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Harmonica Type and Layout (Key of C)

These lessons are designed for the diatonic ten hole Marine Band style harmonica (or similar harmonica). If your harp has a single row of ten holes with the numbers one through ten engraved in the cover over the holes, then this course is for you.



Hohner Limited Edition Gold Harmonica (1896-1996)

Here is a drawing of a key of C harmonica with notes and do-re-mi.... You get one note by blowing into each hole and a different note by drawing out. Note that there are missing notes.

	do	mi	sol	do	mi	sol	do	mi	sol	do
Blow in	C	E	G	C	E	G	C	E	G	C
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Draw out	d	g	b	d	f	a	b	d	f	a
	re	sol	ti	re	fa	la	ti	re	fa	la
		fa missing	la missing						ti missing	

Diatonic harmonicas come in different keys, to allow you to play in keys other than C. You could own as many as 12 harmonicas, though I think you will find that five or six will cover just about every song you will ever play. You can easily get by with just a C and a G harmonica if you are not going to be playing with a band.

The diatonic scale is the [do-re-me-fa-so-la-te-do] scale that you may have learned in school. It would include only the white keys on a piano if you were playing in the key of C.

Harmonica Notation

The holes on the harmonica are numbered from 1 to 10 on the top cover plate. A simple numbering system is used to indicate how to play.

- **Over each word or syllable in the lyrics to a song is a number.**
- **If that number is a 4 then you blow into hole number 4.**
- **However, if it is a -4 then you draw out of hole number 4.**
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Note: The notation does not indicate a key for the songs. It only shows which holes to play. You can play these songs on a harmonica in any key.

Playing the Scale

The scale is "do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do", and is contained on holes 4 through 7 (see above). The scale starts by blowing into hole 4.

4	-4	5	-5	6	-6	-7	7
do	re	mi	fa	sol	la	ti	do

Practice the scale until you can play it without the notes.

First Song

Below is a song to try the new notation. To play each note, pucker up as if you are drawing on a straw. Move your harmonica from hole to hole inside your mouth. Do not turn your head to move up to another hole. Later in the lessons, we will discuss other ways to play.

Mary Had a Little Lamb

5 -4 4 -4 5 5 5 -4 -4 -4 5 6 6
Mary had a little lamb, little lamb little lamb
5 -4 4 -4 5 5 5 5 -4 -4 5 -4 4
Mary had a little lamb, it's fleece was white as snow

You do not always have to play clear single notes. At first it is a little difficult to get just one note. Most beginners will play holes 3, 4 and 5 when trying to play hole #4. When you do, you are playing chords. This will sound good, and you will be able to distinguish the melody part from the other notes. Later we will discuss how to get clear single notes.

You can use your tongue to break up the syllables and produce rhythm. Try whispering "Taa-Taa-Taa-Taa" through your harmonica into any hole. Use a gentle steady blow or draw to break up the song rhythm.

Holding the Harmonica

- The harmonica is held in the crotch or "V" formed between your right thumb and index finger.
- The highest note (tone), or hole # 10 should be to your right (some reverse this).
- The left hand wraps around the right hand, forming a sound chamber, with the left thumb resting ahead of the right thumb and pointing in the same direction as the right thumb. (Some players reverse the hands).



Changing the Sound Using the Hands

- You can use your hands to add effects to your music.
- Cup your harmonica in your hands in such a way that you can enclose it completely to muffle its sound.
- Then by opening and closing your hands with each syllable, you will be producing a "waa-waa" sound.
- By rapidly opening and closing your hands you will be producing a tremolo or vibrato effect.
- By opening your hands wide and leaving them open to form a megaphone effect, you will increase the volume

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Tongue Blocking

If you hear any old timers play the harmonica chances are you will hear a style called "tongue blocking". This was the style everyone wanted to achieve a few years back. And often the little sheet of instructions inside the box of the Hohner harmonicas still teach this style.

With tongue blocking you open your mouth wide enough to blow through 4 holes and then you cover 3 of the holes with your tongue. The

advantage to this technique is that you can then remove your tongue to play chords or add rhythm to your music. It really does sound nice when it is done right.

