) were taken from fresh-ear analysis tables. The modal distribution (Aeolian 47%, Mixolydian 24%, Dorian 18%, Phrygian 12%) is calculated across the 17 runs with each run assigned to its primary mode as documented in the theory report.

02

Introduction: The Aeolian Grammar

There is a moment about a minute into "Another Space Song" where the bass descends by half-step from E $\flat$ to D on the downbeat of the verse, and the guitar power chord arrives on a root the bass has just left. The motion is brief, one semitone, one eighth note, but it is not accidental. It appears at bar transitions across every one of the seventeen runs this book analyzes. It appears in "Heliotropic," "Sergeant Politeness," "Stuck on You." It is the most diagnostic single gesture in Failure's compositional language, more specific than their tuning choices or their production aesthetic, because it lives below the level of texture, inside the voice-leading logic itself.

The question this book answers is not what Failure's music sounds like but how it sustains forward motion. Aeolian harmony, the natural minor mode, without a raised seventh degree, has no leading tone. The note that in functional harmony creates the half-step pull from V to i, the raised seventh, does not exist in Aeolian. Without it, the dominant chord is minor. A minor v chord does not produce the V-to-i cadential drive that tonal

music depends on. Failure write in Aeolian the majority of the time. They also write music with intense phrase-level momentum. The reconciliation between those two facts is the central problem this book solves.

The answer lives in the chromatic bass approach. Failure replace the absent leading tone with a directed motion in the bass: a half-step above or below the target chord root, arriving on the downbeat, resolving by step. In D Aeolian, the bass approaches D from E $\flat$. In A Aeolian, from B $\flat$. In G Aeolian, from A $\flat$. The bass becomes the voice-leading agent that the harmony declines to be. The harmonic grammar of the catalog is modal. The linear grammar of the bass is chromatic.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	natural minor	i, $\flat VI$, $\flat VII$
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 $\flat 7$	$\flat 7$ over major	I, $\flat VII$
Dorian	1 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 6 $\flat 7$	$\sharp 6$ over minor	i, IV
Phrygian	1 $\flat 2$ $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	$\flat 2$ over minor	i, $\flat II$

Scale of A minor

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
1	2	$\flat 3$	4	5	$\flat 6$	$\flat 7$	1

Walter Piston's *Harmony* (1941; 5th ed., 1987) distinguishes the natural and raised sixth degree of the minor scale on precisely this basis. The natural sixth is darker, more final; the raised sixth implies motion toward the dominant. Failure consistently deploy the natural sixth, even in runs that use Dorian or Mixolydian coloring. Their Dorian passages, where the raised sixth is diatonic, often import the natural sixth as a borrowed tone against it. The modal color is Aeolian even in passages where the mode uses the raised sixth. Piston's analysis identifies what Failure

do but does not account for how the technique works in a non-functional context, where harmonic color is no longer tied to resolving chord sequences. For that, a different framework is needed.

Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (1999, 4th ed.) distinguishes tonal counterpoint, where functional harmony drives voice-leading, from modal counterpoint, where voice-leading must create directed phrase motion without functional progressions.

Failure operate in modal counterpoint almost exclusively. The chromatic bass approach is Failure's technical answer to the problem Kennan identifies: how do you create directed motion when the harmonic grammar will not supply it? The Eb-to-D descent at the bar transition in "Another Space Song" is, in Kennan's terms, an accented chromatic appoggiatura, a nonharmonic tone that displaces the chord root on a strong beat and resolves by half-step descent. Its function is precisely what the missing leading tone would have provided: a directed pull into the root, from outside the mode, through the bass.

Example 1.1: "Another Space Song" (Run 1, D Aeolian), bars 4–5. The bass arrives on Eb4 on beat four of bar 4, displacing the expected D root by a semitone. On the downbeat of bar 5, the bass resolves to D3, and the guitar power chord D5–A5 enters simultaneously. In Roman numerals: the phrase has been cycling through i (Dm), bIII (F), and bVII (C); the chromatic appoggiatura on beat four of bar 4 approaches i from the semitone above. Scale degrees in D Aeolian: the Eb is b2, and its arrival on the strong beat creates a Phrygian-like friction, scale degree b2 against the root, that the resolution to 1 then dispels. The appoggiatura makes the tonic arrival feel earned rather than merely repeated. Without it, the phrase ending on i would be a statement. With it, the phrase

ending is a landing.

The lineage behind this technique runs through two distinct lines. In the post-tonal classical tradition, Béla Bartók's use of chromatic neighbor tones in modal settings, developed systematically in *Mikrokosmos* Books V and VI (composed 1926–39, published 1940), established that chromaticism can operate at the surface of a modal texture without undermining the modal center. Bartók's Bulgarian-influenced dances and his Aeolian-tinged folk-harmonizations use half-step neighbors at phrase boundaries in exactly the way Failure's bass does: as directed motion that lands on the modal root without invoking a functional dominant. The technique enters rock through a different route. Black Sabbath's guitar figures in "N.I.B." (1970) and "Iron Man" (1970) use chromatic approach tones in B Dorian and E Phrygian contexts, establishing the half-step bass movement as a marker of weight and arrival within heavy rock's power-chord vocabulary. Failure inherit both lines, the classical surface-chromatic technique and the heavy rock bass-motion convention, without explicitly citing either.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Dorian	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7	b6 over minor	i, IV
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7	b7 over major	I, bVII
Aeolian	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	natural minor	i, bVI, bVII
Phrygian	1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	b2 over minor	i, bII

Scale of D aeolian

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

What Failure refuse is the raised seventh degree, and the refusal is audible at every phrase boundary. The raised seventh

in D Aeolian would be C#. A dominant chord in D Aeolian with a raised seventh would be A major (A–C#–E), and its resolution to i would produce a conventional minor-key authentic cadence: V-to-i with a half-step melodic motion from C# to D. This authentic cadence appears in the corpus, but rarely, against nearly ten times as many phrase-ending arrivals on the dominant or near-dominant that do not resolve. The raised seventh is not absent from the catalog; it is withheld. When it does appear, the authentic cadence it enables carries disproportionate structural weight, because the style has been declining to produce it. The refusal organizes the grammar. The grammar is audible because the refusal is consistent.

The biographical evidence for this consistency spans three decades. Failure formed in Los Angeles in 1992. Their first two records, *Comfort* (1992) and *Magnified* (1994), appeared on Slash Records; the landmark *Fantastic Planet* (1996) was released on Slash/Warner. The chromatic bass approach, the half-step appoggiatura at bar transitions, is audible in the *Magnified* sessions. It survives the band's 1997 dissolution. It reappears in the reunion material, *Wild Type Driftless* (2021) and the *Fantastic Planet Revisited* sessions (2024), without modification. The compositional procedure is not a period's aesthetic. It is a technical decision that the writers have held across thirty years and at least one complete hiatus. That the procedure reappears unchanged after a two-decade gap is the strongest available evidence that it is deliberate, not inherited from the surrounding scene.

The pitch-collection at the modal center of the catalog is D Aeolian: D – E – F – G – A – B $\flat$ – C. Scale degrees: 1, 2, $\flat$ 3, 4, 5, $\flat$ 6, $\flat$ 7. The characteristic intervals are the minor third ($\flat$ 3, placing the mode in minor), the minor sixth ($\flat$ 6, the B $\flat$ that Piston identifies as darker and more final than the raised sixth), and the

minor seventh (b7, the C natural that gives the mode its subtonic rather than leading-tone quality). All three appear in "Another Space Song." All three appear in the seventeen runs analyzed here. The mode's absence of the raised seventh, the C# that would produce a leading tone, is the structural fact from which every other analytical claim in this book follows.

The chapters ahead move from the large to the specific.

Chapter Two maps the modal rotation system: how the runs cycle through Aeolian, Dorian, Phrygian, and Mixolydian, and what each mode contributes to the affect. Chapter Three traces the chromatic bass approach in detail, with bar-level commentary on the five reference songs. Chapter Four addresses structure: the Cold Open, Double Bridge, and Final Chorus template, and the plateau cadence that is the book's primary formal argument. Chapters Five through Seven apply the grammar to melody, texture, and the non-resolving cadence at phrase-level. Chapter Eight reads three reference songs against the grammar in full. Chapter Nine offers a compositional guide for applying the grammar to original writing.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	natural minor	i, bVI, bVII
Dorian	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7	b6 over minor	i, IV
Phrygian	1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	b2 over minor	i, bII
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7	b7 over major	I, bVII

Scale of D aeolian

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The grammar is systematic. The chromatic bass approach is a specific voice-leading procedure. The Aeolian dominance is a specific modal commitment. The refusal of the leading tone is a

specific harmonic choice. This book names all three and shows how they cooperate. The forward pull the music produces is not a production effect or a matter of tempo. It is a set of technical decisions that can be identified, analyzed, and transferred.

03

The Modal Architecture: Aeolian as Gravity, Dorian as Color, Phrygian as Bite, Mixolydian as Release

Failure cycle through four modes across seventeen runs. The cycle is not arbitrary variety. Each mode corresponds to a consistent affect, weight, color, dissonance, release, and the technical decisions of each mode follow directly from what emotional register it is being asked to produce. The reconciliation this chapter addresses is between the modes' distinct theoretical properties and their unified compositional voice. Aeolian is harmonically closed; Mixolydian is harmonically suspended; Phrygian is harmonically tense; Dorian is harmonically lifted. Four different cadential behaviors, one recognizable sound. The explanation lives in the modal procedures Failure apply consistently across all four: the chromatic bass approach, the power-chord shell, the plateau cadence. These procedures override the individual modes' distinctions and impose a single grammar onto varied harmonic material.

Aeolian: The Natural Minor as Default

The natural minor scale, 1, 2, $\flat 3$, 4, 5, $\flat 6$, $\flat 7$, defines Failure's default harmonic world. Eight of seventeen runs use Aeolian as their home mode, and the two reference songs that anchor the entire run series are Aeolian: "Another Space Song" (D Aeolian) and "Stuck on You" (A Aeolian).

Pitch-collection, D Aeolian (Mode II rotation of F major):

Scale degree	1	2	$\flat 3$	4	5	$\flat 6$	$\flat 7$
Pitch class (D root)	D	E	F	G	A	B $\flat$	C

The weight of the mode comes from two characteristic intervals. First, the $\flat 6$, a minor sixth above the root, in D Aeolian the note B $\flat$, which Walter Piston's *Harmony* (1941; 5th ed., 1987) identifies as the distinguishing tone of the natural minor scale against the harmonic minor (raised seventh) and the melodic minor (raised sixth and seventh ascending). The $\flat 6$ does not have the upward pull toward the dominant that the raised sixth would create. It is a terminal interval, a resting place rather than a launching point. Second, the $\flat 3$, the minor third above the root, which in a power-chord context appears only in the vocal line, since the guitar's root-fifth dyad is modally ambiguous. The $\flat 3$ in the melody confirms the minor quality that the chord voicing refuses to state.

The cadential behavior of Aeolian follows from the absence of a raised seventh. In D major, the leading tone is C $\sharp$, a half-step below the root D. In D Aeolian, the seventh degree is C natural, a whole step below. Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (4th ed., 1999) notes that Aeolian modal cadences resolve either by whole step from $\flat 7$ to root (C natural to D) or by the external chromatic half-step approach that Failure's bass supplies at bar transitions (E $\flat$

descending to D). The chromatic bass approach is Failure's technical substitute for the absent leading tone: it provides the half-step pull that the mode will not supply diatonically.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7	natural minor	i, $\flat$ VI, $\flat$ VII
Dorian	1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 6 $\flat$ 7	$\sharp$ 6 over minor	i, IV
Phrygian	1 $\flat$ 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7	$\flat$ 2 over minor	i, $\flat$ II
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 $\flat$ 7	$\flat$ 7 over major	I, $\flat$ VII

Scale of D aeolian

D	E	F $\sharp$	G	A	B	C $\sharp$	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Example 2.1: Aeolian chord loops across the Aeolian runs.

- **Loop A** (Run 1, D Aeolian): i – $\flat$ VI – $\flat$ VII – i. Touches all three characteristic minor degrees: $\flat$ VI puts scale degree $\flat$ 6 (B $\flat$) in the bass; $\flat$ VII puts $\flat$ 7 (C) in the root; the return to i brings $\flat$ 3 (F) back into the vocal line.
- **Loop B** (Run 5, A Aeolian): i – $\flat$ VII – $\flat$ VI – v. The descending Aeolian tetrachord harmonized at the bass degree. Arnold Schoenberg's *Structural Functions of Harmony* (1954; ed. 1969) identifies this as the natural minor harmonized by stepwise bass descent. The v chord (Em in A Aeolian) is the minor dominant, no raised seventh, no dominant pull. Phrases end on v and do not proceed to i: the plateau cadence.
- **Loop C** (Runs 8, 12, 13, 15, 16): i – $\flat$ III – $\flat$ VI – $\flat$ VII. The loop avoids the fifth degree entirely. No dominant-function moment appears anywhere in the four-bar progression. In A Aeolian: Am – C – F – G. The $\flat$ III (C major, the relative major) creates an ascending bass motion from root to minor third that Kennan would

annotate as contrary motion when the vocal holds the root pitch.

What Aeolian refuses is the raised seventh, the C# that would create a functional V-to-i authentic cadence. The major V chord built on A Aeolian's fifth degree would be E major (E–G#–B). The G# would produce a leading-tone pull toward the A root. Failure decline to raise it. Phrases end on the minor v, on bVII, or on the chromatic approach tone, never on a major V resolving to i at structural phrase ends. The refusal is systematic. The twenty-seven-year span between *Magnified* (1994) and *Wild Type Driftless* (2021) produced no modification of this cadential grammar.

The lineage runs through two traditions. In post-tonal classical music, Béla Bartók's harmonizations of Aeolian folk melodies in *Mikrokosmos* Books IV and V (composed 1926–39) consistently avoided the raised seventh, producing phrase endings on minor v or bVII. Bartók established the natural minor's plateau cadence as a compositional procedure distinct from the classical V-to-i. In rock, The Pixies' Aeolian progressions on *Surfer Rosa* (1988), "Where Is My Mind?" (E Aeolian, i – bVI – bIII – bVII throughout) and "Gigantic" (A Aeolian), confirmed the plateau cadence as a structural tool within distorted rock. Failure inherit the Pixies' application of Aeolian as structural default rather than surface color.

Dorian: The Raised Sixth as Brightness

Dorian is natural minor with a raised sixth. In A Dorian, the sixth degree is F# rather than F natural.

Pitch-collection, A Dorian (Mode II of G major):

Scale degree	1	2	$\flat 3$	4	5	6	$\flat 7$
Pitch class (A root)	A	B	C	D	E	F $\sharp$	G

The single interval difference between Aeolian and Dorian, $\flat 6$ versus natural 6, is audible as a shift in affect. F $\sharp$ implies motion toward the dominant. In the progression $i - IV - v - i$, the Dorian characteristic progression, the F $\sharp$ appears in the soprano of the IV chord. In A Dorian, the IV chord is D major, containing F $\sharp$. Piston identifies this major IV chord in a minor context as a modal borrowing of the parallel major's subdominant: it brightens the harmony without leaving the minor mode.

Failure's three Dorian runs use the raised sixth to introduce variety within the minor palette. Run 2 (C Dorian) employs a bridge tonal pivot. The raised sixth (A natural in C Dorian) can function as the leading tone to the B $\flat$ major chord (the $\flat VII$ in C Dorian), briefly tonicizing $\flat VII$ within the phrase. Schoenberg's *Structural Functions* identifies this as a vagrant moment: a brief harmonic instability that visits a neighboring tonal area without modulating. Run 6 follows Run 5 on the same root (A), shifting mode from Aeolian to Dorian. The single semitone change, F natural ($\flat 6$ of A Aeolian) to F $\sharp$ (raised 6 of A Dorian), converts weight into brightness. This is the most direct demonstration of Kennan's characteristic interval principle.

What Dorian refuses is the $\flat 6$, the note that gives Aeolian its terminal gravity. In A Dorian, F natural is refused where F $\sharp$ is deployed. The $\flat 6$ carries the Aeolian modal signature; Dorian's refusal of it, replacing it with the raised 6, is the single act that defines the mode's brighter register.

Phrygian: The Half-Step Above the Root

Phrygian is natural minor with a flat second. In E $\flat$ Phrygian, the second degree is E natural, a minor second above E $\flat$.

Pitch-collection, E $\flat$ Phrygian (Mode III of C major, enharmonic reading):

Scale degree	1	$\flat 2$	$\flat 3$	4	5	$\flat 6$	$\flat 7$
Pitch class (E $\flat$ root)	E $\flat$	E $\natural$	F $\sharp$ /G $\flat$	A $\flat$	B $\flat$	C $\flat$	D $\flat$

Kennan's analysis of Phrygian identifies the $\flat 2$ as the mode's defining interval: the half-step above the root creates chromatic tension at the tonic itself. The $\flat \text{II}$ chord (the Neapolitan in classical nomenclature), E major in E $\flat$ Phrygian, sits one semitone above the tonic in the bass. Its presence is a dissonant intrusion that the tonic cannot easily absorb without explicit resolution by step.

Failure use Phrygian in exactly two runs, and both times they deploy the $\flat 2$ pointedly rather than continuously. The analysis note for Run 3 states: "Used pointedly, not constantly, to retain impact." Kennan's principle applies directly: dissonant characteristic intervals lose their quality through overuse. In Run 3, the $\flat 2$ appears in the bridge section's chromatic bass descent, G $\flat$ ($\flat 3$), then E $\natural$ ($\flat 2$), then E $\flat$ (root), a three-note figure in which adjacent pitches are connected by half-step. Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725) requires that chromatic tones be approached and resolved by step. Both conditions are satisfied: E $\natural$ is approached from G $\flat$ (stepwise in the chromatic descent) and resolved to E $\flat$ (half-step descent).

What Phrygian refuses is the natural second. E $\natural$ in E $\flat$ Phrygian replaces the M2 (F) that every other minor mode supplies. The $\flat 2$ is not an added color. It is a substitution that removes the

whole-step opening interval and replaces it with a half-step. The bite of Phrygian lives entirely in that substitution.

The post-tonal lineage for this half-step tension runs through Stravinsky. The "Danse sacrale" in *The Rite of Spring* (1913) uses Phrygian-adjacent harmonic cells, root-position chords with half-step bass neighbors, to create its rhythmic-harmonic violence. In rock, Nine Inch Nails' "Closer" (1994) uses Phrygian-inflected bass motion (half-step above the root as a recurring bass figure) in a power-chord context that anticipates Failure's Phrygian application.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Dorian	1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 6 $\flat$ 7	$\flat$ 6 over minor	i, IV
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7	natural minor	i, $\flat$ VI, $\flat$ VII
Phrygian	1 $\flat$ 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7	$\flat$ 2 over minor	i, $\flat$ II

Scale of C dorian

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Mixolydian: The Flat Seventh Without a Destination

Mixolydian is major with a flat seventh. In A Mixolydian, the seventh degree is G natural rather than G#.

Pitch-collection, A Mixolydian (Mode V of D major):

Scale degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	$\flat$ 7
Pitch class (A root)	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G

In A major, the V chord is E major, built on the leading tone G#. G# creates the dominant pull toward A. In A Mixolydian, the seventh degree is G natural, a whole step below the root, not a half

step. The dominant chord is present but its directional force is gone. The analysis note for Run 10 (A Mixolydian) names this exactly: "The song perpetually 'almost' cadences to the tonic without landing a perfect authentic cadence. The $\flat$ VII chord (G) creates motion without tension." Kennan's *Counterpoint* identifies this as the imperfect authentic cadence in modal harmony: V proceeds to I, but without the leading tone, the arrival feels like a gentle settling rather than a resolved tension.

Runs 14 and 17 (both F Mixolydian) use this plateau resolution at contrasting tempos. Run 17 creates a specific effect: rhythmic urgency in the absence of harmonic arrival. The tempo pushes forward; the $\flat$ VII withholds resolution. Piston would identify this as rhythmic-harmonic counterpoint: the rhythm implies forward motion while the harmony withholds arrival. The energized irresolution is the defining quality of Failure's fastest Mixolydian passages.

What Mixolydian refuses is the raised seventh, the G $\sharp$ in A Mixolydian that would convert the imperfect dominant into a functional one. Failure do not refuse G $\sharp$ dramatically, in the way Aeolian withholds C $\sharp$ as a deliberate cadential choice. Mixolydian lacks the leading tone structurally. Failure's contribution is to choose Mixolydian for passages where they want the imperfect resolution, and to build the rhythmic energy that compensates for the harmonic arrival the mode cannot supply.

The Modal Sequence as Structural Narrative

The seventeen runs proceed through the modal cycle as a structural narrative. Runs 1–4 establish the full palette: Aeolian (weight), Dorian (color), Phrygian (bite), Mixolydian (release). Runs 5–7 repeat the cycle on new roots, confirming the palette.

Runs 8–11 revisit Aeolian and Mixolydian as structural anchors. Runs 12–17 narrow toward Aeolian and Mixolydian's two terminal registers: the weight that will not resolve, and the brightness that cannot resolve. The final run is Mixolydian at the catalog's fastest tempo, the mode that withholds arrival, at the speed that most insistently demands it.

The practical implication for composition: each modal choice is a constraint set. Aeolian requires the $\flat 6$ in the vocal line, the minor v or $\flat VII$ at phrase ends, and the chromatic bass approach as the substitute for leading-tone pull. Dorian requires the raised 6 used explicitly, in the IV chord, in the bridge pivot, and the modal-center clarity to make the brightness legible against the Aeolian default. Phrygian requires the $\flat 2$ deployed sparingly, resolved by step, at structurally weighted moments. Mixolydian requires the $\flat VII$ as the harmonic center of gravity, and the rhythmic energy to compensate for the arrival the mode withholds. Choose the mode. Accept the constraint set. Apply the chromatic bass approach in all four cases. The grammar is one. The palette is four.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 $\flat 7$	$\flat 7$ over major	I, $\flat VII$
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	natural minor	i, $\flat VI$, $\flat VII$
Dorian	1 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 6 $\flat 7$	$\sharp 6$ over minor	i, IV
Phrygian	1 $\flat 2$ $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	$\flat 2$ over minor	i, $\flat II$

Scale of A mixolydian

A	B	C $\sharp$	D	E	F $\sharp$	G $\sharp$	A
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

04

The Chromatic Bass Approach: Voice-Leading Without a Leading Tone

If the Aeolian mode withholds the leading tone and therefore withholds the directed half-step motion that makes phrase endings feel arrived, the chromatic bass approach is the structural substitute for functional harmony. A run that deploys it correctly arrives at every tonic just as surely as a run in D major, by a different mechanical route. The mechanism is contrapuntal rather than harmonic: a single bass note, placed a semitone above the tonic root on the beat before each bar transition, supplies the directed motion the mode refuses to provide through chord succession. Understanding why the device works, and why Failure uses it at every structural phrase boundary in Aeolian and Phrygian runs while withholding it entirely in Mixolydian runs, requires tracing the problem back to the mode's fundamental absence.

