

Lesson 1 Breathing

Probably the most natural thing the body does is breathe. You don't have to tell it to do this, it just does it! From the moment you come into this world, you begin breathing, and if you'll notice how a newborn does it, you'll get a clue into our first exercise. A newborn infant breathes through its nose and the air fills the baby's stomach so that when it inhales and exhales, you observe the belly rising and falling, rising and falling. No other part of the body moves but the stomach. Animals breathe this way too. Sometime, watch your pet as he sleeps, only the stomach area rises and falls, not other body parts; not the shoulders, not the chest, only the stomach.

The most efficient breathing for singing and for speaking is a combination of abdominal and diaphragmatic breathing, or belly breathing. It's not necessary to totally understand anatomy to breathe correctly for proper vocalization, but we should have at least a slight understanding of the muscles involved. Place your hand on the abdomen, at the place where the ribs arch in front, just below the breastbone. This region is known as the epigastrium, and it's a good place to feel the action of the diaphragm. When you breathe in, the diaphragm, (sometimes called the "breathing muscle") drops down and flattens, forcing down the organs of the stomach and lowering the floor of the chest. This action creates the ability to take in more air to the entire body, (including the lungs), than by the expansion of the ribs in chest breathing. And this is the truly the natural way to breathe, the way we did when we first came into the world.

Breathing properly for singing is the most important foundation technique. Each and every tone we create is carried on the airflow of our breath. The more control you have over the air flow, the more control you will have over your singing tone. Put one hand on your abdomen and the other hand on your back, both at about waist level. Inhale by filling your lower lungs with air so that your stomach sticks out. Your hands should move apart, the air filling the space between them. As you exhale let your stomach go back in gently. Think of your stomach as a balloon that inflates and deflates. Your chest shouldn't move, not even an eighth of an inch. As you get better at this, your back will also move out when you inhale. Try putting your thumbs one on each side of your spine, at about waist level near the kidneys. Relax your shoulders and inhale into your thumbs.

So, if it's such a natural process, why do so many singers breathe incorrectly? There is a profusion of conflicting views on this subject in the voice instruction profession. Most "legit" teachers believe that the most important aspect of sound creation is "posture". After all, before trying any instrument, one should learn how to hold it, and vocally, this means posture. However, as we will learn, standing erect like a soldier with chest high, shoulders back, and buttocks tucked in, strains the organs in the neck and the muscles needed to make the sound. Once we learn how to relax the body, natural breathing follows. If you provide a strong steady airflow, your vocal tone will have the opportunity to ride strongly and smoothly to our ears. But if your airflow is uncontrolled and inconsistent your voice will break and waiver.

The purpose of the breathing exercises below is to increase your breathing capacity and control. Before beginning these breathing exercises, please note that bringing more oxygen into your body than it is accustomed to can sometimes result in lightheadedness or dizziness. Please take care to stand close to something that offers support should you need to steady yourself.

EXERCISE 1

Lie on the floor and put a pillow under your head. Breathe in through your nose, and fill your belly with air. Notice how your stomach rises and falls with each inhale and exhale. You may wish to place a heavy object, perhaps a few phone books on the abdominal area right below the ribs. As you inhale, the weights should rise; as you exhale, they should go down. Notice how only your belly moves in this position, not your shoulders, or chest. This is the

proper way to breathe for singing. Spend at least 5 minutes doing this so that you can experience how it feels to breathe this way. Your own sensory awareness will be a key factor in your progress.

EXERCISE 2

Begin by standing with your knees slightly bent in a relaxed position. If you have a full-length mirror, this is beneficial. You can even slouch (something your mother told you to NEVER do), for this exercise. Take a breath into your belly and try to duplicate the same sensory experience that you had on the floor. If your chest or shoulders are rising, you are doing it incorrectly. You want to stand in a relaxed position, not erect, and have only your stomach move in and out as you breathe through your nose and exhale through your mouth. If you begin to feel slightly dizzy as you do this exercise, you are doing it correctly. The reason for the dizziness is that you are taking in oxygen to parts of your body that don't usually get it. Breathing with a great heave of the chest, and "filling the lungs" may be fine for lifting weights, but it doesn't work here. If you work out, you may need to spend several days on this exercise alone to "unlearn" the breathing techniques you've been using in the gym.

Once you put the air in the right place, you must learn to control it with your diaphragm. The diaphragm is a muscle that sits below your lungs and causes them to fill and empty. If you exhale out all of your air down to the absolutely last drop, you will feel your diaphragm under your rib cage as it pushes up against your lungs. On the outside of your ribs you will feel your abdominal wall pushing in; inside your ribs your diaphragm pushes up. Not only does your diaphragm need to be strong enough to push hard when you want lots of power, but it needs to have even more control and strength when you want to sing a fast and accurate lick, or a big interval between pitches, or very, very quietly. Building the strength and control of your diaphragm begins with proper breathing. We're about to produce a sound that our body produces naturally when we laugh or cry. Try this. Put your hand on the place right in the center of your torso directly below your rib cage. Now laugh... feel that? Feel the pushing down and out of the diaphragm? Try coughing. Feel it now? That's the diaphragm! That's the muscle that's going to make your beautiful sounds for you. Initially you may feel that you can't get enough air, but that is because your lung capacity is small from disuse. All infants breathe into their lower lungs, but as we age and our stress levels increase, our breathing tends to move upwards. With practice you will find that your lower lungs stretch out and that your ribs in the back will loosen up and make room for the larger inhalation. Be patient with yourself. After breathing vertically thousands of times a day all the years of your life, a new way to breathe takes lots of concentration. Remember that your voice is an instrument like any other. It takes time to learn to play it--time and patience and practice.

EXERCISE 3

*Lie on the floor and put a pillow under your head. Breathe in through your nose, and fill your belly with air. Now place a heavy object on your abdomen, and take a deep breath into your belly and watch it expand. As you exhale, make a grunting noise using the syllable "uh" with a hard "u". As you make this sound, you push down so as to force your stomach to extend outward. The weights should pop up, not down, when you make the grunting sound. The bearing down starts the sound from your abdominal region, and lets it float through the larynx and over the vocal chords. This sound is **not** produced in the voice box. It is created in the abdominal area. Imagine the diaphragm looks somewhat like a concertina, or small accordion, sitting vertically in your abdomen. When your push, or bear down, you are*

squeezing the sides of this muscle (accordion) together so that in the vertical position, the bottom of the muscle would come up, and the top of it would go down. Your abdomen should expand as this happens. As you make the "uh" sound, you should feel vibration in your face; under the eyes, in the nose and lips. Putting the sound into the front of your face is the correct way to sing. It keeps pressure off the throat and larynx and creates a resonant warm tone. Keeping the sound in the front or mask of your face also acts as a megaphone for the sound and helps you to project the sound, even without a microphone. Practice for several minutes of "uh", "uh", "uh" in short bursts, stop for a few seconds and then do it again...and again...and again. If you find that you are sucking in your or abdomen or raising your chest as you make the sound, this is incorrect. You want to push it out at the moment you make the sound. What you're actually doing here is "letting go" in the larynx, and creating the opening for the sound to travel through.

It's important for you to understand here the position of your body when you do this exercise. You don't want to be doing the familiar "pelvic tilt" in which your buttocks tightens and actually leaves the floor. That's fine for strengthening the back muscles, but this exercise is different. Your diaphragm is the only muscle being worked and no other. What you are doing is resisting the weights on your stomach area, and you are using only the stomach to do the resisting. You must practice, practice, practice, over and over again so that your body will ultimately create sound naturally. This exercise will get pretty boring after a while, but know this! A strong and controlled diaphragm is the key to your naturally beautiful and powerful voice. Without the mastery of the diaphragm, even if you have a magnificent tone quality already, the years will play havoc with your throat and as you get older your beautiful sound will deteriorate. But learn to always, always use the diaphragm, and the sound you have today will get better with time.

EXERCISE 4

To strengthen the diaphragm, again put one hand on your abdomen and the other hand on your back. Inhale into your abdomen and exhale forcibly so that your stomach muscles push in and the air comes out rapidly. Repeat this--inhale, abdomen out, exhale forcibly, abdomen in--thirty times picking up the tempo as you get comfortable with it. Breathe through your mouth. As you go faster you may find that you've fallen back into the old habit of breathing vertically again. In that case, stop and start over by breathing slowly and gently into your lower lungs until you have the feeling again.

