

tone  
dexter™

# User Guide





## Introduction

ToneDexter is a full featured preamp system for acoustic instruments that have a pickup. It uses new technology that allows the pickup to sound like a microphone placed in front of your instrument. It incorporates patented digital signal processing technology and a pristine analog signal path.

ToneDexter works with guitar, violin, mandolin, dobro, ukulele, and most other acoustic stringed instruments. (A separate software version is required for upright bass.) It's intended for instruments fitted with piezo pickup systems, either passive or active. Magnetic pickups are not recommended due to their higher distortion and string position dependence, but nonetheless may sometimes yield usable results.

## Getting Started

By way of introduction, a WaveMap™ is a transformation filter that ToneDexter creates, stores, and uses. It is also known as an impulse response (IR), and is used to process the sound of the pickup to make it sound like your microphone.

It's necessary to create at least one WaveMap for your particular instrument by training ToneDexter with a microphone. Once that's done, the mic is no longer needed. Up to 11 WaveMaps can be stored. These can be for the same instrument with different mics or mic positions, or for different instruments. ToneDexter does not come with any existing WaveMaps.

Besides your instrument fitted with a pickup, you will need a decent quality microphone, a stand to hold it, and to make things easy, a pair of headphones.

## Definition of Terms Used

- tap – a quick press and release to one of the two footswitches. Depending on context, the action may take effect upon depressing or upon release.
- press and hold – pressing and holding a footswitch for at least one second until the display changes and the action takes effect.
- **mute switch** – the left footswitch
- **boost switch** – the right footswitch
- slot – one of 11 WaveMap storage locations selectable with the **WaveMap select** knob

# Quick Start Training Procedure—6 Steps to Great Amplified Tone

1. Plug your instrument into the input jack on the right. Plug a mic into the rear mic jack which provides 48V phantom power for condenser microphones. It's safe to use with dynamic mics as well. Position the mic in front of your instrument in a place that sounds good. There are two suggested mic locations:
  - a. "Down under" method: 6" out and 6" down from the bottom hollow of the guitar where the upper bout meets the lower bout. Point the mic up at where the picking hand is.
  - b. "Neck joint" method: 10" – 15" away in the front, pointing straight at the place where the body meets the neck.
2. While playing some low chords or double stops, adjust the **pickup level trim** to set the preamp to the proper operating range using the LED indicators. With soft playing the green light should light. With moderate to strong playing, the yellow LED should light. The red LED should not light unless an unusually strong signal is present. A frequently lit red LED indicates the level control is set too high.
3. Plug a pair of headphones into the headphone jack on the rear. Adjust the rear **headphones level** for a comfortable level while playing. Adjust the **phase switch** on the rear panel for the most perceived bass. See the phase switch section for more info on this. The use of headphones is not mandatory. You can train without them, but it will be less convenient to judge the result.
4. Tap the **mute switch** to enter **EDIT mode**, then tap the **boost switch** to enter **TRAIN mode**. The display will show **L** (for learn), and a rotating bar. At any point during the training, you can abort the process by tapping the **mute switch**. This will take you back to **MUTE+TUNE mode** where you can easily start over, or go back to **RUN mode**.

The first part of the training session is a level setting phase where the software is automatically adjusting the level of the mic to match the pickup level. This helps ensure consistent WaveMap volume. During this phase, it's suggested to repeatedly strum a low E chord, or low double stops for violin. You should avoid playing your instrument's main resonant note, as it will tend to cause the WaveMap to be lower in volume than it should be. For guitarists, the main resonant note is usually the low G, G#, or A, with G# being the most common, and is typically much louder than the others. The rotating bar will stop when the automatic level adjustment is finished.

Once the rotating bar stops, the training phase has begun. It's not overly critical what is played during training. For guitarists, a series of chords up and down the neck works well. Alternately, single notes that exercise the full range of the instrument will also work well. You can use your fingers or a pick. For other instruments, just play normally and try to cover the entire range. It's not very fussy about what is played.