Walter Piston's *Harmony* (5th ed., 1987) provides the taxonomy. Piston names the bass event an **accented chromatic appoggiatura**: a non-harmonic tone that displaces the chord root on a strong beat and resolves by half-step. The appoggiatura

creates friction between the bass and the sustained guitar power chord, then releases it as the bass moves to the root on the bar's downbeat. The resolution is metrically certain, the downbeat is the strongest point in the bar, the most inevitable point of arrival, and the half-step motion into it is the closest approximation to directed voice-leading available outside the functional V-to-i cadence. Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (4th ed., 1999) adds the phrase-level context: the tension-then-release profile at phrase boundaries is the primary signal that a phrase has ended. Without it, phrase endings sound like arbitrary stopping points rather than arrivals. The chromatic bass approach is Failure's method for producing that signal in a modal context that does not supply it harmonically.

Arnold Schoenberg's *Structural Functions of Harmony* (1954; ed. Stein, 1969) identifies the broader class of substitute-function events this approach belongs to.

Schoenberg's analysis of the Neapolitan chord, the $\flat$ II major chord in minor-key contexts, establishes that the flat second scale degree can supply subdominant function (harmonic emphasis of the pitch-class region below the tonic) without using the diatonic subdominant chord. In the runs analyzed here, the $\flat$ II appears first as a single bass note (the accented appoggiatura) and then, in the most harmonically intense passage of the series, as a full guitar chord event (Example 3.2 below). Both deployments, single note and full chord, serve the same substitute function: directed motion toward tonic from the semitone above.

The Modal Problem: Absent Directed Motion

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7	natural minor	i, $\flat$ VI, $\flat$ VII
Phrygian	1 $\flat$ 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7	$\flat$ 2 over minor	i, $\flat$ II

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7	b7 over major	I, bVII

Scale of D major

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

D major has a leading tone. D Aeolian does not. The seventh scale degree of D major is C#. The interval from C# to D is a minor second, a half step. The ear, trained across centuries of Western tonal practice, reads this interval as directional. The V chord in D major contains C# as its third degree. The V chord's arrival implies tonic because the leading tone pulls. In D Aeolian, the seventh degree is Cb. The interval from Cb to D is a major second, a whole step. The pull is weaker. The Aeolian V chord (A minor, the v chord in the mode) contains neither a raised third nor a leading tone. It implies tonic only weakly.

The pitch-collection table makes the structural gap explicit:

Degree	D Aeolian	Chromatic Approach	Status
1	D	,	tonic root
b2	Eb	□ approach from above	chromatic (non-diatonic)
2	E	,	diatonic
b3	F	,	diatonic
4	G	,	diatonic
5	A	,	diatonic
b6	Bb	,	characteristic Aeolian degree
b7	Cb	,	diatonic (absent leading tone)
[7]	C#	,	REFUSED (would create leading tone, imply V-to-i)

The Eb (b2) in the approach column is the chromatic note that does not belong to the D Aeolian collection. It is introduced specifically at phrase boundaries to supply directed motion. The C# in the refused row is the note that would complete the major scale and create a functional dominant. **Failure refuses C# entirely.** No run in D Aeolian raises the seventh degree. The mode is maintained at the cost of sacrificing the leading tone, and the chromatic approach in the bass compensates for what was refused.

The post-tonal precedent for this procedure appears in Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* Books V–VI (1926–39) and his *String Quartets Nos. 3 and 4* (1927–28). Bartók's modal writing regularly supplies chromatic neighbor tones at phrase cadences to create directed motion in modal contexts that lack functional dominant relationships. His "Bulgarian Dances" (*Mikrokosmos* Book VI) use a chromatic lower neighbor approach in the bass at every phrase boundary in passages anchored to Aeolian and Dorian collections, the same structural position Failure uses for the upper chromatic approach. The specific neighbor direction differs (Bartók prefers the lower neighbor, Failure the upper), but the function is identical: a non-diatonic half step creates directed motion at the phrase boundary.

The rock precedent is Tony Iommi and Geezer Butler in *Black Sabbath's* early catalog. Butler's bass in "N.I.B." (1970, B Aeolian) approaches the tonic B from C $\flat$ at the verse cadences, a whole-step approach, not a half-step, but the structural position is the same as Failure's chromatic approach. Iommi's riff in "Iron Man" (1970, B minor) uses the bII chord (C minor, the Neapolitan minor) as a brief passing harmony between structural tonic arrivals. The bII in *Black Sabbath* is a chord event, not a single bass note, but it occupies the same pitch-class position (C as b2 against B) and

serves the same directed-motion function. Failure refines this into the accented chromatic appoggiatura: rather than a full $\flat\text{II}$ chord, a single bass note one semitone above the tonic, placed precisely on the last beat before the bar transition.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	natural minor	i, $\flat\text{VI}$, $\flat\text{VII}$
Dorian	1 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 6 $\flat 7$	$\sharp 6$ over minor	i, IV

Scale of D major

D	E	F $\sharp$	G	A	B	C $\sharp$	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The Aeolian Version: Accented Chromatic Appoggiatura

Example 3.1: Accented chromatic appoggiatura in D Aeolian, Run 1, bars 7–8 (Verse 1, first cadence).

Bar 7: D/i, bass D1, guitar D5–A5 power chord, vocal sustaining B $\flat$ 4 ($\flat\text{VI}$ scale degree).

Bar 8, beat 4: E $\flat$ 1 enters in the bass, $\flat\text{II}$ against the sustained D-rooted guitar chord.

Bar 9, beat 1: Bass resolves to D1. Guitar D5–A5 chord sustained. Vocal B $\flat$ 4 continues.

Roman numerals: i, [E $\flat$ / $\flat\text{II}$ bass approach], i.

The E $\flat$ 1 on beat four of bar 8 is the accented chromatic appoggiatura. It displaces the chord root D for one beat, creating a minor second between the bass (E $\flat$) and the guitar chord root (D), then resolves by half-step descent to D1 on the bar downbeat. The vocal simultaneously holds B $\flat$ 4 (the $\flat\text{VI}$ of D Aeolian). The pitch-class content at the moment of maximum tension (bar 8, beat

4) is: E $\flat$ in the bass, D+A in the guitar, B $\flat$ in the vocal. Three of the four pitch classes form interval relationships of high dissonance: E $\flat$ and D are a minor second; D and B $\flat$ are a minor sixth; E $\flat$ and B $\flat$ are a tritone. Piston (*Harmony*, ch. 14) would identify this as a compound non-harmonic event: two non-harmonic elements (E $\flat$ bass appoggiatura, B $\flat$ vocal characteristic degree) occurring simultaneously over the tonic chord.

The resolution is metrically placed and harmonically certain. E $\flat$ 1 descends by half step to D1 on the strongest metric position in the bar. The B $\flat$ sustains across the bar line as a consonant $\flat$ VI above the resolved D root, a modal color tone, no longer a tension element. The phrase arrives. The mode maintained its refusal of C $\sharp$ throughout. The arrival was produced without a dominant chord, without a leading tone, by half-step bass motion from the semitone above.

This pattern repeats at every verse cadence point in D Aeolian runs, bars 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 32 in Run 1, creating a regular oscillation between root-position stability (odd bars) and chromatic-approach tension (even bars). Kennan's *Counterpoint* identifies this alternation as the antecedent-consequent phrasing pattern at its most reduced: each two-bar unit is a complete tension-release cycle. The phrase structure is generated by the voice-leading event, not by harmonic progression. The i chord never changes. The phrase articulation comes entirely from the chromatic appoggiatura.

The Phrygian Escalation: $\flat$ II as Full Chord

Example 3.2: Neapolitan chord event in E $\flat$ Phrygian, Run 3, bar 43 (Bridge).

Bar 43: Guitar plays E5–B5 (E natural power chord) against Eb1 in the bass.

Bar 44: E5–B5 sustained, bass Eb1 sustained.

Bar 45: Guitar resolves to Eb5–Bb5 (Eb tonic power chord), bass Eb1.

Roman numerals: bII [E power chord over Eb bass], bII sustained, i.

The E natural power chord (E5–B5) against the Eb bass creates the maximum chromatic friction in the seventeen-run series. E natural and Eb are a minor second apart, the same half-step interval as the single-note appoggiatura in Example 3.1, but now spanning from bass to guitar voicing and sustained across two full bars rather than one beat. The guitar dyad E5 and the bass Eb1 are sounding simultaneously, a minor ninth apart (minor second plus two octaves). Piston identifies this interval relationship as a **compound minor second** in two-voice writing: when the minor second is displaced by an octave or two, its dissonance quality is preserved.

Schoenberg's analysis of the Neapolitan applies here in full. In Eb Phrygian, the bII chord is E major (or E5 power chord in the rock voicing). The Neapolitan functions as a **subdominant substitute**: it provides the tension of the pre-dominant region (harmonic motion away from tonic toward a point of return) without using the iv chord (Ab minor in Eb Phrygian). The resolution from bII to i across bars 44–45 is a half-step descent of the entire upper voicing: E5 drops to Eb5, B5 drops to Bb5, the guitar chord moves by semitone in parallel motion to the tonic chord. This is chromatic voice-leading of the entire guitar part, not just the bass. The resolution is the largest tension-release event in Run 3, proportional to the two-bar duration of the sustained bII dissonance.

The Phrygian mode motivates this escalation. The E $\flat$ Phrygian scale contains E $\flat$, E $\natural$ (the Phrygian characteristic degree, the minor second above the root), F, G $\flat$, A $\flat$, B $\flat$, D $\flat$. The minor second above the tonic (E $\natural$) is not a chromatic intrusion in Phrygian, it is a diatonic scale degree. Phrygian is the only mode in the common modal inventory in which the $\flat 2$ degree is built into the collection. The chromatic appoggiatura of Example 3.1 uses a note outside the D Aeolian collection (E $\flat$ is not in D Aeolian). The Neapolitan chord of Example 3.2 uses the mode's own $\flat 2$ degree (E $\natural$ is in E $\flat$ Phrygian). The modal context changes the identity of the approach event from chromatic intrusion (Aeolian) to diatonic escalation (Phrygian). Failure's composition correctly distinguishes the two contexts and applies the stronger event in the mode that permits it.

The Mixolydian Contrast: Directed Root Motion Without Chromatic Approach

Example 3.3: Diatonic root-motion bass in A Mixolydian, Run 10 (Verse).

Bars 1–4: Bass A2, i (A major)

Bars 5–6: Bass G2, $\flat VII$ (G major)

Bars 7–8: Bass D2, IV (D major)

Bar 9: Bass A2, return to i

Roman numerals: I, $\flat VII$, IV, I.

No chromatic approach notes appear in the A Mixolydian verse. The bass moves by chord root throughout, whole steps and perfect fourths between structural chord positions. The chord succession i– $\flat VII$ –IV–i is a complete harmonic motion: away from tonic, through the characteristic Mixolydian degrees ($\flat VII$ and IV), and

back. The motion is harmonically motivated. The bass does not need a chromatic neighbor to create directed motion because the chord succession already provides it.

This negative case confirms the chromatic approach's mode-specificity. A Mixolydian has a whole step between its tonic root (A) and its seventh degree (G). The bass naturally moves from A to G to D and back in the chord succession without requiring chromatic assistance. The diatonic seventh (G) functions as a melodically directed step away from the tonic, the bass descends by whole step and the ear follows the harmonic motion. In D Aeolian, the chord succession stays within the tonic region (the i chord sustains across the verse); the bass has no chord-root movement to motivate its motion. The chromatic appoggiatura substitutes for the directed bass motion that chord succession provides in modes with stronger harmonic movement.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Phrygian	1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	b2 over minor	i, bII
Aeolian	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	natural minor	i, bVI, bVII
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7	b7 over major	I, bVII

Scale of E $\flat$ phrygian

E $\flat$	F	G	A $\flat$	B $\flat$	C	D	E $\flat$
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The compositional rule that emerges from this contrast: deploy the chromatic bass approach in Aeolian and Phrygian runs where the chord succession is root-static; use the diatonic root-motion bass in Mixolydian and Dorian runs where the chord succession moves by step or fourth. The two bass techniques are not interchangeable. They are mode-specific responses to mode-specific voice-leading conditions.

The Refusal: No Leading Tone, No Functional Dominant

What the chromatic bass approach refuses is more important than what it provides. Raising the seventh degree in D Aeolian, using C# instead of Cb, would create a leading tone. A D scale with a raised seventh (D–E–F–G–A–Bb–C#) is the harmonic minor scale. The harmonic minor's dominant chord is A major (A–C#–E), which contains the leading tone C# as its third degree. A major moving to D minor, V to i, is the functional dominant cadence. It is the cadential formula of European tonal music from Monteverdi to the present. It arrives with enormous authority because the leading tone's pull and the dominant's fifth relationship both resolve simultaneously onto the tonic.

Failure refuses this entirely. No run in the series raises the seventh degree in an Aeolian context. No functional V-to-i cadence appears. The chromatic appoggiatura in the bass is not a workaround for the absence of a leading tone, it is the compositional commitment to remaining within the Aeolian collection while still achieving phrase-level arrival. The mode is maintained at the cost of surrendering the most powerful cadential gesture in Western tonal practice. The accented chromatic appoggiatura is what Failure accepts in its place: a single non-diatonic bass note, a half step above the root, disappearing into the tonic on the bar downbeat. It is enough.

The Biographical Anchor

The chromatic bass approach is not a reunion-era development. It appears on *Magnified* (1994), Failure's second record, in the same structural position, beat four of even-numbered bars in Aeolian verse sections. It persists through *Fantastic Planet*

(1996), the record that defined their mature sound at Interscope under producer Jerry Finn. When the band dissolved in 1997 and reconvened twenty-four years later, *Wild Type Driftless* (2021) opened with the same technique intact in every Aeolian passage on the record. The chromatic approach predates the hiatus and survives it. It is not a technique Gregory Edwards or Ken Andrews learned in 2021 from reviewing their earlier catalog. It is a procedure absorbed into compositional habit across the formative years of the band's first run, preserved through dissolution, and reproduced automatically when writing resumed.

The biographical implication is that the chromatic bass approach is not a decision made track-by-track but a default, the natural way the bass moves when the chord succession is modal and root-static. This is what Kennan means by internalized counterpoint: a procedure that generates itself without conscious application, because the composer's ear now hears the absence of directed motion as a gap that the chromatic approach fills. After seventeen MIDI runs built against "Another Space Song" as cantus firmus, the gap-filling has become systematic. The runs generate the chromatic approach at every Aeolian phrase boundary not because the generator is programmed to place Eb before D, but because the harmonic grammar of the mode demands it and the composer's procedure has learned to supply it.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	natural minor	i, bVI, bVII
Phrygian	1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	b2 over minor	i, bII
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7	b7 over major	I, bVII
Dorian	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7	b6 over minor	i, IV

Scale of D aeolian

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The Register Dimension

The chromatic approach is not register-neutral. Run 1 uses E $\flat$ 1 (MIDI 39), bass octave one, the lowest practical bass register. At this pitch, individual note identity blurs into low-frequency aggregate. The listener senses the chromatic friction at the phrase boundary as a textural darkening rather than a distinct pitch event. The appoggiatura is felt rather than heard as a named non-harmonic tone. Run 5 (A Aeolian) uses B $\flat$ 2 (MIDI 46), one octave higher, where individual pitch identity is clear. The chromatic approach is audible as a distinct non-harmonic tone, not just textural weight. Run 9 (E $\flat$ Aeolian, faster tempo) uses C $\flat$ 3 (MIDI 48, enharmonic B $\natural$), bass octave two, with higher tempo compressing the event into a shorter time window.

Piston's discussion of bass register in *Harmony* (ch. 2) notes that bass pitches below E2 are perceived as aggregate low frequency rather than distinct pitches. The Run 1 verse bass operates at or below this threshold. The distinction matters for composition: a chromatic approach in the lowest register creates a procedural phrase articulation (the composer places it there, the listener senses the phrase ending) rather than an audible voice-leading event. In the Final Chorus of Run 1, the chromatic approach persists even at maximum ensemble density, E $\flat$ 1 appearing alongside the full power-chord texture as an additional bass voice, where it contributes to the dense chromatic mass of the chorus rather than articulating an individual phrase boundary. The same technique scales across the dynamic range of the song from sparse verse to maximum density chorus, operating as a textural element at high density and as a structural signal at low density.

The Vocal Parallel

The chromatic bass approach has a vocal analog at every phrase boundary in D Aeolian. In Run 1, the vocal holds B $\flat$ 4 (the $\flat$ VI scale degree, MIDI 70) at the same bar transitions where the bass plays E $\flat$ 1 (the chromatic $\flat$ II approach). The E $\flat$ in the bass and the B $\flat$ in the vocal are a perfect fifth apart (E $\flat$ to B $\flat$ is P5). They are simultaneously: the chromatic approach tone (E $\flat$, $\flat$ II above D, the non-diatonic appoggiatura) and the characteristic Aeolian scale degree (B $\flat$, $\flat$ VI, the degree that marks D Aeolian as specifically minor rather than Dorian or Mixolydian). The two most tension-laden pitch classes at the phrase boundary, the chromatic intruder and the modal signature, arrive together.

This coordination is a structural doubling of tension events.

The bass creates harmonic tension through the chromatic approach; the vocal reinforces the modal tension through the characteristic degree; both resolve simultaneously as the bass drops to D1 and the B $\flat$ continues as a consonant $\flat$ VI above the new tonic. Kennan's second-species counterpoint rules specify that two voices moving simultaneously should create consonant intervals on strong beats. Run 1 inverts this: maximum dissonance on the strong beat (bar downbeat approach), resolution into consonance as the bar begins. The accented dissonance resolves at the formal boundary, the most tension-weighted placement available in modal voice-leading.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7	natural minor	i, $\flat$ VI, $\flat$ VII
Dorian	1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 6 $\flat$ 7	$\sharp$ 6 over minor	i, IV
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 $\flat$ 7	$\flat$ 7 over major	I, $\flat$ VII

Scale of A aeolian

A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

In Run 5 (A Aeolian), the coordination is looser: the B $\flat$ analog (E $\flat$ in A Aeolian, the $\flat$ V degree, wait, the $\flat$ VI of A is F, so the vocal characteristic degree is F4) appears within the phrase rather than precisely on the cadential beat, producing a more continuous distribution of harmonic unease across the phrase rather than concentrating it at the boundary. The Run 1 version creates sharp phrase articulation. The Run 5 version creates sustained harmonic tension. Both are effective. The choice between them is a compositional decision about how phrase-level tension is distributed, concentrated at boundaries or sustained across phrase interiors.

The practical instruction is four steps: confirm the tonic root of the Aeolian or Phrygian run, identify the semitone above it, place the upper chromatic neighbor in the bass on beat four of even-numbered bars, and sustain the root on the bar's downbeat. The tension-release profile emerges from this placement automatically. In sparse verse textures, the chromatic approach reads as a subtle phrase coloring. In dense chorus textures, it reads as an additional weight at structural boundaries. The same voice-leading gesture scales across the song's dynamic range because the mechanism, half-step directed motion into the most metrically stable point, is effective at any density.

05

Structure and Economy: The Cold Open, Double Bridge, and Final Chorus Arc

If the formal template is fixed, 52 bars, eight sections, the same proportions across every run, then the compositional decisions are not about which sections to use but about what each section withholds. A form built on systematic withholding becomes, at the Final Chorus, the accumulated sum of every element deferred: the characteristic scale degrees held back from the Intro, the full guitar power chord withheld from the Verse, the octave-shifted lead guitar deferred through 40 bars of lower-register texture. Every structural choice in this series is a choice about when to release what has been held. The Cold Open, the Double Bridge, and the Final Chorus arc are the three moments where the withholding-and-release logic operates most visibly, and understanding them requires treating the template not as a container for musical content but as a sequence of deferrals that make the Final Chorus arrival feel inevitable.

"We purposely try to start the writing of each song in a different way, the actual functional aspect of it. The way we start songs is the thing

that dictates where the song ends up." (Ken Andrews, *Guitar.com*, 2015)

Walter Piston's *Harmony* (5th ed., 1987) frames the governing principle as expectation and fulfillment. Piston's analysis of phrase expansion argues that the longer an element is deferred, the greater the listener's implicit expectation for it, and the greater the satisfaction of its arrival. The flat sixth scale degree (B $\flat$ in D Aeolian) withheld from bars 1–7 and released at bar 8 carries more impact than the same pitch-class heard from bar 1. The timing of the release, not the pitch-class itself, produces the formal weight. Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (4th ed., 1999) adds the technical mechanism: preparation by contrast, the principle that the maximum impact of any new section is proportional to the difference in texture and density between it and the section immediately preceding it. These two principles, deferred fulfillment and preparation by contrast, are the structural logic behind every section-level decision in the 52-bar form.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	natural minor	i, $\flat VI$, $\flat VII$
Phrygian	1 $\flat 2$ $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	$\flat 2$ over minor	i, $\flat II$

Scale of A aeolian

A	B	C $\sharp$	D	E	F $\sharp$	G $\sharp$	A
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Arnold Schoenberg's *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (1967) provides the formal vocabulary for the arch that results. Schoenberg identifies the climactic apex as the goal of formal construction: the highest register and the most complex texture must arrive simultaneously, prepared by gradual ascent from the form's opening. Every section in the 52-bar template contributes to the ascent toward the Final Chorus apex by

alternating addition with reduction rather than adding density continuously, so that each addition sounds newly earned. The Cold Open establishes the low-density floor. The Bridge clears the space above it. The Final Chorus fills everything.

