

Harmonica FAQs



Harmonica FAQs – Welcome to over 100+ questions and answers about the harmonica. You'll find the most common queries asked by beginners (and not only) harmonica players on this page. I categorized the topics into four sections for easier consultation. You'll discover some generic questions concerning the instrument, some about playing theory, and a number of questions about how the harmonica is built and works. Of course, there are also many questions and answer about how exactly to play the harmonica.



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The information you'll find on this page is provided by experts, harmonica players, and teachers all over the world.

Do you doubt your preferred musical instrument and want to ask a fresh question? Get in touch, and we'll answer you soon! You can reach out to me utilizing the contact form or on my social media marketing pages.

Harmonica Frequently Asked Questions – Harmonica FAQs

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GENERIC QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HARMONICA

Can a harmonica play chords?

A standard diatonic harmonica can play several chords; both most important are the first-degree chord (holes 1, 2 and 3 blow) and the fifth-degree chord (holes 1, 2, and 3 draws). There's also some other chords, but their usage is bound.



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Can playing harmonica help in singing?

Learning to play a musical instrument will help you sing better because you'll learn about music and train your ear. However, if you cannot sing, studying the harmonica doesn't guarantee become familiar with to sing.

Can you play any song on a harmonica?

With a standard diatonic harmonica, it is possible to play most of the song out there; however, some require bending and overbending capabilities. The simple truth is that the average harmonica player will never be able to everything he listens to.

Can you teach yourself, harmonica?

Yes, you can teach yourself harmonica, nonetheless it takes more time and effort. Being guided by a teacher is the better option. If you want to teach yourself harmonica try at least carrying out a structured learning path with online courses.

Do you need to read music to play the harmonica?

Reading music isn't a prerequisite to understand harmonica, but your learning journey will undoubtedly be easier and



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faster if you can read music. Reading music offers you more opportunities when you look for new material to study, and knowing the musical language is fantastic if you want to communicate with other musicians.

How can I tell what key my harmonica is in?

If your harmonica is not labeled, blow in hole 4 and work with a common tuner to read the note you obtain; that's the key of your harmonica.

How do you know what key a song is in?

If you want to find a song key, first discover the root note (the one that plays better on the entire song) and then check the minor third and the third major intervals. For example, if you discover that a D note always sounds good on the track, check D and F#, and the D and F. If you discover that the first pair sounds good, the song is in D major; otherwise, it is in D minor. To get the minor third interval, count 3 half-tones up beginning with the main note, add a half-tone to get the 3rd major interval.



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How long does it take to learn harmonica?

It depends, you can learn well in 4 years if you study well and you're followed by a good teacher, or you can be a beginner all lifelong if you just watch YouTube videos.

How much does a harmonica cost?

A cheap harmonica costs less than \$10, and a professional custom harp can cost more than \$150. Good harmonicas cost not significantly less than \$40. However, I will advise that you don't purchase a very inexpensive instrument; they normally don't play because they should and make your practice harder.

How much should I practice to improve my skills on harmonica?

Aim for at least 30 minutes per day, every day, better if you practice one hour each day. Professional harmonica players practice up to 4 hours each day. If you practice many hours during the day, split your study routines right into a 20-minute block, including a break between each prevent.



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Is playing harmonica good for my health?

Of course, playing the harmonica is good for your health. You learn to breathe properly, and music is definitely therapeutic. Additionally, there are a couple of harmonica models designed for pulmonary rehabilitation.

Is the harmonica hard to learn?

Learning harmonica is hard and takes time. It costs few and even though it is often considered as a toy, it doesn't mean that it shouldn't be respected as any other instrument. The majority of the students don't succeed since they don't go on it seriously.

What are the 3 chords used in the blues?

In the blues, the three main chords used are the first-degree, the fourth-degree, and the fifth-degree chord. In a G blues, the first chord is the G chord, the fourth chord may be the C chord, and the fifth chord may be the D chord. Blues often makes usage of dominant seventh chords so that a G blues could have G7, C7, and D7.

What do I have to study to learn



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harmonica?

If you want to learn harmonica well, you should study songs, exercises, scales, and arpeggios. You would also desire to work on your tone and figure out how to bend notes. The harmonica is really a musical instrument like many others, in fact it is not easier.

What is the easiest song to play on the harmonica?