**An important point:** while you're training, be sure to hold still so the distance from the mic to your instrument doesn't change. ToneDexter will count up from **1** to **9** as training progresses, and you will hear the sound improve as this happens. The complete training process should normally take 1 to 2 minutes.

Once training completes, the display changes to **T** (for trained). At this point, it's normal to hear the timbre of the sound change somewhat as the algorithm makes corrections to improve feedback immunity. You may notice that the lowest resonant note of your instrument is no longer as loud as what the mic heard.

5. To confirm that you're happy with the new sound, tapping the **boost switch** will allow you to audition the raw pickup (display shows **P** for pickup), the microphone (display shows **M** for mic), the WaveMap in the current slot (displays shows **S** for stored), and the newly trained WaveMap (display shows **T** for trained). It will cycle through those options in succession with repeated taps to the **boost switch**. If the current slot is empty, it will play bypass.

If for any reason you want to start over, tap the **mute switch** to abort the training session and revert back to **TUNE mode**. Then, tap the **boost switch** to restart training mode.

6. Once you're sure that you like the trained sound, select a preset position in which to store the new WaveMap, using the **WaveMap select** knob. As you scroll through the slots, you will hear the audio change. Occupied slots have a lit dot, empty slots do not. If the slot contains an existing WaveMap, you will hear it. If not, you will hear bypass sound. You may again audition by tapping the **boost switch**. To store the newly created WaveMap, press and hold the **boost switch**. At this point, the training session will end, the sound will change to the new WaveMap, and you'll be back in **RUN mode**. Unless you want to create additional WaveMaps, the mic can be disconnected.

## Helpful Hints for Training

1. If you have an active pickup system, set any onboard EQ controls to flat, and the volume control to a midway position. This is not critical, but helpful for coming back to a repeatable known setting on the instrument.
2. A small diaphragm condenser mic is recommended. Large diaphragm mics can also work very well, but may be more finicky about placement. Dynamic mics, such as common vocal mics, can yield usable results, though generally will not have as much high frequency information. Tube (valve) mics, due to their higher non-linearity, are not recommended but may yield good results nonetheless. Both cardioid and omnidirectional pickup patterns will give excellent results. Active ribbon mics may also be used.
3. Experiment with various mic positions to find a sound that that is even and pleasing, and that gives good timbre through your intended sound reinforcement system. All instruments are different, and it may take a few tries to sort out the best mic and location for your instrument. You can store several WaveMaps using different mics and/or mic locations, and decide later which ones to keep or move to different locations.
4. ToneDexter's EQ controls are disabled during training. After training is complete, the EQ will be automatically re-enabled when you're back in RUN mode. Be aware of this, as EQing the newly created WaveMap may not be what you expect to hear. If any of the EQ knobs are active, the LEDs will be lit to remind you.
5. During the training phase you will hear the pickup sound gradually improve. It is highly immune to background noise and talking. But if you need to pause, the training will automatically pause, and then continue when it hears more playing. If you do pause, make sure to resume your exact same position when restarting.
6. Some piezo pickups use multiple sensors that are mixed phase. In other words, one or more sensor elements are out of phase (have opposite polarity) with other sensor elements within the same pickup. The training technique described above must be modified to work with these pickups systems. Using a modified training technique whereby only strings with elements of like phase are played, some of these pickups may be made to work. Consult with Audio Sprockets for clarification if your particular instrument has problems training.

# Modes of Operation

## RUN Mode

This is the normal mode of operation for playing. The display shows **R** (for run) along with the WaveMap number being used. If the number has a dot next to it, it means there is a WaveMap in that slot and it will be heard. If there is no dot, the slot is empty, and the signal passes straight through unaltered except by EQ and/or feedback notch if engaged. Use the **WaveMap select** knob to choose between the 11 available WaveMap storage locations. When changing the selection, the sound will immediately change to the WaveMap stored in that slot.

