



Notation Key

David Barrett Lesson Material & Song Transcriptions

2nd Edition

Notation of Technique

The harmonica is a very technique-rich instrument. In order to transcribe solos accurately, symbols are used along with standard music notation to designate which technique, or combinations of techniques, are used.

It is not practical to notate every action taken to perform a note or sound on the harmonica (over-notating can also make a transcription very difficult to read). For example, when a note is performed without any techniques that would imply a note has been played with a pucker embouchure (such as triple tonguing) or a tongue block embouchure (such as octaves), it can be impossible to know which embouchure was being used. Another example is when an artist tongue blocks, they will commonly slap notes. How much a note is slapped ranges from 1% (unnoticeable) to 100% (an overly exaggerated chord before the single note), so it makes no sense to notate the use of the slap, knowing that almost every note can be slapped, and the degree of the slap can vary—use your ears to tell you what's going on.

As to which embouchure is being used, some passages will be obvious to you that you must tongue block, others you will have the choice of which embouchure you feel presents a passage best. There is no way to know 100% whether an artist is tongue blocking a particular passage or not. It all gets down to choosing which embouchure YOU believe produces the closest sound to a particular artist or which embouchure YOU choose to perform with.

I will notate all of the important areas that need to be notated. Lesson material is available for study to become familiar with these techniques so that you can use your ears to tell you how much of one or another technique is used. Also keep in mind that the use of tone variation, vibrato, dynamics and shading of notes cannot be notated effectively, so use these transcriptions as a guide and let YOUR EARS tell you what's going on in a song.

Keys

All of my transcriptions (excluding some chromatic harmonica transcriptions) are written as if you are playing on a C Major Diatonic Harmonica. This is very beneficial to the studying harmonica player to think and become proficient in one key. Understand that you can perform any song in any key by simply using a different-keyed harmonica.

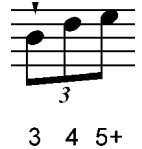


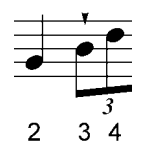

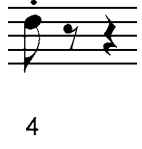

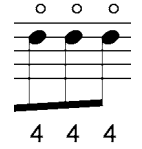

Reference Material

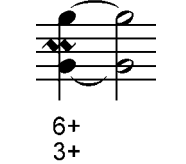
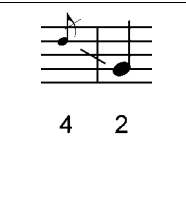
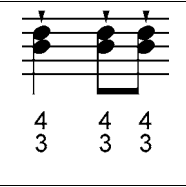


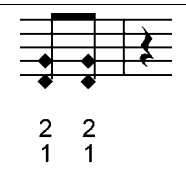
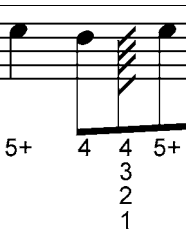
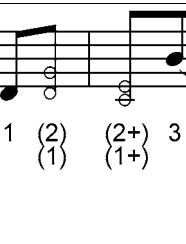
For the first time in blues harmonica history there is an abundance of material available to study. At the end of this notation key I will provide a listing of books that I feel will help you to understand more about technique and application. I have also provided next to each technique a reference to one or more of my method materials that teach this technique or concept.

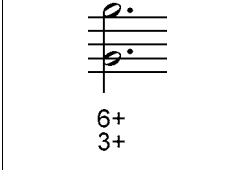
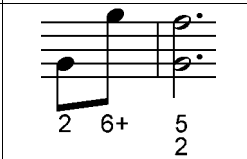
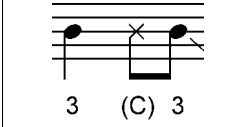
Study Recommendations

When studying a piece of music, start by slowing down the music to a speed where you can hear what's going on well (the Amazing Slowdowner is great for this, found at www.ronimusic.com). Study each chorus at a very slow tempo until you can play the entire song accurately at a slow tempo. Once you have all of the notes, rhythms and techniques down for the song, focus on the fine details such as dynamics, note textures, tone changes, vibrato usage and anything else that will help to polish the song. Speed the song up little by little until you reach the original tempo of the song. Try to find a play-along track with a similar tempo and feel to practice with. Finally, think about how you'll describe the song to a band if you wish to perform the song on stage.

