

Positions

Harp Key, Position, and Music Key												
Position/ Harp Key	1st Major	2nd Mixolydian	3rd Dorian	4th Aeolian	5th Phrygian	6th Locrian	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th Lydian
C	C	G	D	A	E	B	F#/Gb	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F
G	G	D	A	E	B	F#/Gb	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	C
D	D	A	E	B	F#/Gb	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	C	G
A	A	E	B	F#/Gb	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	C	G	D
E	E	B	F#/Gb	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	C	G	D	A
B	B	F#/Gb	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	C	G	D	A	E
F#/Gb	F#/Gb	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	C	G	D	A	E	B
Db	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F#/Gb
Ab	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F#/Gb	Db
Eb	Eb	Bb	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F#/Gb	Db	Ab
Bb	Bb	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F#/Gb	Db	Ab	Eb
F	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F#/Gb	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb

Harp players frequently talk about what *position* they are playing in. The position specifies the "where/how" of the root note in the scale being played. By "where" I mean "which hole", and by "how" I mean how the hole is played, i.e. blow, draw, bend, or overbend. Position is a useful term because diatonic harps come in all keys, but the relative note layout for each key is the same. This means that once you know a song on a harp in a

certain key you can use the same pattern of "where/how's" on any other key and still be playing the same song, or phrase or lick or riff, just *in a different key*. The consistency of patterns associated with scale types (e.g. the blues scale) makes the term position useful for communicating with other harp players, though musicians who play other instruments will have no use for the term--it won't tell them anything!

Positions are numbered according to the [circle of fifths](#). First position is where you start in the circle, and each step clockwise is one position higher. That is, as you add sharps to the key of the harp you increase the position number by the number of added sharps. For example, on a key of C harp playing 1st position puts you in the key of C. To figure out which key is 2nd position, go one step clockwise from C in the circle of fifths (i.e. add one sharp to the key) and you get G. 3rd position is another step clockwise (i.e. 2 sharps added to the 1st position key) which is D, and so on. Rather than memorizing a table of positions for each harp key it is much preferable to **learn the circle of fifths**, which is far more useful.

Since there are 12 distinct notes in a chromatic scale and in the circle of fifths, there are 12 different positions on the harp. When numbering the positions based on going clockwise around the circle of fifths we are essentially talking about "sharp" positions, since each clockwise step gives us a scale with one more sharp than the previous scale. It is pretty unnatural to think about a key having 12 sharps however! For this reason, some players talk about "flat" positions as well as regular positions. The flat positions are named and numbered according to a progression counterclockwise around the circle of fifths. So *first flat* on a key of C harp is the key of F. In terms of the "where/how" of playing, 1st flat is identical to 12th position. Similarly, 2nd flat is identical to 11th position, etc.

There is a natural mode associated with each position. By this I mean that by using just the natural non-bent unaltered blow and draw notes on the harmonica, when you start at a different where/how note you are playing a different mode. Here are the natural modes associated with some common positions.

1. **First position** is a major scale. The mode name for the major scale is called *Ionian*.
2. **Second position** is a major scale variant with a flatted 7th. The mode is called *Mixolydian*.
3. **Third position** is a minor scale. There is more than one minor scale, and the mode for this one is called *Dorian*.
4. **Fourth position** is the natural minor scale whose mode is called *Aeolian*.
5. **Fifth position** is another type of minor scale. The mode for this one is called *Phrygian*.
6. **Sixth position** has a sort of major scale feel and is called *Locrian*.
7. **Twelfth position**, also called **First Flat**, has a major scale type feel and is called *Lydian*.

Here is a table of the position associated with the root note of each scale mode showing the starting place and how the hole is played (i.e. the "where/how" talked about above). For example, first position starts on the hole 1 blow; second position starts on the hole 2 draw, and 12th position starts on the hole 2 draw whole step bend. (Each tic mark ' represents a half step bend.)

