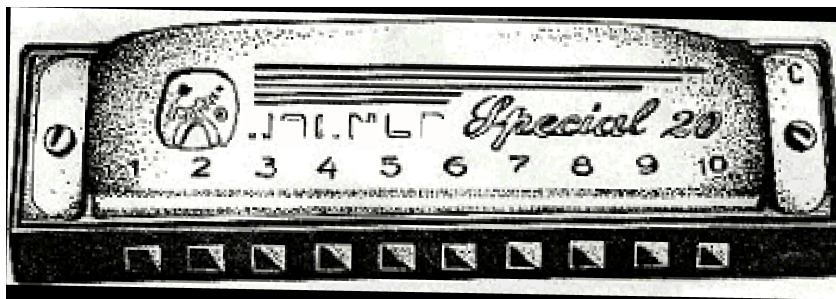


Harmonica Beginner Manual, 4th Edition



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About the Instructor

Frank Strong is on the roster of the Iowa Arts Council, Metro Arts Alliance of Des Moines, Partners in Art and VSA Arts of Iowa. Frank began to play guitar and harmonica when he was 18 years old. In his day job, Frank is Associate Director at a non-profit training agency serving persons with disabilities in central Iowa. Frank regularly teaches harmonica through Des Moines Adult Education and at arts days for local schools. Frank enjoys playing a variety of music, performing at farmer's markets and jamming with local blues bands. Frank has recorded a CD of his favorite railroad songs accompanied by guitar and harmonica, which can be heard on his website **rrsongs.com**.

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History

Adapted from *Blues and Rock Harmonica* by Glenn Weiser.

The story of the harmonica began with the Chinese Emperor Nyn-Kwya, who invented a free-reed instrument called the sheng ('sublime voice') in 3000 B. C. This early instrument is considered the forerunner of the modern harmonica.

The present-day harmonica was invented in 1821 by a German clockmaker named Christian Buschman who put fifteen pitch pipes together. In 1857 Matthias Hohner decided to manufacture harmonicas on a large scale in Trossingen, Germany. The harmonica spread all over Germany, and with the mass emigration of Germans in the latter half of the nineteenth century, all over the world. By the time of the American Civil War, the harmonica was well established in the United States. Many soldiers on both sides of the Civil War played them.

As harmonicas became more widely available, different playing styles have evolved. Players discovered that notes could be lowered in pitch by changing the pressure exerted on reeds. These 'blue' notes of the African vocal scale were reproduced on the new instrument. By the 1920's, when recording companies began to look for blues acts, blues harp was a common sound in the southern part of the United States. After World War II, a large relocation of blacks from the rural south to the urban north took place. Many moved to Chicago, with the giants of blues harmonica recording and performing there.

Other musicians popularized the harmonica as a rock instrument. Young English guitarists imitated American black blues guitarists. The blues-based British rock invasion of the late 1960's re-popularized the blues, and helped to establish the harmonica as a rock as well as a blues instrument.

And now **you** will be a part of the history of the harmonica . . .

Beginning to Play

A diatonic harmonica has ten holes. Each hole can play two different notes, depending on whether you are exhaling (blowing) or inhaling (drawing). The 20 notes of the diatonic harmonica cover a range of three octaves. They are arranged in such a way that only the middle octave contains a complete eight-note scale.

1st position **Major Scale** (Key of C on C diatonic)

	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	7		7	7	6	6	5	5	4	4
Up	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	Down	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑
Note-	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C		C	B	A	G	F	E	D	C
	do	re	mi	fa	sol	la	ti	do									

How to play the diatonic harmonica in the key of C:

1. Hold the harmonica with one hand at each end, with the numbers facing you. Low notes are on the left and high notes are on the right
2. Holes 4, 5, 6 and 7 will play the notes of the beginner songs.
3. Position your mouth over the fourth hole. Pretend you are sipping on a straw, or whistling.
4. Blowing into hole 4 will play a C. Draw on hole 4 and you have D.
5. Blowing into hole 5 plays an E. Drawing out plays F.
6. Blow on 6 for a G and draw to get A.
7. Draw on 7 for a B.
8. Blow into 7 for the top note of the C major scale.
9. Practice going slowly up and down the scale several times until you can hit each note.
10. Lift your tongue on and off holes 1, 2 and 3 and you will get a C chord.

Make sure your mouth is clean before playing. Tap the harmonica lightly to remove debris. Soaking your harmonica in water is NOT recommended.

The Number System

Begin by playing a C Major scale. Any plain number indicates to blow on that hole. A number with a - before it means to draw on that hole.