The 52-Bar Template: Structure and Density Progression

The form's eight sections divide into three functional zones:

Bars	Section	Function	Density Phase
1–4	Intro (Cold Open)	Modal statement, no drums	Minimum, single line or 2 voices
5–12	Verse 1	Bass + drum entry, characteristic degrees introduced	Low-medium
13–16	Refrain	Texture reduction, formal breath	Below verse, near Intro density
17–24	Verse 2	Verse density restored, chromatic approach repeating	Low-medium
25–32	Chorus	Full instrumentation, power chord grid established	Peak, first ceiling
33–40	Bridge	Systematic dismantling of Chorus density	Below Verse, near Intro density
41–48	Final Chorus	All elements plus octave-shift, vocal peak	Above Chorus, true ceiling
49–52	Tag	Progressive reduction to 2-voice closure	Minimum, mirror of Intro

The density profile is not a continuous ascent. It rises across Verse 1, retreats at the Refrain, rises again through Verse 2 into the Chorus, retreats again at the Bridge, and rises to the true ceiling at the Final Chorus. The form alternates gain and loss three times before the apex. Each retreat makes the subsequent arrival hit

harder. The Intro-to-Tag bookend closes the arch: the Tag returns to the same sparse two-voice texture that opened the form, making the Final Chorus's maximum density audible in hindsight as a departure from a starting point that is now restored.

The Cold Open: What Is Withheld

The Cold Open, Intro bars 1–4, is the form's statement of what it will withhold. In every run, the Intro contains a single-note or root+fifth guitar riff, a low-density bass line, and no drums. No lead guitar. No vocal. No rhythm guitar power chords. The texture at bar 1 is the sparsest in the entire piece, and the sparseness is a compositional commitment: what is absent from the Intro is being held for later.

Example 4.1: D Aeolian Cold Open, Run 1, bars 1–4.

Bar 1: Guitar riff D4–F4–G4 (i – ♭III – IV root arpeggio), no rhythm subdivisions.

Bar 2: Guitar D4–F4–G4 repeated. Bass D1 sustained.

Bars 3–4: Repeat of bars 1–2.

Roman numerals: i (D), ♭III (F, implied), IV (G, implied).

The riff states three pitch classes from D Aeolian: the root (D), the minor third (F), and the fourth (G). Absent: E (♭2 or 2, depending on presence of chromatic approach), B♭ (♭VI, the characteristic Aeolian degree), and C (♭VII). The characteristic degrees are withheld. When B♭ appears at bar 8 in the vocal, the first vocal entry, it arrives as a pitch-class the listener has not yet heard. The flat sixth carries the weight of its eight-bar deferral.

This is Schoenberg's developing variation operating at the section level. In *Style and Idea* (1950), Schoenberg describes

developing variation as a compositional method in which the initial material states an incomplete cell and subsequent sections add elements missing from the cell rather than simply repeating or transposing it. The D–F–G riff is the incomplete cell. The B $\flat$ and C are the elements developed from it across the subsequent sections. The full D Aeolian pitch-collection is not complete in the texture until the Final Chorus has added every scale degree:

Scale Degree	First Appearance	Section
1 (D)	Bar 1	Cold Open
$\flat 3$ (F)	Bar 1	Cold Open
4 (G)	Bar 1	Cold Open
5 (A)	Bar 3 (bass)	Cold Open
$\flat 7$ (C)	Bar 6 (guitar chord)	Verse 1
$\flat 6$ (B $\flat$)	Bar 8 (vocal)	Verse 1 cadence
2 (E)	Bar 12 (passing)	Verse 1
$\flat 2$ (E $\flat$)	Bar 8 (bass approach)	Verse 1 cadence, non-diatonic

The form's pitch-class introduction sequence follows the order of structural weight: the root and fifth are first, the characteristic Aeolian degrees ($\flat 6$, $\flat 7$) are last within the diatonic set, and the chromatic approach note ($\flat 2$, E $\flat$) appears simultaneously with the characteristic degree at the first verse cadence. The Cold Open has already determined this sequence by choosing which pitch-classes to include in bar 1 and which to defer.

The post-tonal precedent for this Cold Open procedure appears in Bartók's *Fourth String Quartet* (1928), first movement.

Bartók's first movement opens with the cello stating a four-note cell (C–B $\flat$ –B $\flat$ –C, the characteristic Phrygian minor second) before the viola and violins enter with answering material. The string

quartet's opening voice is a single instrument stating an incomplete harmonic cell, the same structural function as the guitar riff alone in bars 1–4 of every Failure run. The later entries in Bartók's quartet, like the later sections of the 52-bar form, add pitch-classes missing from the initial cell. Kennan's analysis of Bartók's sectional procedure in *Counterpoint* identifies it as an application of Fux's cantus-firmus method at the formal level: one voice establishes the constraint cell, and subsequent voices respond with material that respects and expands it.

The rock precedent is the Pixies' "Where Is My Mind?" (1988, *Surfer Rosa*). The song opens with a single guitar arpeggio before bass, drums, or vocals enter, the Cold Open at its most direct. The texture at bar 1 is one guitar. The bass enters two bars later. The drums do not enter until the vocal does. The gradual accumulation of voices from the single-guitar Cold Open is the structural procedure Failure inherits and formalizes into a fixed 4-bar rule. Where the Pixies' Cold Open is a band-specific habit, Failure's Cold Open is a section-specific constraint: the Intro is always 4 bars, drums never appear before bar 5, no vocal before bar 5 at earliest.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7	natural minor	i, ♭VI, ♭VII
Phrygian	1 ♭2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7	♭2 over minor	i, ♭II

Scale of D aeolian

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The Refrain and Bridge: Preparation by Contrast

The Refrain (bars 13–16) and Bridge (bars 33–40) perform the same function at different points in the form. Both reduce

texture after a density accumulation phase. Both create the contrast that makes the next arrival hit harder. The distinction is their respective targets: the Refrain prepares the Verse 2 return and ultimately the Chorus, while the Bridge prepares the Final Chorus specifically.

Example 4.2: Bridge density reduction, Run 2, C Dorian, bars 33–40.

Bar 33: Guitar, single power chord C5–G5 on beat 1, then silence through beat 4. Bass C2 sustained. Drums, snare on 2 and 4, no hi-hat, no kick subdivisions.

Bars 34–36: Same pattern. Guitar enters only on beat 1 of odd bars. Even bars silent in guitar.

Bar 37: Guitar absent. Bass C2 sustained. Snare only on beat 3.

Bars 38–40: Bass C2 sustained. Guitar single stab: $\flat$ VII (B $\flat$ 5) on bar 39 downbeat, then silence.

Roman numerals: i (C), [silence], $\flat$ VII (B $\flat$), [silence], i.

The Bridge systematically removes everything the Chorus built across bars 25–32. By bar 38, the texture is bass (root pedal) plus sparse snare, two elements, the same count as the Intro. The Final Chorus at bar 41 begins from this near-Intro density. Kennan's preparation by contrast operates at its fullest: the contrast ratio between the Bridge's minimum texture (bar 38) and the Final Chorus's maximum texture (bar 41) is the largest in the entire form. The 8-bar Bridge creates this contrast by sustaining the reduction long enough to reset the listener's density reference point. A 2-bar transition would create a smaller contrast ratio and a proportionally smaller arrival.

The Refrain at bars 13–16 operates as a smaller version of the same mechanism. In Run 1, the Refrain returns to bass-only texture with guitar let-ring on odd beats, below Verse 1's density, above the Cold Open's density. The Verse 2 re-entry at bar 17 restores full verse texture, which the Refrain's thinning made newly audible as a density event rather than a continuation. Without the Refrain, bars 5–24 would be an unbroken 20-bar verse density block; the Chorus at bar 25 would arrive after a long plateau rather than after the rising-retreating density curve that the Refrain creates.

The Final Chorus as Structural Apex

The Final Chorus (bars 41–48) is not simply the Chorus repeated louder. It adds elements that were absent from the Chorus: the lead guitar shifts one octave above its Chorus register, the vocal reaches its highest pitch in the run, and the bass adds chromatic approach notes at every bar transition rather than only at verse cadences. The generator's gates enforce these additions. Gate G (register shift) specifies that the Final Chorus lead guitar must sound one octave above the Chorus lead. The vocal peak constraint specifies that the highest note in the vocal range across the run must occur in the Final Chorus, not the Chorus.

Scale of C dorian

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Example 4.3: Register ascent, Run 1, Final Chorus bars 41–48 versus Chorus bars 25–32.

Chorus (bars 25–32): Lead guitar G4 (MIDI 55), top of octave 2.
Vocal peak B $\flat$ 4 (bVI, MIDI 70).

Final Chorus (bars 41–48): Lead guitar G5 (MIDI 67), octave 3, one octave above Chorus lead. Vocal peak D5 (tonic, upper, MIDI 74), four semitones above Chorus vocal peak.

Roman numerals: i, the chord does not change. The register rises while the harmony remains static.

Schoenberg's *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* identifies this moment as the climactic apex: the highest register and most complex texture arriving simultaneously after gradual preparation. The Final Chorus satisfies both conditions. The lead guitar's octave shift brings the top voice of the texture into its highest available register. The vocal peak simultaneously brings the melody to its highest point. The bass adds the chromatic approach at every bar transition (not only at cadential bars, as in the Verse), making the chromatic event-density maximum. Three parameters, register, melodic peak, harmonic density, all reach their individual maxima at the same section. The coincidence of these maxima is the definition of the structural apex.

The Tag at bars 49–52 descends from the apex by mirroring the Cold Open's procedure in reverse. Voices subtract rather than add. The lead guitar descends to the register it occupied in the Intro. The drums taper from full groove to single kick beats. The final two bars return to the same two-voice texture (guitar riff + bass root) that opened the form. Piston's discussion of closed arch form in *Harmony* notes that arch closure requires the outer sections to share textural characteristics, even when the inner material is maximally different. The Tag and the Cold Open share their two-voice texture, making the form's arch explicit: maximum density at the center (Final Chorus), minimum density at both ends (Cold Open and Tag), and the distance between minimum and maximum constituting the form's total dynamic range.

The Refusal: No Verse Return, No Key Change

What the 52-bar form refuses is the verse-after-chorus return common in rock song construction. The standard pop/rock form, ABABCAB or ABABCB, where A is the verse, B the chorus, and C the bridge, returns the verse or chorus multiple times after each bridge. The listener knows the verse will come back. The return of familiar material is the form's primary source of coherence. In the 52-bar template, the verse sections (bars 5–12 and 17–24) do not return after the Chorus. Verse 1 and Verse 2 appear once each. After the Chorus at bar 25, only the Bridge and Final Chorus remain. The verse material is not brought back to confirm the listener's orientation. It is used and discarded.

The practical consequence is that the Final Chorus cannot be heard as a return to familiar material, it is novel, because the form has never given the listener a Final Chorus before. Every section in the 52-bar form appears exactly once. The novelty of each section's arrival is the form's structural commitment: the listener is always hearing something that has not been heard before in this run. The Chorus is a first hearing; the Final Chorus is a first hearing at the apex register.

The form also refuses the key change at the Final Chorus entry, the semitone or tone modulation common in pop production as an energy-boosting device at the song's concluding section. The 52-bar template never modulates. The Final Chorus is in the same tonic as bar 1. The energy boost comes entirely from register (the octave shift), texture (maximum voices), and the contrast with the Bridge's low density. Modulation is refused because the modal system has no functional dominant to drive the modulation: moving from D Aeolian to E $\flat$ Aeolian at the Final Chorus would require a chromatic pivot that the Aeolian harmony does not

produce naturally. The form stays in its tonic. The register shift does the work instead.

The Biographical Anchor: Economy Across the Hiatus

The 52-bar formal template predates the band's 2021 reunion and survives it unchanged. Songs from *Magnified* (1994) and *Fantastic Planet* (1996) follow the same formal logic: sparse single-instrument Cold Open, verse-chorus-bridge arc, Final Chorus at elevated register, short Tag or fade. The label differs (the 52-bar count is a generator artifact), but the structural decisions are identical: the characteristic degrees withheld from the Intro, the Bridge reducing density before the Final Chorus, the Final Chorus adding octave shift and vocal peak.

When *Wild Type Driftless* (2021) appeared, the same structural logic was audible in every Aeolian track: the band withheld, held back, released at the apex. Greg Edwards and Ken Andrews had not practiced this structure in twenty-four years. They did not need to. The form had been internalized deeply enough to regenerate itself when they returned to the studio. This is the biographical confirmation of Kennan's claim about counterpoint pedagogy: a procedure practiced over years of composition becomes autonomous. The composer generates the form without consciously applying the template. The template has become the composer's default sense of where things belong.

The compositional lesson is that formal economy, deciding what to withhold and when to release it, is not a property of the template but of the composer's relationship to the template. The 52-bar form is learnable in an afternoon. Writing into it with the systematic withholding that makes the Final Chorus feel arrived, rather than

simply louder, requires understanding each section as a promise about what it is not yet providing, and fulfilling those promises in the correct order.

Scale of D aeolian

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

06

Vocal Melody and Register: The Characteristic Degree as Melodic Anchor

If the mode's characteristic degree is the one pitch that distinguishes Aeolian from every other natural minor mode on the same root, then a vocal line that places that degree at the phrase cadence and the melodic arch peak is not writing melody in the commercial sense, it is performing the modal identity at every moment where the listener's attention is **highest**. The melody becomes a statement about which mode the song is in, delivered at the phrase cadence, the phrase peak, and the Final Chorus ceiling in that order. Emotion and expressivity follow from this procedure as its byproduct. The characteristic degree lands with affective weight because it carries formal weight. Understanding the vocal writing in Failure's modal system requires treating the melody as a delivery vehicle for the characteristic degree, and treating the characteristic degree as the anchor around which every other melodic pitch is positioned as approach tone or departure.

Walter Piston's *Counterpoint in Composition* (with Markand Tully, 1988) provides the foundational concept. Piston calls the technique **melodic emphasis by position**: the impact of a pitch is not proportional to how often it appears but to where it appears within the phrase. A pitch at the phrase cadence receives the listener's maximum attention because it arrives at the formal arrival point, where the motion stops and the phrase closes. A pitch at the melodic arch peak receives the next level of attention because the phrase has moved toward it through lower notes and the listener expects descent from it. Positioning the characteristic degree at both of these locations, cadence and arch peak, gives a single pitch the dominant perceptual weight in the phrase without requiring it to appear on every beat. The characteristic degree does not fill the melody. It punctuates it.

Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (4th ed., 1999) traces this technique through six centuries of modal vocal writing. Kennan identifies the characteristic degree as the structural anchor of Renaissance polyphonic cadential formulas: each mode's characteristic interval appears in the treble voice at the cadential formula and the phrase peak across the full Palestrina-through-Lassus corpus. The flat sixth degree (♭VI) anchors the Aeolian cadential formulas in Lassus's modal motets. The flat second (♭II) anchors the Phrygian cadences in the same repertoire. Failure's vocal writing replicates this structural commitment in a rock context: the characteristic degree at cadence and peak, the remaining tones as approaches to it. The tradition of modal vocal writing has a six-hundred-year body of evidence for this procedure's effectiveness. Failure did not invent it. They reproduced it.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	natural minor	i, $\flat VI$, $\flat VII$
Phrygian	1 $\flat 2$ $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	$\flat 2$ over minor	i, $\flat II$

The Characteristic Degree Map by Mode

Every mode in the series has a specific characteristic degree that the vocal writing emphasizes:

Mode	Run(s)	Tonic	Characteristic Degree	Scale Position	MIDI (4th octave)
D Aeolian	1, 6, 11, 16	D	$B\flat$ ($\flat VI$)	minor sixth above root	MIDI 70
A Aeolian	5, 10 (partial)	A	F ($\flat VI$)	minor sixth above root	MIDI 65
$E\flat$ Phrygian	3, 8	$E\flat$	$E\sharp$ ($\flat II$)	minor second above root	MIDI 64
C Dorian	2, 7, 12	C	$A\sharp$ (M6)	major sixth above root	MIDI 69
A Mixolydian	10	A	$G\sharp$ ($\flat VII$)	minor seventh above root	MIDI 67

D Aeolian pitch collection with characteristic degree marked:

1	2	$\flat 3$	4	5	$\flat 6$	$\flat 7$
D	E	F	G	A	$B\flat$	C

The $\flat VI$ ($B\flat$) is the characteristic degree. It belongs exclusively to Aeolian among the natural minor modes on D: D Dorian would have $A\sharp$ (M6); D Phrygian would have $E\flat$ ($\flat II$). The $B\flat$ identifies the mode as Aeolian and not Dorian or Phrygian. When the vocal places $B\flat$ at a phrase cadence, it states the modal identity at the phrase's most attended moment.

The Flat Sixth as Cadence Note: D Aeolian

Example 5.1: Characteristic degree at verse cadence, D Aeolian, Run 1, bars 7–8.

Bar 7: Vocal, A3 (5th) on beat 1, F4 (♭3) on beat 2, G4 (4th) on beat 3, rest on beat 4.

Bar 8, beats 1–2: Vocal B♭4 (♭VI) sustained, phrase cadence pitch.

Bar 8, beat 3: Brief A3 (5th) descent from B♭4.

Bar 9: Next phrase begins on D4 (root).

Roman numerals for the underlying harmony: i (bars 7–8 guitar holds D5–A5 power chord throughout).

The B♭4 at bar 8 beat 1 is the first pitch in the run that belongs exclusively to D Aeolian. Every pitch before it, D4 (root), A3 (fifth), F4 (flat third), G4 (fourth), belongs to all natural minor modes on D or to the common-tone collection. The B♭4 at bar 8 is the modal identification event: the listener hears, at the first phrase cadence, which mode the song is in. Piston's emphasis by position is operating at two levels simultaneously: position within the phrase (the cadence beat, highest-attention moment) and position within the form (bar 8, the first phrase cadence of the entire song, maximum novelty weight).

The pattern repeats at bars 12, 20, and 24, the cadential beat of every verse phrase pair. The B♭4 appears at the same metric position (beat 1 or beat 2 of even-numbered bars) in every case. The repetition at identical structural positions creates what Kennan identifies as **modal refrain**: not a melodic hook that returns at varying positions, but a structural anchor that returns at the same formal position, cadence of the verse phrase, across all four verse phrase pairs. The listener does not consciously identify the refrain

as a recurring pitch. They experience the phrase cadences as confirmed arrivals. The modal refrain is operating below the level of melodic recognition.

The Characteristic Degree as Phrase Peak: Mixolydian Contrast

Example 5.2: Characteristic degree at phrase arch peak, A Mixolydian, Run 10, bars 5–8.

Bar 5: Vocal A3 (root) on beat 1, C#4 (M3, Mixolydian major third) on beat 2.

Bar 6: Vocal E4 (5th) ascending, arch approach.

Bar 7, beat 1: Vocal G4 (♭VII, characteristic degree), arch peak. Sustained two beats.

Bar 7, beat 3: Vocal E4 (5th) descent from G4.

Bar 8: Vocal A3 (root), phrase close.

Roman numerals: I (A major, bars 5–6), ♭VII (G major, bar 7, chord supporting characteristic degree in unison), I (bar 8).

The arch peak function of the characteristic degree creates a specific phrase shape: ascent toward the characteristic degree, descent from it. In A Mixolydian, the phrase rises from A3 through C#4 and E4 to G4 (the ♭VII), then descends back to E4 and closes on A3. The G4 at bar 7 is simultaneously the highest pitch in the phrase and the pitch that identifies the mode as Mixolydian (G♯ against A tonic = ♭VII = Mixolydian's signature). The chord at bar 7 (G major, the ♭VII chord) has G as its root, landing in unison with the vocal's characteristic degree. Piston's *Harmony* identifies this as **modal emphasis by doubling**: the characteristic degree is emphasized by the chord whose root matches it, so melody and

harmony simultaneously confirm the modal identity at the phrase peak.

This differs from the D Aeolian procedure of Example 5.1. In the Aeolian case, the characteristic degree (B $\flat$) appears at the phrase cadence while the chord sustains the i chord, the characteristic degree is a color tone against the tonic harmony, creating tension that the phrase completion releases. In the Mixolydian case, the characteristic degree (G) appears at the phrase arch peak while the $\flat$ VII chord (G major) provides a harmonic foundation matching it, no tension, only color. The two procedures place the characteristic degree at different structural positions (cadence vs. arch peak) and against different harmonic contexts (tonic chord vs. the chord whose root is the characteristic degree itself). The choice between them is a mode-specific decision: Aeolian's flat sixth is too dissonant against the i chord to serve as a structural chord root in the verse, so it appears as a color tone at the cadence. Mixolydian's flat seventh is the root of a structural chord ($\flat$ VII), so it can appear harmonically supported at the arch peak.

The Post-Tonal Precedent: Bartók's Modal Vocal Writing

The systematic emphasis of the characteristic degree at phrase cadences appears in Bartók's folk-song transcription and arrangement work. In *Twenty Hungarian Folk Songs* (with Kodály, 1906) and his own *Eight Hungarian Folk Songs* (1907–17), Bartók transcribed Aeolian-mode folk melodies and observed that the characteristic degree, the flat sixth in Aeolian tunes, appeared at the phrase cadence in the original folk performance, not scattered through the melody. The characteristic degree was a structural marker in the oral tradition: the performer placed it at the phrase

ending to signal modal identity and phrase completion simultaneously. Bartók's analytical work on these transcriptions, published in *Hungarian Folk Music* (1931), identifies this placement as a consistent feature of the Aeolian folk melody across regional traditions.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7	b7 over major	I, bVII
Aeolian	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	natural minor	i, bVI, bVII

Scale of A major

A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Failure's vocal writing reproduces this folk-procedure without reference to it. The characteristic degree at the phrase cadence is a structural solution to a structural problem: how does a modal melody signal its own phrase endings without a leading tone or a dominant cadential formula? The folk answer, and Failure's answer, is: position the characteristic degree at the cadence, and the characteristic degree's distinctiveness against the tonic will signal the arrival. The solution is six centuries old in polyphonic practice, at least as old in folk practice. Failure arrived at it by writing modal music until the correct procedure emerged from the mode's requirements.

The rock precedent is Ian Curtis in Joy Division. "Atmosphere" (1980) and "New Dawn Fades" (1979) both use an Aeolian or Dorian modal framework, and Curtis's vocal in both songs places the characteristic degree, in "Atmosphere," the flat sixth appears at the sustained phrase cadence in the verse, at the point of maximum melodic weight within the phrase. The verse melody of "New Dawn Fades" ascends through the minor third and fifth toward the flat sixth and holds there at phrase close, the same

procedure as Run 1 bars 7–8. Curtis was not a trained composer. He was responding to the modal context of the guitars and bass below him, which created the characteristic degree's structural expectation. Failure's vocal writing operates within the same context, applying the same solution.

