

Intermediate Method #2:

After you've mastered the Easy Method #1...or you're just bored with the hearing the same notes over and over, try Intermediate Method #2. This method will move you to running the scale up and down the harmonica while you inhale and exhale. Be sure to read the section below to learn the proper embouchure (mouth position) necessary to get a single note to sound on the harmonica.

1. Holding the harmonica in your left hand, put it in your mouth at the middle of the harmonica. (Start at hole #4 which is "C" and the beginning of the "C Scale")
2. Using only one breath, Gently blow (exhale) through the harmonica starting on hole#4 and then move your mouth up the harmonica one hole at a time continuing to blow single notes until you run out of air and you no longer get sound from the harmonica. If you get to the top note and still have air left, don't stop, just move back down the scale until you run out of air. This time you can use your stomach muscles to force a little extra air out of your lungs at the very end.
3. Leave your mouth on whatever hole you were on when you ran out of air, and Gently draw (inhale) air back through the harmonica. Once again move your mouth up/down the harmonica scale, one hole at a time until your lungs are full. You should hear the pleasant sound of harmonica notes. If you don't inhale with sufficient force you won't get a note. If you inhale too hard you will get "bent" or overdrawn notes that don't sound very pleasant. Let your ears guide you towards long, deep, controlled breaths that create clear steady notes on the harmonica.
NOTE: Don't try to blow/draw on Holes #1, #2, #3. Start on hole #4 going up the scale and when you get back to hole #4 start back up the harmonica again.
4. Once your lungs are full....hold your breath for a slow count of three...and reposition your mouth over Hole #4.
5. Start the process all over again by exhaling through the harmonica.
6. Repeat this process 20-30 times.

NOTE: At first you may find that after exhaling completely, you need to get air back into your lungs faster than the harmonica will allow. If so simply take the harmonica out of your mouth and gasp in some air. Then go back to step #1 and try again. Eventually (hopefully very quickly) you will be able to "breathe" through your harmonica. Taking long deep inhales and exhales.

You can use Intermediate Method #2 to measure progress. By using a steady rhythm and getting a good single note sound, you can count how many notes you get on one breath. Because you are exhaling through the harmonica (rather than removing the harmonica from your mouth as in Easy Method #1), this exercise prolongs the among of time between breaths...which will force the previously unused airways in the lungs to open up and work. An additional musical benefit is that you learn to move the harmonica in your mouth while maintaining sound and good single notes. (The ability to play single harmonica notes is mandatory to make progress on the harmonica).

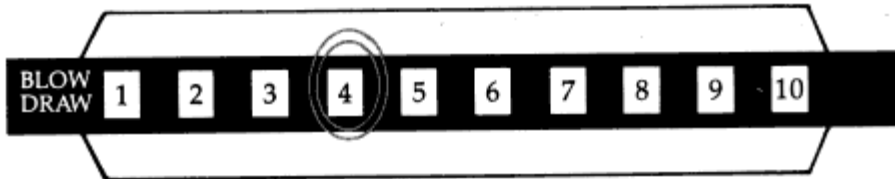
Mouth Position (Embouchure)

Beginners tend to approach the harmonica timidly, putting their lips on the harmonica in a little pucker like they were kissing Aunt Betty. Your mouth needs to be up on the harmonica, touching the metal case with the wood (or plastic) body just inside your mouth. You must form a complete seal with your lips and you can't do that with a "delicate" pucker. Blow a few notes to make sure you have a good seal and can get sound out of the harmonica before proceeding.

While playing the harmonica, your mouth and jaw must be relaxed. This will feel a little strange at first...keeping your lips puckered for a good seal while at the same time keeping your jaw somewhat relaxed. You will also need to drop your jaw slightly to create an open cavern in your mouth. This "cavern" creates a full rich tone.