In order to control your voice you have to put out exactly the amount of breath you need for the sound you want. That breath needs to be as focused as a laser beam. How you exhale controls the quality of the sound, the volume, the pitch and the tone. How you inhale governs how you exhale. Most people, as they walk around in their daily lives, inhale into their upper lungs i.e., their shoulders go up as does their chest. When the air is in your upper lungs, you don't have the kind of detailed control you need. A singer (or a swimmer or runner--anyone who has to control their air) should fill their lower lungs. This means that instead of a breath that is vertical, with your body expanding upwards, the breath should be horizontal, expanding outwards. These next exercises will help you develop correct breath control and tonal placement.

EXERCISE 5

To breathe properly for singing, you must breathe low into the bottom portion of the lungs, engaging the diaphragm. Your rib cage and back will expand. Your shoulders and upper chest will remain still and will not rise. Inhale deeply and exhale completely. Again inhale and

exhale. Inhale and hold your breath for four counts, exhale over four counts and then wait four counts before inhaling again. Do three complete sets, counting time steadily, four beats for each action in the exercise. Remember to inhale deeply and with proper form for singing. Your abdomen should be expanding and your chest should not be rising.

Inhale 2 3 4, Hold 2 3 4 Exhale 2 3 4 and Wait 2 3 Again.

Inhale 2 3 4, Hold 2 3 4 Exhale 2 3 4 and Wait 2 3 Last Time.

Inhale 2 3 4, Hold 2 3 4 Exhale 2 3 4 and Wait 2 3 4.

As you make progress, challenge yourself to increase your breathing count to 8, 12, 16 or more. For best results mix and match the numbers. The size of singing phrase is never the same, so practicing all different airflow situations is ideal.

EXERCISE 6

Step 1. *Start by taking a deep breath, filling your lungs all the way down to the abdomen (not just the top half of your lungs). Then let it out very slowly in a constant stream. Imagine that you're exhaling through a very thin straw and the air is going out so slowly that you don't appear to be breathing at all--like playing "possum." It may help to picture a candle out in front of you, and your breath is moving so slowly that the flame doesn't flicker as you exhale. Repeat this action ten times. Now do five more, but on these next five breaths, pick a nice comfortable note and hold it through the entire breath. Keep the volume as quiet as possible while still maintaining a smooth, consistent note. Don't let it change in pitch or volume--make it seem like a key being held down on an organ. Be sure that each note is a comfortable pitch--somewhere in your normal speaking register. Do not start this part of the exercise with a high note. Low notes are good because they help the throat relax. Use a different pitch for each breath. Don't try to belt out high notes. That strains the vocal chords.*

Step 2. *Now do five more of these, **gradually** changing the volume for each note from zero up to a **medium** volume and back to zero over the entire duration of the breath. Always choose a different pitch for each breath and **never** let the pitch go flat or sharp. In the case of these last five breaths all that should change is the volume, and that should be changing at a rate that is undetectable. An instrument which can provide an accurate scale will be helpful for "calibrating" your voice. An inexpensive keyboard provides a perfect reference for every note in a singer's range.*

Step 3. *For the last set of five breaths (this is now a total of 25 that you'll be doing) do everything you just did in the previous five, but change the timbre of your voice at a faster rate than the volume is changing. This is done by "sweeping" through the vowels: a,e,i,o,u. Make the change gradual in any order you wish. It'll sound like Tibetan chant, so if anyone asks tell them you've converted to Buddhism and you're atoning for your sins.*

EXERCISE 7

Repeat the steps in exercise 6. This time, hold your lips together and emulate the sound of a motorboat chugging through the water. On lower tones your lips should vibrate slower and with slightly more force. On higher tones your lips should vibrate faster. This

exercise is called "bubbling" and will improve your enunciation and resonance, as well as your breath control. Your face and head play an important role in the quality of the sound you produce, and your bubbling should make the sinus cavities in your face vibrate.

Some vocalists incorporate a physical training routine into their breathing exercises. Try doing vocal exercises that you are comfortable with while you are doing pushups or situps. Notice how much more difficult it is to control your breath. Pay attention to controlling the timing of your exercise and keeping the volume low. The physical exercise will make you push your breath harder, and by learning to control this reaction your breath control will improve.

EXERCISE 8

Repeat the steps in exercise 7. This time, as you bubble, try doing a pushup or sit up. If those are too hard, start with jumping jacks or some other low impact exercise. Control your rate of exhalation, keeping it smooth and consistent. Time your breathing with the repetitions of your chosen exercise. Maintain a smooth tone in your bubbling and resist the urge to push harder during your exercise.

These basic exercises are an easy way to improve your breathe control every day, with no risk of vocal injury. Plain fact, the more you exercise your breathing, the more control you will have over your voice. With a little time and practice you will be a master of breathing control. Breathing correctly needs to be a habit, meaning you need to do it correctly without thinking about it. So in the beginning you really want to concentrate on the proper technique.

The most important aspect of good singing technique is having breath capacity and control. An accomplished singer maximizes the efficiency of their breathing to maintain control, access their full vocal range and avoid fatigue. These exercises will produce immediate results, and permanently improved performance if practiced on a daily basis. You may be asking yourself how this helps you and why results are immediate. The answer is remarkably simple. By concentrating on keeping your pitch constant you focus in on what your body needs to do to sing on pitch. Another side benefit of doing these exercises is that they pump extra oxygen into your brain. The increased oxygen will help you focus more clearly on the task you have at hand.

Are you sure you're breathing right? If you are uncertain of yourself see if this little experiment helps. Sit in a chair and while keeping your back straight, lean over and put your elbows on your knees. Take a deep breath. Feel your back and rib cage expand? Now sit up and work to duplicate the feeling, only the expansion should be a ring around your entire body. If your chest or shoulders are rising, you are doing it incorrectly.

REVIEW

1. When in a prone position, as you inhale, are you taking the breath in through your nose?
2. When in the prone position, as you inhale, is only your abdomen moving up and down?
3. After several breaths through your nose and exhaling through your mouth, have you become slightly light-headed?
4. When you stand and do breathing exercises, is only your abdomen moving in and out? Are your shoulders straight but not raised?
5. In the standing position, is your chest loose and not raised? Are your knees slightly bent? Are your arms relaxed?
6. Is your bottom still touching the floor when you make the "uh" sound in exercise 3? Do the weights on your abdomen pop up? Are you pushing out with your stomach, (not sucking in) when you make the sound? Do you have the sensation of "letting go" in the throat at the moment you make the sound? Are you aware that only the stomach muscles are working and nothing else?
7. Are you remembering to keep everything loose except the abdominal region?

Your answers to each of these questions should be "YES". If not, go back and try again until you can answer each question with a "YES". The development and strengthening of the "breathing muscle" is of paramount importance to the task of vocal mastery. It doesn't take very long to explain the proper breathing method, but it takes as long as it takes for each student to really get it and breathe this way when he/she sings. And it's the most important part of your training so don't be impatient. Stay on this exercise as long as you need to in order to totally master this breathing technique.

One last thought: believe it or not, TALKING is more of a strain on your voice than SINGING (if you're doing it right). In fact, Broadway singers are under contract to not utter a single word on the day of the show until after the performance ends. So . . . if you want to be a successful singer you have to learn to breath, learn to focus, then shut up and sing!

Lesson 2 Posture

Posture and movement for singers are an integral part of any tutors teaching. Part of being able to sing well includes the ability to be aware of your body, identify and correct problems that arise due to incorrect posture. This is where a singing teacher becomes essential as they can observe your movements during singing and provide you with immediate corrective advice. This does not mean that your posture needs to be perfect! But, posture is the basis of all good singing. When you study a musical instrument, you are first taught to hold it correctly so that you have the ability to play it properly. The human voice is the most versatile and flexible of musical instruments. Since we sing with our whole body, it is important, and the basis of all good singing, to learn how to hold the body properly. The ultimate goal in singing is a freely produced, rich, open and resonated sound. The vocal apparatus must be relaxed. The way the body is held –its posture– has a major impact on whether the vocal mechanism can remain relaxed and free.

Common posture problems:

1. Locking the knees – When the knees are locked, the body is off balance. This causes body tension, which creates a tense singer. Be sure to put the weight forward on the balls of the feet and keep the tail bone tucked under to help avoid inadvertent locking of the knees.