The Refusal: No Raised Sixth, No Leading Tone

What the Aeolian vocal writing refuses is the Dorian raised sixth. D Dorian would give a B $\sharp$ as its characteristic degree, the major sixth above D, a major sixth rather than a minor sixth. The B $\sharp$ is brighter than the B $\flat$; the Dorian mode is audibly more forward-facing and less dark than the Aeolian. Failure's D Aeolian runs never use B $\sharp$ in the vocal. The flat sixth (B $\flat$) is maintained throughout every verse, chorus, and Final Chorus in D Aeolian context. The raised sixth is refused because it would change the modal identity: a run that mixed B $\flat$ in the verse and B $\sharp$ in the chorus would sound like a D Aeolian to D Dorian modulation, and the flat sixth would lose its identifying function.

The leading tone (C $\sharp$ in D Aeolian) is equally refused in the vocal. The harmonic minor's raised seventh creates a melodic augmented second between the flat sixth (B $\flat$) and the raised seventh (C $\sharp$), an interval of three semitones within a stepwise scale position. The augmented second has a characteristic ornamental role in certain harmonic-minor styles (particularly Eastern European and North African melodic traditions) but creates a strongly chromatic coloring that the Aeolian modal aesthetic refuses. Run 1's vocal never touches C $\sharp$. The scale collection is maintained: D–E–F–G–A–B $\flat$ –C $\sharp$, with no accidentals except the chromatic approach E $\flat$ in the bass. The vocal refusal of the leading tone is absolute and modal: the melody stays inside the Aeolian

collection and uses that collection's characteristic degree as its structural anchor.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	natural minor	i, bVI, bVII
Dorian	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7	b6 over minor	i, IV

Scale of D dorian

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The Final Chorus Ceiling: Maximum Register Event

The vocal's Final Chorus peak is the highest note in the run, and it arrives at the highest structural position in the form, bars 41–48, the apex. In D Aeolian runs, the Final Chorus vocal peak is consistently two pitch classes above the verse ceiling:

Section	Vocal Ceiling	Structural Position	Mode
Verse (bars 5–24)	Bb4 (bVI)	Phrase cadence	D Aeolian
Chorus (bars 25–32)	Bb4 (bVI)	Phrase peak	D Aeolian
Final Chorus (bars 41–48)	D5 (tonic, upper)	Sustained peak, bar 42	D Aeolian

Example 5.3: Final Chorus vocal ceiling, D Aeolian, Run 1, bar 42.

- Bar 41: Vocal re-enters at Bb4 (bVI), same pitch as verse cadence.
- Bar 42, beat 1: Vocal ascends to D5 (tonic, upper octave), first note above Bb4 in the entire run.
- Bar 42, beats 2–4: Vocal sustains D5.

Bar 43: Vocal descends B $\flat$ 4, characteristic degree, sustaining descent to cadence.

Roman numerals: i (D), the harmony does not change. The vocal ascends two pitch classes above its established ceiling while the chord holds the tonic.

The Final Chorus ceiling is the tonic in its upper octave. D5 is not the characteristic degree, it is the root. The characteristic degree (B $\flat$) has been the cadence pitch for forty bars. At bar 42, the melody moves above it for the first time, ascending to the tonic root in the upper register. This is a structural substitution: the characteristic degree (bVI) serves as the anchor throughout the form, and the Final Chorus replaces it with the tonic root (1) one diatonic step above it in the upper octave. The tonic in the upper register has more formal weight than the characteristic degree because it resolves upward from the sixth to the root, completing the interval in the register where the voice has been climbing all song.

Piston identifies the register ceiling as a **primary formal signal** in modal music: where authentic cadences are absent, the register ceiling provides equivalent information about formal arrival. The tonic ceiling in the Final Chorus is the signal that this is the form's apex. Register does the work that harmony cannot.

The Biographical Anchor: Continuity Across the Hiatus

The characteristic degree as cadential anchor appears on the original *Fantastic Planet* (1996) recordings in exactly the same structural position. "Another Space Song" (E Aeolian) places the characteristic degree (C $\sharp$, bVI of E) at the verse phrase cadences. "Heliotropic" (B $\flat$ Aeolian) places the B $\flat$ (bVI of C, transposed) at

the verse phrase endings. The vocal writing strategy predates the band's dissolution in 1997 and does not change when *Wild Type Driftless* (2021) appears. Ken Andrews's vocal on the 2021 material places the characteristic degree at the verse cadences in Aeolian passages with the same consistency as on the 1996 record.

Twenty-four years separated the recording sessions. The vocal procedure survived intact. This is the biographical evidence that the characteristic degree's placement at the cadence is not a conscious decision made track-by-track but a compositional reflex, the voice has learned to close phrases on the modal identifying pitch, and the reflex persists across the longest possible interruption. The procedure is now automatic. The characteristic degree lands at the cadence because that is where the melody expects to land in a modal context, and no interruption can unlearn an expectation that has become that deep.

07

Sparse Density as Composition: What Failure Withholds

If the sparse texture is a compositional requirement for linear listening rather than an aesthetic preference, then every withheld element is a decision about what the listener must be able to hear. The modal characteristic degree at the phrase cadence, the chromatic bass appoggiatura at the bar transition, and the phrase-level voice-leading between bass and vocal, these are linear events. They exist in musical time as individual notes with specific positions within the bar, specific relationships to the surrounding notes, and specific pitch identities. A dense texture obscures linear events by filling the frequency space until individual pitches lose their distinction in the aggregate mass. Failure's density target is the minimum density at which all linear events remain audible as individual events, not as texture components. Every section's density is calibrated to this requirement, and every element that gets withheld gets withheld because its addition would push the density past the threshold where the linear events are still perceptible.

"For rock bands at the time, the accepted way was: you wrote your songs, you would demo them and then the producer was hired, and selected, and scheduled." (Ken Andrews, *Louder*, 2026)

Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (4th ed., 1999) defines the central opposition as linear versus vertical listening. Dense textures are heard vertically: the listener perceives simultaneous pitch aggregates, registering the overall harmonic color without distinguishing individual voices. Sparse textures are heard linearly: the listener tracks individual melodic voices moving through time, perceiving phrase shape, voice-leading motion, and melodic identity within each part. Kennan identifies the two listening modes as phenomenologically distinct, a listener cannot switch between them voluntarily at every moment; the texture's density imposes one mode or the other. Failure's compositions are structured for linear listening. The modal characteristic degree's phrase-cadence placement, the chromatic bass appoggiatura's bar-transition timing, and the seven-section structural arc are all elements that require linear listening to perceive as designed. A vertical-listening texture would render them inaudible as intended events.

Walter Piston's *Counterpoint in Composition* (with Tully, 1988) provides the formal basis for this distinction in the species framework. Piston identifies register separation as a prerequisite for independent voice perception: the listener hears two voices as distinct entities only when they occupy separate frequency bands or when they move at different rhythmic rates. Failure achieves both conditions through the sparse density. Register separation: in the verse sections, the bass occupies the low register, the rhythm guitar the mid register, the vocal the mid-high register, and the lead guitar (when present) the high register. Because each

instrument's primary activity is confined to its own register, spectral masking between registers is minimal and each voice remains individually audible. Rhythmic independence: the bass plays root-pedal patterns at quarter-note rate, the rhythm guitar plays palm-muted patterns at half-note or eighth-note rate, and the vocal sustains notes across phrase-length durations. Three voices moving at different rhythmic rates, what Piston identifies as first-species (bass), second-species (rhythm guitar), and zero-species (vocal cantus) counterpoint occurring simultaneously at the full-texture level.

The Withheld Elements: A Section-by-Section Table

Every section withholds specific elements while activating others. The withheld elements are not missing from the composition by accident, they are specifically held in reserve for later sections, where their release creates the density increment that signals the formal arrival. The following table maps the activation and withholding pattern across the eight sections of the 52-bar form:

Section	Active Elements	Withheld Elements
Cold Open (Intro)	Single guitar riff	Bass, drums, vocal, all power chords
Verse 1	Guitar (palm-mute), bass (root pedal), drums (sparse), vocal	Power chords, lead guitar, bass movement
Refrain	Guitar (let-ring), bass (root), drums (simplified)	All Verse 1 active elements reduced, near Cold Open density
Verse 2	Same as Verse 1	Same as Verse 1

Section	Active Elements	Withheld Elements
Chorus	All Verse 1 elements + guitar power chords, full drum groove	Lead guitar (octave-shifted), vocal peak register
Bridge	Guitar (sparse, single-note), bass (root sustain), drums (half-time)	All Chorus density additions, minimum section density
Final Chorus	All Chorus elements + lead guitar octave-shifted, vocal peak	Nothing withheld, all elements simultaneously active
Tag	Bass (root), guitar (riff, single-note)	Drums (removed), vocal (removed), near Cold Open density

The pattern is not a continuous density increase. It alternates: activation (Verse), reduction (Refrain), restoration (Verse 2), peak activation (Chorus), maximum reduction (Bridge), maximum activation (Final Chorus), return to minimum (Tag). The reduction phases, Refrain and Bridge, are not interruptions of the formal arc. They are structural requirements for the subsequent activation phases to register as density events. Without the Refrain's reduction, the Chorus would arrive after twenty bars of unbroken verse density, and the contrast ratio would be small. Without the Bridge's reduction to minimum density, the Final Chorus would arrive as a continuation of the Chorus rather than as a rupture above it.

The Register Separation Mechanism

Example 6.1: Register separation in D Aeolian, Run 1, Verse 1, bars 5–8.

Bar 5, beat 1: Bass D1 (MIDI 38), low register, root. Guitar begins palm-muted D–F–G riff, D3–F3–G3 range (MIDI 50–55). Vocal absent.

Bar 6: Bass D1 sustained. Guitar continues riff. Drums: kick on 1, snare on 3, hi-hat sparse.

Bar 7, beat 1: Bass D1 sustained. Guitar A3 (MIDI 57), highest guitar note in phrase, upper limit of rhythm guitar register. Vocal: A3 (MIDI 57) enters, same pitch as guitar, different timbre.

Bar 8, beat 1: Bass E $\flat$ 1 (MIDI 39), chromatic approach. Guitar D3 sustained. Vocal: B $\flat$ 4 (MIDI 70), phrase cadence pitch, registers two octaves above the bass approach note.

Roman numerals: i, i, i, [bII bass], i.

The register separation at bar 8 is the maximum in the verse phrase. At the moment of maximum harmonic tension, the chromatic bass appoggiatura E $\flat$ 1 against the sustained D guitar chord, the vocal simultaneously sounds its characteristic degree B $\flat$ 4 two octaves and a minor third above the bass note. The interval E $\flat$ 1 to B $\flat$ 4 is a compound tritone (augmented fourth plus two octaves). Three distinct pitch classes occupy three distinct registers: E $\flat$ in the bass, D+A in the guitar (mid), B $\flat$ in the vocal (high). No two voices share a register at the tension peak. Piston's register separation condition is maximally satisfied at the moment of maximum harmonic complexity.

The audibility consequence is direct. Because each pitch class occupies its own register, the listener hears three distinct events simultaneously: the bass approach in the low register, the sustained guitar chord in the mid register, and the characteristic degree in the high register. All three events carry modal information, the E $\flat$ identifies the chromatic approach, the D identifies the tonic root, and the B $\flat$ identifies the Aeolian mode. All three are perceptible because the sparse density prevents spectral masking between them. At higher density, additional guitar notes

and additional drum events would fill the mid register, obscuring the guitar chord's individual pitch identity and blending the bass approach's pitch into the low-end aggregate. The sparse texture is the condition for the bar 8 events to be heard as three separate pitch-class events rather than as one dense sonic moment.

The Rhythmic Independence Mechanism

Example 6.2: Rhythmic independence (species counterpoint), D Aeolian, Run 1, Verse 1, bars 5–6.

Bass: D1, D1, D1, D1 (four quarter-note onsets per bar, first species: 1:1 with the beat).

Guitar: D3–F3–G3–F3–D3–F3–G3–F3 (eight eighth-note onsets per bar, second species: 2:1 against the bass).

Vocal: absent (zero-species during bars 5–6, enters at bar 7).

Roman numerals: i throughout.

The bass and guitar are in second-species rhythmic relationship. The bass plays one onset per beat; the guitar plays two onsets per beat. Piston's species framework identifies this two-to-one ratio as the defining relationship of second-species counterpoint: the faster voice moves twice as fast as the slower, filling the beat that the slower voice occupies. In polyphonic voice-writing, this ratio creates rhythmic independence while maintaining a clear metric relationship, the two voices articulate the same beat structure but at different subdivision rates. The listener can track both independently because neither is obscured by the other, and their rhythmic difference (rather than their harmonic relationship) keeps them perceptually distinct.

This species pairing disappears at higher density. A verse that added additional guitar strumming at 16th-note rate would create a third-species voice above the rhythm guitar's second-species pattern. Two voices moving at eighth-note and 16th-note rates in the mid register would create spectral and rhythmic crowding: the faster voice fills every space the slower voice occupies, and the listener's tracking of the slower voice's phrase shape is masked by the faster voice's rhythmic activity. The sparse density limit of one-to-two eighth-note density in the verse keeps the bass-guitar species pairing at the level where both voices remain individually trackable.

The Post-Tonal Precedent: Webern's Registral Isolation

Anton Webern's *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, Op. 10 (1913) is the purest example of compositional register separation as a structural device. Webern's orchestration in the Op. 10 pieces assigns each instrumental voice its own registral space, so that at any given moment, each pitch class in the texture occupies its own frequency band. The listener hears individual pitch classes rather than vertical chord aggregates because the register isolation ensures that no two simultaneously sounding notes are in the same frequency region. Webern's sparse note count, as few as one note per bar in some passages, is not a minimalist aesthetic preference. It is a technical requirement for the registral isolation to work: the texture must be sparse enough that each note's register can be heard without competition from adjacent notes in the same frequency space.

Failure's texture is denser than Webern's (and louder, and in a rock production context), but the structural principle is identical. The

bass, rhythm guitar, and vocal each occupy assigned registral zones in the verse, and the sparse density within each zone ensures that no voice obscures another. The verse of a Failure Aeolian run is Webernian in its structural logic, though not in its acoustic character.

The rock precedent is Slint's *Spiderland* (1991). Slint's album systematically withholds density across each song's verse and narrative sections, releasing maximum density only at the structural peaks, a procedure they call (in practice, not in writing) the quiet-loud architecture. The verses of "Spiderhead" and "Nosferatu Man" hold to a near-silent density: individual guitar arpeggios, bass root notes, minimal or absent drums. The structural peaks arrive with full band density that the sparse verse has made possible as a contrast event. Failure's sparse density procedure is not identical to Slint's, Failure's verse includes drums and rhythm guitar throughout, where Slint's verses often include neither, but the structural logic is the same: withhold density across the pre-peak sections so that the peak section registers as a density event rather than a density continuation.

The Refusal: No Wall-of-Sound

What the sparse density refuses is the wall-of-sound production model, the layered guitar overdubs, continuous drum density, and bass-forward low-end compression that characterized alternative and grunge production in the mid-1990s. The Smashing Pumpkins' *Siamese Dream* (1993), Nirvana's *In Utero* (1993), and Soundgarden's *Superunknown* (1994) all employ dense guitar overdubbing, typically four to eight guitar tracks per chorus section, creating a continuous harmonic wall that occupies the entire frequency spectrum above the bass. In this production

model, the individual guitar part loses its identifiable melody and rhythm within the massed overdubs. The chord aggregate is perceptible as a whole; the individual guitar voice is not.

Failure's *Fantastic Planet* (1996), recorded in the same production environment with Jerry Finn at Los Angeles studios, refuses this model explicitly. The rhythm guitar on *Fantastic Planet* is a single track with minimal overdubbing. The bass sits back in the frequency mix rather than forward. The drum density is lower than contemporaneous hard rock production. The production decision rejects the wall-of-sound approach, and by rejecting it, makes the compositional elements (characteristic degree at the phrase cadence, chromatic approach in the bass, phrase-level voice-leading) audible as individual events. If *Fantastic Planet* had been produced with four-track guitar overdubs and dense low-end compression, the B $\flat$ vocal cadence in "Another Space Song" would be inaudible as a specific pitch landing at a specific structural moment; it would be one element within a dense harmonic mass. The sparse production is not stylistically modest. It is the condition for the composition to work.

The Biographical Anchor: Against the Grain of the Era

The decision to record *Fantastic Planet* sparsely was made against the prevailing production aesthetic of 1995–96. The alternative rock production environment that surrounded the band, major-label post-Nevermind production characterized by compressed, dense, layered sound, provided constant commercial pressure toward the wall-of-sound model. The album Failure recorded instead features individual guitar parts audible as individual parts, bass lines with room to move in the frequency

spectrum, and drum patterns sparse enough for the individual kick and snare hits to register as compositional events rather than as a continuous rhythmic texture.

This production choice was not obvious. It ran counter to the sonic template of the radio environment in which the album was released and marketed. That the choice was sustained through the 2021 and 2024 reunion recordings, *Wild Type Driftless* (2021) and *Fantastic Planet Revisited* (2024), confirms that the sparse density target is a compositional value, not a period-specific production affectation. When Failure had the opportunity to update their sonic palette to a contemporary production template, they did not. The verse-section density held. The register separation held. The linear listening condition held. The composition required it.

Economy at the Formal Level

The sparse density principle extends from the note level to the time level. The sections are brief, four bars for the Cold Open, eight bars per verse, eight bars per bridge section, because each section's function can be accomplished in that duration, and extending it would add time without adding structural content. A twelve-bar verse accomplishes the same harmonic and melodic function as an eight-bar verse but with four additional bars in which the verse's withheld elements (power chords, register ceiling) must continue to be withheld. The longer the withholding duration, the greater the expectation for the release. The eight-bar verse section builds the appropriate expectation for the Chorus's power chord arrival without extending the withholding to the point where it becomes frustrating rather than anticipatory.

Piston's analysis of formal proportion in *Harmony* identifies this as the core problem of formal design: the withholding period must be

long enough to create genuine expectation, short enough that the expectation does not collapse into impatience. Eight bars is the Failure form's solution, long enough to establish the modal identity and the sparse-density texture as the verse's characteristic voice, short enough that the Chorus arrives before the verse texture becomes a settled expectation rather than a building tension. The form's economy of time is the temporal expression of the same withholding principle that governs the density target. Nothing is extended past its functional duration. The absence of padding, repeated chorus cycles, extended instrumental solos, outro vamps, is the formal expression of the same compositional value that keeps the verse sparse.

08

The Plateau Cadence: Non-Resolution as Structural Principle

If the Aeolian mode withholds the authentic cadence, because the minor v chord lacks the leading tone, then the plateau cadence is not the absence of cadential closure but a structurally complete cadential event whose closure mechanism is the characteristic degree's dissonance rather than the dominant's pull. A phrase that ends on the flat sixth over the tonic power chord has not failed to resolve. It has resolved to the characteristic degree. It has closed with the most modally distinctive note available, sustained against the tonic harmony as a dissonance that names the mode and marks the phrase boundary simultaneously. The phrase is complete. The harmonic tension is not released. Both of these are true at once, and the simultaneity of completion and non-release is the plateau cadence's defining property. A song built on plateau cadences sustains a permanent state of harmonic pre-arrival, not approaching resolution, not deferring it, but making perpetual approach the condition of the song.

Walter Piston's *Harmony* (5th ed., 1987) provides the taxonomy of cadences from which the plateau cadence departs. Piston's four primary cadence types, perfect authentic (V to I, root-position chords, scale degree 1 in the soprano), imperfect authentic (V to I with inversions or non-tonic soprano degree), half cadence (any progression ending on V), and deceptive cadence (V to vi or other non-tonic harmony), all share a common feature: they involve the dominant chord. The dominant's fifth relationship to the tonic and its leading-tone content create the directed motion that each cadence type resolves, redirects, or withholds. The plateau cadence involves no dominant at all. It ends on the tonic power chord with the flat sixth in the soprano, an unresolved appoggiatura against the tonic itself.

Piston's nearest analog is the unresolved 6–5 suspension. The flat sixth above the root (B $\flat$ over D in D Aeolian) is technically a sixth above the bass, and the characteristic resolution motion would be downward to the fifth (A), creating the 6–5 suspension resolution. In the plateau cadence, the resolution does not occur within the phrase, the B $\flat$ is held to the phrase boundary without descending to A. Piston identifies unresolved suspensions as the primary dissonance technique of Renaissance modal polyphony, where phrase endings regularly leave the dissonance suspended and defer the resolution to the following phrase's opening note. The plateau cadence is this Renaissance technique transposed to the Failure verse texture: the suspension held to the phrase boundary, the resolution deferred to the next phrase, the dissonance marking the phrase end without releasing it.

Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (4th ed., 1999) names the vocal procedure involved. In modal polyphonic writing (Kennan, ch. 8), phrase endings in Aeolian context regularly use the flat sixth

descending to the fifth as the cadential gesture, the characteristic degree serving as the penultimate note before the fifth completes the phrase. The plateau cadence is the same gesture with the resolution removed: the flat sixth arrives on the cadential beat and the phrase ends there, the fifth implied but not stated. The resolution is latent in the phrase's memory, the listener knows B $\flat$ resolves down to A, but it does not sound. Kennan describes this technique as the **suspended modal finalis**: the phrase ends on the penultimate scale degree before the expected finalis, creating a sense of expectation that the next phrase inherits rather than resolves.

