



Vocal Warm-up Techniques

We always start our vocal practice in the following way

1. **Body** – checking posture, releasing the diaphragm and intercostal muscles – this warms up the powerhouse.
2. **Breath** – Check you are breathing from the belly to maximize sustain of output sound.
3. **Vocal folds** – warm-up the voice for vocal fold flexibility and safety to avoid injury.

Body - Postural Awareness

Stand with feet hip width apart, knees loose, with your arms by your side. Relax the head and shoulders. Check-in with your body. Do you have any tension anywhere or is there a natural flow of energy? Take time to make any adjustments needed in order to feel centered, focused, and body aware. It is from this relaxed flowing state that we do our vocal work. Tension may well return so it is important to continually monitor your physical state in the way described whilst vocalizing.

Body Warming

Warming up the body allows it to move easier, be more flexible, and increases circulation – all of which contributes to proper functioning of the breath and voice.

- Give yourself a good massage / body rub whilst noticing any areas of tightness or tension. Start with your lower back, work upwards through the inter-costal muscles

of your ribs, your pectorals (chest), your upper arms and shoulders, your neck, your jaw, your head where neck meets head and finally your scalp.

- Stand with feet apart, under their respective shoulders. Raise your right arm straight over head, reach over toward ceiling to your left, keeping line of shoulders straight over feet. Object is to stretch muscles of the right abdomen. Repeat for the left side.
- Standing up straight, with feet planted firmly under your shoulders, reach toward the ceiling with right arm, then left arm. Raise both arms extended, raise first one, then the other, to your highest reach. Finally, raise both arms toward ceiling as far as you can. Object is to stretch diaphragm underneath rib cage as you raise your arms.
- Stand as though you are about to draw a bow. Inhale as you draw the bow to maximum stretch. Hold for as long as you can and let the arrow go whilst exhaling. Repeat three times on each side.
- Relaxing the **throat**, open your mouth wide and have a nice open throated yawn or a big sigh on 'ah'. Do this a few times.
- Smile! It relaxes the **face** and various muscles affecting the **throat**.

Aim to stay relaxed. Tension can creep into areas that we are not always aware of such as the jaw, the brow, the legs etc. Continually check in and adjust accordingly.

Breath Awareness

- Standing upright, shoulders and neck still relaxed, slowly take several deep breaths. The stomach should visibly push out, and the shoulders should remain almost completely still and relaxed. Object is to consciously establish the habit of breathing from the diaphragm & abdomen. (Remember the rib cage is not flexible, and tight shoulders lead to problems in the throat).

Control and Support

- The first step is to free the diaphragm and one of the ways you can do this is by

bouncing. Swing your arms (like a loose marching motion) and by following the natural flow of that movement incorporate a gentle 'bounce' by loosening your knees.

- Keep the chest expanded while letting the air escape. Think tall – keep your chest out and back straight while breathing out. Your chest will reduce in size a little, but don't allow it to collapse and don't allow the diaphragm to spring back. Don't blow out your breath but rather let it escape slowly like air from a punctured tyre. Say the letter F with your top teeth resting on your bottom lip. Even at the end of the breath imagine your chest is expanding. This exercise will pull on your abs and may hurt if you are not used to it, so go easy in the beginning. This will help your support and sustain of a note.
- Taking the same easy, deep breaths from the diaphragm, begin to warm up the vocal folds. Let a "sighing" sound slide down to your lowest pitch and finish in a sigh. Repeat several times.
- Candle Blowing; Imagine there's a candle in front of you. Take short sharp breaths to blow it out. An alternative is to use a "ha ha ha ha ha" laughing technique but only do this once you have warmed up your voice (as below).

Voice

- Start by humming for a few minutes on a low pitch, keeping lips closed.
- Next begin slowly to extend your pitch higher and lower in a kind of siren – this will help you to warm up and exercises the tiny muscles that control the vocal folds.
- Once you feel you have gone as high and as low as you can on a hum, begin to sing an 'oo' sound, still doing sirens. This whole process could take up to 10 minutes. Regular practice of sirens, gently increasing your range, will help to increase vocal flexibility.
- Lip Rolls / Lip Roll Sirens: Lip rolls are an excellent warm up exercise and can be sustained on one note or used in conjunction with the pitch spiral / siren exercise above. Place your index fingers either side of your lips. With loose lips and mouth closed exhale. Your lips should now roll. The sound is rather like a horse snuffle! Once you have the hang of lip rolls you can bring in various tones (pitches) and

pitch slides (sirens). Lip rolls also help to brighten the voice and engage the diaphragm.

To sum up: Please make sure you adopt these exercises into your daily practice. At first they will seem time consuming but the more accomplished you become, the more you can cherry pick what you need to do to maintain the optimum vocal instrument.

1. 'Stop' to align posture and for self-diagnosis
2. Stretch the body, massage, shake out tension
3. Begin sighing to release tension and some false (or real!) yawns to switch on breathing neurology
4. Check where the breath is coming from and correct this as necessary
5. Check diaphragm is flexible and correct this as necessary
6. Do some diaphragm support exercises for toning up the area
7. Warm up voice with some Oms in mid-range
8. Move to sirens gently increasing range

Diagnose the quality of your voice and place appropriate exercises into your warm ups for vocal training and development.

Now you are ready to safely start your voice-work!