Classification of Instruments

- Definite vs. Indefinite Pitch
  - Instruments that are tuned...
  - Instruments of indefinite pitch...
  - Instruments usually considered to be of indefinite pitch but could be tuned...

Idiophones

Instruments that produce sound through the vibration of their entire body (e.g., cymbals, triangles, wood blocks, temple blocks, claves, maracas, guiro, cowbells, gongs, steel drums, keyboard percussion). Although these instruments are usually struck to generate a sound, they may be shaken, scraped, rubbed, or bowed as well.

Membranophones

Instruments that produce sound through the vibration of a membrane stretched over a bowl or a shell. Construction can be open ended (e.g., timbales, bongos, djembe); can be closed by a resonant membrane that sympathetically vibrates with the struck membrane and internal air chamber (e.g., concert toms, snare drum, bass drum); and can be a closed bowl or shell (e.g., timpani, tabla, West African bowl/kettle drum).

Chordophones

Instruments that produce sound through the vibration of strings stretched over or through a resonating box to amplify the sound. They are typically tuned and played by striking, stroking, rubbing, or plucking (as with the cimbalon or zither), or are played by a hammer striking or plucking a string through a keyboard action (e.g., piano or harpsichord).

Aerophones

Instruments that produce sound primarily through the vibration of an enclosed air column. Percussion aerophones include a variety of whistles (e.g., train, bird, boat, slide) as well as sirens, horns, wind machines, and bull roarers. Although some can produce a definite pitch, they are generally not classified as tuned.

Electrophones

Instruments that produce sound primarily by electronic means. Use of a microphone with acoustic instruments for sound amplification, reinforcement, or to obtain unique effects when fed through complex filters, processors, mixers, and amplifiers may sometimes be included in this classification.