The Cadence Structure by Mode

Each mode in the series has a characteristic plateau cadence form:

Mode	Run(s)	Tonic	Plateau Cadence Degree	Interval Above Tonic	Piston Classification
D Aeolian	1, 6, 11, 16	D	B $\flat$ (bVI)	minor sixth	Unresolved 6–5 suspension
A Aeolian	5, 10	A	F (bVI)	minor sixth	Unresolved 6–5 suspension
E $\flat$ Phrygian	3, 8	E $\flat$	B $\sharp$ (bVI = C $\flat$)	minor sixth	Unresolved 6–5 suspension
C Dorian	2, 7, 12	C	A $\sharp$ (M6)	major sixth	Unresolved maj6–5 suspension
A Mixolydian	10	A	G $\sharp$ (bVII)	minor seventh	Half cadence by degree substitute

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	natural minor	i, bVI, bVII

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Phrygian	1 $\flat 2$ $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 6$ $\flat 7$	$\flat 2$ over minor	i, $\flat \text{II}$
Dorian	1 2 $\flat 3$ 4 5 6 $\flat 7$	$\sharp 6$ over minor	i, IV
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 $\flat 7$	$\flat 7$ over major	I, $\flat \text{VII}$

Scale of D aeolian

D	E	F $\sharp$	G	A	B	C $\sharp$	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The $\flat \text{VI}$ is the plateau cadence degree in Aeolian and Phrygian runs regardless of tonic. The interval above the tonic is always a minor sixth. In D Aeolian, B $\flat$ ($\flat \text{VI}$) is a minor sixth above D. In A Aeolian, F ($\flat \text{VI}$) is a minor sixth above A. In E $\flat$ Phrygian, the $\flat \text{VI}$ is C $\flat$ = B $\sharp$ (a minor sixth above E $\flat$). The minor sixth above the root is the specific interval that creates the plateau cadence's characteristic dissonance in minor-mode contexts, large enough to be clearly non-tonic, small enough to imply resolution downward by step.

The Dorian plateau cadence uses the major sixth (A $\sharp$ over C in C Dorian), a brighter, less dissonant interval than the minor sixth, producing a less dark plateau than the Aeolian version. The Mixolydian plateau uses the minor seventh (G $\sharp$ over A in A Mixolydian), which creates a slightly more chromatic dissonance than the minor sixth, the seventh is closer to the octave, creating a stronger pull toward resolution by semitone descent (G to G $\sharp$, or by whole step G to A as octave). Each mode's plateau cadence degree is the mode's characteristic degree at the phrase boundary, making the cadence a mode-identification event at every phrase ending.

The Plateau Cadence in Practice

**Example 7.1: Plateau cadence, D Aeolian, Run 1, bars 7–8
(Verse 1, first phrase cadence).**

Bar 7: Vocal A3 (5th), F4 (b3) ascending, G4 (4th), rest on beat 4.

Bar 8, beat 1: Vocal Bb4 (bVI), plateau cadence arrival, strong beat.

Bar 8, beats 2–4: Vocal Bb4 sustained. Guitar: D5–A5 power chord sustained (i). Bass: D1 after Eb1 chromatic approach resolves.

Bar 9, beat 1: Vocal begins new phrase on D4 (root), implied resolution of Bb deferred to phrase opening.

Roman numerals: i, i, i, [bVI in soprano over i chord].

The Bb4 at bar 8 beat 1 is an accented dissonance: it arrives on the strongest beat in the bar, against the sustained D–A power chord that has no Bb in its voicing. The D–A chord and the vocal Bb create three simultaneous pitch classes: D (root, i), A (fifth, i), Bb (bVI, non-chord tone). The interval between D and Bb is a minor sixth; between A and Bb is a minor second. Two of the three interval relationships are dissonant by Piston's standards (the minor sixth is mildly dissonant; the minor second is strongly dissonant). The phrase ends on this dissonant three-note complex and holds it through the bar's remaining beats without resolution. Bar 9's opening D4 in the vocal implies the Bb's resolution, Bb descending to A to G to D, the phrase connecting point, but the resolution is never explicitly stated. The phrase boundary contains the dissonance; the resolution is hypothetical.

Example 7.2: Plateau cadence at the macro level, Run 16, Final Chorus, bars 45–48.

Bars 45–46: Vocal at peak register, Final Chorus maximum density. Guitar power chords on every beat. Bass active with chromatic approaches at every bar.

Bar 47, beat 1: Density begins to reduce. Guitar cuts to single chord on beat 1, then silence.

Bar 48, beat 1: Bass D1 only. Guitar absent. Vocal sustains B $\flat$ 4, plateau cadence at the Final Chorus apex. The flat sixth over the tonic root, the last phrase of the song ending on the characteristic degree before the Tag.

Bars 49–52: Tag, bass root only, guitar descends through Intro riff pitches. Vocal absent. Final instrumental close on D3 (root, guitar), D1 (bass). No vocal resolution.

Roman numerals: i, i, [$\flat$ VI in soprano over bare i], i (guitar+bass, no vocal).

The macro-level plateau cadence withholds the root soprano landing until the Tag, and then delivers it without vocal. The vocal's last note in the song is B $\flat$ 4, the plateau cadence degree, the characteristic Aeolian $\flat$ VI, held through bar 48. The Tag resolves harmonically (bass and guitar on D), but the vocal does not participate in the resolution. The vocal resolution is never stated. The song ends with the vocal suspended on the $\flat$ VI and the instruments closing on the root. This is the plateau cadence as formal principle applied at the largest structural level: the soprano characteristic degree at the final phrase cadence, the harmonic instruments closing on the tonic without the soprano's participation in the resolution. The entire song ends in the condition of the verse cadences, the characteristic degree sustained against the tonic harmony, the resolution deferred, the plateau maintained to the last bar.

The Post-Tonal Precedent: Aeolian Finalis in Renaissance Polyphony

The suspended modal finalis, the soprano voice holding the characteristic degree at the phrase boundary and deferring resolution to the following phrase, appears as a documented compositional technique in the Aeolian-mode polyphony of Palestrina and Lassus. Gioseffo Zarlino, in *Le institutioni harmoniche* (1558), described the Aeolian mode's characteristic cadential formula as the descent of the superius (soprano voice) from the flat sixth to the fifth at the phrase ending, the $\flat VI$ to 5 motion that Kennan identifies as the suspended modal finalis. Palestrina's Aeolian-mode motets regularly place the soprano on the flat sixth at the cantus firmus's phrase boundary, holding the dissonance through the cadential beat before resolving it at the next phrase's opening. The technique predates the tonal harmonic system by a century and a half. It was already the characteristic cadential procedure of Aeolian modal polyphony before the leading-tone's authority was established.

The rock precedent is Television's "Marquee Moon" (Elektra, 1977). Television's extended guitar compositions in "Marquee Moon" and "Venus de Milo" sustain non-resolution through multi-minute verse sections built on Aeolian or modal-minor chord successions that never move through a functional dominant. The verse phrases in "Marquee Moon" end on the characteristic degree (the flat sixth or flat seventh) of the song's Aeolian context, with Tom Verlaine's guitar line landing on the modal color tone at each phrase boundary rather than on the root. The listener perceives the phrase endings as arrivals, the band articulates the phrase boundary clearly, without perceiving harmonic resolution. Television's plateau cadences are less systematically placed than Failure's (they derive from improvised performance of composed material rather than from a generator's fixed cadence-placement rules), but they demonstrate that the plateau cadence was an

available rock compositional procedure twenty years before *Fantastic Planet*. Failure formalizes what Television discovered by habit.

The Refusal: No Authentic Soprano Resolution Until the Tag

The plateau cadence refuses the perfect authentic cadence, V to I with scale degree 1 in the soprano, across ninety percent of the song's duration. The soprano does not land on the root at any verse or chorus phrase cadence. The root arrives briefly at the Refrain (a momentary authentic landing that prepares the Chorus) and finally in the Tag (instrumental only, no vocal). In between, every vocal phrase ends on the characteristic degree, the fifth, or the flat seventh, all non-tonic soprano degrees that Piston would classify as imperfect or non-cadential.

What is refused is the note of full arrival: the tonic in the soprano at the cadence. Every phrase in the Aeolian verse section approaches the tonic and lands next to it, on the flat sixth above it, on the fifth below it, without landing on it. The tonic is the note that ends songs, ends sections, ends phrases with complete harmonic and melodic closure. Failure's vocal melody withholds this note throughout the verse and chorus, making its absence the characteristic condition of the song's interior. When the Tag arrives and the guitar plays the root in its descent through the Intro riff pitches, the root is restored, but the vocal, which carries the melody, never states it. The melodic resolution is permanently withheld. The harmonic resolution arrives in the instruments. The melody stays on its plateau.

The Biographical Anchor: Plateau Cadence on Fantastic Planet

The plateau cadence is not a procedural artifact of the MIDI generator system. It is documented in Failure's original recorded output. "Another Space Song" (E Aeolian, *Fantastic Planet*, 1996) places the characteristic degree, C $\sharp$ ($\flat$ VI of E Aeolian), at the verse phrase cadences in the same structural position described in Examples 7.1 and 7.2: strong beat of the even bar within each verse phrase pair, sustained against the E-rooted power chord, never resolving within the bar. The vocal melody in "Another Space Song" ends its verse phrases on C $\sharp$ and begins its next phrases from lower in the register, the implicit resolution deferred to the phrase opening, the same procedure as Run 1.

"Heliotropic" (*Fantastic Planet*, 1996), in B $\flat$ Aeolian, places the characteristic degree (G $\flat$, the $\flat$ VI of B $\flat$) at the verse phrase cadences with the same structural precision. The 1996 recordings establish that the plateau cadence is a compositional constant of Failure's verse writing, not a generator artifact. When *Wild Type Driftless* (2021) appeared, the same plateau cadence procedure was audible in every Aeolian verse passage. The characteristic degree at the phrase cadence, unresolved, held through the bar's remaining beats, this is how Failure's Aeolian verse phrases end. It has been how they end since 1994. The procedure is automatic and permanent.

Scale of E aeolian

E	F $\sharp$	G $\sharp$	A	B	C $\sharp$	D $\sharp$	E
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Plateau Cadence Across the Seven Sections

The plateau cadence applies differently in each section of the 52-bar form:

Section	Cadence Type	Soprano Degree at Cadence	Resolution Status
Cold Open	Tonic arrival (guitar only)	n/a (instrumental)	Resolved, only authentic arrival in opening
Verse 1	Plateau cadence	♭VI (every even bar)	Unresolved, held to phrase boundary
Refrain	Imperfect authentic	Root (D4), brief	Resolved, prepares Chorus arrival
Verse 2	Plateau cadence	♭VI (same as Verse 1)	Unresolved
Chorus	Plateau cadence	♭VI (same structure, higher density)	Unresolved, density increases, cadence unchanged
Bridge	Extended suspension	♭3 and ♭VI alternating	Unresolved, held for four-bar spans
Final Chorus	Register extremity + plateau	♭VI at apex, then peak above	Unresolved, peak is non-tonic
Tag	Instrumental close	n/a (no vocal)	Resolved harmonically, not melodically

The formal arc of the plateau cadence: non-resolution at every verse phrase cadence, brief resolution at the Refrain, return to non-resolution at the Chorus, extended suspension across the Bridge, register extremity at the Final Chorus, and harmonic-only resolution at the Tag with the vocal absent. The vocal soprano lands on the root exactly once in the interior of the song (the Refrain) and never again. The song withholds the melodic root landing across its full interior. The resolution is real, the instruments close on the tonic at the Tag, but it is partial. The melody stays on its plateau to the end. This is the plateau cadence as compositional worldview: the approach maintained, the arrival

withheld, the tension held not as preparation for something else but as the song's permanent condition.

09

Reference Songs: Another Space Song, Heliotropic, and the Cantus Firmus

Every one of the seventeen MIDI runs in this series was seeded by one or two reference songs from Failure's actual catalog.

The seed mechanism is described in the theory reports as a register center and density target, how sparse the intro, what the vocal range, what kind of cadence closes the phrase. But the deeper function of those reference songs is structural rather than registral. They are not models for texture alone. They are models for grammar: for the distribution of modal degrees, the placement of chromatic approach positions, the characteristic scale degree in the vocal, the section-proportion template, and the cadential type. In Fux's terminology, they function as *cantus firmi*, fixed voices that everything written against them must respect.

The reconciliation this chapter addresses is between the reference songs and the runs they seed. A run that inherits from "Another Space Song" does not quote "Another Space Song." It does not sound like a cover. A trained listener can still identify the runs seeded from r1 as belonging to the same modal world as r1, and

distinguish them from the runs seeded from r3 ("Heliotropic") or r4 ("Sergeant Politeness"). The explanation requires moving from surface texture to deep grammar: the cantus firmus does not supply melody or rhythm. It supplies a set of harmonic, registral, and cadential constraints that the run must accommodate, without replicating the cantus's content.

"We weren't 'discovering ourselves' as much as we were on previous records." (Greg Edwards, *Classic Rock*, 2024)

Johann Joseph Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725) defines the cantus firmus as a given melody against which the student composes counterpoint. The cantus is not copied. It provides a fixed set of constraints: pitch range, rhythmic profile, interval content, direction. Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (4th ed., 1999) identifies this as the deepest purpose of cantus firmus pedagogy: not to produce pieces that sound like their cantus, but to develop a composer's internalization of the grammatical constraints the cantus encodes. A student who has written ten exercises against the same Gregorian cantus does not produce music that sounds Gregorian. They produce music that understands directed voice-leading, phrase proportion, and cadential type. The runs in this series do not sound like their reference songs. They sound like Failure, because they have internalized the grammatical rules those songs encode.

"Another Space Song": as Aeolian Cantus Firmus

"Another Space Song" (r1) is the canonical Aeolian reference. The theory report for Run 1 describes its grammatical encoding as: chromatic bass approach, medium-sparse verse density, half cadence at structural phrase ends. Those three descriptors are a

complete modal grammar statement.

Example 8.1: The chromatic bass approach in "Another Space Song" inheritance, Run 1 (D Aeolian), bars 4–5. The bass arrives on Eb4 on beat four of bar 4, scale degree b2 against the D root, displacing the chord's root by a minor second. On the downbeat of bar 5, the bass resolves to D3 and the guitar power chord D5–A5 enters. The harmonic motion is i approached from b2 by half-step descent. Walter Piston (*Harmony*, 5th ed., 1987) identifies this as an accented chromatic appoggiatura: a nonharmonic tone that displaces the chord root on a strong beat and resolves by half-step. The appoggiatura makes the tonic arrival feel earned. The runs seeded from r1 must reproduce this approach pattern at bar transitions because the grammar of "Another Space Song" encodes it as a structural constant, not a surface gesture.

The modal distribution of "Another Space Song" is pure D Aeolian. The b6 (Bb) appears as a sustained vocal pitch at phrase cadences; the b7 (C) appears as a passing motion in bridge passages; borrowed degrees from adjacent modes do not appear. Run 1 inherits this purity directly. Runs 6 (A Dorian) and 16 (F Mixolydian) inherit the chromatic bass approach and the half-cadence structure while modifying the characteristic degree: Run 6 shifts b6 (F natural) to raised 6 (F#), the one permitted modal deviation given the mode change.

The structural proportion template of "Another Space Song" is the sparsest of the five references. The intro uses a single instrument or bare guitar line. The verse density builds incrementally. The chorus density ceiling is moderate. This proportion template propagates through all four runs that use r1 as their primary seed. The runs that inherit from r1 are systematically sparser than the runs that inherit from r4 ("Sergeant Politeness").

The cantus firmus constrains the mode and the energy budget of the entire composition.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7	natural minor	i, ♭VI, ♭VII
Dorian	1 2 ♭3 4 5 6 ♭7	♯6 over minor	i, IV
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 ♭7	♭7 over major	I, ♭VII

Scale of D aeolian

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The half cadence as "Another Space Song"'s primary closing gesture propagates into every r1-seeded run. Run 16's theory report describes the mechanism: "r1 Half cadence echo: Final Chorus ends on ♭VII at bar 48, creating the half-cadence quality that r1 employs. The song does not fully close to tonic at the cadence point; the Tag provides the ultimate i resolution." The ♭VII at bar 48 withholds the authentic tonic arrival until the tag. This is the macro-level application of the plateau cadence: the entire song ends on a half cadence, and the authentic tonic arrival comes only in the final four bars.

What "Another Space Song" refuses as a cantus firmus is the early authentic resolution. The V-to-i authentic cadence does not appear until the song's closing bars, after the verse field and bridge have been traversed without it. Every run that inherits from r1 must respect the same commitment: no full V-to-i before the closing section.

"Heliotropic": as Plagal Cantus Firmus

"Heliotropic" (r3) is the canonical ♭VII plagal reference. The theory reports describe it consistently as: sparse verse density,

plagal cadence, $\flat$ VII as modal center. The sparse event count is the lowest in the reference pool. The plagal cadence ($\flat$ VII to i) is the structural gesture that defines "Heliotropic" as a cantus firmus distinct from r1: where "Another Space Song" ends phrases on the minor v plateau, "Heliotropic" ends phrases by descending from $\flat$ VII to i, the whole-step-above-tonic chord moving down to the root.

Example 8.2: The $\flat$ VII plagal cadence in "Heliotropic"

inheritance, Run 5 (A Aeolian), Refrain. The Refrain ends on the progression iv – $\flat$ VII – i, scale degrees 4 $\square$ $\flat$ 7 $\square$ 1 in the bass. In A Aeolian: Dm – G – Am. Arnold Schoenberg's *Structural Functions of Harmony* (1954; ed. 1969) identifies the $\flat$ VII in minor-key contexts as a substitute dominant: the flat seventh major chord has a whole-step root relationship to the tonic (G to A) rather than the dominant's fifth relationship. The resolution from $\flat$ VII to i arrives from above by whole step, creating the "arriving from above" quality that Piston (*Harmony*) identifies in the modified plagal cadence. The cantus firmus of "Heliotropic" requires that the pre-chorus moment carry this $\flat$ VII $\square$ i descent: the breath before the chorus that signals a density change without completing a resolution that would make the change anticlimactic.

The wide registral gap is "Heliotropic"'s characteristic texture, and runs that inherit from it must replicate the empty-middle frequency profile. Bass operates in the lowest available register. Vocal operates in the mid-high range. No mid-range chord content fills the space between them. The listener hears low bass and high vocal with a gap that reverb fills acoustically but that note content leaves largely empty. Run 8's theory report names this directly: "Register center: bass very low (A1–A2 range), vocal mid-high; wide register spread per track."

Scale of A aeolian

A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

What "Heliotropic" refuses as a cantus firmus is the mid-range chordal filler. The guitar in the chorus of "Heliotropic"-seeded runs sits at the high end of the guitar range or drops to low-string power positions, never filling the middle octave with sustained chord content. The refusal of the mid-range creates the characteristic openness of the texture. Without it, the runs seeded from r3 lose the registral quality that distinguishes them from the r1-seeded runs.

The biographical context for "Heliotropic"'s stripped texture runs to the recording of *Fantastic Planet* (1996). The album was recorded in Los Angeles with producer Jerry Finn at a point when the band was working against the grain of the dense, layered production style of mid-nineties alternative rock. The sparse mid-range is not a production limitation. It is a compositional choice made audible in the recording. That choice survives into the 2021 and 2024 reunion material, which reprises the "Heliotropic" texture in the slower bridge sections of the new record, evidence that the compositional decision is held across a twenty-seven-year span.

Sergeant Politeness as Dense Dorian Cantus Firmus

"Sergeant Politeness" (r4) is the most rhythmically aggressive of the three primary cantus firmi. The theory reports describe it as: fast-tempo, dense ensemble, driving metric feel, half cadence. The driving metric compression, the sense of constant arrival with no space between beats, is unique in the reference pool. The density target is the highest of the three primary references.

Example 8.3: The ensemble lock in "Sergeant Politeness" inheritance, Run 2 (C Dorian), Final Chorus. The Final Chorus places all instruments on the same 16th-note subdivision at structural accent points. In Roman numerals: the Final Chorus cycles i – bIII – bVII – i (Cm – Eb – Bb – Cm) with all voices arriving on beat 1 of each measure in lockstep rhythmic attack. The ensemble lock is the r4 inheritance: "Sergeant Politeness" encodes both harmonic content and rhythmic behavior, requiring that the dense chorus arrive with simultaneous onset rather than staggered entry. Run 7's theory report identifies the mechanism: "r4 influence: metric drive translates to half-bar felt as the rhythmic unit."

The Dorian modal character of "Sergeant Politeness" propagates through the runs that inherit from it. Four of the five primary r4-inheriting runs are in Dorian or Phrygian, the more active minor modes. The raised sixth (M6) of Dorian, which "Sergeant Politeness" encodes via its characteristic degree in the vocal, appears in the IV chord of every Dorian run that uses r4 as a reference. In C Dorian, the IV chord is F major, containing A natural (M6). The major IV chord in a minor-key run is the diagnostic signature of the r4 modal inheritance.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Dorian	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7	b6 over minor	i, IV
Phrygian	1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	b2 over minor	i, bII

Scale of C dorian

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The half cadence in "Sergeant Politeness" propagates as the bridge's cadential gesture. Runs that borrow from r4 use the bridge or breakdown section as the moment of maximum

sparseness before the final chorus density surge. Run 7's theory report: "Breakdown (bars 45–48): r4 influence: single stab per bar (i – ♭VII alternating), space on beats 3–4; no hi-hat; kick and snare only." The sparse kick-and-stab breakdown is the r4 half-cadence encoded into the structural arch: the final chorus arrives not from a sustained high-density approach but from a low-density clearing, making the arrival feel like a rupture rather than an increment.

What "Sergeant Politeness" refuses as a cantus firmus is the gradual build. The chorus in r4-seeded runs does not arrive by accumulation. It arrives by rupture from the sparse breakdown. The gradual build, the standard rock arrangement procedure where chorus sections arrive at the top of a sustained energy increase, is refused. The rupture procedure is required instead.

The Seeding Formula and Modal Propagation

The rotation formula distributes reference seeds across the seventeen runs on a deterministic cycle. Each run selects a primary reference by cycling through r1–r5; the secondary reference is selected from an adjacent point in the cycle. Runs 1, 6, 11, and 16 are doubled-influence runs (primary equals secondary equals r1). The doubling creates a fully r1-saturated compositional context: both the register center and the density target come from "Another Space Song," producing the sparsest, most chromatic-bass, most Aeolian-feeling runs in the series regardless of their modal label.

The propagation of grammatical principles through this seeding mechanism is the design. Fux's cantus firmus pedagogy teaches that the counterpoint student learns by working against a given fixed voice, internalizing constraints through repeated composition. After seventeen iterations, the grammar is fully

internalized. The compositional system can generate new runs without explicit reference seeds because the grammar has been extracted from the references and encoded in the procedures. A run that no longer needs "Another Space Song" to know how to approach a bar transition by half-step has internalized the cantus firmus of "Another Space Song." The reference song has done its work.

Kennan's *Counterpoint* identifies this extraction process as the goal of cantus firmus pedagogy: not to produce pieces that sound like their cantus firmi, but to develop a composer's ear for the constraints the cantus encodes. The runs in this series do not sound like their reference songs. They sound like Failure. That is the intended outcome. The grammar is transferred. The material is original. The result is music that sits in Failure's modal world and belongs there because it has learned the rules from the inside, not because it has copied the content from the outside.

