

# Harmonica For Absolute Beginners

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**Objective:** Reading music not required. Learn how to play campfire favorites ("straight harp") as well as beginning blues harp. The student will be exposed to fundamental concepts of music, such as pitch, chords, melody, dynamics, tempo and rhythm.

## **Required Materials:**

Student must have own standard, 10 hole major key harmonica in key of C. Instructor provides all other materials.

**Optional:** If you want to buy a second harmonica, make sure you have a C and G.

**Weather Policy:** If the roads look questionable, call Parks & Rec at 387-6455, ext. 4. Even if schools are closed, Brambleton Center may still be open.

**Missed Class:** If you miss a class, see Pacing Guide below to find out what was covered.

**Harmonica Resource:** [www.leeoskar.com](http://www.leeoskar.com) for technical advice, tips and more.

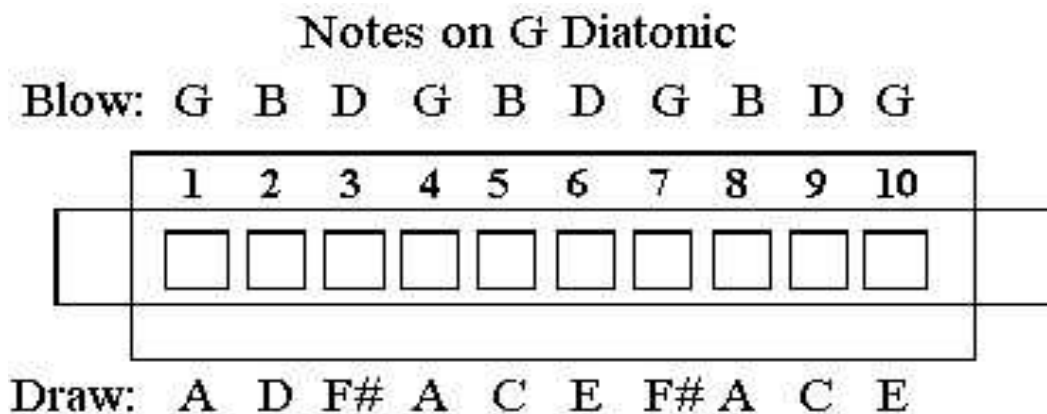
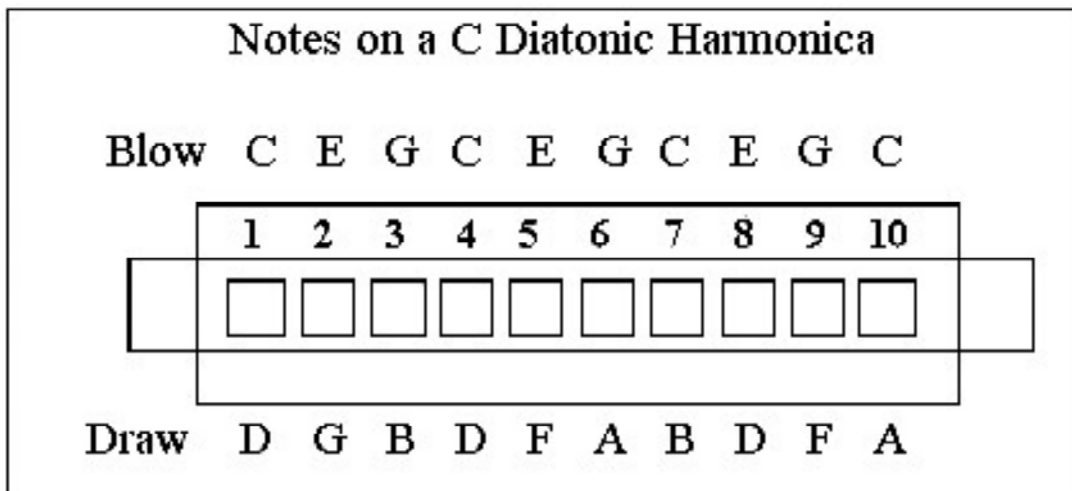
## Contents