2. Swayback – Sometimes a singer tries to attain a lifted chest by pulling the shoulders back (and consequently tensing them) instead of using the muscles around the rib cage to lift the ribs out of the waistline. The intercostals muscles surrounding the ribcage are the muscles that should be used to lift the ribs and the sternum. When the shoulders are pulled back instead of the sternum being lifted high, and the buttocks are not tucked under but are thrust backward, swayback posture is the result. In this tense, unbalanced position, good vocal production is not possible.

3. Chest droop – As a musical phrase is sung and air is exhaled, it is easy to allow the chest to cave in and the rib cage to drop back into the waistline. At the end of the phrase, if this occurs, the singer has lost the height of the sternum. As you sing a phrase, consciously retain the height of the sternum and resist the collapse of the rib cage.
Standing naturally ensuring the head, neck and shoulders are relaxed is the correct posture for singing.

Whilst most people correct these conditions automatically, there are others whose posture has become lazy, or who have developed bad habits that can inhibit their singing. This lesson will provide some guidelines and exercises to help improve your posture.

Please Note: - This does not mean that you will not be able to sing if your posture is less than perfect. If you suffer with a disability that affects your posture, you can still learn to sing. Posture is not a substitute for vocal talent. It is just a means of improving your control and providing your voice with optimum conditions for reaching its potential.

Posture Do's and Don'ts

Do.....

Be relaxed and natural
 Keep your movements fluid
 Keep your chin level
 Keep your knees loose
 Keep your head up
 Keep your shoulders sloping and relaxed
 Keep your toes pointed forward with your weight on heels and soles
 Keep the front of your neck loose - don't stretch it
 Keep abdominal muscles relaxed
 Keep your back muscles relaxed
 Smile!

Don't.....

Drop or hunch your shoulders
 Move stiffly or jerkily
 Drop or tuck in your chin when trying to sing low notes
 Stretch your head upward when trying to sing high notes
 Strain or push your abdominal muscles

Proper singing posture, from the toes up:

One foot slightly in front of the other, feet comfortably apart for good balance
 Weight forward on the balls of the feet, heels on floor
 Knees relaxed and flexible
 Buttocks tucked under
 Chest (sternum) lifted high and spread wide
 A feeling of the ribs being lifted up out of the waistline
 When walking your weight should be mainly on the balls of your feet, your heels just lightly touching the floor, with the majority of movement from the hips and legs.
 Shoulders relaxed, as if hanging on a coat hanger
 Neck relaxed, head able to move freely
 Head remains level
 Chin parallel to the floor, neither lifted nor lowered should remain straight, relaxed and not 'swing' from side to side.

The exercises below are used by schools and teachers to help models, actors and singers achieve correct posture. This age old practice has been used for years and is designed to help you become more aware of how your body works, therefore enabling you to move fluidly and correct mistakes as you feel them happening. Take them at your own pace. Master one exercise before moving on to the next. Don't rush or try to do too much in one day. These exercises will help you develop strength and endurance in the intercostals muscles. Your ability to hold your rib cage high and wide will become more efficient and your endurance and air capacity will improve.

Exercise 9

Take in a full breath through the nose, inhaling as much air as possible but without creating any tension in the chest or shoulder area. Expand the rib cage to its capacity. Now exhale, using a hissing sound like air escaping from a tire, as you count slowly from one to eight. Resist the inclination to allow the rib cage to collapse while exhaling; use the intercostals muscles to keep the rib cage high and wide. Continue to perform the exercise on a daily basis, gradually building up your exhalation time to 16 counts while maintaining the position of a high, wide, open rib cage. Note that the danger in this exercise is tension and overexertion. It is easy to become tense about not allowing the rib cage to collapse. Remain conscious of keeping free of tension, constriction and tightness in the shoulder and chest areas.

Exercise 10

For these exercises you will need a partner (or a full length mirror to practice at home alone). You will need a large book of medium weight. Wear comfy loose clothing. Wear flat shoes or bare feet. All movements should be fluid and breathing natural. Stand facing your partner. Study how your partner (or yourself in the mirror) stands and compare this with the Do's and Don'ts above. Make adjustments to their/your posture as necessary. Stand at the end of the walk space and walk naturally towards your partner/mirror. Observe their/your movements and posture as you walk. Compare with the Do's and Don'ts above and make adjustments to your posture if necessary.

The following exercises will not work if your posture is incorrect!! 5 to 10 minutes practice a day will help you to achieve better posture, the ideal is to reach a point whereby your posture and movements become automatic and unconscious.

Exercise 11

Place the book on the top of your head. Repeat exercise 10 while turning your head slowly to the left. Continue walking towards your partner/mirror as you return your head to center. Then repeat the exercises turning your head to the right. These head movements should be smooth with eyes ahead, chin level, and your head, neck and shoulders relaxed. If the exercise is done correctly the book will remain in place. Tense up, drop the jaw or move jerkily & the book will fall! Repeat this exercise until you can do it several times without the book falling off.

Since posture is a key ingredient and the basis for all good singing, it is important for every singer to practice often enough and long enough to make correct posture a habit. Even after you consider yourself an expert; it is vital to continue to monitor your posture, because it is extremely easy to lapse into incorrect body alignment. Maintaining correct posture even for the length of one song requires considerable muscle strength and control. Regular practice helps build vocal strength and endurance, as well as reinforcing the techniques themselves.

Lesson 3 Stage Fright

You are not alone if you suffer from what we have come to know as stage fright. Many accomplished musicians are actually terrified and get physically sick prior to a concert. This basis for this is actually a good motivation. We all want to be good, want to be accepted, and want to sing our best. That desire is a good thing, but being debilitated by stage fright is not. There are some effective ways of dealing with this condition.

The most effective way to manage the phenomenon of stage fright is constant performance. For some this may not be possible, or you may just be starting out and you are struggling at the starting gate, so to speak. If you are just starting out and cannot even imagine performing in front of people yet, find a friendly audience that will accept you no matter what.

It may sound silly, but you will be nervous even though you know they will accept you no matter what you do. When you perform for them try not to talk to them as they were your friends, but make it a little "impersonal", if you will. Pretend they are an audience of strangers. If you make a mistake, keep going. You need to learn to "roll with it", or even sometimes make something out of a mistake. This can lead also to improvisational opportunities. Once this little "concert" is over you will feel a sense of accomplishment. Even if you made a mistake or two, you will feel good about what you have done.

You must continue to stretch your self. Once you are past the first awkward stage and on to performing for larger groups of strangers, there are some other ways of dealing with stage fright. Practice, practice, practice. You must know your piece or pieces of music backwards and forwards if you are to be truly prepared. You must constantly practice to overcome any technical limitations on your performance, then you can more easily deal with stage fright as a separate issue. You may have a very real reason to be afraid if you do not know your music!

The day of the performance it is best not to practice very much at all. You can wear yourself out and "peak" too early. One way to know if you've over practiced is that if you sounded perfect two hours prior to performance but were too worn out by the time the concert started. Just rest a lot and go over the music in your mind. Listen to a CD of the music, if you have one. Warm up, to be sure, but only that. If you know your music you should be fine. I like to take a nap before a performance so I can be rested. If I cannot actually sleep, then just laying down for 30 minutes or so seems to help. Now when you take the stage, remember all of the work you have done, tell yourself, " I am prepared, I can do this! You will be amazed at what you can do if you believe in yourself. Be not afraid!

Tips for Battling Stage Fright

You hear your name being called and your knees begin to tremble, you begin to breathe more heavily and your mouth goes dry - a singer's nightmare. Here are some tips:

1. Remember that you are an actor performing through song. If you are shy and have difficulty getting on stage, remember that we all have different sides of personalities. Obviously, there is a side of you that enjoys music or you wouldn't be pursuing vocal instruction. So, let go. Give this "character" the right to take over when it is time to perform. Just like in the acting exercises above, build the character you want your audience to see. Bottom line, perception is everything. Your performance, and all aspects of it, will help people build their perception on whether they are enjoying themselves or not. Who is in control of

that perception? You.