Position Designation of Tonic or "home" or "root" Note

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	
Blow	1	5	2	1	5	2	1	5	2	1	Blow
'''			9					10	7	11	'
"		12	4							8	"
'	8	7	11	8		9					
Draw	3	2	6	3	12	4	6	3	12	4	Draw

1st, 2nd , 3rd and 5th are particularly useful. First position is primarily useful for simple melodic playing for country, folk and polka style harmonica. Second position is our main go to position for blues and rock. Third position is often used for minor in the Dorian mode, and fifth position is perhaps the easiest way to play along with minor blues in the Phrygian mode, especially in case where the chord change back and forth from the minor to the relative major. (Like "The Hesitation Blues" by W. C. Handy)

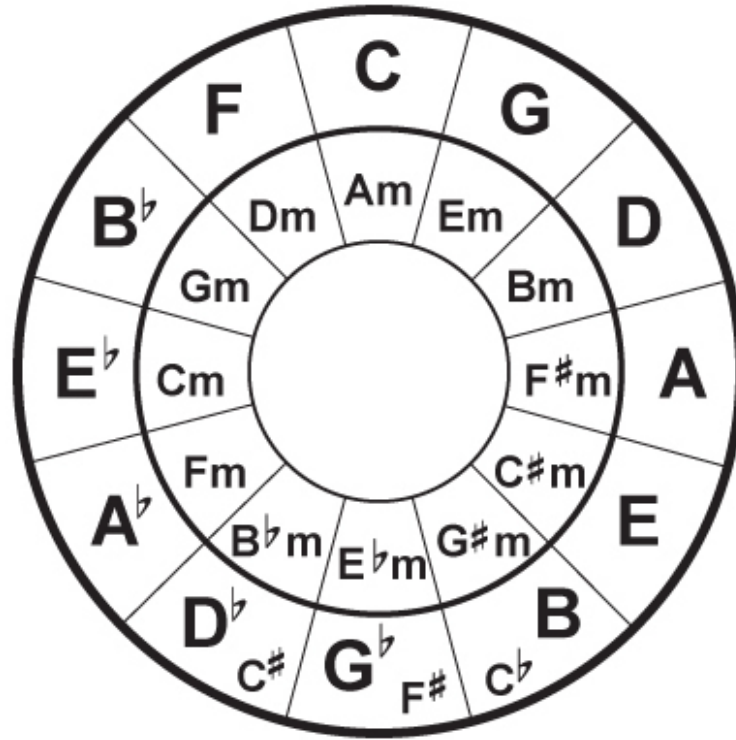
1st position, also called "straight" harp, is the natural key of the harmonica. In other words, if you have a key of C major tuned harmonica, first position utilizes the scale tones of the C major scale, which starts on the C note.

2nd position, commonly called "cross" harp, starts on the 2 draw and uses a scale a 5th higher than the natural key of the harmonica. 2nd position is the most commonly used harmonica position for Blues, Country, and Rock music because it makes use of draw notes much more than 1st position. This is important because the draw notes for holes 1-4, and 6 can be bent, allowing all the notes for the blues scale to be played, as well as being able to be played with more variety and nuance. For a key of C harmonica, the 5th scale tone is G (C=1, D=2, E=3, F=4, G=5), so playing 2nd position on a C harp is playing in the key of G (technically the G "mixolidian" mode).

3rd position, sometimes called "slant harp" or "double-crossed", is the scale starting another 5th up from 2nd position, e.g. for a C harmonica, D.

5th is equivalent to picking up the "cross" harp to play the relative minor of the major scale a 5th higher than the natural key of the harmonica.

To be able to easily determine the music key associated with any key harp in any position, you need to understand the [Circle of Fifths](#).



Which harmonica keys should I get?

If you are just starting, then your C harmonica will be fine. As you progress, then buy others. If you join in with guitar players (most people do to begin with), then the **following 5 harmonica keys will cover most situations: C, D, F, G, A.**

As your music progresses you will get harmonicas in other keys as well.

A final twist... second position

Many beginning harmonica players want to play blues. As always, you need a harmonica which matches the key of each blues song. However, most blues harmonica is played in **second position**, where the harmonica key is different to the key of the song.

The table below will show which key harmonica to use when playing second position blues.