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C'
4	-4	5	-5	6	-6	-7	7
blow	draw	blow	draw	blow	draw	draw	blow

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to be able to read music to play harmonica?

No. There are several systems for notating harmonica music that do not use a clef. Most use up arrows for the blow (exhale) notes, and down arrows for the draw (inhale) notes.

What if I have problems playing a single note?

Don't worry too much about playing single notes. Have some fun with the songs first. Practice single notes by placing your index fingers tightly over holes 3 and 5 and cram the whole thing into your mouth. Tightly cover holes 3 and 5 and practice blowing into hole 4. Or, use your fingers to manually squeeze in the corners of your lips. Now try to maintain this position without your fingers. The average person takes a few weeks to get this technique. Repeat it slowly over and over again until you build the correct muscle memory.

How far in my mouth should the harmonica go?

The harmonica should always be **between** your lips and **not against** them. That is, we want the harmonica against the inside of our lips and not the outside of our lips. Try this on hole number 4, slowly blowing and drawing. As a general rule, always put the harmonica as far into your mouth as possible while still playing a clean single note.

How long should I practice?

For the first few weeks of playing you will find that after a short amount of time your lips get tired and they don't do exactly what you ask them to. This is perfectly normal and will go away with practice and time. It is normal for your mouth and hands to get tired after playing for extended periods. Practice for 10 minutes 2 or 3 times a day and build up your endurance.

What if the harmonica sticks to my lips?

If your lips begin sticking to the harmonica when you go from hole to hole, lick your lips and the portion of the harmonica where you would place them. Any lubricants other than your natural saliva are not recommended.

What about saliva?

Keep your head up while playing, which will help keep the excess saliva that you will naturally generate from ending up in the harmonica. Remove excess moisture from inside the harmonica from time to time by rapping the harmonica, mouthpiece down, against your palm or leg. The excess moisture can clog the reeds in the harmonica.

Beginner Songs

Remember, a plain number indicates to blow on that hole.
A number with a - before it means to draw on that hole.

g	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C'
3	4	-4	5	-5	6	-6	-7	7
blow	blow	draw	blow	draw	blow	draw	draw	blow

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Twin-kle, twin-kle, lit-tle star. How I won-der what you are.

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

Up above the world so high, like a dia-mond in the sky.

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

Twin-kle, twin-kle, lit-tle star. How I won-der what you are.

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

Taps (all blows)

Day is done	Gone the sun	From the lake	from the hills
3 3 4	3 4 5	3 4 5	3 4 5

from the sky	all is well,	Safe-ly rest.	God is nigh
3 4 5	4 5 6	5 4 3	3 3 4

London Bridge

Lon-don bridge is fall-ing down,	fall-ing down, fall-ing down.
6 -6 6 -5 5 -5 6	-4 5 -5 5 -5 6

Lon-don bridge is fall-ing down,	my fair la-dy.
6 -6 6 -5 5 -5 6	-4 6 5 4

Ring Around the Rosies

Ring a-round the ro-sies.	A pock-et full of po-sies.
6 6 5 -6 6 5	5 6 6 5 -6 6 5

Ash-es , ash-es	We all fall down.
6 5 6 5	5 6 5 4

Baa Baa Black Sheep

Baa, baa, black sheep have you an - y wool? Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full.
4 4 6 6 -6 -6 -6 -6 6 -5 -5 5 5 -4 -4 4

1 for my master and 1 for my dame, and 1 for the lit-tle boy who lives down the lane
6 6 6 -5 -5 -5 5 5 5 -4 -4 6 6 6 -5 -5 -5 -5 5 5 5 -4

Baa, baa, black sheep have you an-y wool? Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full.
4 4 6 6 -6 -6 -6 -6 6 -5 -5 5 5 -4 -4 4

Mary Had a Little Lamb

Ma-ry had a lit-tle lamb, lit-tle lamb, lit-tle lamb
5 -4 4 -4 5 5 5 -4 -4 -4 5 6 6

Ma-ry had a lit-tle lamb, it's fleece was white as snow.
5 -4 4 -4 5 5 5 5 -4 -4 5 -4 4

When the Saints Go Marching In

Oh when the saints, go march-ing in, Oh when the saints, go march-ing in,
4 5 -5 6 4 5 -5 6 4 5 -5 6 5 4 5 -4

Lord, I want to be in that num-ber. When the saints go march-ing in.
5 -4 4 4 5 6 6 6 -5 5 -5 6 5 4 -4 4