*The following modes are available from **RUN mode**:*

### **RUN mode with boost**

Tap the **boost switch** and the unit will add anywhere from 0dB to 8dB more gain, as set by the **boost knob** on the rear. This is useful for solos or to switch from flat picking to fingerpicking where more gain is required. Tap the **boost switch** again to get back to normal level.

The boost circuitry is analog and is located after the effects return jack, so it will not affect the pickup level trim adjustment or diminish signal headroom.

### **BYPASS mode**

Press and hold the **mute switch** (until the display shows **BYP**) to enter **BYPASS mode**. The sound will immediately change to the unprocessed pickup. (This will remind you why you need a ToneDexter!) EQ and notch will still be active if engaged. (Empty slots do not have a lit dot, and will play bypassed as well.)

### **BYPASS mode with boost**

Tapping the **boost switch** toggles the extra boost gain on and off.

## **MUTE+TUNE mode**

Tapping the **MUTE switch** will mute all outputs (except the headphone jack), and engage the built in tuner. Play a single note at a time to tune your instrument. The display vector rotates clockwise if sharp, counter-clockwise if flat. It stops rotating if tuning is within 1 cent. In addition there is visual tuning indicator: the left decimal dot indicates flat, the right dot sharp, and the center dot lights if tuning is within 2 cents. The tuning standard is A = 440Hz.

Tap the **mute switch** again to get back to **RUN mode**.

*The following modes are accessible from **MUTE+TUNE mode**:*

### **TRAINING mode**

Tap the **boost switch** to enter **TRAINING mode**. Tap the **mute switch** or **boost switch** to abort **TRAINING mode** before training is done if you want to start over. After training is done, the unit enters **TRAINED mode**. Tap the **boost switch** to toggle the audio auditions, or press and hold the **boost switch** to store the trained results in the selected slot, or tap the **mute switch** to abort **TRAINING mode**.

### **EDIT mode**

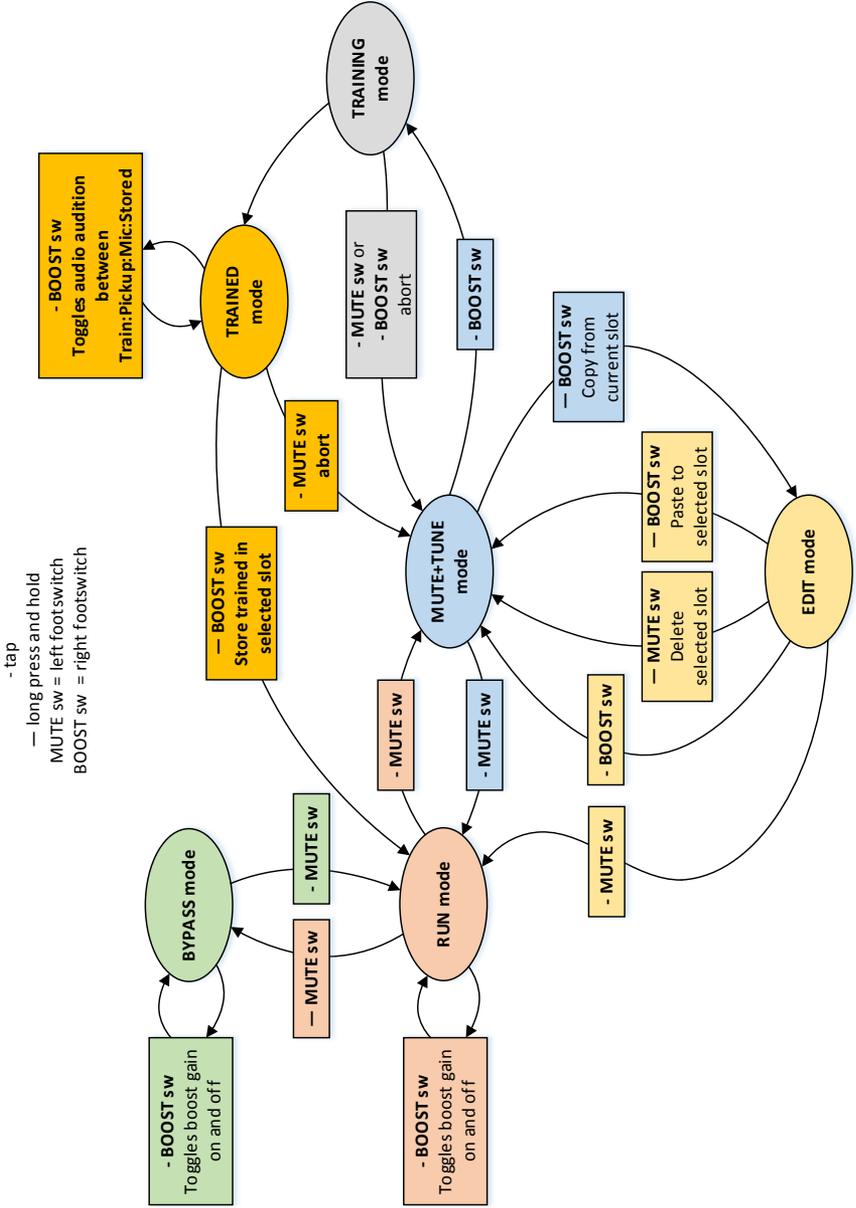
Stored WaveMaps may be copied and pasted to different slots, and unneeded WaveMaps may be deleted.