Notes on C & G Harmonicas.....	2
Children's Songs.....	3
Campfire Favorites.....	4
More Songs.....	5
Single Notes.....	6
Keys.....	6
Blues Harmonica.....	7
Special Techniques.....	7
Easy Blow-Draw Blues.....	8
Positions and Scales.....	9
Types of Harmonicas.....	9
Cleaning.....	9
Rhythm Study.....	10

## Pacing Guide

Week, Topic
1-First notes, children's songs
2-Campfire position & songs
3-Single notes, hand vibrato, more songs, keys
4-Blues harmonica
5-Easy Blow Draw Blues
6-Rhythm study
7-Positions and scales
8-Special techniques (shimmer, grace notes, rapid artic; playing thru an amp

# Notes on C and G Harmonicas



## Your First Notes

1. **Orient your harmonica.** The 1 should be on the left, the 10 on the right. The notes on the left are lower, the notes on the right are higher.

2. **Notes on the harmonica.** There are 10 holes. Each hole can play 2 notes (not at the same time). Each hole can play a blow (blowing out) and draw (sucking in) note. Therefore, the harmonica can play a total of 20 notes. These notes are referred to as blow 1, draw 1; blow 2, draw 2, etc.

3. **Easy Breathing.** Cover three or four notes with your mouth. Gently blow, then gently draw. When you play 3 or 4 notes at the same time, you are playing a chord. To get clear, undistorted notes from 2, 3, and 4 draw, try gently breathing in and out (resting respiration--don't push or suck) through these holes.

4. **Move the chord around.** Play a higher (to the right) and lower (to the left) chord. Also, notice that you get a different chord depending on whether you blow or draw.

# Children's Songs

These melodies are written in harmonica tablature, or tab. Draw notes are shown with a minus sign. The vertical lines represent measures.

## Hot Cross Buns

5 R -4 R | 4 R R R | 5 R -4 R | 4 R R R R = rest  
4 4 4 4 | -4 -4 -4 -4 | 5 R -4 R | 4 R R R

## London Bridge

6 -6 6 -5 | 5 -5 6 R | -4 5 -5 R | 5 -5 6 R  
6 -6 6 -5 | 5 -5 6 R | -4 R 6 R | 5 4

## Twinkle, Twinkle

4 4 6 6 | -6 -6 6 R | -5 -5 5 5 | -4 -4 4 R  
6 6 -5 -5 | 5 5 -4 R | 6 6 -5 -5 | 5 5 -4 R  
4 4 6 6 | -6 -6 6 R | -5 -5 5 5 | -4 -4 4

## Row Your Boat

4 4 4 -4 5 | 5 -4 5 -5 6  
7 7 7 6 6 6 5 5 5 4 4 4  
6 -5 5 -4 4

## Happy Birthday Time signature: 3/4

6 6 | -6 6 7 | -7 R 6 6 | -6 6 -8 | 7 R 6 6  
9 8 7 | -7 -6 (hold) -9 -9 | 8 7 -8 | 7

## Frere Jacques The measures are numbered 1-8.

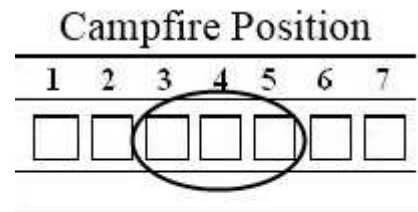
1 2 3 4  
| 4 -4 5 4 | 4 -4 5 4 | 5 -5 6 R | 5 -5 6 R  
5 6 7 8  
| 6 -6 6 -5 5 4 | 6 -6 6 -5 5 4 | 4 3 4 R | 4 3 4 R

## Yankee Doodle

7 7 -8 8 | 7 8 -8 R | 7 7 -8 8 | 7 R -7 R  
7 7 -8 8 | -9 8 -8 7 | -7 6 -6 -7 | 7 R 7 R  
-6 -7 -6 6 | -6 -7 7 R | 6 -6 6 -5 | 5 R 6 R  
-6 -7 -6 6 | -6 -7 7 -6 | 6 7 -7 -8 | 7 R 7 R

# Campfire Favorites

The "fraction" next to the title is the time signature. The top note indicates beats per measure.



