

# Coil Shunts vs. Splits vs. Taps

---

Ah, the vocabulary! I THINK I have a handle on what **MOST** of us mean when we use these terms:

**COIL SHUNT:** USUALLY refers to playing only **one coil** of a *humbucker's pair*, accomplished by routing (shunting) the connection between the two coils to ground (or hot), thereby bypassing (*shunting*) **one coil** out of the voltage potential. The resulting tone is thinner and brighter than that of a humbucker, with less output. This is probably the **MOST COMMON** way to get a single **coil** tone out of a humbucker. Now, it might not sound like a classic Strat or a Tele (shucks!) pickup, but it **IS** a single coil tone.

**COIL SPLIT:** Also USUALLY refers to playing only **one coil** of a *humbucker's pair*. Technically, this would be done by breaking (*splitting*) **the connection between the two coils**, and routing the hot lead of the coil on the "ground half" of the pair straight to the volume pot or switch; OR routing the "ground" (series-connecting) lead from the pup that is on the "hot half" of the pair to ground, whichever. Again, the resulting tone is thinner and brighter than that of a humbucker, with less output.

Most modern humbuckers come with a four-conductor option, allowing you to utilize either the "**shunt**" or "**split**" scheme to get that "**single-coil**" tone from a humbucker. Personally, I can NOT hear a difference, but there are those who will say they can, I'm sure. I will confess that I believe the SHUNT seems to retain some SMALL measure of noise-cancellation, whereas a SPLIT does not. But again, perhaps that's just me. Consider my handle...

So many people have INCORRECTLY use the terms "coil-**shunt**" and "coil-**split**" as interchangeable for so long that it has become OK to do so. Not by me. I think we should all use the same terms, and as correctly as possible – it's less confusing that way! Which brings us to...

**COIL TAP:** Is a completely different idea. This USUALLY refers to "tapping into" the windings of a **SINGLE COIL**, cutting out (bypassing) a number of windings to decrease the impedance of the pickup. When a **SINGLE COIL** pickup is wound, an "extra" lead is spliced on to the **coil** windings part way through the winding process (usually between the 66-80% point), that allows the player to bypass the remainder of the windings added after. The USUAL result of playing a pickup with the "**COIL TAP**" on is a brighter tone, with less output.

As I recall, back in the seventies I began to see a number of hot **SINGLE COIL** Tele bridge pups that used this **coil-tapping** scheme, and it is still a popular option today. I can recall a few humbuckers made 'way back when with real **coil-taps**, too, but I don't think I

have seen anything like that in a very long time. The shunt/split seems to be the way to go with humbuckers today.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Even though all three of these terms result in the same kind of change in a pickup's sound, I don't think we should be using them interchangeably. I ASSUME that the popular convention is that **COIL TAP** has come to mean something entirely different than **COIL SHUNT**. Or, maybe it's just me, again...

Anyway, by this vernacular convention, you can **coil-SHUNT** or **coil-SPLIT** a humbucker; you could wire up a **coil-TAP** on ANY pickup that was manufactured or rewound with that "spliced halfway through the windings" option. You would NOT **coil-tap** your standard four-conductor humbucker - the proper terms for your options there would be a **shunt** or **split**.