

Exercising and Expressing your Voice

Developing your voice to its fullest potential is a long and personal process focused on cultivating an awareness of how you use your voice and practicing healthy habits. As you work to develop your voice, you need to become aware of how you use it right now, what habits you want to encourage or discourage, where you hold tension, and what different contexts do to the way you use it. Then you can begin to practice using your voice differently – taking control and establishing desirable habits. The following exercises are potential tools to use in this process.

Relaxation:

Tension can be linked to many problems such as vocal fatigue and breathing difficulties. It is therefore important to foster relaxation in your whole body, so that tension doesn't become an obstacle to healthy voice use.

Exercise 1 – Scan your body for tension and then do something to release it.

e.g. roll feet or ankles; bend or do circles with your knees; wiggle or twist your torso; roll your shoulders or neck; extend your arms behind your back, clasp your hands together and then lift them slightly; massage any tense muscles or tense them even more and then relax them; raise your arms above your head and then drop them down while releasing your torso forwards and slightly bending your knees; jog on the spot; wiggle your arms around like spaghetti; while standing, bend over at the waist and then slowly roll back up stacking your vertebrae on top of each other one by one

Exercise 2 – Become aware of any habitual imbalances in your body – particularly in terms of alignment of your spine and weight distribution. Strive to even out any imbalances, as they can cause long-term tension.

Breathing:

Your vocal chords only make sound if there is air passing through them, and therefore it is very important to develop deep, relaxed breathing to support your voice. Try to take your time breathing, and eliminate unnecessary movement in your shoulders when you breathe.

Exercise 1 – Practice inhaling and exhaling for a certain number of counts, and then change the counts to challenge yourself to inhale or exhale either faster or slower.

e.g. Inhale for 2, exhale for 2; 3-3; 4-4; 4-6; 3-6; 2-6; etc.

Exercise 2 – Inhale and then practice saying long and longer series of numbers, using up all of your breath on each series. You can also try walking each time you speak a string of numbers.

e.g. Inhale and then speak ‘one’; inhale and speak ‘one, two’; inhale, ‘one, two, three’, . . . inhale, ‘one, two, three, four, five, six . . .’ as high as you can go comfortably using one breath

Exercise 3 – Imagine scenarios where you would be speaking to someone placed at different distances away from you and then speak a simple phrase to these imaginary people. Try to change only the amount of breath you use for each scenario, and resist

the urge to move your chin, add tension to your body, or change the pitch of your voice in different scenarios.

Articulation:

While air makes our voice speak, it is our face, jaw, lips, and tongue that create intelligible sounds. It is therefore important to make sure they are awake, relaxed, and able to do what we ask of them.

Exercise 1 – Relax and awaken your face, jaw, lips, and tongue using massage, horse lip blows, or lion stretches.

Exercise 2 – Use tongue twisters or exercises to practice enunciating.

e.g. ‘Baby bye’: Go through each of the consonants of the alphabet, placing them one at a time in front of the same sequence of vowels: **a, e; a, e, i, i; a, e, o, o, o; a, e, i, o, oo**. (bold denotes the main beats of the phrase)

Exercise 3 – Practice clearly enunciating text while lightly biting down on two fingers placed in between your front teeth.

Expression:

Much of the meaning we convey comes not just from what we say, but from how we say it. Experimenting with new ways of putting expression into our voices, and becoming aware of how we can vary our vocal expression, can help us to become more engaging, dynamic speakers.

Exercise 1 – Use contentless dialogue, poems, or any other text to experiment with aspects of expression including intonation/pitch (high/low), speed (fast/slow), volume (whisper/shout), variances in inflection (rising pitch, pauses). You can also imagine different contexts and speak with the type of expression you would use (or you imagine characters like soap stars or footballers using) in them.

Contentless Dialogue:

Person A

-Hi

-What did you do last night?

-Watched a little TV.

-No, not really

-Bye

Person B

-Hello

-Oh, not much. How about you?

-Anything good?

-See you later.