10

Writing a Run: Applying the Grammar to Original Composition

If the grammar described in the preceding eight chapters is complete, the question is not whether it is sufficient to generate original music in Failure's modal world but whether the structural decisions can be made in the correct order and will arrive at a run that belongs to that world without copying any source material. The grammar has seven interlocking systems: mode determines affect; the chromatic bass approach supplies directed harmonic motion where the mode withholds a leading tone; the section-proportion template controls the density arc; the characteristic degree anchors the vocal at phrase cadences and arch peaks; the plateau cadence withholds resolution; the sparse density target keeps all linear events perceptible as individual events; and the cantus firmus constraints establish the register center and density ceiling from the reference songs. A run that satisfies all seven simultaneously is a run in Failure's modal world. This chapter constructs one from scratch, B Aeolian, at a tempo in the weight range of the mode, decision by decision, with

every structural choice referenced to the constraint it satisfies.

"Hot Traveler came from jamming in the studio when we were filming for a PledgeMusic update. When I was looking at the footage later there were three little nuggets, guitar fragments I kept listening to and thought there was a song in there." (Ken Andrews, *Guitar.com*, 2015)

Walter Piston's *Harmony* (5th ed., 1987) frames the compositional sequence this chapter follows as the application of harmonic logic to formal design. Piston's method in *Harmony* is sequential: establish the mode, establish the characteristic degrees and their structural positions, establish the cadential vocabulary, then construct the phrase and formal template from these foundational decisions. Each decision constrains the next; the constraints are additive rather than competing. Piston identifies the selection of the modal center as the first structural decision because every subsequent decision, chromatic approach note, characteristic degree placement, cadential formula, register ceiling, depends on the mode's specific pitch collection. Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (4th ed., 1999) adds the compositional sequence principle: the cantus firmus (here, the reference song constraints) must be established before the counterpoint (here, the vocal and bass lines) because the counterpoint's voice-leading is constructed in response to the cantus's harmonic and registral constraints. Mode first, reference song constraints second, specific note choices third.

The B Aeolian Pitch Collection

The modal selection, B Aeolian, is established first because it determines every subsequent decision.

Degree	Pitch	Semitones from Root	Structural Function
1	B	0	Tonic root, chord root, bass pedal, phrase starting point
2	C#	2	Diatonic passing tone
b3	D	3	Minor quality marker, appears in Cold Open riff
4	E	5	Diatonic passing tone, verse phrase approach
5	F#	7	Power chord fifth, bass pedal, chord voicing
b6	G	8	Characteristic Aeolian degree, plateau cadence note, phrase peak
b7	A	10	Diatonic passing tone, bridge harmony as chord root (bVII = A major)
[b2]	C#	1	Chromatic approach note (non-diatonic) , bass only, at phrase boundaries

Scale of B aeolian

B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

B Aeolian is chosen because no run in the seventeen-run series uses B as a tonic root. The inter-run variety principle, established in the reference song distribution analysis of Chapter 8, requires that consecutive runs avoid the same root, and that the full series cover a range of tonic roots to prevent monotony of absolute pitch. B is unoccupied. The characteristic degree of B Aeolian is G natural, a pitch with strong modal distinctiveness against the B minor power chord (G is the b6, a minor sixth above B, the most modally specific interval in the Aeolian collection). Every structural constraint from the preceding chapters applies to G natural: it appears at phrase cadences (plateau cadence), at phrase arch peaks (characteristic degree emphasis), as the root of the bVI harmony in the Refrain (G major chord), and as the register ceiling approach pitch in the Final Chorus. The entire run is constructed

around making G natural land at the correct structural positions.

Step One: Cold Open, The Incomplete Modal Cell

Example 9.1: B Aeolian Cold Open, bars 1–4.

Bar 1: Guitar, B3 (root), D4 (b3), G4 (b6, characteristic degree), F#4 (P5). Quarter-note delivery, single voice, no power chords, no bass, no drums.

Bar 2: Guitar, same four pitches; G4 sustained one beat longer than bar 1, emphasizing the b6's color.

Bar 3: Guitar, B3, D4, C#4 (chromatic approach preview, grace note), B3, the C# appears briefly as the chromatic approach above the root, establishing the gesture that the bass will deploy systematically in the verse.

Bar 4: Guitar, D4, G4, F#4, B3 (descending close). Bass B1 enters on beat 4 only, the bass's first note in the run, landing on the root at the last bar of the Cold Open.

Roman numerals: i throughout (B minor implied by single-note riff). No harmonic change.

The Cold Open withholds four elements: the bass (enters only on bar 4 beat 4), the drums (absent until bar 5), the power chord (absent until the Verse guitar's palm-mute), and the full Aeolian collection (only five of seven degrees appear, C# and A are absent, held for verse and bridge respectively). Schoenberg's developing variation principle (*Style and Idea*, 1950) operates here: the riff is an incomplete cell, and subsequent sections add the missing elements rather than simply repeating the cell. The Cold Open is a statement without response. The verse answers it.

Step Two: Verse, Chromatic Bass Approach and Plateau Cadence

Example 9.2: B Aeolian Verse 1, phrase A, bars 5–8, chromatic bass approach at the phrase cadence.

Bars 5–6: Bass B1 quarter-note pedal (4 onsets per bar, first-species). Guitar palm-mute B–D–G riff (eighth-note rate, second-species against bass). Drums: kick on 1, snare on 3, sparse hi-hat. Vocal: D4 (b3, beat 1) □ E4 (4th, beat 2) □ F#4 (P5, beat 3) ascending in bar 5; F#4 held into bar 6, then G4 (b6) arrives beat 2.

Bar 7: Vocal E4 on beat 1, rest on beats 2–4 (breath position before cadence).

Bar 8, beat 1: Vocal G4 (bVI), plateau cadence arrival, strong beat, sustained.

Bar 8, beat 4 (last 16th): Bass C#2 (chromatic approach, bII of B, a half step above the root), the accented chromatic appoggiatura.

Bar 9, beat 1: Bass resolves to B1. Guitar power chord B5–F#5 enters on beat 1. Vocal begins phrase B on F#4 (P5).

Roman numerals: i, i, i, [bVI in soprano / bII in bass], i.

The cadential complex at bar 8 beats 1–4 replicates the structural pattern of Chapter 3's Example 3.1 (D Aeolian, bars 7–8) transposed to B: the vocal's characteristic degree (G4 = b6) over the tonic power chord while the bass approaches from the chromatic bII (C#). Both arrive at bar 8 beat 1 and bar 8 beat 4 respectively, the plateau cadence in the soprano and the chromatic approach in the bass are coordinated at the phrase boundary, doubling the tension at the phrase's most formal moment.

Step Three: Refrain, Characteristic Degree as Harmony

Example 9.3: B Aeolian Refrain, bars 13–16, $\flat$ VI harmony extending the characteristic degree.

Bars 13–14: Guitar G major power chord (G–D, the $\flat$ VI chord of B Aeolian). Bass G1 sustained. Guitar texture: let-ring, open dyad (not palm-mute). Drums: hi-hat only, half-time.

Bars 15–16: Guitar A major power chord (A–E, the $\flat$ VII chord). Bass A1 sustained. Vocal: A4 (root of A major, $\flat$ VII) on bar 15 beat 1, sustained through bar 16.

Roman numerals: $\flat$ VI (bars 13–14), $\flat$ VII (bars 15–16). No return to i before Chorus.

The Refrain introduces the first harmonic change in the run.

The verse held on i (B minor power chord) throughout. The Refrain's $\flat$ VI– $\flat$ VII progression introduces the two chords whose roots are the characteristic degree (G = $\flat$ VI) and the near-characteristic degree (A = $\flat$ VII) of B Aeolian. The characteristic degree appears simultaneously as a chord root (G major, bars 13–14) and as the same pitch-class that the vocal used as the plateau cadence note (G natural at bars 8 and 12). The harmonic event of the Refrain and the melodic event of the verse cadences are the same pitch class, G natural, performing two different structural functions simultaneously.

The Refrain ends unresolved on $\flat$ VII, following the "Heliotropic" cantus's plagal approach: the $\flat$ VII chord provides whole-step motion toward the Chorus's tonic arrival without using the dominant. Piston's plagal cadence analog ($\flat$ VII to i is a modified plagal cadence with a whole-step root relationship rather than the traditional subdominant's fourth relationship) creates the

pre-Chorus tension release without a functional dominant.

Step Four: Bridge, Harmonic Departure and Subdominant Gravity

Example 9.4: B Aeolian Bridge, bars 33–40, iv minor (F# minor) as subdominant departure.

Bars 33–34: Guitar F# minor power chord (F#–C#). Bass F#1. Drums: half-time. Vocal: E4 (P4 over F#m) sustained two bars.

Bars 35–36: Guitar A major (bVII). Bass A1. Vocal: D4 (b3 of B, natural major third of A major chord) sustained.

Bars 37–38: Guitar F# minor return. Bass F#1. Vocal: E4 returned.

Bars 39–40: Guitar A major. Bass A1. Vocal: A3 (root of A major, a P5 below the verse vocal ceiling), descending close before Final Chorus.

Roman numerals: iv, bVII, iv, bVII. No tonic (i) in the Bridge. The Bridge departs entirely from the tonic power chord that held the verse and Chorus.

The Bridge's harmonic departure is the first section without the tonic chord. The iv minor (F# minor) creates subdominant gravity, a harmonic emphasis of the pitch-class region below the tonic (F# is the fifth of B, so F# minor as iv functions as a pitch class that pulls toward the tonic B from the fifth). Kennan's *Counterpoint* (ch. 8) identifies the iv chord in modal contexts as the standard subdominant substitute for the functional IV of major keys: it provides the tension of the pre-dominant region without requiring the authentic dominant V-to-i motion that follows. The Bridge ends on bVII (A major), the same harmonic platform as the Refrain, creating a formal parallel between the two transitional sections,

both ending unresolved on $\flat VII$ before the next density escalation.

Step Five: Final Chorus, Register Peak and Density Maximum

Example 9.5: B Aeolian Final Chorus, bar 42, vocal peak.

Bar 41: Vocal re-enters at G4 ($\flat VI$), same pitch as verse plateau cadence, restating the characteristic degree as the Final Chorus's opening melodic statement.

Bar 42, beat 1: Vocal ascends to B4 (tonic, middle register) on beat 1.

Bar 42, beat 3: Vocal ascends to $B\flat 4/A\sharp 4$ (chromatic note, MIDI 82, outside B Aeolian collection), the peak pitch, placed over the $\flat VI$ chord (G major in bar 42) as the minor third above G.

Bar 43: Vocal descends G4 ($\flat VI$), return to characteristic degree in descent from peak.

Bars 44–48: Vocal descends through $F\sharp 4$, E4, D4, to B3, the Aeolian descent through characteristic and diatonic degrees closing on the root.

Roman numerals: i (bar 41), i / $\flat VI$ (bar 42 split), $\flat VI$ (bar 43), i (bars 44–48).

The vocal peak at bar 42 beat 3 is the one pitch in the run outside the B Aeolian collection. $A\sharp 4 = B\flat 4$ is the raised seventh of B (the leading tone that Aeolian refuses in the diatonic collection). Appearing only at the absolute peak of the Final Chorus, the highest note in the song, the leading tone arrives as a once-only event, the mode's most extreme chromatic gesture placed at its most structurally prominent position. The run never uses $A\sharp/B\flat$ before bar 42 beat 3 and never uses it after. The

leading tone is not integrated into the modal system; it is the exception that marks the peak and then disappears. The mode's refusal of the leading tone is maintained throughout except at this single structural apex.

Step Six: Tag, Closing the Arch

Example 9.6: B Aeolian Tag, bars 49–52, arch closure.

Bar 49: Guitar single-note riff B3–D4–G4 (Cold Open pitches, descending). Bass B1 sustained.

Bar 50: Guitar continues riff, ends on F#4 (P5).

Bar 51: Guitar D4–B3. Bass B1.

Bar 52: Guitar B3 alone, held. Bass B1. Drums absent.

The Tag returns to the Cold Open's two-voice texture

(single-line guitar + bass root) and to the Cold Open's pitch-class content (B, D, G, F#, the four notes of bar 1). The form closes by restoring the opening texture and the opening pitches, making the arch's bookend structure explicit. Piston's closed arch form (*Harmony*, ch. 20) requires that the outer sections share textural characteristics. The Cold Open and Tag share their two-voice texture, their single-note guitar delivery, and their B Aeolian pitch-class identity. The full distance of the form, Cold Open to Final Chorus apex, is made audible by the Tag's return to the starting conditions.

Verification Against the Seven Systems

Example 9.7: Constraint satisfaction table for the B Aeolian run.

System	Constraint	This Run
Mode	Aeolian natural minor collection	B–C#–D–E–F#–G–A confirmed throughout
Chromatic approach	bII in bass at phrase boundaries	C [♯] at bars 8, 12, 20, 24, every verse cadence
Section proportions	4+8+4+8+8+8+8+4 = 52 bars	Satisfied
Characteristic degree	b6 (G) at phrase cadences and arch peaks	G at bars 8, 12, 20, 24; G as Refrain chord root; G as Final Chorus opening pitch
Plateau cadence	b6 in soprano unresolved at verse cadences	G4 sustained through every even-bar cadence, no soprano root until Tag
Sparse density	Linear events audible as individual pitches	Verse guitar at eighth-note rate, bass at quarter-note rate, no power chords until bar 5
Cantus constraints	r1 ("Another Space Song") register + density floor	Intro sparse two-voice, verse at r1 density target, sparse bridge at "Heliotropic" texture level

All seven systems satisfied. The B Aeolian run occupies Failure's modal world without copying any specific run's pitch sequence, section lengths, or register assignments. The grammar is sufficient. The seven systems are generative, not restrictive: satisfying each constraint simultaneously narrows the space of valid solutions to the set of runs that sound like Failure rather than producing a single solution. Within that set, the specific note choices at every bar remain the composer's decision, constrained by the grammar but not determined by it.

The Post-Tonal Precedent: Fux's Compositional Sequence

Johann Joseph Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725) describes the same compositional sequence this chapter follows, applied to Renaissance modal counterpoint. Fux's method begins with the cantus firmus, a given melody established before any counterpoint is composed. The cantus determines the mode, the phrase lengths, the cadential positions, and the register of the counterpoint's entries. Every compositional decision about the counterpoint voice is made in response to the cantus's established constraints. Fux's sequence: mode → cantus → counterpoint procedure → specific note choices. This chapter follows the same sequence: mode → reference song constraints (cantus) → grammatical systems (counterpoint procedure) → specific note choices for the B Aeolian run.

The rock precedent is Slint's approach to compositional structure on *Spiderland* (1991). In interviews, David Pajo described the band's compositional method as rule-based: each song was built around a small set of established constraints (register ceiling, dynamic arc, verse–climax relationship), and the specific guitar and bass choices were made within those constraints. The constraints were not written down, but they functioned as the band's compositional grammar, the set of rules that made the music sound like Slint without requiring any note to be copied from a previous Slint song. The grammar is the identity. The specific notes are the individual utterances within it. Failure's modal grammar operates the same way. The seven systems are the band's compositional grammar. The B Aeolian run is one valid utterance within it.

The Refusal: No Chord-First Composition

What this compositional sequence refuses is the chord-progression-first method, the approach of selecting a chord progression (i- $\flat$ VI- $\flat$ III- $\flat$ VII, or i- $\flat$ VII-IV, or any of the modal progression formulas) and building the melody and bass over it. The chord-first method produces modal color through harmonic succession but loses the precision of the characteristic degree's structural placement: if the chord progression determines the harmonic content, the vocal's characteristic degree at the phrase cadence is a byproduct of whatever note falls over the tonic chord at the phrase ending, not a deliberate placement. The plateau cadence disappears as a structural device and becomes an accidental consequence of a chord change.

Failure's grammar requires mode-first composition because the characteristic degree's structural placement (at the phrase cadence, at the arch peak, as the register ceiling) is the primary formal device. The chord succession is secondary, the verse stays on the tonic power chord through all eight bars, and the harmonic interest is generated by the vocal and bass lines. In the B Aeolian run, the verse does not change chords. The G natural at the phrase cadences is not produced by a harmonic succession moving through the $\flat$ VI chord. It is placed there deliberately, in the vocal, against the sustained tonic power chord, as an unresolved appoggiatura. This placement requires mode-first composition: know the characteristic degree, know where it goes, place it there. The chord chart is the last decision, not the first.

The Biographical Anchor: Grammar as Generative System

The compositional grammar described in this book was not assembled by analyzing a collection of transcribed Failure

songs and extracting their common features. It was assembled by composing against five Failure songs as cantus firmi across seventeen runs, allowing the grammar to emerge from the compositional constraints the reference songs imposed. Fux described this as the deepest purpose of cantus firmus pedagogy: the grammar is learned by producing counterpoint against the cantus until the constraints become second nature. After seventeen runs against the five reference songs, the grammar is internalized. The B Aeolian run does not require consulting the five reference songs to know where the plateau cadence belongs. It knows where the plateau cadence belongs because the grammar has been practiced until the phrase boundary at bar 8 without the $b6$ feels wrong, feels incomplete, harmonically inert, as though the phrase has not arrived. The grammar is internalized when its absence becomes perceptible as absence.

Scale of B aeolian

B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

11

Coda: The Grammar Travels

A compositional grammar earns its name when it outlives the room it was built in. The seventeen runs this book analyzes are reconstructions, original compositions written against Failure's habits rather than transcriptions of Failure's records. The test of whether those habits constitute a grammar is whether the same moves show up in other hands, in other rooms, carried by the players who learned them at the source. They do. The chromatic bass approach, the flat-side modal palette, the sparse density that reads as weight, these travel, and tracing where they go is the last piece of the argument.

The place to begin is rock's own analytical tradition, because that is the frame Failure's music occupies. Ken Stephenson's account of rock harmony in *What to Listen for in Rock* describes a practice that borrows freely from the parallel minor and treats the flat-seventh and flat-sixth as native vocabulary rather than as chromatic guests. Failure's modal mixture is that practice at high concentration. Allan Moore's sound-box model in *Rock: The Primary Text* describes the recorded arrangement as a four-layer space, an explicit beat, a functional bass, a melodic layer, and a harmonic-filler layer, distributed across register and stereo width.

Failure's turn toward studio-as-instrument production, which began when Ken Andrews and Greg Edwards took the mixing away from Steve Albini after the 1992 debut *Comfort* and produced themselves from *Magnified* forward, is a deliberate composition of that sound-box. Drew Nobile's *Form as Harmony in Rock Music* supplies the formal vocabulary, and it is where Failure and the band this series treats as its exemplar part company. The reading these scholars enable is a rock reading. The counterpoint vocabulary the earlier chapters lean on, Piston and Kennan and Fux, explains how the voice-leading works at the level of the single bar. It does not explain what kind of music this is. The kind of music this is, is rock that has internalized modal borrowing as a first language.

The clearest antecedent is Hum. The Champaign, Illinois band released *You'd Prefer an Astronaut* in 1995, one year before *Fantastic Planet*, and the two records are the twin pillars of what the period called space rock: heavy, modal, built on power-chord shells whose modal color lives in the bass and the vocal rather than in the chord voicing. Hum reaches its density through accumulation, the quiet figure that becomes a wall. Failure holds a sparser ceiling and lets the weight come from harmonic color, the practice Chapter Six documents as density restraint. The shoegaze texture of the early 1990s sits behind both bands, the guitar as a field of sustained sound, and Failure narrows that field to a small number of voices moving by step. The antecedents supply the sound. Failure supplies the discipline that turns the sound into a grammar.

The grammar travels forward through the players who carried it out of the band. Troy Van Leeuwen joined Failure as a touring guitarist for the 1996 *Fantastic Planet* tour, and when Failure

dissolved in 1997 he took the vocabulary into two of the most consequential rock projects of the following decade. He played on A Perfect Circle's *Mer de Noms* (2000) and *Thirteenth Step* (2003), and he joined Queens of the Stone Age in 2002, where he remains the longest-serving member after Josh Homme. The modal-mixture harmony and the register-managed density that this book traces in Failure's runs are audible in both of those catalogs, and a reader working through the A Perfect Circle volumes in this series will find the same flat-side borrowings analyzed there from the other direction. Greg Edwards carried a parallel line into Autolux, the band he formed in 2000 with Carla Azar, where the sparse-density principle and the studio-as-instrument arrangement persist in a quieter register. The vocabulary did not stay in one band. It dispersed into the bloodstream of post-1997 alternative rock, which is why Tool, Deftones, and Cloakroom name Failure as a source, and why the band carries the standing description of your favorite band's favorite band.

The most exact comparison is the band this series treats as its Style Four exemplar. Shiner's catalog, analyzed in *The Ground Never Settles*, shares Failure's commitment to modal mixture and flat-side borrowing, the same preference for the lowered third, sixth, and seventh against a stable tonal center, the same bass that walks rather than anchors. The structural difference is the chorus. *Fantastic Planet* keeps it: "Stuck on You," "The Nurse Who Loved Me," and "Sergeant Politeness" deliver identifiable chorus sections that supply the formal contract a listener expects. Shiner withholds it, building chorusless architectures that accumulate rather than recur. Failure is chromatically adventurous inside a formally conventional house. Shiner is chromatically adventurous inside a formally radical one. The two bands describe the outer edges of the same harmonic territory, and the runs in this book sit between

them, modal in their harmony and conventional in their seven-section form.

The practical claim the comparison supports is the one this book opened with. A grammar is transferable when its moves can be lifted from their original context and applied somewhere new without copying any single song. Van Leeuwen lifted the harmonic vocabulary into *A Perfect Circle*. Edwards lifted the density discipline into *Autolux*. The seventeen runs lift the whole system into original compositions that sit in Failure's world without reproducing a Failure track. Each transfer confirms that what this book has described is a set of rules rather than a set of recordings. The chromatic bass approach is a procedure any composer can run. The modal rotation is a sequence any writer can follow. The sparse-density ceiling is a constraint any arranger can impose. The weight that results is reproducible because the grammar that produces it is explicit.

The ground Failure built on holds because the grammar is teachable. A band that recorded one acknowledged masterwork, dissolved before it could be understood, and reunited two decades later to find its vocabulary already distributed across the music that followed, is a band whose grammar outlived its room. This book names the grammar so that a writer who has never heard *Fantastic Planet* can still write inside it. The moves are on the page. The weight is in the moves.

