

10.2: Prelude to Sound

Sound is an example of a mechanical wave, specifically, a pressure wave: Sound waves travel through the air and other media as oscillations of molecules. Normal human hearing encompasses an impressive range of frequencies from 20 Hz to 20 kHz. Sounds below 20 Hz are called infrasound, whereas those above 20 kHz are called ultrasound. Some animals, like the bat shown in Figure 17.1, can hear sounds in the ultrasonic range.



Figure 10.2.1: Hearing is an important human sense that can detect frequencies of sound, ranging between 20 Hz and 20 kHz. However, other species have very different ranges of hearing. Bats, for example, emit clicks in ultrasound, using frequencies beyond 20 kHz. They can detect nearby insects by hearing the echo of these ultrasonic clicks. Ultrasound is important in several human applications, including probing the interior structures of human bodies, Earth, and the Sun. Ultrasound is also useful in industry for nondestructive testing. (credit: modification of work by Angell Williams)

Many of the concepts covered in Waves also have applications in the study of sound. For example, when a sound wave encounters an interface between two media with different wave speeds, reflection and transmission of the wave occur.

Ultrasound has many uses in science, engineering, and medicine. Ultrasound is used for nondestructive testing in engineering, such as testing the thickness of coating on metal. In medicine, sound waves are far less destructive than X-rays and can be used to image the fetus in a mother's womb without danger to the fetus or the mother. Later in this chapter, we discuss the Doppler effect, which can be used to determine the velocity of blood in the arteries or wind speed in weather systems.

This page titled 10.2: Prelude to Sound is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [OpenStax](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- **17.1: Prelude to Sound** by [OpenStax](#) is licensed [CC BY 4.0](#). Original source: <https://openstax.org/details/books/university-physics-volume-1>.