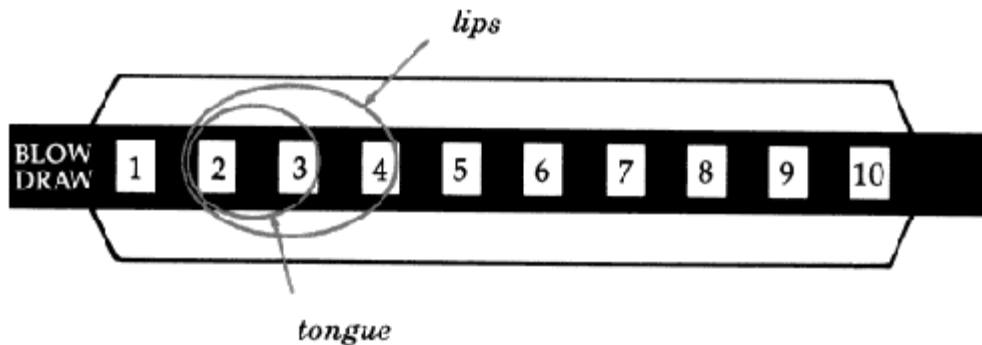
The ability to play one note at a time is critical to playing the harmonica. Two techniques (Lip Blocking and Tongue Blocking) are generally used to play single notes. You'll need to learn them both...but I suggest learning Lip blocking first.

- **LIP BLOCKING:** (or "lipping") is the preferred method for melody and blues bends. Lipping is a technique where you cover all holes on the harmonica with your lips EXCEPT the one hole you want to play. You do this WITHOUT using your tongue to block any of the holes. Your pucker should be about the size of a pencil eraser. Your lips have to be open enough to allow room for one complete hole. If you pucker too much you will lose volume and tone. If you don't pucker enough you will get multiple notes.....This takes practice!!



Lip Blocking

- **TONGUE BLOCKING:** is another technique for playing one note. In tongue blocking you put the harmonica deeper into your mouth than in lip blocking. Your lips are more open and allow 2-3 holes to be open inside the pucker. You use your tongue to cover all but the one hole you want to play. Typically you cover the notes to the left of your mouth and leave the note on the right open....but you can cover which ever side you like. (See Tongue Blocking below to play the 4 hole)



Tongue Blocking

The tongue blocking is also used (in a different form) to cover center holes and leave holes on each end open. This form of tongue blocking is called "tongue splitting" and comes in handy for playing multiple notes and even octaves.

Play around with whichever blocking technique you chose until you can make one note sound good. Then practice moving from one hole to the next. Alternate blow/draw notes along with the mouth movement up and down the harmonica. Play the "C" scale up and down until it becomes smooth and you consistently hit one note and ONE NOTE ONLY.

Blowing/Drawing Notes....Breath Control

"Blow and "Draw" are the terms used to describe playing notes on the harmonica. To get really good tones you need to think of "blow" and "draw" as "exhale" and "inhale". You don't puff at a harmonica....you exhale though it. You don't suck air through a harmonica...you inhale though it. Good harmonica notes (like singing) come from the diaphragm. WARNING: Don't over blow or overdraw!! Beginners often go overboard and use way too much air. It really doesn't take a lot of air to get a good sound. The harmonica is an expressive instrument and responds well to medium amounts of air movement. If you want more volume than the harmonica naturally provides....get a microphone and amplifier.

- BREATH CONTROL:

- In classical instruments (flute, trumpet, etc.) breath control is a big issue because the instrument is played completely with blown air. Classical musicians are taught early on when to take a breath and beginning classical musicians often mark these "breathe points" on their sheet music.

- The harmonica has the advantage of playing both inhale and exhale notes, and it is sometimes possible to "breathe" through your instrument. However, you will find times when you need to recover your breath before playing the next note.

- As you play more complex songs where the melody (or the blues riff) doesn't alternate blow and draw notes, you will notice yourself either running out of air or having too much air in your lungs (beginners may have this problem even on simple tunes). Songs that have long sequences of blow or draw notes together will either expend all your air or acquire too much air in your lungs. This means you have to pause playing for a split second to either replenish your air by breathing in or relieve the expansion in your lungs by exhaling.

So...When do you take these "pauses" without messing up the song???

General Rule of Thumb:

You can safely take a breath (without disrupting the flow of the song) at the end of each musical phrase. For those not familiar with music terminology, a musical phrase is any series of notes played together as one subset of a song. A musical phrase usually covers several measures. On many songs musical phrases often (but not always) end on a measure boundary.

If the preceding paragraph just confused you, perhaps a simpler way to illustrate the point is to time your breathing as though you were singing the song. You would take a breath playing the harmonica at the same place you would take a breath if you were singing the song. For example...if you were playing the Irish tune "DANNY BOY" you would play the notes and take a breath, at the same place you would sing the song and then take a breathe.