Jingle Bells

Jin-gle bells, jin-gle bells, jin-gle all the way
5 5 5 5 5 5 5 6 4 -4 5

Oh, what fun it is to ride in a one horse o-pen slei-eigh
-5 -5 -5 -5 -5 5 5 5 5 5 -4 -4 5 -4 6

Jin-gle bells, jin-gle bells, jin-gle all the way
5 5 5 5 5 5 5 6 4 -4 5

Oh, what fun it is to ride In a one horse o-pen sleigh
-5 -5 -5 -5 -5 5 5 5 5 6 6 -5 -4 4

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat Gent - ly down the stream
4 4 4 -4 5 5 -4 5 -5 6

Mer-ri-ly, mer-ri-ly, mer-ri-ly mer-ri-ly Life is but a dream.
7 7 7 6 6 6 5 5 5 4 4 4 6 -5 5 -4 4

Good Night, Ladies

Good night, la-dies, good night la-dies
5 4 3 4 5 4 -5 -5

Good night la-dies, we're going to leave you now.
5 4 -5 -5 -5 5 5 -4 -4 4

Mer-ri-ly we roll a-long, roll a-long, roll al-ong.
5 -4 4 -4 5 5 5 -4 -4 -4 5 6 6

Mer-ri-ly we roll a-long, o'er the deep blue sea.
5 -4 4 -4 5 5 5 -4 -4 5 -4 4

On Top of Old Smokey

On top of Old Smok-ey all cov-ered with snow.
4 4 5 6 7 -6 -5 6 -6 5

I lost my true lov-er, a court-in' too slow.
4 4 5 6 6 -4 5 -5 5 -4 4

Now court-in's a pleas-ure, and part-ing is grief
4 4 5 6 7 -6 -6 -5 6 -6 6

And a false-heart-ed lov-er is worse than a thief.
4 4 4 5 6 6 -4 5 -5 5 -4 4

Intermediate Songs

c d e g b C D E F G A B C' D' E' F' G' A' C''
 1 -1 2 (-2 and 3) -3 4 -4 5 -5 6 -6 -7 7 -8 8 -9 9 -10 10

Louis, Louis

-3 -3 -3 4 -4 -4 -4 4 -4 4 -4 -3 -2 -2

Bridge: 6 -5 -4 4 -3 -2

Jamming Riffs

(to play along with your favorite musicians)

First Position Riffs

Practice Riff

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

Warble (Trill)

4 5 4 5 4 5 3

Can't Turn You Loose'

Blues Bros. 2000 CD

5 -4 4 5 5 -4 -4 4



Second Position Riffs

Frank's Riff

-2 -2 2 -1 -2

Love Lost Riff

-1 -2 -2 -3 -2

Blues Pattern

-2 -3 -4 5 6 5 -4 -3
 (-2)

Octave Riff

This riff ends on an octave above the beginning note.

-2 -3 -4 5 6

Harmonica Resources

Books: (from the Des Moines Public Library) See your local library for other resources.

- *Starting Blues Harmonica for Young Blues Harp Players* by Stuart "Son" Maxwell. **Highly Recommended**
- *Blues Harp from Scratch* by Mick Kinsella
- *Instant Chromatic Harmonica: the Blues/Jazz Improvisation Method* by David Harp.
- *You Can Teach Yourself Blues Harp* by Phil Duncan.
- Also available are various CDs of harmonica performances.

Instruction and Song Web Sites:

- Jack's Giant Harmonica Songbook (<http://www.volcano.net/~jackmearl/songs/index.html>) 600+ online songs in categories, online lessons, searchable
- Harmonica Country (<http://www.harmonicacountry.com/>) lessons, songbooks for sale
- Wilbur's Music Page (<http://www.hoerl.com/Music/harmon1.html>) beginner tips, images of harmonica positions, lip blocking

Harmonica Magazines:

- American Harmonica Newsmagazine, 104 Highland Avenue, Battle Creek, MI 49105
- Easy Reeding (Hohner USA) see their website (<http://www.hohnerusa.com>)

Company Web Sites:

- Harmonicas & Stuff (<http://www.harmonicasadstuff.com>) harmonicas, accessories
- Harp Depot (<http://www.harpdepot.com/>) Suzuki, Hohner and Lee Oskar harps, mini harps, instruction books
- Hohner Company (<http://www.hohnerusa.com>) history, harmonica models, Frequently Asked Questions, dealers
- Suzuki Harmonicas (<http://suzukimusic.com/harmonica>)
- Mel Bay Instruction Books (<http://www.melbay.com/>)