If 5 is the target note, cover it with the right corner of your mouth.

## On Top Of Old Smoky

3  
4  
4 4 5 6 7 -6 -5 -5 6 -6 6  
On top of old Smoky, all covered with snow  
4 4 5 6 6 -4 5 -5 5 -4 4  
I lost my true loved one, a- cour-tin too slow.

## Clementine

3  
4  
4 4 4 3 5 5 5 4 4 5 6 6 -5 5 -4  
Oh my darlin, oh my darlin, oh my darlin Clementine  
-4 5 -5 -5 5 -4 5 4 4 5 -4 3 -3 -4 4  
You are lost and gone forever, oh my darlin Clementine.

## Camptown Races (Stephen Foster)

4  
4  
6 6 5 6 -6 6 5 5 -4 5 -4  
Camptown ladies sing this song, do-dah, do-dah  
6 6 5 6 -6 6 5 -4 5 -4 4  
Camptown racetrack five miles long, oh do dah day.  
6 6 5 6 -6 6 5 5 -4 5 -4  
I came with my hat caved in, do-dah, do-dah  
6 6 5 6 6 -6 -6 6 6 5 -4 5 -4 4  
Went back home with a pocket full of tin, oh do dah day.  
4 4 5 6 7 -6 -6 7 -6 6  
Goin' to run all night, goin to run all day.  
6 6 5 6 6 -6 6 5  
Bet my money on the bob-tail nag,  
-4 5 -5 5 5 -4 4  
Somebody bet on the bay.

## Oh Susanna (Stephen Foster)

4  
4  
||: 4 -4 5 6 6 -6 6 5 4 -4 5 5 -4 4 -4  
4 -4 5 6 6 -6 6 5 4 -4 5 5 -4 -4 4 :|| [repeat sign]  
-5 -5 -6 -6 -6 6 6 5 4 -4 4 -4 5 6 6 -6 6 5 4 -4 5 5 -4 -4 4

## Hand Vibrato

To add vibrato, sandwich the harmonica between the index and thumb of the left hand. Cup the harmonica with your right hand and open and close the cup.

# More Songs

## Amazing Grace 3/4

6 7 8 8 -8 7 -6 6  
A- maz ing grace how sweet the sound  
6 7 8 8 -8 9  
that saved a wretch like me  
8 9 9 7 6 -6 7 6  
I once was lost but now am found  
6 7 8 8 -8 7  
was blind but now I see

## Marines Hymn 4/4

||: 5 -5 6 6 6 6 6 7 6 5 -5 6 6 -5 -4 4 :|| [*repeat sign*]  
7 -7 -6 -5 -6 7 6 -6 6 7 -7 -6 -5 -6 7 6  
5 -5 6 6 6 6 6 7 6 5 -5 6 6 -5 -4 4

## Tom Dooley 4/4

6 6 6 -6 7 8 8 6 6 6 -6 7 -8  
Hang down your head Tom Dooley, hang down your head and cry  
6 6 6 -6 7 -8 -8 -8 -8 8 7 -6 7  
Hang down your head Tom Dooley, poor boy you're bound to die.

## Auld Lang Syne 4/4

6 | 7 -7 7 8 | -8 7 -8 8 -8 | 7 7 8 9 | -10 -10  
9 8 8 7 | -8 7 -8 8 -8 | 7 -6 -6 6 | 7

## When The Saints 4/4

4 5 -5 6 4 5 -5 6 4 5 -5 6 5 4 5 -4  
Oh when the saints go marching in oh when the saints go marching in  
5 -4 4 4 5 6 6 6 -5 5 -5 6 5 4 -4 4  
How I want to be in that number when the saints go marching in

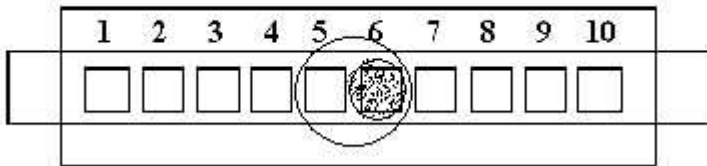
# Single Notes

1. **Lip Blocking Tecnnique.** Google "How To Play Single Notes on the Harmonica" for a good article with illustrations by J.P. Allen at harmonica.com.