There are many easy songs to play on harmonica. "Piano Man" by Billy Joel is a good one for beginners.

What is the lowest key harmonica?

In the standard harmonica set, the G harmonica is the lowest, whereas the F sharp harmonica may be the highest. There are also many low-tuned harmonicas like low F and low C.

What key are most blues harmonica songs in?

Many blues are played in E, G, and A. The best way to play an E blues is to use an A harmonica and play in second position (cross harp). You may use a C harmonica for a G blues; and for



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an A blues, work with a D harp.

What key harmonica should I buy to play with a guitar?

It depends; you should consider the song key you play on the guitar and the position you would like to play on harmonica. For example, if you enjoy a G track on the guitar, it is possible to take a C harmonica and play in the second position or a G harmonica and play in the first position. Many rack harmonica players, particularly of days gone by, used to play harmonica on your guitar in the 1st position.

What type of harmonica is used in country music?

A standard diatonic harmonica may be used in country music. You can also buy a country-tuned harmonica to have an F sharp note on hole 5 in place of the natural F; this would fit more in the event that you play major mode melodies. To play country songs on harmonica, you'll make large usage of the second position pentatonic scale, and the G scale on a C harmonica.



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Who is the most famous harmonica player?

It is hard to choose the most famous harmonica player. Here is a small list of great artists:

Alan Wilson

Cliff Martin

Paul Butterfield

Little Walter

Sonny Terry

James Cotton

Sonny Boy Williamson II

Charlie Musselwhite

TECHNICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HARMONICA

Can a harmonica go out of tune?

Yes, a harmonica can go out of tune; however, this shouldn't become an obsession. In the event that you play alone, your tuning doesn't have to be perfect, and if you play with someone else, you then should check your harmonica tuning more regularly.



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Can I wash a harmonica?

If your harmonica has a plastic comb, you can wash it under water, and then dry it with a soft cloth and a hairdryer. You can also opt for an ultrasonic cleaner that permits you to avoid disassembling the harmonica. If your harmonica includes a wood comb, you should be careful and prevent immersing the instrument in water because the comb will get deformed.

How long does a harmonica last?

A harmonica can last for years once you learn how to play it properly and keep maintaining it. When learning, beginners break harmonicas easier; usually, they use an excessive amount of hair for performing and make an effort to bend notes.

How to retune a harmonica?

Tuning a harmonica reed isn't complicated, but you should be careful because in the event that you move the reed, it could happen that it doesn't vibrate well in its slot. You will need to file the reed on the tip part (far from the rivet) if you need to raise the note pitch, or on the start part (where the rivet is) to lower the pitch. A little action will be required; often check the way the reed sounds while tuning it.



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What is a custom harmonica?

A custom harmonica can have a different comb design, different materials and can be worked to make bending and overbending easier. Customization can interest not only the instrument look, but especially how it'll play.

What harmonicas are made of?

Common harmonicas are made of plastic, wood, steel, stainless steel, and brass.

Where did harmonica originate?

The harmonica, how we know it today, was born in Germany. Among its ancestors is the Sheng, a Chinese mouth-blown free reed instrument comprising vertical pipes.

How does a harmonica work?

In the harmonica, the sound is produced by the vibrations of the reeds in the slots. When you blow in the holes, the upper reeds vibrate; those in the bottom work once you draw.



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QUESTIONS ABOUT HARMONICA THEORY

How many harmonica tunings are available?

The most common harmonica tuning is called “Richter,” followed by the “Country Tuning” that differs on hole 5 draw, where you discover an F sharp in place of a natural F note. There are also some minor tuning, such as the natural minor and harmonic minor. Some manufacturers also produce custom tuning (like Seydel) along with other special tunings. Among those, you will discover the melody maker by Lee Oskar and the Powerbender.

What are harmonica keys?

There are twelve notes inside our musical system, those you find on a piano keyboard and form an octave. They’re basically, the white and black keys. A song can be in twelve different keys, and the diatonic harmonicas can be purchased in twelve keys and labeled with the name of the key. The standard range starts from G (the lowest key) to F sharp (the best). Once you learn how to play something on the blues harp, if you need to change the key, you only need to use a different harmonica and play the same holes. That’s the advantage of playing a pitched instrument. With an individual harmonica, you can play various song importants, nevertheless,



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you have to know something about “harmonica positions,” this means knowing various musical scales.