2. *You have to get your breath under control, bottom line. If you lose your breath control due to nervousness, you have undermined your voice's foundation and it is going to be a long song. If possible, stop and do jumping jacks several times throughout the day. It is also recommended that in addition to your regular vocal warm-up that you do some form of low impact cardio-vascular activity around thirty to forty-five minutes prior to performance. Engaging in cardiovascular exercise shortly before a performance will help you control the nervous reaction your stage fright inspires. Practice getting your breath under control when the nervousness begins by altering the conditions of your environment. You could practice breath control during times of tension, like during a scary movie or on a rollercoaster. As soon as you begin to feel that panicky feeling and your heart rate increase, take deep, long and low breaths.*
3. *Stay hydrated. To combat the dry mouth try to find something that will create saliva when you are nervous and use this knowledge during these times of crises. It may be putting your finger in your mouth; it may be sucking on your tongue or swallowing several times.*
4. *Learning to sing, the vocal journey, is usually a very a personal one. Learn to love and enjoy your voice. If you don't like the way you sound you are sure to express this emotion during performance... so why should others enjoy listening to it? Believe in yourself and learn to use your voice, along with its unique characteristics, to your best advantage.*
5. *Finally, focus on what is important throughout the entire performance. Distraction is usually a full body experience. You are the control central of your performance, so stay focused and tell everyone else in your mind to get lost for the next three minutes or so. You deserve the time and so does your audience.*

There are many approaches to help you conquer stage fright. However, the first crucial step is to pick out an appropriate song. Find a song that means something to you personally. It is important to identify with the situation or character before performing the piece. It is important to choose a song you are comfortable with, one that you know well. It should be in your vocal range, or you should have a plan for how to compensate for the notes above or below your range. You can practice this at home without interruptions. This will help greatly when you go out in public.

Read through the lyrics carefully finding the character in it. After that, read it again, out loud, to bring the character out of the script. If your stage fright is severe, you should make every effort to have the entire set of lyrics and the map of the song memorized thoroughly. It is during this reading (and memorizing) that you should begin the next step: deciding where your voice should rise and fall, the mood of the piece, your pronunciation and phrasing style, and then implementing those decisions to create changes in tone and quality. Once you memorize the lyrics you will be able to perform at your best. It is impossible to optimize your timing, breathing, control and delivery until you have the ultimate confidence of knowing your material. The last step is to polish your performance by practicing the parts that are rough again, until the performance runs smoothly. Then, at last, you have a solo performance worthy of grand presentation that you will be much more relaxed.

Lesson 4 Practice Techniques

Studies have proven that a child who learns good study habits will have a more rewarding educational experience. Did you know the same is true for singing? While it is important to exercise and work our voices often, it is not always how much or how long you practice, but whether or not your practice time is productive. How do you rate your practice time? How should you rate your practice time?

Many students practice singing songs over and over again in their entirety. While there is often some measure of improvement due to the repetition, this repetition can also be detrimental. If a singer continues to perform a phrase with an error, this error will become a habit which will continue to appear in similar phrases. Instilling this mistake repeatedly into memory can be a difficult thing to overcome. Our voice organs are made up of many muscles and membranes, and much of our singing comes from muscle memory. Our muscles can be trained to act appropriately, or to misbehave. The best way to avoid the frustration of bad habits is to learn the art of productive practice.

A singer is like an athlete who gradually trains their body until it reaches the peak of its operating ability. Like any other muscle in body, the vocal chords (also known as vocal folds) need to be warmed up with exercises before asking them to perform. These small, thin muscles vibrate when air passes through them and the more 'elastic' they become the easier it is for notes to be produced. Although you may have been singing since you were small, it is important that you learn to sing in a healthy manner that builds up the muscles slowly and prevents damage to the voice. An accomplished singer is one who has learned how to control their breathing, and uses vocal exercises and scales which help to develop flexibility in the vocal chords.

How long a singer should practice depends on the level of experience and amount of training that the singer has. Every singer should warm up their voice with a few scales or other vocal exercises throughout your range to help slowly develop the muscles. For a complete beginner 20 minutes a day, including warm up, rests, vocalization and cool down, is an appropriate amount. That amount should be gradually increased over a period of months, according to your singing teacher's instructions. An advanced singer can practice for a lot longer, with practice sessions broken down into 15 - 20 minute slots of warm up, vocalization, rest, repertoire, rest, advanced repertoire and cool down. **It is not advisable to sing for long periods of time without a lot of training!** You would not expect to run a marathon without training slowly and regularly over a long period of time. The vocal mechanism is like any other group of muscles and requires the same type of gradual development. It should also be noted that even professional singers use their practice periods to do other types of training! As well as vocalizing, a singer should use their time between performances at rehearsal to learn lyrics, learn music, study techniques, observe recorded performances and more, rather than singing continuously for long periods of time which may result in a strained voice! In all cases, your practice sessions need to be modified if you have an upcoming performance and at least one day a week should be spent resting the voice - NO Singing! So remember to keep your practice time productive and keep it simple. Review the song material providing you with a challenge and logically determine what simple steps are necessary to achieve your goal. Singing usually does take practice, practice, practice; but, knowing how to fill that time can make all the difference in the speed of your vocal improvement.

Here are some useful tips:

1. Make sure you are always properly warmed up before you sing.
2. Never sing or vocalize if you are ill or suffering with a sore throat. If your voice starts to feel

hoarse or sore during your practice session, **STOP** singing immediately and completely rest your voice. When your voice has fully recuperated, review your vocal technique, begin vocalizing with gentle humming, and cut down the length of practice time until you can consult your teacher. If the problem persists, do not sing and visit your doctor. Vocal strain can be caused by speaking, whispering or yelling too much, or by trying to 'over reach' the natural range of the voice.

3. Eat a light meal at least 2 - 3 hours before you start, and allow plenty of time for the food to digest. Singing while overstuffed with food interferes with the proper action of your diaphragm, resulting in diminished control, power, range and air capacity.
4. Avoid caffeine, alcohol or acidic drinks like orange before you sing as these can cause drying or excess phlegm in some people. Drink between 8 - 9 pints water a day and keep a supply of water to hand during your practice period.
5. Take a break when your voice is tired, stay hydrated, and rest before and after working on demanding songs. Pay attention to what works for you and refer to your recorded practices often to assure that you are on the right track.

A typical practice session for intermediate and professional vocalists might include:
Limbering up the body by using gentle exercises first.

Breathing and/or Bubbling exercises.

Vocalization exercises to prepare for excellent enunciation.

Beginning targeted exercises or practicing specific music.

Repeat the vocalization exercises to cool down.

Repeat the relaxation exercises and spend five minutes relaxing completely to end the practice session.

For the purpose of efficient self-instruction, it is assumed at this point that the singer has made reasonable accommodations for recording their practice sessions. This could be an inexpensive camcorder, a tape recorder, or one of thousands of professional or hobby-level recording solutions. The quality is not as important as the ease of playback, but you should be able to hear every detail of your performance. If the recording quality is too poor, diagnosis of vocal difficulties is impossible.

Correlating a collection of recorded data with a journal of any behaviors which might have positive or negative effects on your singing is another powerful tool. Take note of recent performances or practice sessions, and any food or beverages you've consumed which could affect your vocal abilities. This information can be helpful in analyzing your training and help to correct behaviors that have a negative effect on your ability. Get organized early and save yourself time later.

You can tailor your recording medium selection to focus on the weak points I your performance. Camcorders are a great solution for the singer looking to improve their stage presence, or for selecting performance attire. The ability to record with a handheld microphone can improve microphone technique. With some basic knowledge of sound quality and your microphones characteristics, you can use your recordings to improve your live sound. It is important to know what the focus of your training should be before spending any resources on this equipment. Your vocal coach can help you with this selection.

You do not need to have a special room to record in; any quiet area you are comfortable practicing in will be fine. The focus of these recordings is not to make a professional release; it is to improve your vocal and listening abilities. The best musicians and vocalists are ones who can perceive the subtle differences between a good performance and a great one.

It is now time to dissect a specific song by breaking it into manageable pieces and focusing on areas needing improvement.

EXERCISE 12

Step 1. Record yourself singing the song or the vocal exercise you wish to learn. Sing it as well as you can in its entirety (or as much of it as you can). This recording gives you a reference point for monitoring improvement, aids in memorization and is a useful tool for identifying vocal weaknesses. Be sure to label the recording properly for easy reference later. Use the date, location (if recording live performances), and track or project title.

Step 2. Listen to your recording, preferably soon after the performance. A recording which provides enough detail to discern the relevant components of your vocal performance is essential. There is no other way to provide this type of feedback. Even the best vocal coach cannot replace this type of learning.

Step 3. Make observations (and notes, if you need them) about what it is you would like to sound better or different. Take note specifically of any areas in the piece which will challenge your range or vocal abilities and make a plan for tasteful accommodations. This could be as simple as adding an additional breath or singing a single note at a different octave. Or, your solution might be a radical change to the original piece. Recording your performances can be helpful in determining what is tasteful. A combination of your own feelings about the recording and feedback from educated or relevant opinion sources are good sources for honing your style.