Press and hold the **boost switch** to enter **EDIT mode**. This earmarks the current WaveMap for potential pasting into a new slot. Once in **EDIT mode** you have two choices:

1. To paste, first select a new slot to paste to. Remember: occupied slots have a lit dot, empty slots do not. Then press and hold the **boost switch** to paste it into the newly selected slot. If you paste into the same slot that was earmarked, the WaveMap will remain unchanged.
2. To delete a WaveMap in any slot, scroll to the desired slot then press and hold the **mute switch** to delete the WaveMap in that location.

In either case, you will end up back in **MUTE+TUNE mode** from which other activities or more editing may be chosen.

# Mode Navigation Map



## Controls

### Pickup Level Trim

Adjusts gain of the pickup to get your signal into the proper operating range of the system. The LED indicators serve as the level metering. The green light should light with soft playing, the yellow LED should light with moderate to strong playing. The red LED should not light unless an unusually strong signal is present. A frequently lit red LED indicates the gain is too high and distortion may result.

### Output Level

Sets the desired output level for the ¼" main output on the left side of the unit. The DI output may optionally be set to follow this output level control.

### WaveMap Select

Selects one of 11 stored WaveMaps. Occupied slots have a lit dot next to the display number, empty slots do not.

### Character Select

The **character select** control alters the sound of the current WaveMap to achieve a more focused, punchy sound relative to what the microphone heard. It is not blending the raw pickup signal, but rather a special transformation of the WaveMap that removes ambience. There are three settings available:

- Fully clockwise                      full mic sound
- Mid-way                                      50/50 blend of focus and mic
- Fully counter-clockwise              more focused sound

Experiment. You may find that a mid-way or fully counter-clockwise setting works better in an ensemble situation to cut through the other instruments.

### Bass and Treble

These are shelving equalizers that boost or cut 9dB. The inflection points are 125Hz for bass, and 2KHz for treble. The EQ lights will go out when the EQ gain controls are centered and off. EQ is automatically disabled during training, then resumes when back in **RUN mode**. The EQ affects the real-time run signal, and is not stored with the WaveMap. It also affects the signal when in bypass.

## Notch

The WaveMaps created by ToneDexter have intelligent feedback suppression built into them. They are much more immune to feedback than the microphone signal would be, and thus will work well in most situations, especially if the phase switch is in the optimum position.