What are harmonica positions?

With the same harmonica, you can play different songs in different keys. Knowing the position is basically knowing the musical scales and where these scales’ notes can be found on the harmonica.

What are harmonica tabs?

Harmonica tabs certainly are a simple way to notate music for the harmonica. Simple harmonica tabs show only the hole number to blow or draw and some additional information like if you have to bend notes. Some more complex tabs also show the information on the staff plus some hybrids tabs with the name of the notes. You need to know the song you’re using the basic harmonica tabs as you don’t have whatever lets you know how each note lasts.

What harmonica key should I buy for blues?

The most common harmonica key for blues is A, this is because most of the blues are in E. Another common blues key is really a, and you need a D harmonica to play it. The G blues is also



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quite typical, also it requires a C harmonica. With these harmonica keys, you'll play the blues in the second position (cross harp); in the event that you get the same key because the song, you will play in the initial position (straight harp).

Which harmonica key should I buy?

Harmonicas in the key of C and A are the most common for beginners. You also want to consider a D, a G, and an F harmonica to get a quite complete set. Knowing different playing positions will permit you to play most of the songs.

What is the fifth position on harmonica?

The fifth position is one of the best harmonica positions to play minor songs and small blues. Your root note is located on hole 2 blow, 5 blow, and 8 blow with the fifth position. Once you learn the second position, you already know how to play in the fifth placement; in fact, the next position major pentatonic scale, and the fifth position minor pentatonic scale share exactly the same notices. On a typical C harmonica, in the 5th position, your root note is E.

What is the first position on harmonica?

The first position, also known as straight harp, is one of the



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best harmonica placements to play major songs. Your root note is located on hole 1 blow, 4 blow, 7 blow, and 10 blow. On a standard C harmonica, in the initial position, your root notice is C, and you also have a complete main scale on holes from 4 to 7.

What is the second position on harmonica?

The second position is an excellent harmonica position to play blues songs and major songs. Your root note is located on hole 2 draw, 3 blow, 6 blow, and 9 blow with the second position. On a standard C harmonica, in the next position, your root notice is G.

What is the most common key for a harmonica?

The most common harmonica key is C.

What is the third position on harmonica?

The third position is one of the best harmonica positions to play minor songs and small blues. Your root note is located on hole 1 draw, 4 blow, and 8 blow with the third position. On a standard C harmonica, in the 3rd position, your root notice is D. When playing in the third placement, the minor scale you play will be called "Dorian" and shares the same note as the



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first position major level. For example, a C major scale gets the same notes as the “Dorian” D minor scale. It’s suggested in order to avoid playing holes 3 and 7 draws in third position if the song mode is minor.

What’s the difference between a diatonic harmonica and a chromatic one?

Basically, the diatonic harmonica includes a three-octave extension but doesn’t permit you to play all of the notes that form them. The note layout follows a diatonic progression (major scale). With a chromatic harmonica, it is possible to play all the notices like a piano. The technique to perform these two kinds of harmonicas differs, and the sound is quite different too. On the chromatic harmonica, the blues is nearly always played in the 3rd position, and the fact you could play all the notes makes the chromatic harmonica ideal for jazz and classical music.

What’s the extension of a standard diatonic harmonica?

The extension of a standard blues harp is three octaves, but they are not complete. Even the major scale of the same key of the harmonica is found only on the middle octave, holes 4 to 10. To play exactly the same scale on the low octave, holes 1



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to 4, you have to play a couple of bendings. On the best octave, holes 7 to 10, another bending must obtain the whole level.

Which harmonica should I use for minor key songs?

If you want to play minor chords, you need a minor tuned harmonica because the standard tuning permits you to enjoy only a minor chord on holes 3, 4, and 5 draws, and 8, 9, and 10 draw. On a C harmonica, the notes of the D small chord. If you need to play solos and melodic lines, a standard diatonic harmonica is fine, and you just have to find the right key and the right position. The most typical placements used to play minor songs will be the third and the fifth. You could also use the fourth position for minor playing, but getting the root note on hole 3 whole-step bending isn't comfortable.

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT PLAYING THE HARMONICA

How do I start learning harmonica?