2. **Tongue Blocking Technique.** This is the Hohner recommended method and also the method I use. Cover two holes with your mouth. Now, block out one hole with your tongue leaving the other hole free.

The diagram shows the tongue blocking a hole to the right, leaving a free hole on the left. You could do it the other way, with the tongue blocking a hole on the left and leaving a free hole on the right.

Single Note Tongue Blocking Technique



The tip of the tongue, staying in one hole or another at all times, becomes a guide to where you are on the harmonica.

## Keys

Unlike a piano or guitar, any given diatonic harmonica cannot be played in every key. Diatonic harmonicas are available in all 12 major keys: A, A# or Bb, B, C, C# or Db, D, D# or Eb, E, F, F# or Gb, G, G# or Ab.

The standard tuning used on harmonicas today is also called the Richter tuning after Joseph Richter, the instrument manufacturer who adopted it in the 19th century.

Notice that some notes are missing in the diatonic tuning. On a C harmonica, for example, there is no Bb, C#, Eb, etc. This is roughly comparable to a piano with only white keys.

A chromatic harmonica includes the notes that are missing from the diatonic harmonica. It can theoretically be played in any key although certain keys will be easier.

Other tunings are available, such as the Melody Maker, Natural Minor and Harmonic Minor from Lee Oskar. See leeoskar.com for complete charts detailing the notes of different types of harmonicas.

# Blues Harmonica

When playing blues, you use a harmonica in a different key than the key of the song. For example, if the guitarist is playing blues in the key of G, you use a C harmonica.

Blues harmonica is more suited to playing riffs (a short, repeated pattern) or improvised solos than melodies.

<u>Guitar Key</u>	<u>Harp Key</u>
A	D
B	E
C	F
D	G
E	A
F	Bb
G	C

## Blues Riffs in 4/4, each 2 measures

A. 3 -3 4 -4 | 4 -3 3 R

B. -5 5 -4 5 | -5 5 -4 R

C. -2 2 -1 2 | -2 2 -1 R

D. 2 2 -1 2 | -2 2 -3 R

E. 3 -3 -4 5 | -5 5 -4 -3

F. -6 6 -5 5 | -5 R R R

G. -4 5 -5 5 | -4 R R R

H. -5 5 -4 4 | -4 R R R

I. -3 4 -4 4 | -3 R R R

R= rest

Try playing these riffs with "Blues G Backing Track Guitar With Counting" from my Google drive, or with a YouTube blues backing track in G (using a C harmonica).

## Special Techniques

Shimmer--Move the harmonica rapidly from side to side.

Grace note--Quickly slide up to the target note.

Rapid articulation--While playing, make the "T" sound quickly.

# Easy Blow-Draw Blues

<i>measure:</i> 1	2	3	4
<i>guitar:</i> G	G	G	G
<i>harm:</i> Draw -2,-3,-4,-5	Draw -2,-3,-4,-5	Draw -2,-3,-4,-5	Draw -2,-3,-4,-5
<i>measure:</i> 5	6	7	8
<i>guitar:</i> C	C	G	G
<i>harm:</i> Blow(any)	Blow(any)	Draw -2,-3,-4,-5	Draw -2,-3,-4,-5
<i>measure:</i> 9	10	11	12
<i>guitar:</i> D7	C	G	G
<i>harm:</i> Draw -4	Blow (any)	Draw -2,-3,-4,-5	Draw -2,-3,-4,-5

(-2,-3,-4,-5) above means you can play any or all of these notes in any rhythm or order during the specified measure; you don't necessarily have to play them in this order.

The notes indicated aren't the only ones you could play, but they are part of the chord, so they are "safe."

Also you can put in rests (silences); you don't have to fill up every second of the song. Try playing along with "Blues G Backing Track Guitar With Counting."

## Harmonica Greats

Here are a few suggestions for harmonica players to listen to on YouTube.

