

SPAH 2010 COMB TEST: Information for the 6 Test Players

ABOUT THE TEST

Thank you for your participation. The purpose of the test is to record your impressions of the distinctive sounds and responses of a diatonic harmonica with the same reedplates and covers, but differing comb materials. Your ratings and summaries thereof may be published, but without direct association of your name to your ratings.

You will play each harp/comb combination once, for 20 seconds per test. There are ten tests, with players following each other in random sequence. The assembled harp will be swabbed with alcohol before every play. Measures have been taken to avoid any distractions arising from differences in comb material name, appearance, weight, odour, taste, texture, sequence, etc. You will wear a blindfold and earplugs when required (provided).

The harp/comb combinations are attached to a weight with two metal strips, one at each end. You should hold the harp by these strips (or at most the ends of the harp) for every test, so that hand cupping does not mask the sound.

Please play the same set of riffs/licks on every test, in the same order. They should cover the full range of the harp in the 20 seconds. Please try not to move around as you play, as there will be a microphone in front of you. All tests will be recorded; this repetition and stillness will be helpful to ensure useful recordings for later analysis.

After playing, honestly record what you heard/felt about the harmonica on the attached score sheet. You must not discuss your impressions with other participants until after the whole test is concluded.

RATINGS

If you do not perceive any difference that sets the sound apart from the average harmonica as you know it, rate it a 3. A rating left blank will be treated as a 3 in any summary. If you do perceive such a difference, rate it 4 for moderately strong and 5 for very strong. Conversely, rate it 2 for moderately weak and 1 for very weak.

DESCRIPTIONS

Putting sound qualities into words is difficult, but we have chosen four categories that are widely used by musicians to describe instrument tone, plus an overall category of how much the harmonica pleased you. Here are the descriptive terms we have chosen, along with explanations of their meaning:

"Bright/Dull"

Explanation: "Bright" refers to the presence of overtones. Its opposite 'Dull' refers to the absence of overtones. Compared to other instruments, harmonicas are relatively bright. However, in this test we are comparing what we hear in the test to what we perceive to be the "average" (3) harmonica sound; so the scale of "dull (1) to bright (5)" must lie within the range possible for harmonicas.

"Thick/Thin"

Explanation: "Thick" refers to the body of the tone. Other commonly used words for this quality are 'solid', 'fat', or 'round', and the opposite is normally described as 'thin' or 'weedy'. If the tone is very thick, the rating would be 5. If the tone is very thin, it would rate a 1. Average thickness is 3.

"Loud/Quiet"

Explanation: "Loud" refers to the overall sound level or volume (usually measured in decibels). If it is very high, the rating would be 5. If the volume is very weak or quiet/soft, it would rate a 1. Average volume is 3.

"Balanced/Unbalanced"

Explanation: "Balanced" refers to the loudness variations with pitch. If all pitches are perceived to be equally loud, then the rating would be 5. If the high or low pitches seem to be relatively very weak, the rating would be 1.

"Pleasing/Displeasing"

Explanation: "Pleasing" refers to the player/listener's overall subjective feeling about the sound. For whatever reasons, if you like it a lot, give it a 5 rating. If you dislike it intensely, give it a 1.