

*Voice Care and Development
for Educators -*

The VOCAL WARM UP

General note: like most working professionals you will no doubt find it difficult to schedule an additional ten or fifteen minutes in the morning to warm-up your voice for the teaching day. Therefore, we encourage you to consider incorporating some of these exercises during your morning shower, in the car, walking to school, or in your classroom before the bell rings. In other words, learn to view a warm-up as a necessary part of your work, not as a luxury.

Step One: The Sound-Supporting Mechanism

How does Breath work?

* when we are at rest and/or not in action, the pattern of our breath may be observed in three parts, which move seamlessly from one to another without any conscious control. In simple terms:

The first part of the cycle: the act of Breathing In (Inhalation).

The breath gently entering the body through the nose and/or mouth traveling down the throat, past open vocal folds, into the lungs (where the ribcage expands by moving gently up and outward and the diaphragm muscle releases downward).

The second part of the cycle: the act of Breathing Out (Exhalation).

When the breath begins to leave the body (whether you are speaking or not). The diaphragm releases upwards, the rib cage contracts by moving in and downward as the air passes between the vocal folds, releasing through the nose and/or mouth.

The third part of the cycle: the act of Suspension (or Deep Rest).

This is the part of the cycle of breath where you may observe that you are no longer breathing out, but you are not yet breathing in. This is a time of rest, or recovery. This part of the cycle can be more important than we realize.

All learning begins with Observation

* begin by observing the *movement* of your breath. Do you feel your breath moving high in your chest? Do you sense it dropping towards the solar plexus? Or are you having a really good day, and you feel it releasing into the pelvic floor?

* our stress levels, both emotionally and physically, affect the movement and freedom of the breath on any given day, in any given moment. For example, I would invite you to observe your breath the next time one of your students is "acting-up" for the tenth time! Compare this, if you will, to how your breath feels after you've had a restful sleep, or a massage. There is a difference; and this difference affects your voice. *Tension in the breath mechanism is heard in the sound quality of the voice.*

Exercise for the Breath:

- 1) Place your hand on your upper chest (just underneath the collar bone). Allow the breath to drop only as deep as the level of your hand. Begin speaking. What is the quality of your voice?
- 2) Place your hand over your solar plexus. Allow the movement of the breath to drop as deep as the level of your hand. Begin speaking. What is the quality of your voice?
- 3) Place your hand over your umbilicus (your tummy-button)
- 4) Bring your hands to the sides and bottom of your rib cage
- 5) Rest the tops your hands on the lower back . . .
- 6) Place your hand over your lower abdominal wall

General note: be mindful that you do not make this exercise like 'work': rather think of this as a 'game.' After all, you do not wish to press or force your breath to these lower places.

Exercises to prepare the Body:

Head and Neck Rolls

Allowing your chin to travel towards your chest, gently moving your head side-to-side as you encourage the muscles in the neck to become soft and flexible.

Shoulder Curls

Gently lifting and moving your shoulders in small circles, allowing for freedom of movement between the shoulder girdle and the top of the rib cage.

Opening the sides of the Ribcage

Reaching the arms above the head (as you think of your feet melting into the floor).

Rolling through the Spine

Once again, allow the head to travel forward and down towards the floor. As the head travels, the rest of the spine will follow. Release forward, remembering to keep your knees bent, as you travel through your spine to the tailbone. You might imagine yourself as a swimmer preparing to leave the diving board. Allow the weight of the spine to release as you hang over. Direct any unwanted tension to release through your head, neck and shoulders as you hang for a moment. *Question: can you sense the movement of the breath in the lower back in this position?*

Then gently roll up through the spine (remembering to keep your knees bent) until the head rests gently on top of your spine. *Question: did you remember to breath while you did this exercise?*

Shake It Out

Gently shake everything that will shake! Fingers, toes, legs, arms, etc.

Massage the Mask

Bring your hands to your mask and gently massage the muscles in your face. Specifically, your brow, around your eyes, your cheekbones, your jaw, etc.

Yawn and Stretch

If you are one of those people who find it difficult to yawn on command - you must learn. Yawning is one of the most beneficial warm-up exercises for the voice, as it opens the muscles at the top and the back of the throat; a place where unnecessary tension can inhibit free sound.

Step Two: The Sound-Producing Mechanism

How do we make Sound?

As the air releases and passes across the vocal folds, they vibrate, producing sound.

Exercises for the Voice:

Yawn as you Speak

Very simple: yawn as you count from one to ten. Repeat.

Play with Pitch

Imagine, for a moment, that you are a singer and play with your speaking voice as though you were singing. Begin with the voice of a little child and count from one to ten, moving downwards in pitch. Now, in contrast, begin on a lower pitch and as you count to ten travel upwards in pitch towards that little child's sound.