This is what you should start to learn harmonica: Figure out



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how to hold the instrument correctly, choose a technique such as puckering, tongue blocking, U blocking, or Lips blocking. Then figure out how to breathe correctly and play single notes, better if you practice long notes. Focus on your tone and don't rush; learning to bend notes should happen later. Work on simple tunes and practice the whole instrument range. Avoid focusing too much on blues and on the blues scale. Make an effort to become a musician, not really a copy of everyone else.

How many embouchures to play the harmonica?

There are several techniques to play the harmonica. Puckering, tongue blocking, lips blocking, and U blocking, will be the most common, and all of them requires a different approach.

How to accompany on harmonica?

To accompany on harmonica, you should learn to play chords and how to interact with the other musicians. Avoid overenjoying; it is very important learn where to stop playing, leaving space for others. When accompanying with the harmonica, it is possible to play pads using octaves, emulate horn sections, and adapt your playing to the music style.



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How to bend on harmonica?

Bending on harmonica isn't for beginners and often is really a trap that results in a waste of time plus frustration. Basically, to bend a note, you have to shape your oral cavity and use your tongue to modify the airflow. Blow bending differs from draw bending, and bending with puckering is different from bending with tongue blocking. Understanding how to bend notes takes much time; consider it a long-term goal, and do not neglect the most crucial what to learn, like playing at tempo and getting single clear information.

How to breathe for harmonica playing?

The correct breathing for harmonica playing involves the diaphragm. You should learn to make long breathes in a relaxed way while sustaining the flow. Controlling the airflow is fundamental for a good tone on harmonica. The majority of the harmonica players struggle with air and get full of it easily, in fact it is important to figure out how to manage the quantity of air you inhale and exhale, making use of your nose as a vent valve.

How to cup a harmonica microphone?

Your tone on harmonica is strictly correlated to your embouchure, the seal you make with the harp, and the shape of



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your oral cavity. Sustain of the airflow also plays a big role in shaping your tone. Before relying on expensive harmonica mics and amps, try to build your tone with your embouchure. Basically, a bigger space in your mouth creates a bigger tone and vice versa.

How to have hole 2 draw playing well?

Getting a good sound from hole two draw is frequently difficult for beginners. Keep your throat relaxed and prevent sucking. The airflow should start in your opened throat, not in your mouth. Think about breathing from your own belly and not in the mouth area.

How to hold the harmonica?

Hold your harmonica without tilting it, and it should stay straight in front of your own mouth. Practice before a mirror to verify you don't assume strange postures. Move the instrument rather than your head.

How to play a dip bending on harmonica?

A dip bending is a note that starts with bending and ends with the normal pitch. The transition should be quick, and you also don't want to hear two notices. Start like when you play the bending and immediately release it. Opening your nose can



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assist you to achieve the goal. It is possible to perform a dip bending on blow notes, on draw information, and on double stops too.

How to play a glissando on harmonica?

To play a glissthendo, start from a hole that is different than the target one. For example, to play hole 7 blow with a glissando, start hole 2, and continue blowing until you reach hole 7. The airflow remains constant while you move the harmonica. You can play a glissando with blow and draw notes, and you may go up or right down to achieve your target.

How to play a pull on harmonica?

A harmonica pull is a feature of the tongue blocking technique. Basically, the sound is stopped by the tongue on the harmonica, and you start drawing or blowing before removing the tongue. Once you remove the tongue from the holes, the sound starts.

How to play a slap on harmonica?

The slap is really a feature of the tongue blocking technique. To play a slap, your airflow (it could be draw or blow) starts with the tongue off the harmonica. You'll slap the harmonica holes quickly to obtain a distinct sound attack. Very often,



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slap and pulls interact when performing with the tongue blocking technique. When playing by way of a bullet microphone and an amplifier, slaps and pulls help you to get that punching audio that lots of harmonica players love.

How to play a tremolo on harmonica?

A tremolo is a variation of the note volume. You can use your throat or the diaphragm, or both. When playing a tremolo, you can shape it by working on the amount of air variation (volume) and speed (frequency).

How to play a vibrato on harmonica?

A vibrato involves a note pitch change. To play vibrato on harmonica, you should know how to bend notes. Basically, you perform a bent note and changing the airflow amount influences the note pitch. You can regulate how much the pitch is affected and the speed of change.