Step 4. After identifying the area(s) needing improvement, focus on the corrective measures and then repeat the exercise.

Once you have determined what you would like to improve or what you need to adjust to fit your voice, it comes important to understand what it takes to accomplish your goal. This is where it can get a little tricky, but knowing the facts can make most vocal frustrations easy to fix with a little practice.

Sometimes just recognizing the specific vocal issue solves the problem and rehearsal of the section or phrase is all you need. If so, practice it a few times and monitor your success rate. If you are satisfied with your performance, add the section or phrase back into the full song and start the process over. A word of caution: It is just as detrimental to learn to never complete a song as it is to learn to sing a song with the same mistakes. Once you are prepared to, "reassemble" the song, perform it again and compare your first recorded performance to your new one. The section you have worked on should show improvement on the recording.

However, some problems are not solved so easily. For example, if you are working on a song in and your performance problem lies in a basic foundation technique like inconsistent airflow, then studying rhythm patterns and listening to other artist's renditions will not help. Diagnosing these troubles is where the benefit of coaching at its best. It can be much easier for a trained vocalist to diagnose the cause of your performance issue. This objective advice should be used to establish direction for your independent study. Recording your performance can be a more cost effective way of receiving many of the benefits of coaching, but it's limited to your ability to perform self-diagnosis.

If realizing the vocal challenge alone is not enough to conquer the problem, or if you have multiple challenges in one section or phrase, try stripping everything back to the basics. This technique involves working with vocal exercises geared to develop the necessary skills causing the

current struggle. If the underlying problem is with inconsistent airflow, then do some basic foundation exercises geared to develop a consistent and strong air flow before trying the section again. Repeating this process at least three times (exercise/sing rest exercise/sing rest exercise/sing) will help apply the concept to real world singing. If your problem lies with timing, try singing the song a cap Ella with a metronome keeping time. The sound of your solo voice will be easier to focus on with only the metronome accompanying and keeping time. If your problem lies with staying in pitch, try singing your song slowly and softly. Do not push on any notes. Focus on clearly singing each word and note correctly and start at whatever speed allows you to do so. Working with a properly tuned instrument possessing a range compatible with the human voice can also help improve pitch accuracy.

EXERCISE 13

Play each note of the melody on your instrument and sing the corresponding part of the lyric. Focus on singing each note and speaking each word correctly. Do not worry about your skills (or lack thereof) on your instrument of choice. The important part of this exercise is to sing the notes as accurately as possible.

Note: An inexpensive keyboard is recommended for those with little or no instrument experience. If you have trouble finding the melody of your chosen piece on the keyboard, you can find the melody in letterform online and label the keys to assist your search.

LESSON 5: YOUR VOCAL RANGE

VOCALIZATION TYPES

Human voice is usually considered to have at least three [voice registers](#); ranging from lowest to highest, they are the: [chest register](#), [head register](#), and [falsetto](#). The [whistle register](#), comprising the highest notes that a human voice can reach, is also often considered a proper register, although individuals who are able to use it well are fairly rare. Some singers choose to remain in a single range (usually the chest register) throughout a piece, but many will switch between these different ranges in order to produce a wide range of pitches, or even simply for effect. [Yodeling](#) is a technique that requires rapidly switching between at least two different registers many times in the same phrase, producing a distinct high-low-high-low sound.

ANATOMY

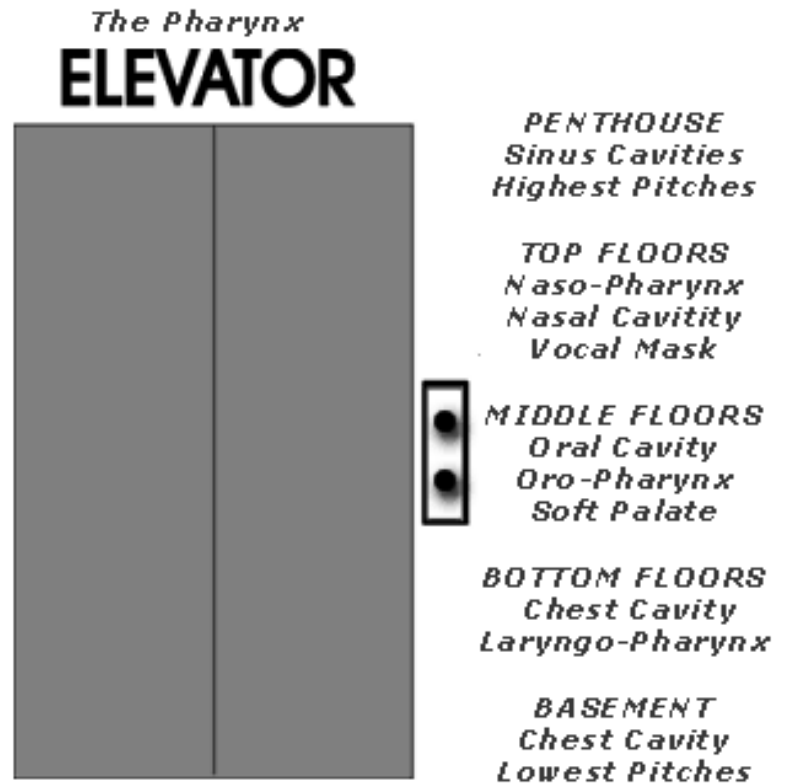
Thus sound that resonates and is felt more in the chest is called chest register, and that which resonates higher than the larynx and is seemingly felt in the head is called head register. Finally, sound that resonates partially in the chest and partially in the head - mixed register.

Knowledge of anatomy is not essential to be able to sing, but learning how the body works and the terminology used by singing teachers, lecturers and voice specialists will provide the aspiring singer with a greater understanding of the singing process. The pharynx is simply a passageway from the nasal cavity down to the larynx (and then continuing into the esophagus). It is known to have three different regions: the nasal-pharynx (located behind the nose), the oropharynx (located in the rear of the mouth), and the laryngeal-pharynx (behind the throat). Understanding the pharynx and how it works with regard to singing can make a huge difference in

a singer's voice.

Review the diagram (last page) (be sure to note the pharynx & resonating cavities) and consider the following analogy and theory. The vocal instrument, your body, is a multi-level building and the pharynx is the elevator inside running from top to bottom. Sinus cavities are the penthouse and associated with the highest pitches. The nasal cavity, nasal-pharynx, and vocal mask represent the top floors. The oral cavity, oro-pharynx, and soft palate represent the middle floors. The upper chest cavity and laryngeal-pharynx represent the first floors. The lower chest cavity represents the building basement and the lowest pitches.

Just like the pharynx is actually one component divided into three regions for easy reference, singing voices are often categorized in registers (chest voice, middle voice, head/falsetto voice). These registers have assigned names which indicate the tonal quality changes that occur when moving from register to register.



- A. The *chest voice* is often associated with deep, warm, rich, thick sounds.
- B. The *middle voice* is generally associated with middle pitch ranges, and warm, rich tones. The middle voice also extends to the inclusion of the vocal mask and a warm, heady sound.
- C. The *head voice* (women) and *falsetto* (men) are associated with light, bright singing tones that are higher in pitch and resonate within the upper sinus cavities. Some singers consider warm, heady tones associated with the vocal mask as the head or falsetto voice and never reach their range potential.

TRANSITIONS

When addressing the question, "Should I sing this in my chest voice or head voice?" the answer is always the same: start by sing the note softly and see where it lands in your range. At this point, you should be familiar with the different portions of your vocal range through exploration during vocal exercises. Teaching the student to balance all of the vocal registers will achieve the best sound. That requires blending, not separating, the vocal registers. Each individual should listen to the note and decide, does it need more warmth or more brightness - and then adjust the vocal instrument to create that sound. Not sure how to do this? The pharynx, the available avenue between most of the resonating cavities, is a major part of the solution.

Many singers refuse to use "the elevator" which moves effortlessly to the next pitch. Instead they laboriously climb the building staircase, often taking mental note of each and every stair landing (register or note change). Instead of concentrating on one floor (or one note) at a time, learn to use the pharynx to your advantage and improve the overall tonality of your voice. This technique will also increase your range. Use the following exercise to test out the concept. Be sure your body and instrument are free of tension before beginning.

