CENTS OF HEARING

Sort pennies by sound.

THE SETUP
There’s no challenge to sorting pennies by the year they were made if you look at the date stamped on them. It’s harder, but still possible, to sort old pennies from new pennies by listening to the sound they make when dropped onto a tile floor.

You will need:
• an assortment of pennies old and new
• a bathroom or kitchen with a tile floor
• a friend

Divide the pennies into two piles: one consisting of coins minted in 1982 and earlier and the other of coins made in 1983 or later. So far your sorting has been done by sight. Now you’re ready to test your ability to sort by sound!

Close your eyes so that you can concentrate all your attention on listening. Have your friend hold the new pennies in one hand and the old pennies in the other. Your assistant should drop them one by one in a random pattern from each group onto a tile floor. Your assistant should identify which pile each coin came from after you’ve heard the sound. Soon you will be able to hear the difference in the sounds and tell the new pennies from the old by sound alone.

Practice by calling out “old” or “new” with confirmation from your assistant.

INSIDER INFORMATION
One-cent coins were once called “coppers” because they were made of copper metal. But the price of copper rose faster than the value of a penny. To cut costs the U. S. government decided to make pennies out of zinc, which is a cheaper metal, and plate them with copper. Zinc pennies were first mass-produced in 1983. They look the same as the old copper pennies but they don’t sound the same. Newer pennies make a dull, tinny sound when dropped. Older pennies make a sharper, ringing sound.