Deford Bailey ("Fox Chase, Pan American Blues")

Muddy Waters with Paul Butterfield ("Goin' Down to Main Street")

James Cotton ("The Creeper")

Sonny Terry

Little Walter, Big Walter Horton

Sonny Boy Williamson ("Cross My Heart")

Junior Wells, Buddy Green



# Positions and Scales

A position on a harmonica can be thought of as a starting point that has a certain type of scale, or set of notes associated with it. Children's Songs and Campfire Favorites in this handout use 1st position. Blues uses 2nd position (also called cross harp).

<u>POSITION</u>	<u>HOME</u>	<u>SCALE</u>	<u>STYLE</u>
First	4	Major (4, -4, 5, -5, 6, -6, -7, 7)	Country, folk, "campfire"
Second (cross harp)	3	Blues (3, -3, 4, -4, 5, -5, 6)	Blues
Third	-4	Minor (-4, 5, -5, 6, -6, -7, 7, -8)	Minor-key folk, blues

Scarborough Fair (third position). On a G harmonica, key is A minor. C harmonica, D minor.

-4 -4 -6 -6 5 -5 5 -4 -6 7 -8 7 -6 -7 6 -6

-8 -8 -8 7 -6 -6 6 -5 5 4 -4 -6 6 -5 5 -4 4 -4

House Of The Rising Sun (third position). On a G harmonica, key is A minor. C harmonica, D minor.

-4 -4 5 -5 -6 6 -4 -4 -8 -8 -8 7 -6 -6 -6 7 -8 -8 7 -6 6 -4 -4 -4 -4 -6 6 -5 -4

## Other types of harmonicas

The **solo tuned** harmonica such as the Hohner 364S Marine Band has 12 holes and provides 3 full octaves. It is available only in the key of C.

The **Lee Oskar Melody Maker** allows melodies to be played from the cross harp position. It has 2 full octaves plus one partial. See [leoskar.com](http://leoskar.com) for exact tuning.

A **chromatic harmonica** such as the Koch Hohner has a slide which doubles the number of available notes. Pushing in the slide raises the note a half step, providing sharps and flats, like the black keys of a piano.

A **tremelo harmonica** has 4 reeds in every hole, 2 blow and 2 draw. The paired reeds are slightly offset in pitch, creating a wavering or vibrato effect.

## Cleaning

Lee Oskar harmonicas, and any other harmonicas with plastic combs, can be rinsed in plain water.

For more thorough cleaning, disassemble the harmonica, and clean with rubbing alcohol and a lint free cloth. Be very careful with the reeds. Use a small brush to clean the comb. Be sure the harmonica is completely dry before reassembling and playing it. For details see [leoskar.com](http://leoskar.com).

# Rhythm Study

In a time signature, the top number indicates the beats per measure.

The bottom number indicates which note value receives one beat. (4 means quarter note)

4 or 4/4 ("four-four") 4 beats per measure.  
4

3 or 3/4 ('three-four") 3 beats per measure.  
4

○ Whole note. Receives 4 beats.

♩̇ Dotted half note. Receives 3 beats.

♩ Half note. 2 beats.

♩ Quarter note. 1 beat.

♪ Eighth notes. 1/2 beat. They are also written with a horizontal beam like this. ♪♪

♪♪ is the same as ♪♪

All notes except whole notes have stems.  
It does not matter whether the stem goes up or down.

1. 4/4 ○ | ○ | ○ | ○

2. 4/4 ♩ | ♩ | ♩ | ♩

3. 4/4 ○ | ♩ ♩ | ○ | ♩ ♩

4. 3/4 ♩̇ | ♩̇ | ♩̇ | ♩̇

5. 4/4 ○ | ♩ ♩ ♩ | ○ | ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩

6. 4/4 ♩ ♩ ♩ | ○ | ♩ ♩ ♩ | ○

7. 4/4 ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩̅ | ♩ ♩ ♩ ♩̅ | ♩ ♩̅ ♩̅ | ○

8. 3/4 ♩̇ | ♩ ♩ ♩ | ♩ ♩ | ♩̇

9. 3/4 ♩̇ | ♩ ♩ ♩̅ | ♩̇ | ♩̅ ♩̅

10. 4/4 ○ | ♩ ♩ | ♩̅ ♩̅ | ♩ ♩ ♩