Travel from counting onto the following sounds, continuing to travel up and down through your pitch range. As you play allow yourself to lengthen out the sounds of the vowels, gently creating the consonants at the beginning and ends of the utterances:

EE as in the word 'leaf'
AY as in the word 'lace'
AH as in the word 'lost'
OH as in the word 'load'
OO as in the word 'lose'

BEEB	BAYB	BAHB	BOHB	BOOB
DEED	DAYD	DAHD	DOHD	DOOD
MEEM	MAYM	MAHM	MOHM	MOOM

Sensing sound before judging it!

Place your hands on the top of your skull and begin to gently hum. Encourage yourself to sense or feel the sound. For example, do your lips vibrate or do you sense the vibration of *inside* the mouth? This vibration, or movement of the voice, is called *resonance*. As you play with this sensation begin to sing/speak the following tongue twister (to the tune of the William Tell Overture) - *Many men, many men, many men, men, men*

Placing the Voice

Cup your hands together and place them over your lips. Your hands, in this position, will act as a small megaphone wherein you may further sense the vibration of your voice. Begin to play with the sound VVV . . . (getting your lips to vibrate); then play with the sound . . . (getting the inside of your mouth to vibrate); and finally play with a soft GE sound . . . (as in the word 'measure'). With this final sound, you want to encourage your entire skull to vibrate!

Slowly move your hands away from your mouth and begin to speak into the space. What do you observe? Do you create more sound with less effort?

Step Three: The Word-Producing Mechanism

How do we Articulate?

The tongue (tip, front and middle), the teeth and the lips move to produce the desired vowels or consonants.

Exercises for Language and Articulation:

Lip Trill

Move air over your lips as a small child pretending to drive a truck. You may practice this with and without sound.

Tests for the Tongue

Gently stretch the tongue down toward the chin. Up towards the nose. Towards the right ear. And towards the left.

Shake Out the Tongue!

It is a good idea, after any stretching, to shake it out. This prevents us from holding unnecessary tension in the muscle.

Tongue Twisters

Play with the following sentences. It is important to understand that if the articulators are not sufficiently warmed-up we tend to compensate with unnecessary tension and volume. Have you ever spoken to someone who is hearing impaired? It's not that they require more volume. They do, however, benefit from a sharper articulation.

1. A pale pink proud peacock pompously preened its pretty plumage.
2. A blue-backed blackbird blew big bubbles.
3. A tidy tiger tied a tie tighter to tidy her tiny tail.
4. Cameron Campbell is a crazy, crooked critic from Calgary.
5. Vera valued the valley violets.
6. Maggie MacGregor makes magnificent macaroons.
7. A library littered with literary literature.
8. Whether the weather be fine
 Or whether the weather be not,
 Whether the weather be cold
 Or whether the weather be hot,
 We'll weather the weather
 Whatever the weather,
 Whether we like it or not.

Remember - a warm-up is not a workout!

Projecting the Voice

The art of projecting the voice is an interesting one. Even word *project* often creates or conjures up images of speakers working hard, tightening up the muscles in their throat and pushing or pressing their voice in order to get it to the back of the room. The teacher may presume that this tension is good; after all, they may measure this tension against the perception that they are working. In contrast, however, when the voice is open and free the teacher might feel that they are doing nothing; and this can be scary!

First of all, in order to have a powerful voice that will resonate and fill a room it needs to be warmed-up. Would we expect a thoroughbred to run their best race if they had not been properly prepared? Of course not. If you begin your teaching day without warming up the voice you will be required to compensate. Specifically, to engage with a greater physical effort as you coordinate the systems that create voice. In other words, you will be running your race cold.

Secondly, if you can incorporate a small warm-up into your daily teaching preparation you will discover quite quickly how the voice will gain strength. This strength will assist you in being able to release your voice freely into a space.

Exercise

Go back for a moment, to the exercise where you cupped your hands and placed them over your mouth. Once again, play lightly with these sounds to get the voice resonating freely: *VVV . . . ZZZ . . .* and a soft *GE . . .* Move your hands away from your mouth and begin to speak focusing on different objects in the space. Some objects may be close, some may be far. Direct your voice specifically to these locations. Observe that you can direct or throw the voice, like you would a ball to the spot that you choose. You do not need to become physically tight in the throat or jaw to do this.

We need to understand that the act of projecting our words and thoughts through space towards the listener takes time in space. Once again, to use the image of throwing a ball: you throw the ball towards another person and you need to consider the time that it takes *to travel* before they catch it. Speakers need to be aware of the time it takes for their words and thoughts to reach the listener.

Exercise

If you are able, procure a small ball and find yourself an empty basement or tennis court - practice throwing the ball and speaking simultaneously. You will observe that as the ball travels through space so does your voice.

Finally, know that the ability to project one's voice is connected to the confidence and understanding we possess of the subject we are teaching. If you have extensive experience with your material, and your intent to communicate the information to students is your utmost concern, you may find that your voice travels freely. Unfortunately, there are many times, when we are not confident, when we feel that we are only one step ahead of the class. In these situations it is important to consider these lessons will 'cost us more,' but that we are on a journey towards gaining the experience we require to let it be easier.