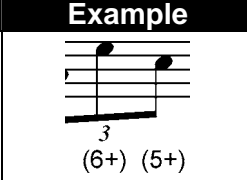
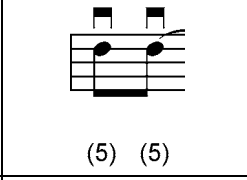
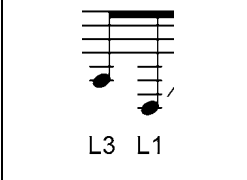
Basic Notation & Common Techniques – Ordered from most common to least common

Technique	Example	Description	Reference
Blow & Draw		When a hole number stands by itself (3) the hole is to be inhaled (draw). When a hole number is followed by a plus (3+) the hole is to be exhaled (blow).	All Books
Bend Slash(s) next to hole number		For each degree of a bend on the harmonica a slash will be used following the hole number. A 3 draw half step bend (B-flat) is notated with one slash (3'). A 3 draw whole step bend (A) is notated with two slashes (3''). A 3 draw minor third bend (A-flat) is notated with three slashes (3''').	C1 p60-68 BHTDVD12 S1
Slur Curved line above or below connecting two note heads.		The slur indicates to slide smoothly from the pitch of one note to the pitch of another note.	General Music Notation
Dip Small "V" shape above a note.		Note starts bent (around a quartertone to a half step) and releases quickly. Some players use the articulations: Ya, Gya, Tya or Kya. A dip is a cleaner way to notate this technique compared to writing out the bent note with a slur to the non-bent note. When a dip is present on a bent note (3' B-flat), you will start below the pitch of the bent note (slightly below B-flat)—ending at the notated pitch (B-flat).	C1 p69 BB p18 BHTDVD12
Cut Small upside-down "V" above a note		The opposite of a Dip—note starts at natural pitch and quickly bends downward (around a quartertone to a half step). The articulations Dow, Gow or Cow work well.	BH2 p11
Staccato Dot above note head		Note still receives its full note value, but is played short. (such as a "Ta," not holding the note after articulating).	General Music Notation
Shake Three slashes above or below note head(s)		Shake between lower and upper notes. We commonly start with the lower note and then start the shake. Most draw shakes start with a dip. You can open your embouchure a bit to allow a little of the other note to bleed for a dirtier shake. You can also shake in an octave or fake-octave embouchure.	BB p17 C1 p42 BHTDVD12
Slap Small open circle above note head		Same as standard tongue block (lips over four holes, tongue blocks three left holes), but tongue starts off the harmonica, sounds chord, and tongue slaps down to leave one note sounding (similar to saying "Hal"). This is not notated in newer books and transcriptions.	BB p24 C2 p18 BHTDVD12 EX3 BBC
Flutter Tongue Same notation as shake, but notice there is no second note for a shake		Same embouchure as slap, but tongue travels on and off the harmonica to create a "flutter-like" effect.	C2 p26 BHTDVD12 EX3 BBC

<p>Side-Flutter Tongue Small squiggly line between note heads</p>		<p>Same embouchure as flutter tongue, but tongue moves left to right. You can use the tip of the tongue to cover less holes, thus achieving a larger chord sound or block three holes at a time, only hearing the octave notes (left and right single holes) jump back and fourth.</p>	<p>Little Walter's "Off The Wall," 5th Chorus</p>
<p>Glissando Line traveling in an upward or downward direction to note head</p>		<p>Slide between the two notes that are connected by the glissando. When there is no starting note for the glissando, look at the direction of the line that leads to the note head. If the line starts high and leads downward to a note head, slide from somewhere on the harmonica that is higher in pitch than the note you are traveling too. Opposite for lines traveling upward.</p>	<p>C1 p38 BHTDVD12</p>
<p>Note Combination</p>		<p>The addition of an upper note for a thicker texture. How much of the upper note depends on how strong of a chord sound you want. If only a little bit of upper note is added, I will use parenthesis on the upper tablature hole number to show that only a little bit of air should leak into the upper hole.</p>	<p>General Music Notation</p>
<p>Quarternote Small plus (+) above a note head</p>		<p>Half of a half step bend. Basically, it's a very slight bend. The example at left shows a half step bend for the tablature on the 3 draw (3' B-flat). The music notation shows the half step bend B-flat. The plus (+) above the note head indicates that the note should be played a quartertone higher than notated. For this instance you would play a pitch between the 3 draw and 3 draw half step bend. Quartertones are used often in blues—especially on the 3 draw in second position. If you don't bend enough, your line will sound very major (non-bluesy). If you bend the 3 draw too much, your line will sound very dark (more towards sounding minor than bluesy). You will see in the notation (and hear on recordings) that players will use many variations of the bend on the 3 draw. Listen carefully and do your best to match the player's pitch.</p>	<p>C2 p14 BHTDVD34</p>
<p>Grace Note Small note with slash on stem</p>		<p>A grace note indicates to play a note quickly before the next note. A grace note is used in place of a faster notated rhythm in the cases where the note is played so quickly that it doesn't make sense to place it in the normal stream of a line.</p>	<p>General Music Notation</p>
<p>Chuk Diamond-shaped note heads</p>		<p>This is a special notation where a player hits a set of notes with a strong, staccato attack. Articulations for this are commonly: chuk, tut or kuk. Listen to Junior Well's instrumental "Chitlin Con Carne" for a great example of this.</p>	<p>Junior Well's "Chitlin Con Carne"</p>
<p>Pull Slash-shaped note heads</p>		<p>Tongue covers all four holes (no notes sound), slight pressure is built and tongue releases to sound chord. Unlike the Lift, the Pull is an articulation (more common).</p>	<p>BB p30 BHTDVD12 EX3 BBC BH1</p>
<p>Rhythmic Breathing & Ghosted Notes Thin, hollow-shaped note heads</p>		<p>Rhythmic Breathing is used by players for rhythmic effect between main musical lines. These lines are not just breaths on the harmonica, but rhythmic elements that if not played present the song differently than the original. These should be played very softly. Ghosted Notes are basically the same, but sometimes not heard, but felt—note(s) may not sound, just the sound of the player's articulation or cough is heard.</p>	<p>Little Walter's "Rocker"</p>