Music Key —————> **Pick Up a Harmonica in this Key**

- A —————> **D**
- Bb —————> **Eb**
- B —————> **E**
- C —————> **F**
- C# —————> **F#**
- D —————> **G**
- Eb —————> **Ab**
- E —————> **A**
- F —————> **Bb**
- F# —————> **B**
- G —————> **C**
- Ab —————> **Db**

2nd position (G on C) **2nd Position Blues Riffs**

<p><u>Trouble Riff</u></p> <p>4 5 4 5 6 ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↑</p>	<p><u>Blues Riff #4</u></p> <p>6 5 4 5 6 ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↑</p>	<p><u>Mannish Boy Riff</u></p> <p>2 4 (3) 3 2 2 2 ↓ ↑ (↑) ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ opt.</p>
<p><u>Blues Riff #1</u></p> <p>2 3 4 4 4 3 2 ↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓</p>	<p><u>Blues Riff #2</u></p> <p>1 2 2 3 2 ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓</p>	<p><u>"Almost" Blues Scale</u></p> <p>2 3 4 4 5 6 5 4 4 3 2 ↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓</p>
<p><u>Blues Riff #3</u></p> <p>4 4 4 5 6 ↓ ↙ ↓ ↓ ↑ b</p>	<p><u>Blues Riff #4 w/ bend</u></p> <p>2 2 1 2 2 ↓ ↙ ↓ ↙ ↓ bb bb</p>	<p><u>Warble (trill)</u></p> <p>4 5 4 5 4 5 4 ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ etc.</p>
<p><u>Triplet Riffs</u></p> <p>4 3 4 6 5 4 4 5 4 3 2 2 ↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↑</p>		

(Triplets: all three notes in one foot tap. Emphasize first note each time.)

You will soon learn which harmonica to use. In the meantime, write this table on to a business card, and keep it with your harmonicas. I used a "cheat sheet" table like this for years until I replaced it now with the Circle of Fifths diagram like the one above.

The throat is independent of tongue. Keep the throat in a "pre-yawn attitude". As you begin to yawn, the throat does its thing by opening and relaxing, with very gentle muscle flex. When you recognize it for what it is, you can voluntarily keep your throat in this "attitude" the whole time you play the harmonica. (I've trained myself to automatically do this even as the harmonica approaches my mouth).

Changes in pitch can be totally controlled by the tongue, with minimal amount of musculature. In fact, I've discovered that most will use the tongue almost correctly, but bundle it together with a lot of unnecessary musculature tension.

The trick is to eliminate everything that does not contribute to the desired effect.

To this end, I began teaching tongue position awareness 10 years ago at Augusta Heritage Center Blues Week and to my private students, once again with astonishing results.

When you say the consonants (or nonsense words) "T", "D", "Rrrrr", "K", "Guh" and "Cha" (The Jewish "Cha" - not the dance "Cha Cha) and turn your full attention to what the tongue does to create these sounds, you will find TARGET SPOTS along the roof of your mouth (moving from just behind your upper front teeth to down the back of the throat) that you can "aim" your curving tongue towards. The airflow that enters your mouth is diverted up and over the curve created in the tongue when aimed at these target points. This airflow diversion instigates the bending effect. On the inhale, you will find it easy to create all the inhale bends in, say hole 3, by coupling the aural feedback of correct pitch with a definite spot to which you aim for in curving the tongue. For instance, 3 hole inhale 1st bend may be a target point around the "T" with subsequent lower bends having target points that move back towards the throat ("Rrrrr", "K", "Guh", etc).

Try this slowly a few times right now. You will develop a sense of solid and specific target points that can be recreated exactly time and time again. You can aim your tongue at these points. Remember, the tongue is a miracle muscle that can be quite acrobatic and you CAN learn to control it. It was just taught in quite this fashion to anyone outside of those that specialize in linguistic differences and/or language accents.

If you combine this new knowledge with the BREATHE YOUR HARMONICA - not suck, blow or draw it - and keep your throat at the pre-yawn attitude, you will discover the doorway to complete control of all the bends with MINIMAL amount of musculature movement and effort.

This is actually much easier to teach to someone that has never played the harmonica, as they are not full of bad habits that need undoing. I've taught rank beginners to do this in one lesson and see amazing results within one to two weeks. I've had these students totally out control notes created through bending technique when compared to players with years of experience and bad habits.

The exhale notes created through bending technique uses the exact same concept. The difference is that the air direction is out, so the tongue has to curve at the very front of the mouth, creating that up and over air deflection effect at the front of the mouth. It is a bit more "compressed", so the target points need to be created in a much tighter area, but once you "get it" through inhale bending, it is not much of a stretch to apply this new knowledge to the exhale.