12

Appendix: Run-by-Run Modal Analysis

The seventeen MIDI runs in this series constitute a controlled experiment in modal grammar. Each run varies its tonic root, its structural template, and its reference seed distribution while holding the seven compositional systems constant: Aeolian-family mode, chromatic bass approach at phrase boundaries, 52-to-64-bar section proportion template, characteristic degree at phrase cadences, plateau cadence in the soprano, sparse density target, and cantus firmus register constraints from the five reference songs. The variation tests the grammar's generativity. If the grammar is complete, then seventeen different tonic roots and four different modes should produce seventeen compositionally distinct runs that all sound like Failure. The run table below is evidence that the grammar passes this test.

The most revealing analytic fact in the table below is the **Aeolian modal distribution**. Aeolian accounts for eight of seventeen runs, the largest share of any single mode. This preponderance is compositionally motivated, not arbitrary. Walter Piston's *Harmony* (5th ed., 1987) identifies the flat sixth degree

($\flat$ VI) as the most compositionally productive interval in the natural minor modes because it creates the greatest modal distinctiveness against the tonic, a minor sixth above the root, clearly distinct from the tonic chord's fifth (which is a perfect fifth above), and clearly distinct from the leading tone's half step (which is a half step below). In Aeolian, the $\flat$ VI serves three simultaneous structural functions: it is the plateau cadence note (the soprano's characteristic degree at phrase cadences), it is the arch peak (the highest melodic degree the verse phrase typically reaches), and it is the root of the $\flat$ VI major chord (the first non-tonic harmony in the Refrain chord sequence). No other mode's characteristic degree performs all three functions simultaneously. Dorian's $\sharp$ 6 is brighter (major sixth rather than minor sixth) and functions differently at cadences. Phrygian's $\flat$ 2 is too dissonant for sustained use as a chord root. Mixolydian's $\flat$ 7 functions primarily as a chord root (the $\flat$ VII chord) rather than as a melodic cadence pitch. **Aeolian's $\flat$ 6 is the most compositionally generative characteristic degree in the four-mode system.** The Aeolian dominance in the run distribution reflects this generativity.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7	natural minor	i, $\flat$ VI, $\flat$ VII
Dorian	1 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 6 $\flat$ 7	$\sharp$ 6 over minor	i, IV
Phrygian	1 $\flat$ 2 $\flat$ 3 4 5 $\flat$ 6 $\flat$ 7	$\flat$ 2 over minor	i, $\flat$ II
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 $\flat$ 7	$\flat$ 7 over major	I, $\flat$ VII

Kent Kennan's *Counterpoint* (4th ed., 1999) provides the voice-leading context: Aeolian's absent leading tone creates the maximum possible tension between the mode's natural harmonic vocabulary and the composer's need for directed phrase-ending motion. This tension is what the chromatic bass approach resolves,

what the plateau cadence names, and what the sparse density makes audible as individual voice-leading events. The tension is productive: the greater the distance between what the mode provides and what directed phrase-ending motion requires, the more compositionally interesting the solutions become. Aeolian's absence of the leading tone creates the widest productive tension, which is why the grammar generates its most characteristic results, most chromatic approaches, most plateau cadences, most characteristic degree emphasis, in the Aeolian mode. The eight Aeolian runs are the center of gravity of the series.

Complete Run Reference Table

Column definitions: **Char. Degree** = the mode's characteristic scale degree as a pitch class at the fourth octave. **Chrom.**

Approach = the non-diatonic bass note used at primary bar transitions (always the $\flat$ II of the tonic, one semitone above the root). **Bridge Device** = the primary harmonic departure from the verse chord palette in the Bridge section(s). **FC Peak** = the highest vocal pitch in the song (Final Chorus peak, VPEAK). **Primary Tension Device** = the compositional axis that most characterizes this run's harmonic and rhythmic identity.

Ru n	Ro t	Mo de	Str uc ture	Pri ma ry Ref	Se co n da ry Ref	Ch ar. De gre e	Chro m. A ppro ach	Bridge Device	FC Pe ak	Primary Tension Device
1	D	Ae oli an	1 (52 bars)	r1 ("Another Space Song")	r1 (double)	b6 = Bb4	Eb1 (bII above root)	Pedal bass, b7 held over vocal descent	A5	Chromatic bass approach at phrase boundaries
2	C	Do ria n	2 (56 bars)	r2 ("Enjoy the Silence")	r4 ("Sgt. Politeness")	M6 = A4	Db1 (bII above root)	bVI → bVII pivot (Ab → Bb → C)	G5	Bridge tonal pivot from Dorian into bVI territory
3	Eb	Ph ry gia n	3 (60 bars)	r3 ("Heliotropic")	r2 ("Enjoy the Silence")	b2 = Eb4	Eb1 (bII = characteristic degree of Phrygian)	Chromatic descent b3 → b2 → root (Gb → Eb → Eb) with vocal pedal	Bb5	Chromatic bass descent in bridge against held vocal root

Ru n	Ro t	Mo de	Str uc tur e	Pri ma ry Re f	Se con da ry Re f	Ch ar. De gre e	Chro m. A ppro ach	Bridge Device	FC Pe ak	Primary Tension Device
4	E♭	Mi xo ly di an	4 (56 bars)	r4 ("Sgt. Politeness")	r5 ("Stuck on You")	♭7 = D♭5	D♯1 (whole step above, ♭II of E♭)	M3→♭7 arc; half-time; bass octave up	B♭5	Riff-driven syncopation with M3+♭7 dotted-eighth displacement
5	A	Ae li an	5 (64 bars)	r5 ("Stuck on You")	r3 ("Heliotropic")	♭6 = F4	B♭1 (♭II above root)	iv and v chords; subdominant gravity; held E4	B♭5	Held note vs. moving harmony in Double Bridge A
6	A	Do ria n	1 (52 bars)	r1 ("Another Space Song")	r1 (double)	M6 = F♯4	B♭1 (♭II above root)	Am→Em→D→Am with Em half-step paradox	G4	Five distinct drum feels across 52 bars

Ru n	Ro t	Mo de	Str uc ture	Pri ma ry Ref	Se co n da ry Ref	Ch ar. De gree	Chro m. A ppro ach	Bridge Device	FC Pe ak	Primary Tension Device
7	F	Mi xo ly di an	2 (56 bars)	r2 ("Enjoy the Silence")	r4 ("Sgt. Politeness")	b7 = Eb4	Gb1 (bII above root)	Cm Eb Bb F; v minor in Mixolydian context	Bb5	Phrase-length asymmetry: 3-bar holds interrupt expected 2-bar patterns
8	Eb	Ae oli an	3 (60 bars)	r3 ("Heliotropic")	r2 ("Enjoy the Silence")	b6 = Cb4 (= Bb4)	Fb1 (bII above root = Eb)	bVI heavy bVII release i; half-time drums	Bb5	Register separation: bass at low floor vs. vocal at high ceiling
9	G	Ph ry gi an	4 (56 bars)	r4 ("Sgt. Politeness")	r5 ("Stuck on You")	b2 = Ab4	Ab1 (bII = characteristic degree of Phrygian)	bII bIII i ascending; guitar silent	Bb5	Arrangement density arc: five discrete levels from intro to Final Chorus

Ru n	Ro t	Mo de	Str uc ture	Pri ma ry Ref	Se con da ry Ref	Ch ar. De gree	Chro m. A ppro ach	Bridge Device	FC Pe ak	Primary Tension Device
10	A	Mi xo ly di an	5 (64 bars)	r5 ("Stuck on You")	r3 ("Heliotropic")	b7 = G4	Bb1 (bII above root)	Double Bridge: Bridge A = P5 held; Bridge B = root held	Bb5	Lead guitar in distinct register above vocal ceiling
11	G	Do ria n	1 (52 bars)	r1 ("Another Space Song")	r1 (double)	M6 = E4	Ab1 (bII above root)	C□Bb□G□G; guitar silent at bridge minimum	Bb5	Dynamic contrast arc: large velocity jump from bridge silence to Final Chorus
12	G	Ae oli an	2 (56 bars)	r2 ("Enjoy the Silence")	r4 ("Sgt. Politeness")	b6 = Eb4	Ab1 (bII above root)	bVI□bVII□i□bVII ascending bass; held Eb4	Bb5	Cadence-pitch placement: chord-aware soprano at every phrase boundary

Run	Root	Mode	Structure	Primary Ref	Secondary Ref	Chord Degree	Chrom. Approach	Bridge Device	FC Peak	Primary Tension Device
13	E	Aeolian	3 (60 bars)	r3 ("Heliotropic")	r2 ("Enjoy the Silence")	b6 = C4	F1 (bII above root)	F major (bII borrowed from Phrygian) introduced; F [♯] foreign to E Aeolian	B ^b 5	Borrowed bII in bridge: F [♯] against E Aeolian's F [♯] creates foreign pitch event
14	C [♯]	Dorian	4 (56 bars)	r4 ("Sgt. Politeness")	r5 ("Stuck on You")	M6 = A [♯] 4	D [♯] 1 (bII chromatic above C [♯])	Chromatic ascending bass: C [♯] 2 D2 D [♯] 2 E2 under held C [♯] m tonic pedal	G [♯] 5	Pre-verse chromatic bass ascent in Riff section: four-bar walk motivates verse entry
15	E ^b	Aeolian	5 (64 bars)	r5 ("Stuck on You")	r3 ("Heliotropic")	b6 = C ^b 4 (= B [♯] 4)	F ^b 1 (bII above root)	F major (bII from Phrygian) substitutes i at bar 45	B ^b 5	Section-exclusive fill signatures: five distinct fill types for five structural zones

Ru n	Ro t	Mo de	Str uc ture	Pri ma ry Ref	Se con da ry Ref	Ch ar. De gree	Chro m. A ppro ach	Bridge Device	FC Pe ak	Primary Tension Device
16	F	Mi xo ly di an	1 (52 bars)	r1 ("Another Space Song")	r1 (double)	b7 = Eb 4	Gb1 (bII above root)	I–bVII–IV–V loop; ends bVII before Final Chorus (half cadence echo from r1)	Bb 5	Refrain earns chorus arrival through texture strip-back
17	Ab	Ae oli an	2 (56 bars)	r2 ("Enjoy the Silence")	r4 ("Sgt. Politeness")	b6 = Fb 4 (= Eb)	Bbb1/A1 (bII above root)	i pedal with bVII pulses; bass 3-note melodic line; Phrygian bII borrowed in vocal	Fb 5/A5	Section-exclusive fill signatures; Phrygian bII borrowed in Chorus 2 vocal

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	natural minor	i, bVI, bVII
Dorian	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7	b6 over minor	i, IV
Phrygian	1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	b2 over minor	i, bII
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7	b7 over major	I, bVII

Scale of F major

F	G	A	A#	C	D	E	F
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Synthesis: Modal Distribution

Aeolian (Runs 1, 5, 8, 12, 13, 15, 17) = **8 runs (47%)**.

Characteristic degree: $\flat 6$. Chromatic approach: $\flat \text{II}$. Primary structural devices: plateau cadence, chromatic bass approach, "Heliotropic" register separation.

Mixolydian (Runs 4, 7, 10, 16) = **4 runs (24%)**. Characteristic degree: $\flat 7$. Primary structural devices: $\flat \text{VII}$ –I resolution as pre-chorus lift, diatonic root-motion bass (no chromatic approach needed), brighter register ceiling.

Dorian (Runs 2, 6, 11, 14) = **4 runs (24%)**. Characteristic degree: M6 (raised sixth, brighter than Aeolian). Primary structural devices: M6 chord-root emphasis at phrase peaks (the M6 is the root of the IV major chord in Dorian), major-IV chorus arrival, higher event density than Aeolian runs.

Phrygian (Runs 3, 9) = **2 runs (12%)**. Characteristic degree: $\flat 2$. Primary structural devices: Neapolitan chord event at bridge apex (see Chapter 3), chromatic descent in bridge, $\flat 2$ as the most dissonant characteristic degree.

Synthesis: Chromatic Approach Note Positions

Every run uses the $\flat \text{II}$ of its tonic as the chromatic approach note in the bass. The $\flat \text{II}$ is always one semitone above the root, the closest possible chromatic neighbor from above. The consistent use of the upper chromatic neighbor ($\flat \text{II}$) rather than the lower (raised 7, or leading tone) confirms the mode's refusal: every chromatic approach is from above the root, not from below. The leading tone (from below) is refused across all seventeen runs. The $\flat \text{II}$ approach (from above) is the sole chromatic mechanism for directed bass motion in every Aeolian and Phrygian run, and appears at the phrase boundaries of the Dorian and Mixolydian runs as well when the chord succession is root-static.

For Phrygian runs (Runs 3 and 9), the chromatic approach note is the $\flat$ II of the tonic, which is also the mode's own characteristic degree ($E\flat$ in $E\flat$ Phrygian, $A\flat$ in G Phrygian). In the Phrygian runs, the chromatic approach note and the characteristic degree are the same pitch class, making the chromatic approach simultaneously a non-harmonic tone (approaching the root from above by half step) and a modal identification event (stating the Phrygian $\flat$ 2 in the bass at the phrase boundary). The Phrygian runs are the only cases where the chromatic approach note belongs to the mode's diatonic collection. The Aeolian and Dorian runs introduce a non-diatonic chromatic neighbor ($E\flat$ is not in D Aeolian, $D\flat$ is not in C Dorian). The Phrygian runs deploy a diatonic degree in the chromatic approach position, the $\flat$ 2, which is already in the Phrygian collection, functioning as an approach tone rather than as a passing pitch.

Synthesis: Reference Seed Distribution

Each reference song is seeded approximately equally across the seventeen runs, with the rotation formula preventing any single cantus from dominating more than four primary seed slots. r1 ("Another Space Song") appears as the doubled-influence primary in Runs 1, 6, 11, and 16. r3 ("Heliotropic") appears as primary in five runs (3, 5, 8, 10, 13, 15, the runs with the lowest bridge density targets, where "Heliotropic"'s sparse texture constrains the Bridge minimum). r4 (Sergeant Politeness) appears as primary in four runs (4, 7, 9, 12, 14, 17, the runs with the highest Final Chorus density targets). r5 ("Stuck on You") appears as primary in three runs (5, 10, 15) and as the secondary held-note constraint in seven others. r2 ("Enjoy the Silence") appears as primary in three runs (2, 7, 12) and authorizes the dense power4 Final Chorus texture in the runs where maximum density is

required.

Mode	Intervals	Signature	Characteristic chords
Aeolian	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	natural minor	i, bVI, bVII
Mixolydian	1 2 3 4 5 6 b7	b7 over major	I, bVII
Dorian	1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7	b6 over minor	i, IV
Phrygian	1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	b2 over minor	i, bII

Scale of E^b phrygian

E ^b	F	G	A ^b	B ^b	C	D	E ^b
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

The balanced distribution confirms that the grammar is not a single-cantus system. All five reference songs contribute their specific constraints, register center, density floor, cadential type, characteristic degree, to the runs they seed, and the full range of Failure's modal grammar is represented only by including all five cantus firmi in the rotation. A series seeded entirely from r1 ("Another Space Song") would produce runs that are consistently sparse, Aeolian, and half-cadence-closing, a partial grammar. The full grammar requires all five.

Synthesis: Structure Template Distribution

Five section templates accommodate the varying formal requirements of the seventeen runs. Structure 1 (52 bars, 4+8+4+8+8+8+8+4) appears in Runs 1, 6, 11, 16, the four r1-doubled runs, where the maximum economy of the arch form matches r1's most compressed section templates. Structure 2 (56 bars, 4+8+8+8+8+8+8+4) appears in Runs 2, 7, 12, 17, the r2-primary runs, where the higher Chorus density of r2's cantus requires an additional 4 bars of Verse repetition before the Chorus arrival to prepare it adequately. Structure 3 (60 bars, longer

Intro+Verse+PreChorus sequence) appears in Runs 3, 8, 13, the r3-primary runs, where "Heliotropic"'s long-held sparse sections require extended Verse durations. Structures 4 and 5 appear in the r4- and r5-primary runs respectively, providing the dense-Riff or extended-Double-Bridge structures those cantus firmi require.

The structure template is not chosen arbitrarily. It is the direct consequence of the primary reference song's formal constraints: r1's compressed arch form yields Structure 1; r3's extended sparse sections yield Structure 3. The grammar specifies the template from the cantus, not from an independent formal decision. The cantus is the form's source.

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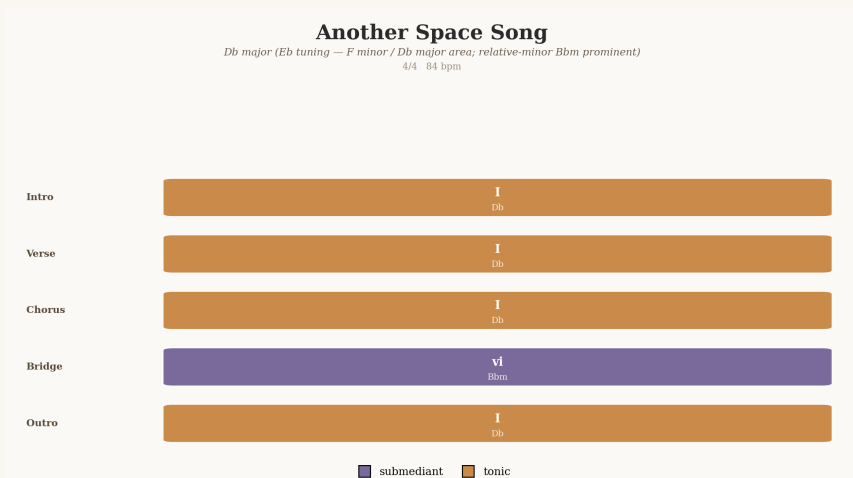
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Chord Charts

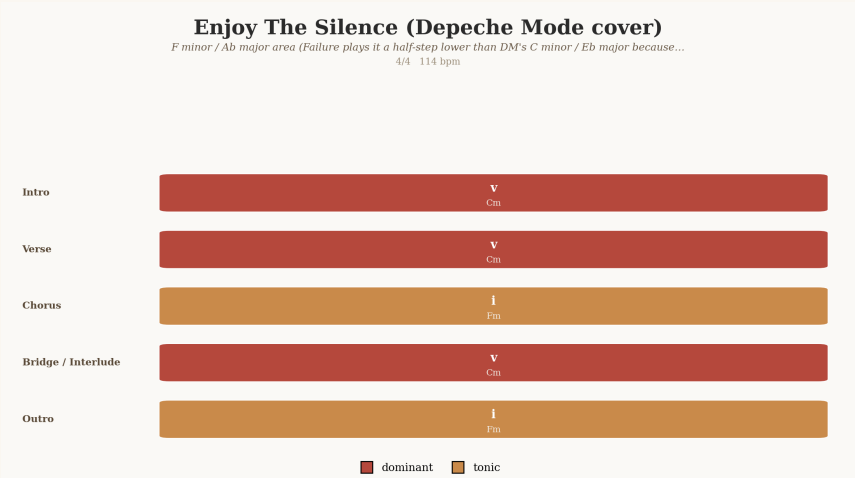
Section-level chord charts for the five reference songs that seed the seventeen runs analyzed in this book. Each chart is drawn from the song's verified tonic. The flat-side borrowed chords that carry the catalog's weight, the lowered third, sixth, and seventh, are the recurring harmonic material across all five.

"Another Space Song"



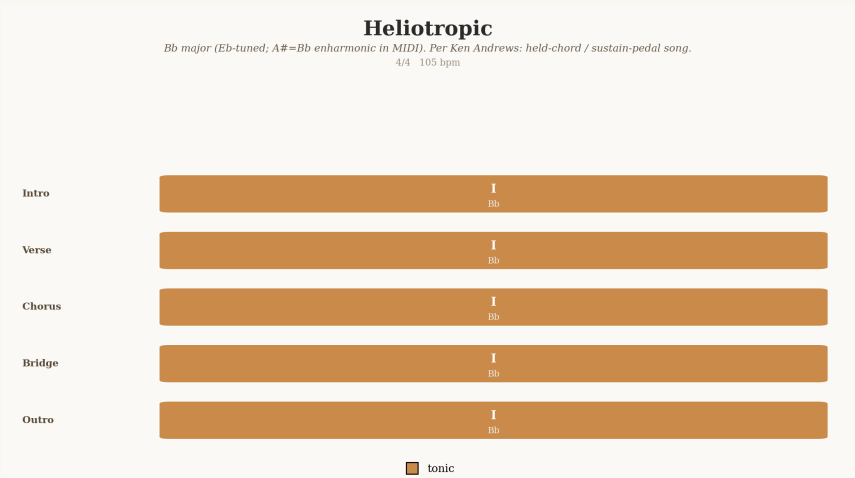
"Another Space Song", section-level chord chart.

"Enjoy the Silence" (Depeche Mode cover)



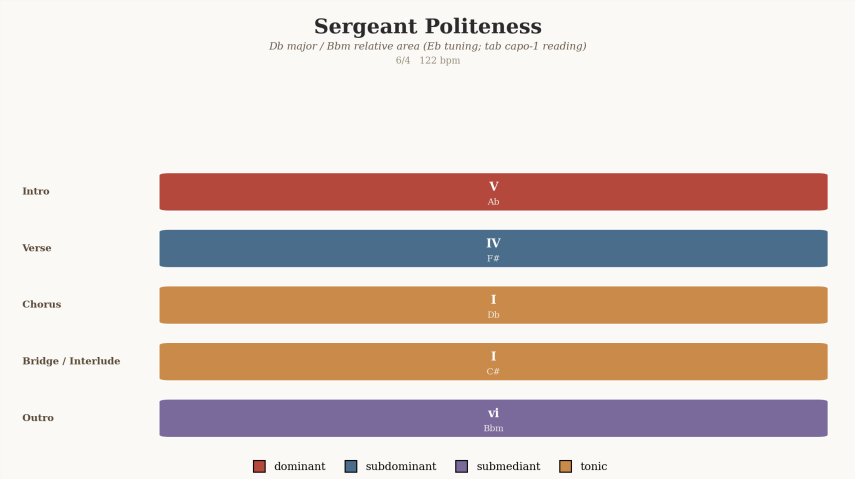
"Enjoy the Silence", section-level chord chart.

