EXPERIMENT 8: SPEED OF SOUND IN AIR

Introduction: In this lab, you will create standing sound waves in a column of air confined to a tube. You will be able to change the frequency of the sound waves by creating the sound with labeled tuning forks, and you will be able to change the length of the air column. While you cannot see the standing sound waves, you will be able to detect their existence by the loud sound that they produce. Since you will thus know both the wavelength of the sound waves and the time for one vibration of the source of the sound, you will be able to calculate the speed of sound.



Procedure

- 1. By raising or lowering the supply tank, you can change the water level in the sound tube. Adjust the water level so that the tube is nearly full of water.
- 2. Select a tuning fork and record the frequency of your selected fork in Data Table 8.1. Strike the tines with a rubber hammer (for fork frequencies above 1000 Hz, use a wooden hammer), and hold the vibrating fork just above the opening of the sound tube. Slowly lower the water level while listening for the loud sound that will be produced by a standing sound wave in the tube. Lower the water level as far as possible; as the water level is lowered, use a water-erase marker to make dots on the tube to indicate the approximate water levels which result in a loud sound.

- 3. Whenever a standing sound wave is created in the tube, there is a node (a place where the "little boxes of air" are not moving) at the surface of the water. We will use the highest, and second highest, resonant water levels as our two node locations. Slowly raise the water level; as the rising water reaches each of the highest resonant levels, make a careful adjustment to produce the loudest possible sound. Mark the resonant level as precisely as possible. Meaure, from the top of the tube, the position of each marked level (a tape measure is provided). Record those positions in Data Table 8.1.
- 4. Again start from a nearly full tube and lower the water level slowly. As the water reaches each of the highest resonant levels, again make careful adjustments to produce the loudest possible sound and mark the level (use a different color marker). Once again, measure the position of each level and record the results in Data Table 8.1.
- 5. Repeat steps 2, 3, and 4 with two different forks. Clean the tube when you are done.
- 6. Record the room temperature for this day in the space below Data Table 8.1.

frequency (Hz)	highest level #1 (cm)	highest level #2 (cm)	highest level avg (cm)	next level #1 (cm)	next level #2 (cm)	next level avg (cm)	node-node distance (cm)

Data Table 8.1

Today's room temperature is _____ °C.

Data Table 8.2

frequency (Hz)	node-node distance (m)	$\begin{array}{c} \text{wave} \\ \text{length} \\ (\text{m}) \end{array}$	period (s)	wave speed (m/s)

Results

1. Fill in the remaining columns of Data Table 8.1. Do the following for each tuning fork frequency: for each resonant water level, take the average of your two separate position measurements (once while raising the water and once while lowering the water). The node-node distance is your average position for the highest level minus your average position for the next-highest level. Show your calculations for one of your three frequencies in the space below.

2. Transfer your results for the three frequencies to Data Table 8.2, changing the units of node-node distance from cm to m. Then fill in the remaining entries for that Table. The wavelength is twice the distance between nodes. The time for one vibration is the reciprocal of your tuning fork frequency. The measured speed of sound is the wavelength divided by the time for one vibration. Show your calculations for one of your three frequencies in the space below.

3. You now have three different determinations of the speed of sound in air. What is the percent difference between your largest determined value and your smallest determined value?

4. Take the average of your three determined values of the speed of sound to get your reported value. Show your calculation below, then report your value for the speed of sound, with uncertainty. The uncertainty in your reported value is plus or minus half of your percent difference in step 3 above (for example, if your average value is 340 m/s and your percent difference is 20%, your reported value would be 340 m/s \pm 10.0%).

5. Now that you have a measured value for the speed of sound, describe how you would do a similar experiment to determine the frequency of an unlabeled tuning fork.

Going Further

1. You can compare your reported value of the speed of sound with the accepted value at the temperature of your lab room. That value is given by

$$v(at \ temperature \ T_{room}) = 331.4 \ m/s + \left(\frac{0.6 \ m/s}{\circ C}\right) T_{room}$$

Use your recorded room temperature to calculate the speed of sound in your room on the day of your experiment. Then compare your reported value to the accepted value by calculating a percent error.