(Harmonica Tablature.....+4 means blow on 4 hole)

(..... 4 means draw on 4 hole)

"Oh Danny Boyyyy" (breathe)

7 +7 8 +8

"The pipes the pipes are calling" (breathe)

8 +8 10 +9 +8 8 +7 6

"From glen to glen (breathe)

7 +7 8 +8

Playing this little snippet of a familiar song should give you the idea of musical phrasing and when to breathe.

EMBOUCHURES

The *embouchure* (ahm' ba sure) is the method of applying the lips and tongue to the mouthpiece of a wind instrument, like the harmonica! If you are just learning to play I recommend you start with the Lip Block.

1) Lip Block - A variant of the pucker (see below), it's also called *lipping*. Tilt the harp up at the back about 30 to 45 degrees, and open your mouth pretty wide, enough to cover about 3 holes, with your upper lip about 1/2 to 2/3 of the way over the top cover. Let the harp nestle into your lower lip. What happens is that quite naturally, without really trying and without forcing it, the lower lip blocks the 2 side holes and lets the center hole sound cleanly. The open mouth position helps improve your resonance, which in turn helps in getting bends correctly, and improves your overall tone. The harp needs to be well in your mouth... Don't be shy! You can't just peck it with puckered lips and make it work right. You should be relaxed, without tightening your lips or pinching in your cheeks.

2) Pucker - The lips are pursed and pushed out, and the harp is positioned deep back into the mouth (but not as far back as for tongue blocking or U-blocking. See below). The air stream is "directed through the pucker to one hole". (Note: This is as described in many beginning harp books, ala John Gindick's. In my opinion, the pucker does not direct the air stream through the hole so much as the deep position of the harp in the mouth brings the lips into contact with the side holes not to be played.)

Note: I believe that for experienced players the pucker and lip block evolve so as to become nearly indistinguishable. In my opinion, it is easier to reach this "pucker/block" embouchure starting with the lip block than with the "pucker" mental image.

3) Tongue Block - The mouth is opened to cover 3 or more holes, and the tongue blocks the holes that are not intended to sound. The tongue block pretty much must be used for octave and split interval play. Tongue blocking also facilitates various harp playing techniques and effects, such as "slaps" and "flutters". The tongue normally blocks the holes on the left and leaves a single note on the right unblocked to sound, but the tongue can also block holes on the right leaving a single note on the left to play. It's best to learn to block and play on *both* sides to facilitate quick jumps and easy access to holes on both ends of the harp.

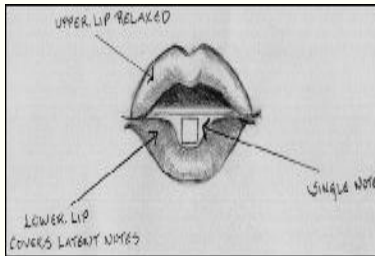
4) U-block - A variant of the Tongue Block where the tongue is (normally) rolled into a "U" shape, though the tightness of the curve varies a lot from player to player. The tip of the tongue is placed just beneath the hole to be played or even down onto the lower cover. The mouth is open to cover about 3 holes, and the tongue curves up, or is pushed up to block the left and right holes.

All bends and overblows/draws are available using any of these embouchures. There is no clear evidence of which I am aware that any embouchure allows faster or cleaner play than any other. The consensus best approach is to learn them all and use the ones you like.

Note: The tongue block is the only embouchure that offers split intervals and certain "slap" effects. (U-block techniques easily extend to become essentially tongue block techniques for blocking multiple holes.) In my opinion, for most people if only one embouchure were to be used, the tongue block would offer the most versatility. However, as mentioned above, there is no need to stick to only one embouchure, and it's best to learn as many as possible. (***Mad Dog disagrees, he prefers to primarily depend on the "pucker" block which frees the tongue to do complex rhythmic air control, he still uses tongue blocking for split intervals.***)

Also note: It is possible to "pucker/block" out of either corner of the mouth, and it is possible to lip block on either side of a single hole to be played. These modifications to the "standard" embouchures can add speed and accuracy since less harp/head movement is required to jump to a non-contiguous note. For the pucker/block, the harp is "twisted" from side to side to bring either corner of the mouth into play. For the tongue block, the tongue is moved left or right to cover/expose the proper notes. For U-blocking, the tongue can be moved from side to side to select individual notes with little or no movement of the harp relative to the mouth.