EXERCISE 14

On the syllable "HEEE" we are going to start on a comfortable low note in your range and slide one pitch at a time to a comfortable high note in your range (from the bottom floor to the top floor of the building, currently ignore the basement and penthouse). Follow these exact instructions:

- 1. Think about the comfortable low pitch you are going to start on – hear it in your head.*
- 2. As you begin the pitch, envision the mind picture of the elevator beginning in your chest.*
- 3. Begin to slide on the syllable "HEEE", pitch to pitch, up to the comfortable high note. With each note, picture the elevator on a steady, smooth and effortless rise to the top.*
- 4. You will need to gradually increase your airflow with each pitch.*
- 5. Know your top pitch. Hear the top note you wish to hit in your head. As the educated elevator doorman, make a definite yet easy stop once the destination is reached.*

The transition between one registers often produces a vocal tone that breaks and cracks, or experiences a great change in quality. The first goal is to sing the "**HEEE**" syllable strongly over each note; even through a break or tone change should one occur. Repeating this exercise over time will help you gain the necessary strength and coordination to negotiate pitch changes without cracks or breaks. It will also help you develop a full and natural singing voice, with an enviable singing range.

Here is another tip for you if you are still having difficulty with the transition areas in your range. Many singers try to delay the transition area and force notes into the next register from the one below. It is more common to see this at the top of a register and when the melody is rising in pitch. Working in the opposite direction, the voice makes the transition more naturally as the singer relaxes.

EXERCISE 15

For this exercise, you will need an instrument. An inexpensive keyboard is a good choice. Start humming at the lowest part of your range. Follow your range on your instrument, note by note. Make sure your humming is matching every tone of your instrument as the notes get higher. As you approach the transition point between chest and middle voice, stay in your chest voice and maintain your volume. Do not allow your volume to rise. When you can no longer make sound in chest voice, make note of the last note in your chest register. Repeat these steps through your middle and head/falsetto voices. Once you have your range mapped out, repeat the exercise. This time, instead of resisting transitions, begin each transition one or two notes before you reach the end of the current vocal register. This is the key to learning to blend the different sounds your voice can make.

HEAD VOICE

Head voice is not just for tenors. All singing voices are entitled to this healthy aspect of vocalism, and it can be learned by almost all who study and practice to learn it.

'Finding' a head voice is most problematical for those who have sung by forcing... by trying to sing high notes with the same register they use for the lower part of the voice. A good beginning for this type of singer is to include soft dynamics into their exercise routine, centered at the blending point between registers. Make sure you are using an exercise with some tonal movement (up and down a scale, for instance). Exercises employing low tension, well supported 'leaps' across the change region allow the voice to 'go wonky' a little, and spontaneously respond to the pitch change. With a little, non-judgmental vocal play, the student can 'find' a nicely

coordinated head voice. Expect it to occur accidentally, spontaneously, as any 'control' mental images or concerted efforts to make it happen will induce just enough restricting tension to prevent it from happening. The very act of trying this, over time, will induce a gentleness of thought which will allow the voice to rebalance a little, dropping some of the weight at the softer dynamics.

A singer possessing a very light, wispy tone may also find the search for their head voice challenging. Over time, these singers have become used to expect that their voices should feel a certain way when they sing, and those expectations (and their associated mental images and physical sensations) are habit.

To learn to sing head voice, which is a co-coordinated use of the musculature of the voice, the student must progressively replace their habits (and expectations) with new, practiced ones. The expectations (and images) seem to play leapfrog with the muscle coordination during this time, in something like 6 week cycles, in my experience. A teacher can guide the process by identifying specific trouble areas and asking the student to make sung sounds that are a little different, maybe even experimental.

From there, the student must learn how to move the voice from pitch to pitch without 'selling up' (sliding) to the higher pitches. It's remarkable that, after all the 'performance' stress has been removed, that a given voice will have a tendency to relax, readjusting to the balance of registration in a nice gradual fashion.

At a certain point in this development, a teacher gets the sense, partly by watching, partly by listening, that the singer is ready for a breakthrough to a relaxed head voice. Many singers have a noticeable sensation during the transition as their voice moves into head voice on the way up, or when coming out of it. These transition sensations can be substantial, but as a general rule singers train to 'allow' such a transition to occur, without adding unnecessary extra work and tension in the throat, jaw and tongue regions. Under the guidance of a good teacher, the student will learn how these sensations change note to note. A teacher can assist them in finding their right 'sound' in that area, and to begin to accept the fact that these new sensations, and their accompanying sounds, are 'right' for their voice. In this area, recording is beneficial for those vocal students who have been working on developing their listening skills.

Descending scales, beginning in the falsetto range, are an effective means for developing the head voice for males. Start in falsetto and then continue down into the head and chest ranges, switching to the next register when it's comfortable. Beginning exercises in falsetto aids in keeping breath relaxed, open and properly supported in the high range rather than the straining, push from below feeling most are used to. Usually, the changeover notes are lacking control at first, but the student will learn how to keep the open, lifted, on-the-breath feel of the falsetto on the higher "normal" notes, and can then continue that feeling to gain the true head voice. I think that using descending scales is a great part of the exercises; they must learn how to begin each phrase with the capacity for the highest notes so that an appropriate amount of "head" voice and the correct physiology is available for them no matter where they are in their range. (Actually, I use lots of descending scales for everyone at first - along with the "eee" vowel and the lip trill; it's a great way to get the head voice humming!)

EXERCISE 16

Now that we have discussed the penthouse portion of the elevator theory, you probably have a notion of where we are going with the basement idea. Let's call again upon the training exercise vocal sirens to demonstrate the idea, this time beginning on a high note.

1. Think about the comfortable high pitch to start on – hear it in your head first.
2. Initiate the pitch with the mind picture of the elevator starting in the Penthouse.
3. Begin to slide on the syllable "HEEE", pitch to pitch, down to the lowest note of your singing

range. With each note, picture the elevator on a steady, smooth and effortless ride to the bottom.

4. As you reach the bottom of your range it is important to balance the decrease in airflow, the amount of resonating space in the chest cavity, and the amount of muscular control used. As the doorman, experiment with access to these areas. The ability to negotiate the space in the "basement" is directly related to how low you can sing and how warm your tone sounds.

NOTE: Do not **ever** "push" the voice in this range at all. It is much better to relax and decrease your airflow, while continuing to support with the diaphragm. With productive vocal practice and repetition the strength of that vocal range will increase. Pushing the voice in this range will only result in stress/damage to the voice organ and delayed vocal development.

THE VOCAL MASK

Appoggiare la voce - means to support and focus sound. There is only one specific place where such focus is possible. This location is referred to as "The Vocal Mask". You can imagine an acute triangle whose base is the bottom of your top teeth, the sides of your nose, and the top is at the bridge of your nose. The current of air being exhaled meets the vocal chords along the way, and makes them vibrate. The sound that is created is carried along through the regions of the pharynx, soft palate, nose and mouth, and gathers its true color, hue, and timbre. If allowed to travel into the open mouth without resistance, the sound will be shrill, or "white". Projecting too much on the hard palate, it will be hollow. So direct the current to the upper teeth, directing the sound into the mask. Only this kind of sound will be clean, clear, and light.

To make it easier to understand the technique of projecting the sound into the mask, try to sing the vowels separately "a-a, o, o-o, e, e-e" adding the consonants "l" or "m", at the same time accentuating the pronunciation with a strong but unforced, even relaxed movement of the tongue from the base of the upper teeth down. In order to relax the vowels, the singer needs to relax their jaw, tongue, and entire body as completely as possible. You should note that you will probably find one of the vowels easier to project into "the mask". Use this phenomenon to your advantage and practice holding this position on the other vowels. The sound should be vibrating against your upper teeth.

DEVELOP A HIGHER RANGE

Developing a higher range can be a daunting task and is an elusive goal for many singers. Many students are taught to focus primarily in the vocal mask. As a result, even after years of training, some singers sing up to a certain note and get stuck as if they were hitting their head on the ceiling. Returning to our analogy, it is as if the elevator is reaching the top of the building, or nasal cavity ceiling, and is permitted to go no further. The sound created using this type of focus is often a bit heady or even covered sounding. In order to increase your singing range past this point, we need to access the penthouse, the frontal sinus cavities and cavities in the top and back of the head. The tonal sound created will be light and bright, without the headiness associated with the vocal mask.