However, in very loud situations you may still experience feedback. In that case, a very narrow notch can be enabled by engaging the notch control. To engage the notch, rotate it clockwise slowly to find and stop the offending frequency. It will have minimal impact on the sound. When the notch control is fully counter-clockwise, the notch is disabled and the light will go out. Notch is automatically disabled during training, then resumes when back in run mode. The notch affects the real-time run signal, and is not stored with the WaveMap. It also affects the signal when in bypass. Operating range is 50-350Hz, with 12dB depth and 1/12 octave width. Special firmware versions, such as for upright bass, may have different notch specifications.

## Phase switch

The **phase switch** on the rear panel changes the phase (flips the polarity) of all the outputs. This is significant for two reasons.

- When playing through loud sound reinforcement, one phase/polarity position will usually be less prone to feedback than the other. Try both positions if you're experiencing feedback issues.
- When you're training with headphones, the sound of the headphone signal will combine with the acoustic leakage path to your ear. The "correct" phase will be the one that has the most perceived bass, the other position will sound more anemic. Headphones vary, so try both positions. The position of the phase switch does not affect training, only your perception of the sound.

## DI fixed/variable switch

On the rear panel, this switch determines if the DI Output is a fixed level, or follows the output level control. Fixed level can be useful for situations where you want to use the output level control to adjust your personal monitoring via the ¼" output jack, and have that not affect what is sent to the front-of-house mixer via the XLR DI output.

## Option A/B switch

Reserved for future use.

# Connections

## Input

- 1/4" phone jack on the right side of the unit
- Works with passive or active pickups
- Input impedance: 1M $\Omega$
- Gain range: off to +21dB
- Maximum signal level after gain: -1dBV

## Mic Input

- Female XLR jack on the rear
- Only used during training
- Provides 48V phantom power for active condenser mics. Safe for passive dynamic mics. Not recommended for passive ribbon mics.
- Differential input impedance: 2.5K $\Omega$
- Maximum signal level: -35dBV

## Output

- 1/4" phone jack on the left side of the unit
- Volume is controlled by the **output level** control with range: off to +6dB
- Muted during training
- Output impedance: 300 $\Omega$  unbalanced, 600 $\Omega$  impedance balanced
- Headroom above nominal level: 15dB
- Nominal output level: -15dBV balanced or unbalanced
- Maximum output level (include +8dB boost): +14dBV balanced or unbalanced
- If connected, the pin 1 ground to the DI output jack is disconnected to prevent ground loops.

## DI Output

- Male XLR jack on the rear
- Level is either fixed or follows the output level control, depending on the DI fixed/var switch on rear.
- Muted during training
- Output impedance: 600 $\Omega$  balanced differential
- Headroom above nominal level: 15dB
- Nominal output level: -9dBV balanced differential

- Maximum output level (include +8dB boost): +20dBV balanced differential
- To prevent ground loops, pin 1 ground is disconnected when a phone plug is connected to the ¼" output jack.

### **Effects Loop**

- 1/4" TRS phone jack on rear
- Tip send, Ring return
- Send output impedance: 300Ω unbalanced
- Headroom above nominal level: 15dB
- Nominal output level: -15dBV unbalanced
- Return input impedance: 1MΩ
- Nominal return level: -15dBV

### **Headphones Output**

- 1/4" stereo phone jack on rear, for critical listening during training
- Volume set by the **headphones level** control on the rear
- Works with low or high impedance headphones
- Output impedance each side: 110Ω

### **Power**

Accepts 9-15VDC regulated supplies of either polarity. Requires an 8W supply.