How to play a wah wah on harmonica?

The wah wah effect on harmonica is made by working on the cupping of the instrument. You apply the wah wah moving your hand (normally your right one), opening and closing the cupping. You can also help the wah wah by working with the airflow.



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How to play a warble or shake on harmonica?

A warble, also known as a shake, is when you play two contiguous holes switching from one to the other very quickly. You don't stop the airflow through the playing, and you may furthermore play a bent shake or warble. It is suggested to go the harmonica and not the head, or both, but never only the top.

How to play double stops on harmonica?

A double stop on harmonica is when you play two notes on two contiguous holes simultaneously. To play the double quit, open your embouchure a little. If you play using the tongue blocking technique, start like once you want to play a single hole, and open up your embouchure, moving your right lip side.

How to play single notes with lip blocking on harmonica?

Lip blocking is really a particular technique used to play the harmonica. It involves blocking the holes with the inner side of your bottom lips. Tilt the harmonica a little bit when positioning it on your lips to possess better adherence. With lip blocking, you may also play double stops and bend notes.



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This system is easier than what most players think; test it out for, and you will be surprwill beed!

How to play single notes with puckering on harmonica?

To play single notes on harmonica with puckering, you need to shape your embouchure, making a little "O." Blow or draw in a hole to obtain the sound. If you hear two notes, you want to reduce your embouchure and check the harmonica's position, and it might be that you are in the center of two holes. Puckering lips shape is comparable to the one you make by using a drinking straw.

How do I play single notes with tongue blocking on harmonica?

When playing holes 3 to 10, cover the holes that must be blocked on the left, with the upper section of the tongue, closer to the end, and leave the right hole free. Don't use the tip of the tongue if you want to protect two or three holes, as you need a slightly larger surface of your tongue to serve that purpose. Being an indication, put your tongue on the vertical separator between holes 2 and 3 if you need to play hole 4. The tongue covers two holes: i.e. 2 & 3.

For hole 2 playing, put your tongue between hole 1 and the



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left border of the instrument. For hole 1 actively playing, you should learn to switch your tongue to the right and cover holes 1 and 2 with its left side.

How to play single notes with U blocking on harmonica?

U blocking is another technique used by some harmonica players. To use this method, you should be able to curl your tongue to possess its sides facing up. Essentially you will play like with the puckering technique, but with the added centering of your air via your tongue. Sounds very complicated? It is; most people can't even curl their tongue.

How to play split notes on harmonica?

You can play split notes on harmonica if you use the tongue blocking technique. The most common type of split notes may be the octave. To perform the hole 1 and 4 octaves (C octave on a C harmonica), close holes 2 and 3 with the tongue. You can play many octaves on a diatonic harmonica, and they're a good way to obtain a full sound which has low and high frequencies.

What chords can I play on harmonica?

The most common chords you can play on a standard harmonica will be the first-degree chord and the fifth-level chord. On a



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C harmonica, the C major chord and the G main chord.

What is an overblow on harmonica?

An overblow on harmonica is a note obtained with very advanced technique that most of the time requires to create the harmonica. Reed gap adjustment and embossing are a few of the modifications that help to obtain the overblow. Overblows allows you to play chromatically and have more notes on the instrument; for instance, on a C harmonica, on hole 1, you may get a D sharp, as well as on hole 4. On hole 5, with the overblow, you can perform an F razor-sharp, whereas, on hole 6, you will discover a B flat. The B smooth on hole 6 is essential for playing the second position blues scale on the higher section of the harmonica. With overblows, it is possible to play far better jazz music because it makes large usage of chromatics.

What octaves can I play on harmonica?

On a standard harmonica, you can play many octaves if it is possible to tongue block. For example, on a C harmonica, blowing, you should have C, E, and G octaves overall instrument extension. Drawing notes enables you to play D, A, F, and B octaves.



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What scales can I play on harmonica?

There are many scales you can play on a harmuponica. Basically, the first position major scale, then the second position dominant seventh scale. You can also play the third position "Dorian" minor scale, and also the twelfth position major scale. It depends on your bending and overbending skills. The most common scales it is possible to play on a C harmonica are C major, G seventh, D Dorian minor, D blues, G blues, C, F, and G major pentatonic scales. It is possible to perform F major and D main scale on holes 1 to 4. They are only some examples.



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