The disadvantage, and possibly the reason many have gone to the simple pucker up around one hole method, is that it is harder to get clear single notes and it is especially more difficult to bend notes. With the popularity of the blues style, many have gone to the single hole pucker up style. Even then you can open your mouth wider and play an occasional chord where appropriate.

Care and Cleaning

Your harmonica will last longer if you take care of it. Various particles (food, skin cells, etc.) will build up inside the harmonica holes.

After playing each song, tap out any moisture that may have accumulated in the harmonica. Slap the harp against your palm, holes down, a couple times. Using this method will prevent your plate from rusting.

Periodically clean out the holes. Turn your harp so the holes are facing the ground. Use an old tooth brush and brush away until all the crud comes out.

Repairing the Harmonica

Sometimes one or more holes just don't sound right. It may be that a hair or thread has found its way inside your harmonica and is the cause of that weird sound. Or, it may be that a small drop of moisture that was allowed to remain inside your harmonica actually formed a tiny bit of rust.

If the problem is caused by something blocking the reed, such as a hair or bit of rust, then you can easily repair your instrument if it was constructed with bolts and nuts. You simply, and carefully, remove the plates to your harmonica and break free or remove the obstacle. Just don't use any pliers or screwdrivers on the reeds. They can easily get

bent permanently and then you may as well chuck your harmonica in the trash.

Ten Hour Rule

- You can learn all the basic skills on the harmonica in about ten hours of playing time.
- After the first ten hours of playing, your skills advance very slowly. Possibly your tone and expression will improve some. And your breathing skills will improve a little. But for all practical purposes, others around you will not be able to tell much difference between you and the more experienced player.
- I have heard the statement, *The only difference between the harmonica player who has played ten hours and the one who has played ten years is the number of songs they have learned.*
- You have probably passed the ten hour mark by now. If so, consider yourself as having arrived at the competent level of skill.
- From here on out it is just a matter of adding to the number of songs you have memorized.

Playing in public

- Sooner or later you are going to find yourself playing before an audience.
- Most harmonica players keep their skill to themselves. They only play out on their deck or porch. If they have an audience, it is most likely their dog.
- The real harmonica players find that playing their instrument is good therapy. It soothes their emotions and calms their nerves. It is their tranquilizer. Many marriages have been saved simply by the harmonica player partner going off by himself to play his instrument. In so doing, a war was avoided.
- But eventually, you will find yourself playing in front of others. It is a good idea to prepare ahead of time.
- First, begin by playing for your children or grand children. Kids are fascinated by the harmonica. And they never laugh at your mistakes.
- Second, find a guitar player who will jam along with you. A guitar

can improve the sound of your playing 200%. Then when you are asked to play in front of audience at church or your local Lion's club dinner, you will not be alone. Having someone beside you, helps take away the fear.

- **Third, make sure you know the song you are going to play. Practice it at least 50 times before attempting to do it in public. This will give you confidence and it will surely show during your performance.**
- **Fourth, only play one or at the most two songs. Always leave your audience wishing for more, not wishing for you to quit.**
- **Fifth, play familiar songs. Choose songs that the audience will know the lyrics. If you are playing in church, announce the hymn number and let them read the lyrics as you play.**
- **Sixth, do not try to improve on the composer's arrangement. Keep it simple.**

Hints for Learning Harmonica

- **Choose a song you know, and play each line at least 5 times.**
- **Start slowly and increase your speed with each repetition.**
- **Once you have played each line at least five times, then play the entire song at least twenty times.**
- **Do not move on to another song until you have mastered the first one.**
- **Use the notes only initially to get the feel of the harmonica.**
- **After using the notes, try the song without the notes.**
- **Play the melody as you know it, not necessarily as in the notes.**
- **Pick a melody you know and try to play it without ever seeing any notation. If you can do this, you will not need notations.**
- **Remember that the diatonic harmonica doesn't have all notes. Some songs can't be played exactly.**

Some Harmonica Websites

<http://www.harmonica.com/lessons> (JP Allen's Harmonica Lessons)

<https://www.harptabs.com> Harptabs (allows you to find tabs and also post your tabs)

http://www.harmonicclub.com/harmonica_tabs.htm Harmonica Tabs