Octave Embouchure		An embouchure where four to five holes are covered by the lips and the tongue blocks the middle holes to sound the notes on the left and right to produce an octave. All common tongue block techniques can be used on the octave (slaps, pulls, side-pulls, pull-slaps, flutters, side-flutters, etc.).	BB p31 C2 p21 BHHTDVD12
Fake Octave		Same as octave embouchure, but notes are not octaves (in our example at left the interval of a flat-7th is played).	BB p31 C2 p21 BHHTDVD12
Cough X-shaped note head with (C) in tablature		Similar to a Ghosted Note, but a strong cough is used to pronounce the note.	Magic Dick's "Whammer Jammer," 2nd Chorus
Wa	Wa	Note sounds with hands closed tight, then hands open quickly creating a "Wa" sound.	BHTDVD12
Roll	Roll	Tongue flutters like the Spanish "R," as in "Rosa" or the top-back of the tongue like the Hebrew "Ch" as in "Chaiim."	Big Walter Horton's "La Cucaracha"
Double Vibrato	Double Vibrato	Throat vibrato with hand tremolo.	William Clarke's "Lollipop Mama," 1st Chorus
Straight Eighths	Straight Eighths	A passage where the rhythm moves from a swing (triplet-based) feel to a straight (eighth note-based) feel.	William Clarke's "Blowin' the Family Jewels," 6th Chorus

Chromatic Harmonica Specific Notation

Technique	Example	Description	Reference
Button In Hole number in parenthesis		Slide button in when this notation is present.	Little Walter's "Blue Light"
Slide Jab Staple-like shape above a note head		Start with the slide button out and press the slide button in quickly to perform the notated note. In the example at left the 5 draw would be played first, with the slide coming in quickly after. The note produced when the slide is out is similar to a grace note.	Mitch Kashmar's "Crazy Mixed Up World"
Low Octave "L" next to hole number		On 16-hole chromatic harmonicas (such as the Hohner Super Chromonica model 280C) there is a range of four holes that is one octave lower than the lowest holes of the standard 12-hole chromatic. These holes are also labeled as 1 through 4, confusing it with the standard range 1 through 4. In notation, an "L" will be placed before the hole number to designate that it is to be played in the low register.	Little Walter's "Blue Light"

Techniques Not Notated

Technique	Description	Reference
Pucker	An embouchure where you use your lips to obtain a single note and any other desired note combinations.	BB1 CC1
Tongue Block	An embouchure where you use your tongue to obtain a single note and any other desired note combinations. Mouth commonly placed over four holes with the tongue blocking the three holes to the left, leaving the single note on the right side of your embouchure to sound.	BB p24 C2 p18 BHTDVD12 EX3 BBC
Pull-Slap	An articulate slap. Same as a slap, but tongue starts on the harmonica like the Pull before it pulls off to sound the slap. This can be used in a single-note or split embouchure.	BH2 p18
Side-Pull	Tongue covers all four holes (no notes sound), right side of tongue pulls back to sound single note on right. Similar to pucker "Ta." This can be used in single-note or split embouchure.	BH2 p18
Lift	Similar to a Pull, with no articulation. Tongue releases after a tongue block to sound the chord in the embouchure. Can be used in place of any Pull if a softer sound is desired.	Same Idea as Pull
Throat Tremolo	Throat opens and closes (vocal chords). No change in pitch.	BB p24 C1 p42 BHTDVD12
Vibrato	Throat opens and closes with tongue relaxed, allowing it swing in and out of air stream to cause change in pitch.	C2 p15 BHTDVD12
Hand Tremolo	Hand (right hand for a right-handed person) opens and closes rhythmically.	BB p7 BHTDVD12

Method Book & Video Abbreviation Key

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