For those of you familiar with the fictional character, Willy Wonka, and the famous glass elevator shooting through the roof of the building, this concept may be easier for you because you have a true mind picture of what needs to happen. That's right; to increase your singing range you need to shoot the elevator through the roof. This requires a minor increase in air flow and a change in focus. Move your focus from behind the bridge of your nose/eyebrow area and turn it to the top of the head, floating the notes easily. You may need to drop your jaw to add space. Sing easily, don't search for volume or strength too soon. Repeating this exercise often will help to

develop strength, dexterity and stamina within this pitch range.

Follow the steps listed above and do the vocal sirens again, only this time allow the elevator (and focus) to access the Penthouse. Shoot your focus through the roof and sing higher than you ever have before. Use the elevator theory and related mind pictures to help you understand where the tone is focused for every pitch. Remember that the resulting tone should be light and bright, but with a sense of warmth and richness. Although the sensation may seem uncomfortable at first, there is no vocal straining involved. In fact, when done properly, singing very high notes is quite easy.

Remember to drink room temperature water every few exercises to prevent dehydration of your instrument.

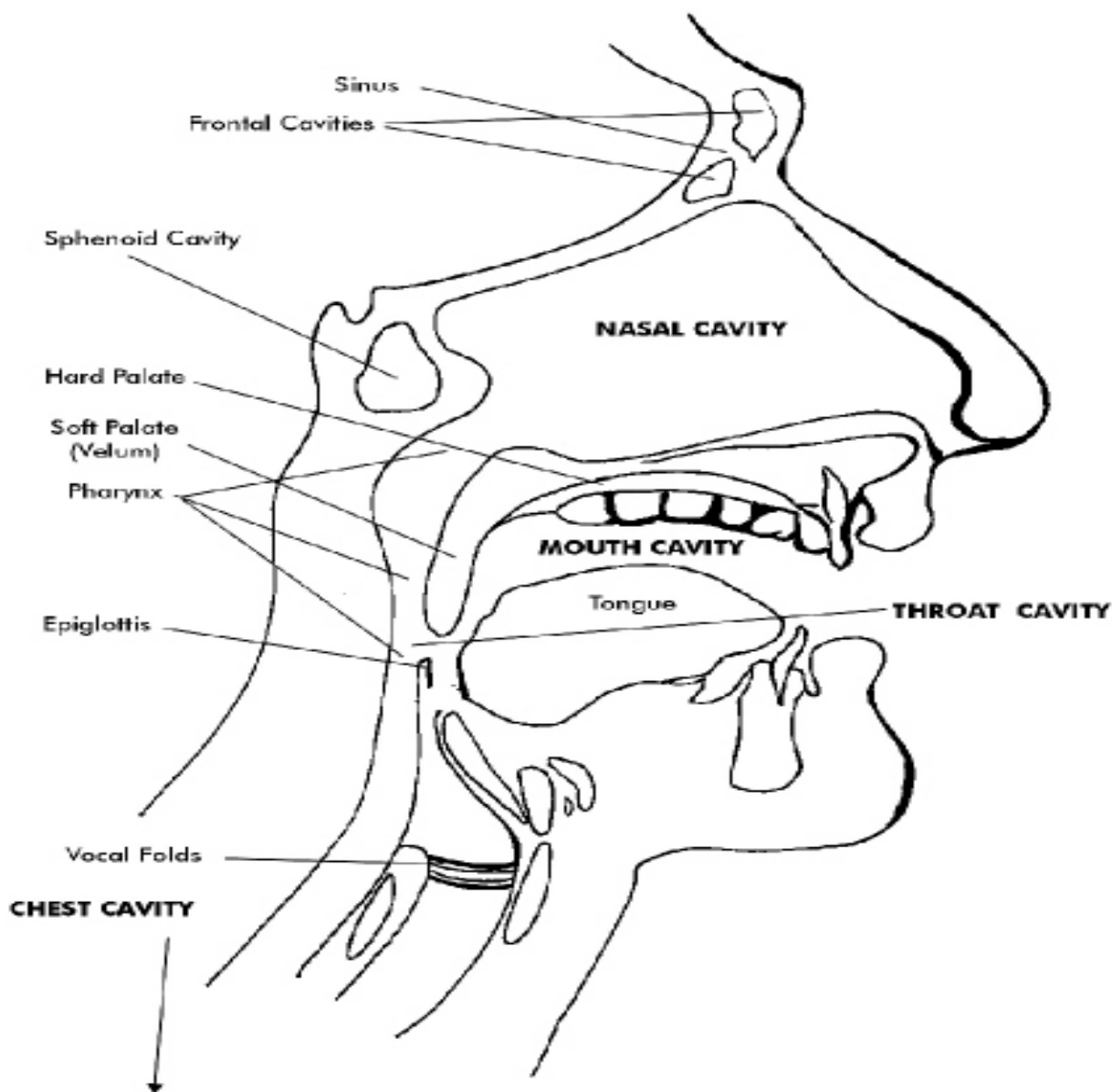
EXPANDING YOUR RANGE THROUGH RECORDING

An intermediate or professional singer with the ability to record their practice sessions can guide their own process. For this type of self-training to be effective, the singer must either already know the difference between the vocal registers, or must be able to identify, or even just realize that there are differences between their recorded practice and the tones they are attempting.

To try this technique at home, pick a piece of music which will set a standard for you. This piece should be a "cover tune"; that is, a song written and performed by another artist. It is important to pick an artist who sings with skill, since you are, in effect, taking lessons from them. Unfortunately, you may not be able to pick your favorite music in the beginning. Some genres are filled with singers who are not accomplished vocalists.

For the easiest comparison, and just for the fun of it, I advise that you use a Karaoke track when you practice. By singing with the music it will be easier to perform in the correct key and at the proper tempo. It will also be easier to hear the vocal differences between your recording and the original piece. Make sure to select a high quality track, one that is accurate to the original piece and bears decent sound quality.

This method should only be employed by singers who have already embraced the limitations of their voice. Singers who have no knowledge of their mistakes and who regularly misplace their vocal production should not try to teach themselves via recording. The results will probably include vocal injury or reinforcement of bad habits.



LESSON 6: SINGING HARMONY

How to Sing Backups: Blend in to Stand Out

Harmonizing can be an extremely difficult thing to do well. But there are some tricks that might make it easier. You must practice to get this right. It may take a long time but if you keep practicing you'll do great!

In some ways it is harder to learn to sing backup than being a solo singer. When you are singing solo, you do not have to worry about blending in or following someone else, they have to follow you! Not so when you are the second singer, or "backup", as it is known. When this is the case, you have to be aware of the main singers phrasing, nuances and even possible mistakes.

Listening is the most important skill a backup singer has to learn. It is far more important to blend in and not over shadow the main vocal than it is to showcase your own voice. This is not the time for standing out, you are there to enhance, color and accentuate the main vocal, not to over power it. You will not be asked back if it is felt you are only interested in your self. The best backup singer is one who goes virtually un-noticed. Sometimes people may not even remember that there was a backup singer, this is ok, and you did your job!

BLENDING IN

In order to blend properly with the main vocal there are many things you must keep in mind. First, position yourself where you can see the face and lips of the main vocalist. You cannot know when they are going to start a phrase or end one if you cannot see them. Also, you will not be able to react if to a mistake by the lead if you cannot see the mistake coming. Sometimes you will need to sing a different verse for example because they started on the wrong one. If you are just looking at the music or going by what you have memorized you will be singing over the main vocal with a different verse and guess who will be blamed? Sometimes they will indicate by a nod of the head or a hand gesture that they want to repeat a section or go back to "the top" and you will not know this if you have your head buried in the music in front of you. Learn to watch them all the time.

Start and end each phrase with the main vocal. This is very difficult to do but there are some little tips to doing a good job even if you are not familiar with this particular vocalist or their phrasing habits (and everyone has their own). First as mentioned before, watch them very carefully to see when they actually start the phrase. Begin singing your line only when you are sure the lead has started their line. Start yours quietly, this allows room to grow and to blend in imperceptibly. Bring your volume up to an appropriate level, in relation to the main vocal. The same strategy applies in reverse at the closing part of the phrase, the end if you will. Prepare for the end of your phrase before you get there, anticipating the actions of the lead vocalist. Make sure you watch their lips and face to see when they might end. Do not get caught singing after they have ended! This can be very, very embarrassing.

Beginning and ending consonants can create vocal clutter. Sometimes when two or more people are singing a phrase there can be multiple popping "p's" or sibilant sounds as each singer attempts to sing at the same time. A neat trick to avoid this is to drop the first consonant entirely when you are the backup singer. If the line is something like "peter piper picked a peck of", you as a backup vocalist might sing "eter-iper-icked-a-eck-of". This enables the main singer to have the definite first consonant of the phrase without you running over them or being out-of-sync with them.