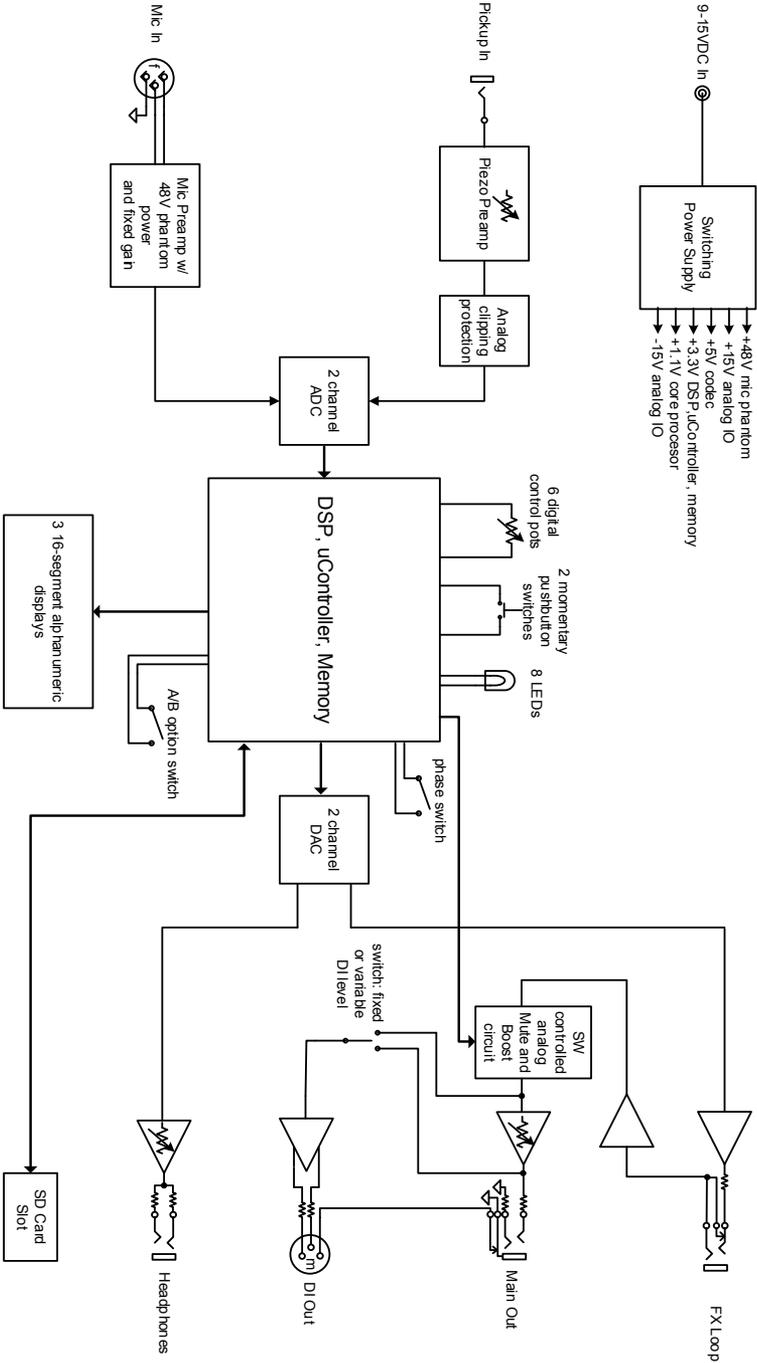
### **SD Card Slot**

The slot accepts a standard size SD (Secure Digital) memory card. It is used to update the internal firmware. See the Audio Sprockets website for specific update instructions.

### **A Note about Hum**

If you are using a passive piezo pickup, you may hear some AC power line hum if your system is not grounded. In normal use ToneDexter will be connected to an amplifier or PA system which is grounded, and you will not experience any noticeable hum. But if you do experience hum when training using just headphones, plugging one of the outputs into a grounded system will eliminate the hum.

# Block Diagram



## **Compliance**

This product complies with FCC part 15 Class B requirements for home or office use.

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ToneDexter user guide version 1.0  
April 2017