Once again, you will have to rethink and undo bundled bad habits and rebuild your technique. However, I promise you that the results are worth it. You will begin to approach effortless mastery of bends.

The Iceman

When bending very low notes, some players describe this as bending 'with the throat' but I'm fairly sure that it's really just the tongue constricting in concert with the very back tip of the soft palate, which feels as if it's in the throat.

Bending is initiated and controlled by the tongue - not the throat. Hold the throat open in the pre-yawn attitude.

Raise areas of the tongue towards the back (the "guh" "kuh" areas as target points) for inhale bends. If you were to use your tongue to scratch the back of your throat, it would be curved in a similar way. The challenge is to find that sweet spot - the small area of the tongue towards the back - that creates all the bending, and move it. Most people who bend indiscriminately are indeed moving the proper area of the tongue, but are bundling it with a lot of unneeded movement of the throat, jaw and tongue. Remove what you don't need and find the essence of the bend in minimal tongue movement.

The Iceman

I wouldn't make such a flat categorical statement as the Iceman makes below. Some bends are more easily controlled by the throat than by the tongue. Some of the deeper bends can benefit from this approach, as can tongue blocked bend in the middle and lower ranges of the harp.

Two things are needed to make a note bend:

- Tuning the mouth (ee-ooo vowels are one way of doing this)
- Activating the bend by creating a narrow passage in the airflow. This defines the back "wall" of the tuned chamber in your mouth. Without this the whistling analogy and ee-oo vowels will have little or no effect on the pitch of a note.

There are two places (maybe more) that you can activate the bend.

One is on the tongue, in about the place where you hump the tongue up to the roof of the mouth to say "K" (the K-spot).

The other is where you cough - the Cough-spot.

In both these places, you normally block off the airflow entirely for a brief moment to say "K" or to cough. When bending, you want to narrow them but not close them off. When inhaling a bend, you should feel suction trying to pull the tunnel shut. When exhaling a bend, you should feel pressure trying to push the tunnel open.

Winslow

The whistling inward analogy may be imperfect (all analogies are imperfect by definition) but nonetheless it is an effective exercise that is intuitively understood by almost all beginning harp students who want to bend notes. It is WAY more easily applied than any arcane lecture about narrowed air flows, dropped jaws, or humped tongues. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. It works well with many students, who are delighted to find that bending notes was so easy...

-Spec20

SPOONFUL intro

The -2 is played

with a slight bend, listen to the song for timing (~ = rest)

-2 2 -1-2 2 -2 2 ~~~~~ 2

-1 2 -2 2 -2 2 ~~~~~2

12 Bar Blues (Phil Wiggins)

12 Bar Blues (Phil Wiggins)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1 2 3 4

(tah)
ta
da
da
dah
dah
da
dah

QUARTER NOTE BLOW
 QUARTER NOTE DRAW
 DRAW BEND (1 semitone)
 DRAW BEND (2 semitones)
 DRAW BEND (3 semitones)
 OVERBLOW
 2 - 1/8 NOTES
 HALF NOTE

Funkin' Up All The Bends

-1 -2" -2' -2 -3" -3' -3 -4 5 -4 -5 5 -3' -2

-2 -2' -2" 2 3 -3''' 3 -3''' -3 -4' 5 5 6 -6'6 -6' -7 6 -6' 8

-8 -8' -8 -8 8 -9 9' -10 -9 9' -8

7 -8 8' 8 9 8' 8 7 10 10" 10' 9

2 -2" -1 -2 -3' -9 9 -9 8 9 8 8' 9 8' -8

1 -1' -1 -56 (trill)

-1 -2" -2' -2 -3" -3' -3



HARMONICA TAB LIBRARY

Website: www.harmonicatabs.net

Email: contact@harmonicatabs.net

Key: F

Genre: Blues

Harp Type: Diatonic

Skill: Beginner

Spoonful

4 5 4 5 4 5 4

4 5 4 5 4 5 4

7 -9 -9 -9 8 7 7 7 7

It could be a spoon full of diamonds

-9 -9 -9 8 7 7 7

could be a spoon full of gold.

-9 -9 -9 -9 8 7 -6 7 -6 -5

Just a little spoon of your precious love

7 7 -6 -5 -5

Satisfies my soul.

Chorus:

7 -7-6 -5 -5 -5

Men lies about it.



