

Warming up the voice

A vocal warm up is essential in order to maintain a healthy voice and to make the most of the rehearsal session to follow. Warm-ups cover everything from stretching the body to preparing the muscles of the face, as well as introducing good vocal technique and focussing the mind. Below are some ideas for warming up the voice, body and face / tongue.

1. Stretching

Any warm-up should begin with a systematic stretch of the body. Start with the head and face and move down the body;

- Head: nodding, shaking, tipping gently to one side then the other
- Face: chewing, massaging, gentle 'rain' with the fingertips all over the face
- Shoulders: circles backwards and then forwards, raising to ears and dropping
- Arms: wiggle fingers, wrists, elbows, stretch arms out to side
- Waist/hips: draw circles with the hips
- Legs: using each leg in turn, draw imaginary circles on the floor, first using ankle, then knee, then hip
- Back: stand with legs apart in A-frame, drop head down and follow through with each bone of spine until folded over completely. Swing gently forward and back through legs, then side to side, then slowly uncurl back to count of 8.

2. Vocalising

The voice should be introduced gently, using sound effects rather than sung words;

- Sinnngggggg: say the word "sing", then repeat it holding onto the final sound "ng". Repeat it once more, this time raising the pitch up and down on the "ng".
- Mmm/ugh: make an "mmm" sound and an "ugh" sound and slide from one sound into the other by starting either high or low and gradually lowering/raising the pitch.
- vibrate your lips to form a "brrrr" sound. If you find this hard, try a rolled "rrr", or even a long "vvvv" sound instead.



3. Breathing & Posture

Keep an eye on breathing and posture as you're doing the warm-up. You can go through a regular posture-drill:

- Feet flat on floor, weight evenly spread and feet hip-width apart
- Knees loose and not locked
- Bottom tucked in
- Tummy relaxed
- Shoulders and arms loose
- Back of the neck long
- Chin pointing straight down

Breathing in should not involve the shoulders going up! Fill your stomach with air when you breathe in.

4. Exercises for range and strength

We have covered some of the major techniques for developing the voice in our warm up. All of these exercises should be used right up to adult age to help develop and maintain good vocal health.

The warm-up which follows develops the voice in both chest and head register, focusing on releasing tension and freeing the breath. Some people find it more useful to exercise the head voice before the chest – this is an individual decision. It is crucial that both registers are used in the warm up, and that the beginning and end exercises should gently link the two ranges together.

5. Don't be a shop dummy!

Often a large gesture can be used to demonstrate what we are trying to achieve internally. Visualising the process in this way helps to take the mind off the sound you are making! This is crucial – if you can stop censoring the sound you'll surprise yourself. You are in charge of the sound you make – many people sit on a note waiting to see if they like it before they really commit to it – this leads to late sound and a habit of swelling on each note. Some techniques are listed below:

- Sit on a chair and place your hands around the seat of the chair. As you sing, pull on the seat without letting your shoulders rise. This is useful when looking for a bigger tone, or when approaching a scary high note



INSIDEOUT

- Place your hands on the wall in front of you. Lean into the wall, bending your elbows, as you sing. Again, keep the shoulders relaxed. This has a similar effect to the previous exercise
- Flop the upper body over and hang the arms. Make sure that the neck is completely relaxed. Now sing the exercise or phrase. This helps to eliminate neck tension
- Team up with another student and join hands. Place the feet reasonably close together, and as you sing drop your weight as though you're going to sit down, trusting your partner to balance your weight. This takes a few goes, but once you're used to it you can feel the support muscles being engaged
- Massage the face and jaw as you sing – this helps to prevent any lower jaw tension
- Circle the shoulders or swing the arms to eliminate any upper body tension

6. Tongue twisters

Warm up your mouth and work on your diction using one of the following, or any others that you may know:

Red lorry yellow lorry

Mister Mick's mixed biscuits

Three tree toads tied together tried to trot to town

Wicked cricket critic

Swan swam over the sea, swim swan swim!
Swan swam back again, well swum swan!

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