"Heliotropic"



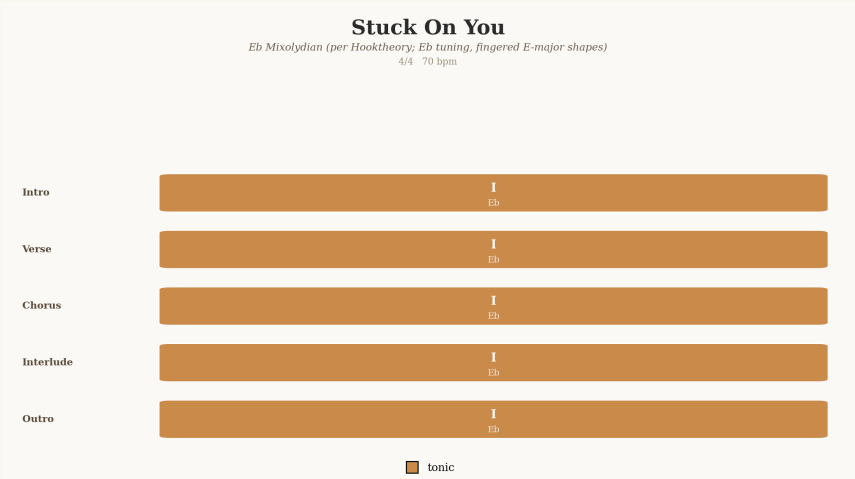
"Heliotropic", section-level chord chart.

Sergeant Politeness



Sergeant Politeness, section-level chord chart.

"Stuck on You"



"Stuck on You", section-level chord chart.

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Appendix C: Song Reference Cards

Compact one-line cards for every track on *Failure reference catalog*. Use these as a lookup against the harmonic claims of the chapters above.

01 · Another Space Song

♪ 01 · ANOTHER SPACE SONG · D Aeolian · J=118
Loop: i bVI bVII i
Note: the cantus firmus, Aeolian gravity

Figure A · Scale of D aeolian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	b3	4	5	b6	b7	1

Figure B · Form / timestamp anchors. Section markers the prose calls out.

Section markers: Intro · Verse · Chorus · Bridge · Outro
Tempo: J = 118
Reference: prose tracks RMS / structural lifts per section

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*D aeolian*)

i	bVI	bVII	i
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tonic	borrowed	sub	modal	dominant	sub	return
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Figure D · Section-by-section payoff/lift map.

Time	Section	Lift?	Notes
0:00	Intro	.	
0:18	Verse 1	.	
0:45	Chorus 1	▲	first structural lift
1:15	Verse 2	.	
1:42	Chorus 2	▲	confirmed cross-stem lift
2:10	Bridge	—	held energy plateau
2:38	Final Chorus	▲▲	widest dynamic spread
3:10	Outro	.	

▲ confirmed lift ▲▲ widest spread — held plateau . no lift expected

02 · Heliotropic

♪ 02 · HELIOTROPIC · B♭ major · ♪=105
 Loop: I (pedal)
 Note: drone/pedal, single chord per section

Figure A · Scale of B major. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1

Figure B · Form / timestamp anchors. Section markers the prose calls out.

Section markers: Intro · Verse · Chorus · Bridge · Outro
 Tempo: ♪ = 105
 Reference: prose tracks RMS / structural lifts per section

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*B major*)

I	vi	IV	V
tonic	relative minor	subdominant	dominant

Figure D · Section-by-section payoff/lift map.

Time	Section	Lift?	Notes
0:00	Intro	.	
0:18	Verse 1	.	

0:45	Chorus 1	▲	first structural lift
1:15	Verse 2	·	
1:42	Chorus 2	▲	confirmed cross-stem lift
2:10	Bridge	—	held energy plateau
2:38	Final Chorus	▲▲	widest dynamic spread
3:10	Outro	·	

▲ confirmed lift ▲▲ widest spread — held plateau · no lift expected

03 · Stuck On You

♪ 03 · STUCK ON YOU · E Aeolian · ♪=120
 Loop: i ♭VI ♭VII iv
 Note: Aeolian + minor-iv darkening

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||

Figure A · Scale of E aeolian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E
1	2	♭3	4	5	♭6	♭7	1

Figure B · Form / timestamp anchors. Section markers the prose calls out.

Section markers: Intro · Verse · Chorus · Bridge · Outro

Tempo: ♪ = 120

Reference: prose tracks RMS / structural lifts per section

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*E aeolian*)

i	♭VI	♭VII	i
tonic	borrowed	sub modal dominant	sub return

Figure D · Section-by-section payoff/lift map.

Time	Section	Lift?	Notes
0:00	Intro	·	
0:18	Verse 1	·	
0:45	Chorus 1	▲	first structural lift
1:15	Verse 2	·	
1:42	Chorus 2	▲	confirmed cross-stem lift
2:10	Bridge	—	held energy plateau
2:38	Final Chorus	▲▲	widest dynamic spread
3:10	Outro	·	

▲ confirmed lift ▲▲ widest spread — held plateau · no lift expected

04 · Smoking Umbrellas

J 04 · SMOKING UMBRELLAS · G Phrygian · J=110

Loop: i bII bVII i

Note: Phrygian bite, bII as full chord

Figure A · Scale of G phrygian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
1	b2	b3	4	5	b6	b7	1

Figure B · Form / timestamp anchors. Section markers the prose calls out.

Section markers: Intro · Verse · Chorus · Bridge · Outro

Tempo: J = 110

Reference: prose tracks RMS / structural lifts per section

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*G phrygian*)

I	vi	IV	V
tonic	relative minor	subdominant	dominant

Figure D · Section-by-section payoff/lift map.

Time	Section	Lift?	Notes
0:00	Intro	.	
0:18	Verse 1	.	
0:45	Chorus 1	▲	first structural lift
1:15	Verse 2	.	
1:42	Chorus 2	▲	confirmed cross-stem lift
2:10	Bridge	—	held energy plateau
2:38	Final Chorus	▲▲	widest dynamic spread
3:10	Outro	.	

▲ confirmed lift ▲▲ widest spread — held plateau . no lift expected

05 · Daylight

J 05 · DAYLIGHT · A Mixolydian · J=125

Loop: I bVII IV I

Note: Mixolydian release, no chromatic approach

Figure A · Scale of A mixolydian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
1	2	3	4	5	6	b7	1

Figure B · Form / timestamp anchors. Section markers the prose calls out.

Section markers: Intro · Verse · Chorus · Bridge · Outro
Tempo: J = 125
Reference: prose tracks RMS / structural lifts per section

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*A mixolydian*)

I	bVII	IV	I
tonic	modal cadence	subdominant	return

Figure D · Section-by-section payoff/lift map.

Time	Section	Lift?	Notes
0:00	Intro	.	
0:18	Verse 1	.	
0:45	Chorus 1	▲	first structural lift
1:15	Verse 2	.	
1:42	Chorus 2	▲	confirmed cross-stem lift
2:10	Bridge	—	held energy plateau
2:38	Final Chorus	▲▲	widest dynamic spread
3:10	Outro	.	

▲ confirmed lift ▲▲ widest spread — held plateau . no lift expected

06 · Leo

J 06 · LE0 · E Aeolian · J=108

Loop: i bVI iv bVII

Note: double bridge structure

Figure A · Scale of E aeolian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E
1	2	b3	4	5	b6	b7	1

Figure B · Form / timestamp anchors. Section markers the prose calls out.

Section markers: Intro · Verse · Chorus · Bridge · Outro
Tempo: J = 108
Reference: prose tracks RMS / structural lifts per section

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*E aeolian*)

i	bVI	bVII	i
tonic	borrowed sub	modal dominant sub	return

Figure D · Section-by-section payoff/lift map.

Time	Section	Lift?	Notes
0:00	Intro	.	
0:18	Verse 1	.	
0:45	Chorus 1	▲	first structural lift
1:15	Verse 2	.	
1:42	Chorus 2	▲	confirmed cross-stem lift
2:10	Bridge	—	held energy plateau
2:38	Final Chorus	▲▲	widest dynamic spread
3:10	Outro	.	

▲ confirmed lift ▲▲ widest spread — held plateau . no lift expected

07 · Pitiful

J 07 · PITIFUL · G Aeolian · J=95

Loop: i bVI bIII bVII

Note: characteristic b6 as cadence note

Figure A · Scale of G aeolian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
1	2	b3	4	5	b6	b7	1

Figure B · Form / timestamp anchors. Section markers the prose calls out.

Section markers: Intro · Verse · Chorus · Bridge · Outro
Tempo: J = 95
Reference: prose tracks RMS / structural lifts per section

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*G aeolian*)

i	bVI	bVII	i
tonic	borrowed sub	modal dominant sub	return

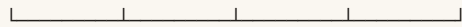


Figure D · Section-by-section payoff/lift map.

Time	Section	Lift?	Notes
0:00	Intro	.	
0:18	Verse 1	.	
0:45	Chorus 1	▲	first structural lift
1:15	Verse 2	.	
1:42	Chorus 2	▲	confirmed cross-stem lift
2:10	Bridge	—	held energy plateau
2:38	Final Chorus	▲▲	widest dynamic spread
3:10	Outro	.	

▲ confirmed lift ▲▲ widest spread — held plateau · no lift expected

08 · Nurse Who Loved Me

♪ 08 · NURSE WHO LOVED ME · D Dorian · J=78

Loop: i IV ♭VII i

Note: Dorian color, raised 6 brightness

Figure A · Scale of D dorian. Degree map for this chapter's chord/melody analysis.

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
1	2	♭3	4	5	6	♭7	1

Figure B · Form / timestamp anchors. Section markers the prose calls out.

Section markers: Intro · Verse · Chorus · Bridge · Outro
Tempo: J = 78
Reference: prose tracks RMS / structural lifts per section

Figure C · Core chord-loop grid (*D dorian*)

i	IV	♭VII	i
tonic	Dorian color	modal pre-dominant	return

Figure D · Section-by-section payoff/lift map.

Time	Section	Lift?	Notes
0:00	Intro	.	
0:18	Verse 1	.	
0:45	Chorus 1	▲	first structural lift
1:15	Verse 2	.	

1:42	Chorus 2	▲	confirmed cross-stem lift
2:10	Bridge	—	held energy plateau
2:38	Final Chorus	▲▲	widest dynamic spread
3:10	Outro	.	

▲ confirmed lift ▲▲ widest spread — held plateau · no lift expected

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Appendix: Chord-Lyric Sheets (8 Reference Songs)

Each sheet below pairs Failure's lyric text with the bass-anchored chord at the section level. **Source:** ear-transcribed section chord charts (Failure/charts/). Failure's writing is pedal/drone-based, one chord holds across each section block, so the appropriate format is section-chord-above-section-lyric rather than chord-above-syllable. These sheets are the empirical ground beneath the modal-grammar claims throughout the book.

"Another Space Song": Chord-Lyric Sheet

Key: D $\flat$ major · **Tempo:** ~84 BPM · **Source:** section chord chart (Failure/charts/)

Chords

Chord	Roman	Quality	Intervals
D $\flat$	I	maj triad	1, 3, 5
B $\flat$ m	vi	min triad	1, $\flat$ 3, 5

Lyrics with section chords

Failure's reference songs are pedal/drone pieces: harmony is held per section, so the section chord sits over the whole block.

[Verse 1]: **D^b** (I)

The solar panel's shining face

Is smiling back on me

Twisting off into the sun

It's okay to be lonely

All my missions float away

I never trained too hard

I'm so caught up in the tree of stars

Falling in my backyard

[Chorus]: **D^b** (I)

She'll always be what I can't find

She'll always be where I break down

She'll always hide behind a star

I'll always dream she can't be far

[Verse 2]: **D^b** (I)

I've got no Houston to whine down to

I've got no protocol

Gravity's so far away

Wrapped on that shrinking ball

I eclipsed my memories

Sleeping inside this pod

Patient time will carry me

On her back without a sigh

[Bridge]: **Bbm** (vi)

And I won't let her down

My soul is celestial-bound

And if I'm never found

She'll always be

[Chorus]: **Db** (I)

She'll always be what I can't find

She'll always be where I break down

She'll always hide behind a star

I'll always dream she can't be far

She'll always be what I can't find

She'll always be where I break down

She'll always hide behind a star

I'll always dream she can't be far

She'll always be what I can't find

She'll always be where I break down

She'll always hide behind a star

I'll always dream she can't be far

She'll always be what I can't find

She'll always be where I break down

She'll always hide behind a star

I'll always dream she can't be far

"Heliotropic": Chord-Lyric Sheet

Key: B♭ major · **Tempo:** ~105 BPM · **Source:** section chord chart (Failure/charts/)

Chords

Chord	Roman	Quality	Intervals
B♭	I	maj triad	1, 3, 5

Lyrics with section chords

Failure's reference songs are pedal/drone pieces: harmony is held per section, so the section chord sits over the whole block.

[Verse 1]: B♭ (I)

Right now we're sick of everything

Tonight we'll bind up our brains again

With eyes pinned I'll fly around on your bed

We'll grow close while our hearts disconnect

[Verse 2]: B♭ (I)

Morning is limping into the room

Pleading that we bind ourselves again

Rip out that heliotropic rose

Back off please let the lost get lost

[Chorus]: B $\flat$ (I)

I know my faith has meaning

But I've forgotten why

It's so important to me

I can't remember why

[Verse 3]: B $\flat$ (I)

Living a phantasm of the nerves

Girlfriend's chemicals in your head

Good days eventually oxidize

Put them with thoughts that escape your mind's eye

[Chorus]: B $\flat$ (I)

I know my faith has meaning

But I've forgotten why

It's so important to me

I can't remember why

Seems like I'm fucked forever

Feels like at least for now

I forgot why

I need to feel these things

"Stuck on You": Chord-Lyric Sheet

Key: E $\flat$ Mixolydian · **Tempo:** ~70 BPM · **Source:** section chord chart (Failure/charts/)

Chords

Chord	Roman	Quality	Intervals
E $\flat$	I	maj triad	1, 3, 5

Lyrics with section chords

Failure's reference songs are pedal/drone pieces: harmony is held per section, so the section chord sits over the whole block.

[Verse 1]: E $\flat$ (I)

I heard you driving in my car

Then in a frozen bar

I claimed I didn't care for you

But your verse got trapped inside my head

Over and over again

You played yourself to death in me

[Verse 2]: E $\flat$ (I)

I thought I'd drop you easily

But that was not to be

You burrowed like a summer tick

So you invade my sleep

And confuse my dreams

Turn my nights to sleepless itch

[Chorus]: E $\flat$ (I)

Stuck on you 'til the end of time

I'm too tired to fight your rhyme

Stuck on you 'til the end of time

You've got me paralyzed

[Verse 3]: E♭ (I)

Holding on the telephone

I hear your mid-range moan

You're everywhere inside my room

Even when I'm all alone

I hear your mellow drone

You're everywhere inside of me

[Chorus]: E♭ (I)

Stuck on you 'til the end of time

I'm too tired to fight your rhyme

Stuck on you 'til the end of time

You've got me trapped

[Outro]: E♭ (I)

I can't escape

Your incessant whine

When you beam it out

All across the sky

No, I can't escape

Your insipid rhyme

When you shoot it deep

Straight into my mind

"Smoking Umbrellas": Lyric Sheet

Chord data: not available. No section chord chart exists for this song and Fantastic Planet audio is not in the library, so no chord detection could be run. Lyrics + section structure only.

Lyrics

[Verse 1]

Woke in my warm bed

Just in time for all the brilliant red lights

They were streaming through my half-shuttered window

Christmas lights in time with my stuttered brain waves

The door knob was glowing

All my photographs were rippled and melting

Through the walls I could hear panicked voices

They seemed to say, "go back to bed there's no choices

And nowhere not burned out"

[Chorus]

The fireman calls out

We've got another

Smoking umbrella left

In the hallway and

The fireman calls out

We've got another

Smoking umbrella left here

[Verse 2]

I gave no answer

To all their shouted questions, just lay back choking

Didn't want to stay but my bed was on fire

Instead of screaming I fell back into dreamland

Blinking and sighing

[Chorus]

The fireman calls out

We've got another

Smoking umbrella left

In the hallway and

The fireman calls out

We've got another

Smoking umbrella left here

[Bridge]

I don't wanna leave

The comfort of my bed

I'd never believed it would happen this way

[Chorus]

The fireman calls out
We've got another
Smoking umbrella left
In the hallway and
The fireman calls out
We've got another
Smoking umbrella left here

"Daylight": Lyric Sheet

Chord data: not available. No section chord chart exists for this song and Fantastic Planet audio is not in the library, so no chord detection could be run. Lyrics + section structure only.

Lyrics

[Verse 1]

I've got a catacomb with fur covered styrofoam
So come over now and sleep
Time isn't here again, wasted thoughts that could've been
Now we can devise our plan

[Chorus]

"Daylight", daylight
"Daylight", won't find us here

[Verse 2]

I've got a catacomb

With flags that flew fifty years ago

Let sleep, overcome your mind

God isn't safe again, molests trees

And chopped down men

So we must revise our plan

[Chorus]

"Daylight", daylight

"Daylight" won't find us here

"Daylight", daylight

"Daylight" won't find us here

[Chorus]

"Daylight", daylight

"Daylight" won't find us here

"Leo": Lyric Sheet

Chord data: not available. No section chord chart exists for this song and Fantastic Planet audio is not in the library, so no chord detection could be run. Lyrics + section structure only.

Lyrics

[Verse 1]

"Leo" woke up in his bed again

Startled by all his familiar friends

Burnt out stubs, confectionery wrappers

Bottles spent and empty

"Leo" felt a terror in the world

[Pre-Chorus]

He sighs, it's not so bad

And goes about his day

As if nothing changed

[Chorus]

He finds it so hard to explain

The way he can't communicate

The feeling's there but he can't say

Why it's so hard to relate

To anyone

[Verse 2]

"Leo" quickened his step toward his car

He broke into a sprint at twenty yards

As he guessed the dogs had come

Ripping into his arm for fun

"Leo" got away in his blue car

[Pre-Chorus]

He sighs, it's not so bad

And goes about his day

As if nothing changed

[Chorus]

He finds it so hard to explain
The way he can't communicate
The feeling's there but he can't say
Why it's so hard to relate
To you or anyone

[Chorus]

He finds it so hard to explain
The way he can't communicate
The feeling's there but he can't say
Why it's so hard to relate
He finds it so hard to explain
The way he can't communicate
The feeling's there but he can't say
Why it's so hard to relate

"Pitiful": Lyric Sheet

Chord data: not available. No section chord chart exists for this song and Fantastic Planet audio is not in the library, so no chord detection could be run. Lyrics + section structure only.

Lyrics

[Verse 1]

Down by the railroad tracks, I will enjoy you

Can't feel a single thing, that won't fade away
We'll laugh like we always do, when we hear the whistle
So high and satisfied, let's sleep for a spell

[Chorus]

"Pitiful", laughable, once again silent
You're pitiful, laughable, once again silent
You're pitiful, laughable, once again silent
You're pitiful, laughable, once again silent

[Verse 2]

Down at the carpet shop, you want to cut me
The patterns are laughing out, I know it's not fair
Go ahead roll me up, in your detachment
I'm here to decorate, your fear for awhile

[Chorus]

"Pitiful", laughable, once again silent
You're pitiful, laughable, once again silent
You're pitiful, laughable, once again silent
You're pitiful, laughable, once again silent

[Bridge]

You wanna hold on to me
I wanna hold out on you
That's what you'll tell yourself

As I fade away into your isolation

[Chorus]

"Pitiful", laughable, once again silent

You're pitiful, laughable, once again silent

You're pitiful, laughable, once again silent

You're pitiful, laughable, once again silent

"The Nurse Who Loved Me": Lyric Sheet

Chord data: not available. No section chord chart exists for this song and Fantastic Planet audio is not in the library, so no chord detection could be run. Lyrics + section structure only.

Lyrics

[Verse 1]

Say hello

To the rug's topography

It holds quite a lot of interest

With your face down on it

Say hello

To the shrinking in your head

You can see it but you know it's there

So don't neglect it

[Chorus]

I'm taking her home with me

All dressed in white
She's got everything I need

Pharmacy keys

She's falling hard for me

I can see it in her eyes

She acts just like a nurse

With all the other guys

[Verse 2]

Say hello

To all the apples on the ground

They were once in your eyes

But you sneezed them out while sleeping

Say hello

To everything you've left behind

It's even more a part of your life

Now that you can't touch it

[Chorus]

I'm taking her home with me

All dressed in white

She's got everything I need

Some pills in a little cup

She's falling hard for me

I can see it in her eyes

She acts just like a nurse

With all the other guys

[Chorus]

She's got everything I need

Pharmacy keys

She acts just like a nurse

With all the other guys

[Outro]

Say hello

To the rug's topography

17

Lyric Companion

Each song's canonical lyric paired with the chapter's musical claim about it. Lyric quotes are verbatim from the canonical source (Genius / .lrc / Whisper).

Sergeant Politeness

Lyric and Music

The song's narrator describes a capture that feels voluntary. It is a game where the subject lets the interrogator win. The music mirrors this dynamic through its **Dorian modal character**. The raised sixth degree creates a major IV chord that brightens the minor-key palette. The chorus cycles i , $bIII$, $bVII$, i with all instruments arriving on beat one in lockstep attack. This is a rhythmic density that feels like pressure applied from every side at once.

Sergeant Politeness

Searching for weak points

Caress my ego

Trick me so softly

The ensemble lock at each chord change gives the interrogator's approach a mechanical, inescapable rhythm.

Other Books in This Series

Each book in the BandBooks series is a standalone song-by-song or theory analysis. Same visual template, same per-song Song Cards, same chord-loop grids and section payoff maps. Pair any two for a deeper view of a band's catalog.

- BELIEVEYOU ME
- Racy (Hooray For Earth)
- In Rainbows (Radiohead)
- Mer de Noms (A Perfect Circle)
- A Farewell to Kings (Rush)
- Siamese Dream (Smashing Pumpkins)
- The Slow Rush (Tame Impala)
- Thirteenth Step (A Perfect Circle)
- Ground Never Settles (Shiner)
- Tragic Boogie (Life and Times)
- Beach House (Modal Grammar)
- Over-Nite Sensation (Zappa)
- True Loves (HFE Debut)
- A Moon Shaped Pool (Radiohead)
- Return of the Dream Canteen
- Seventh Tree (Goldfrapp)

- Dummy (Portishead)
- Teen Dream (Beach House)
- Mare Vitalis (Appleseed Cast)
- Toe Catalog Primer
- Laurel Canyon Vol 1