Single Notes!!!



THE PUCKER



TONGUE BLOCK



U BLOCK

Problems with hole 2 draw (and others)- It is normal for new players to have problems with hole 2 draw, other low draw holes, and the high draw notes. In 99% of the cases, it is the playing technique and not a bad harmonica at fault. If you stick with songs that are played between holes 4 and 7, you should not experience too much trouble with the blows or draws.

▪ Quick Tips:

1. **Good posture-** When playing and practicing, stand erect with your head up, back straight, and body relaxed.
2. **Knock out excess saliva-** Get in the habit of frequently rapping the harmonica (mouthpiece side down) against your leg or palm to knock out the excess saliva and condensation from your breath that accumulates inside the harmonica.
3. **Lick your lips and the mouthpiece** If you find your lips sticking to the harmonica when you slide or move from hole to hole, lick your lips and the mouthpiece part of the harmonica before playing. Saliva works best for this purpose, you do not need additional lubricants. If fact, they tend to cause more problems than they will solve.
4. **Move the harmonica, keep head still-** Attempt to move the harmonica and not your head when moving from hole to hole. Use a mirror to check.
5. **Practice 2 or 3 times a day-** 15 to 30 minutes of practice a day is a good amount of time if you can stick with it. You may find it easier to practice for 10 minutes 2 or 3 times a day and build up your endurance (it won't take too long). It's normal to get winded and feel muscle fatigue in your lips and hands for the first few months.
6. **Listen to harmonica playing-** As your skill level continues to increase, try to copy or mimic the sounds and solos of your favorite harmonica players.

Mr. Tambourine Man by Bob Dylan (for diatonic harmonica)

7 7 -7 -6 6 6 5

5 -6 6 5 4

4 -4 5 6 6 6

-6 6 -5 5 5 -4 -4

7 7 -7 -6 6 6 5

5 -6 6 5 4

4 -4 5 6 6 5 -5 5

-4 4 -4 5 -4 4

7 7 7 -7 -6 6 6 5

5 -6 6 5 4

4 -4 5 -6 6

5 4

4 -4 5 -6

6 5 4

4 -4 5 -6 6 5 4

7 7 -7 -6 6 6 -5

5 5 5 -4

7 7 7 7 -7 -6 6 6

5 5 -6 6 5 4

-4 5 -6 6 5 4

4 -4 5 -6 6 5 4

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

7 7 -7 -6 6 6 5

5 -6 6 5 4

4 -4 5 6 6 6 -6

6 -5 5 5 -4 -4

7 7 -7 -6 6 6 5

5 -6 6 5 4

4 -4 5 6 6 5 -5 5

-4 4 -4 5 -4 4

Key: Any key Harmonica played in 1st Position.

Because of the way a diatonic harmonica is tuned you can play this song with any 10-hole harmonica that you have. However, if you want to jam along in tune with a recording, you will need a harmonica in the key of the recording for the tab below.

Home on the Range

4 4 5 -5 6 5 -4 5 -6 -6 -6

Oh, give me a home where the buf-fa-lo roam,

6 -6 7 4 4 4 -3 4 -4

Where the deer and the an-te-lope play

4 4 5 -5 6 5 -4 5 -6 -6 -6

Where sel-dom is heard a dis-cour-a-ging word,

6 -6 7 4 4 4 -3 -4 4

And the skies are not cloud-y all day.

6 -5 5 -4 5

Home, home on the range,

4 4 4 5 5 5 -4 5 -5

Where the deer and the an-te-lope play.

4 4 5 -5 6 5 -4 5 -6 -6 -6

Where sel-dom is heard a dis-cour-a-ging word,

6 -6 7 4 4 4 -3 -4 4

And the skies are not cloud-y all day.

Silent Night



BLOW	DRAW

Franz Gruber (1787-1863)

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				in	
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			ly		
			peee		
					eese
				slee	
		in	eep		
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ly					
peace					



Written in "TurboTablature" for Harmonica
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