We share Harmonica Tabs for Free – Our goal is to have a website where everyone can find and share all of their Harmonica Tabs in one central location. Please feel free to look around and post the harp tabs you have or request ones you are



HARMONICA TAB LIBRARY

Website: www.harmonicatabs.net

Email: contact@harmonicatabs.net

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

Some of them cries about it.

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

Some of them dies about it.

-9 8 7 -6 7 -6 -6 -5 -5 4

Everything fights about a spoonful.

4 5 4 5 4 5 4

That spoon, that spoon, that spoonful.

4 5 4 5 4 5 4

That spoon, that spoon, that spoonful.

7 -9 -9 -9 8 7 7 7 7

It Could be a spoon full of coffee

-9 -9 -9 8 7 7 7

Could be a spoon full of tea.

-9 -9 -9 -9 8 7 -6 7 -6 -5

Just a little spoon of your precious love

-5 7 7 -6 -5 -5

Is good enough for me.

Chorus

7 -9 -9 -9 8 7 7 7 7

It could be a spoon full of water,

-9 -9 -9 8 7 7



We share Harmonica Tabs for Free – Our goal is to have a website where everyone can find and share all of their Harmonica Tabs in one central location. Please feel free to look around and post the harp tabs you have or request ones you are

6 Blow Down #1 (90 BPM)

L-1, C harp, 2nd position

JP Allen

90

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

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

D C G 4 5 -5 6 6 -5 -5 -4 -4 -5 -5 6 6 -5 -4 -4 D

Play along, listen to how it goes at: <https://www.harmonica.com/songs/>. **For C harps only** but you can still listen to get the general idea of how it sounds. This is a great blues solo for you to learn if you are a beginner. If you want to play the blues, start with this piece! There are no bends, but it still has a classic blues sound. This piece will help you get comfortable with some of the most important notes in the blues scale as well as to play with that classic shuffle rhythm that made blues famous.

Blues Riff with a few bends:

Riff1: 3 4 -3 3.

Riff2: -2 -2 -2 -2 -2b 1

b stands for bend.

Riff3: -1 -2 -1 -2 -2b. -1 -2 -1 -2 -2b -1 -1

Riff4: -4 5 -4 5 -5 -5 -5 5 5 5 -4 -4 -4 -4 -4 -4 -6 -6 -6 -6 -6 -6 -3
4 -4b -4 4 -3 -2 -5 5 -4 -3 -2 -2 3 -2 3 -2 -1 -4b -2

12 Slow Blues Riffs

| #=Tounge block | b=Short Bend | bb=Long Bend

1: -2 -3b +4 -4b +6#3 -4b -3 -2

2: -2 -3b +4 -4b +6#3 -4bb -3 -2 -2b

3: -2 -3b +4 -4bb +6#3
-4b -5 +6 -5 +4 -3 -4b -3 -2

4: -2 -3b +4 -4bb +6#3 -4 -5 +6 -6 +6 -5
-4b -5 -4 -3 -2 -2 -321

5: -2 -3b +4 -4bb +6#3 -4b -3 -4b
-3 -4b -3 -4b -4bb -3 -2

6: -4 -4b +4 -3bb -2 -2 -2b -1
-4 -4b +4 -3bb -2 -2 -2b -1

7: -2 -3b +4 -4b -4b -4b -4b +6#3
-4b -4b -4b -4b -4bb -3 -2 -3 -2 -321

8: -2 -3b -4 +4 +5 +6 +6 -4b -4b -4b
-2 -3b -4 +4 +5 +6 +6 -4b -4b -4b

9: -2 -2 -2b -2b -2bb -1 -1bb -3b -2 -1
-3b -2 -1 -3b -2 -1 +1 -1 -2 hold

10: -4b -4b -4b -5#2 -4#1 -5#2 -5#2 -4#1
+5#2 -4#1 +4#1 +6#3 -5 +5 -4 -3b -2

11: -2 -3b -4 +3 -3b -4 +3 -3b -4 +3 -2
-321 -321 -321 (repeat)

12: -2 -3 +4 -4bb +6#3 -4b -3 -2 -321 -321 -321b -2 -2
-3b +4 +6#3 -4b -4bb -3 -2 -2bb +6#3 -321 -321 +6#3