EXERCISE 16

Select a recorded song which bears a very familiar lead vocal. Before you begin to practice singing harmony, play around with a keyboard, guitar, or some other properly tuned instrument with a range similar to the human voice. Find the melody of the lead vocal on your instrument. You don't need to be able to play the whole song; if the act of working with an instrument is challenging a few notes will be enough. Once you have found a few notes of the melody, write down how far apart each note is from the previous one. Write the pattern of notes down, if necessary. Now try moving up the keyboard and find a harmony tone for the first note. You will probably find that this note is between two and five keys higher, depending on which key the original piece is played. Once you have found the first harmony note, continue adding harmony notes using the pattern of the lead vocal. After you have found a few harmony notes, try to sing along with the music and lead singer using the

harmony you found on your instrument. Verify your results by recording your performance or by seeking the opinion of your coach.

This might sound awful when you first try it. Just continually try to sing a little higher or lower than the original and have it sound good. If it sounds bad, then you're not harmonizing. If it sounds good, then you are. You know what sounds right and wrong, and that proves that you know the wrong notes. Just loosen up and try to sing but at a higher (or lower) pitch. A key point here is that harmonizing is intuitive. If you question your own judgment on the quality of your harmony, seek advice from a professional.

EXERCISE 17

Select a familiar song which is available as a karaoke song and also falls easily within your range. If you are unable to find such a piece of music, you will have to take a few extra steps, detailed below. Try to pick a song without back-up vocals in the original piece. Record yourself singing the lead vocal. Listen to your recording to verify that you have sung the lead vocal properly. Once you have a decent recording of your lead performance listen to it and memorize every inflection in your voice. Next, harmonize with your recording. Repeat the steps in exercise 16 to find your harmony tones. If your range is too narrow or you are too picky in your song selection, you will have to start by mapping the original lead vocal. Locate every note which nears the edge of your range and repeat the steps in exercise 16 to find harmony notes. Now memorize singing the lead vocal, replacing the challenging notes with the harmony notes. Once you are able to sing your new arrangement of the lead vocal with confidence you will be ready to finish this exercise.

Vocals in a song may confuse your attempt at harmonizing because you will want to make your pitch identical to the lead singing voice. But the leading voice can change, even for a duet, which is a great way to hear how harmonizing is done. Karaoke removes that distraction. Traditional two-part harmony is a third or fourth above and below the lead vocal melody. Try to harmonize with every song in the car. Guys can match some of the range using falsetto. If you have a low range, don't force it and lower your voice. Imagine: Telling Elton John to sing Christina Aguilera's 'Hurt' in full voice and not changing key is plain far-fetched. Don't over think this. Don't think of the exact notes that you are supposed to sing, if you are knowledgeable of scale theory. This is all ear. Ear first, thought second.

Singing an entire octave above or below the note is still harmonizing. Practice a lot before trying this in public. Not all songs can be harmonized properly. It is mathematically possible for every song to be harmonized, but not every song will sound good with harmony. Remember, you can also 'harmonize' by echoing or layering the lead lyrics. So when you are called to be a backup singer, remember you are there to blend in, not stand out.

LESSONS 7: EXERCISES, BREATHING AND RESONANCE

Practice these exercises every day if possible. Once a week is the minimum you need to exercise your vocal scales, but a daily routine which includes breathing exercise and relaxation of about an hour will yield amazing results!

Start all the exercises by standing with your feet hip distance apart, knees unlocked, hips aligned and your abdomen relaxed. Your head should be upright, looking straight ahead. This is referred to as "the starting position" throughout this text. Do not tense your neck, shoulder or throat muscles during these exercises.

BREATHING WARM-UPS

Breathing warm-up 1. Begin at the starting position. Once your posture is aligned, close your eyes and spend a little time breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. (When singing, breathe in through your nose and out through your nose and mouth.) When breathing in, imagine the breath going down through down into the lowest part of the lungs, keeping the shoulders down and relaxed. When breathing out, try to maintain your inflated shape, breathing out slowly until you feel as empty as possible.

Breathing warm-up 2. From the starting position, begin by counting four, breathe out whilst you bring your left ear down to your shoulder. Counting four, breathe in and bring your head up to the starting position. Repeat, with the right ear.

Breathing warm-up 3. From the starting position, breathing in. Lower your left ear to your shoulder, to the count of eight, breathing out. Rotate your head forward, breathing in to a count of eight, until your right ear rests on your shoulder. Raise your head to the starting position to the count of eight. Repeat, in the opposite direction. Shake yourself loose.

Breathing warm-up 4. From the starting position, stand still, and bring your shoulders back (loosen your shoulder blades). Breathe in to a count of eight, gradually bringing your shoulders up. Breathe out to a count of eight, gradually bringing your shoulders down.

Breathing warm-up 5. From the starting position. Breathe in and shrug your left shoulder backwards. Breathe out shrugging your right shoulder backwards. Repeat 8 times. Reverse - shrug the shoulders forwards. Concentrate on breathing from the diaphragm. Shake yourself loose.

BREATHING EXERCISES

Breathing Exercise 1. Hissing Breathe in to the count of four, breathe out, hissing, for four. Breathe in for 6, and hiss out for 10. Breathe in for 6, hiss out for 12. Breathe in for 2, hiss out for 12. Breathe in for 4, hiss out for 16. Breathe in for 2, hiss out for 16. Breathe in for 4, hiss out for 20. Breathe in for 1, hiss out for 20. The idea behind the hissing is to monitor your breathing, and ensure that you can last through long phrases, and be economical with your breathing. Make sure the hiss is consistent; that it is not louder at the beginning than at the end. You are aiming for smooth even sound.

Breathing Exercise 2. Snatched Breaths Breathing in gradually, think of your lungs filling up in fractions, when counting. Focus on the diaphragm, being careful not to hold tension in the throat. On the count of '1' - breathe in (1/4 full) '2' - (1/2 full) '3' - (3/4 full) '4' - (full) 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 - breathe out, gradually. (For a deep effective breath within a short space of time, releasing

the diaphragm and filling up the lungs quickly.) Repeat, on the count of '1' - breathe in (1/2 full) '2' - (full) 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 - breathe out gradually.

Do all of the below exercises with various mouth shapes & sounds and take note of how your voice sounds with each, the position of your tongue and the feeling it creates in your body. Watch yourself in a mirror and ensure that you remain relaxed while you practice.

1. Start with a yawning feeling to relax the throat and let the larynx drop (this is the bump in the neck that moves up and down when you swallow). Then let out a siren type of sound ("wooo" or "weee") and feel it go up into the head cavities. Now let out a "wooo", like your cheering for someone. Also try hooting like an owl. Pay attention to the feeling of resonance in your head. This is your head voice.
2. Keep the feeling that you are just starting to yawn and say the word "dumb". Place your fingers on your larynx and feel it descend as you do this. Sing a scale using the word dumb (dumb..dumb..dumb..dumb..etc.). As you ascend, let your voice cross over into the same resonance area you felt in the previous exercise. Keep your fingers on your larynx to make sure it doesn't pull up. You should begin to feel the shift from chest voice into head, and back again. Don't worry if your voice breaks or cracks at first; with practice, this will smooth out and disappear. You will always feel the shift in resonance, but ultimately the listener will never hear it.
3. Now say the word "mum" in your normal speaking voice, then use it to sing a scale. As you sing a scale on this word, don't let it get louder or strained as you go higher. Keep it very light if you must. Once again, allow it to cross over into your head resonance area. It will feel weak at first, especially if you are used to pulling your chest voice too high into your range. Never go higher than is comfortable and always stop at the first sign of strain.
4. Stand with your shoulders relaxed, arms by your side. Breathe in slowly. Start with the Scales singing Ooh, Eee, Aa, Aah to each scale. Sing one note, holding the note for as long as you can without becoming short of breath. Do NOT suck in your stomach! Repeat the exercise with different notes using the vocalizations doh, ray, me, far, so, la, te, doh. Use different mouth shapes like "ooh", "ee", "a" and "aah". Try singing up and down a scale (called an Arpeggio). Sing short notes (known as Staccato) as well as long ones. Record your efforts and take notice of the notes that do not sound right. Concentrate on the troubled areas of your range and any vocalizations that give you difficulty. Listen to the difference in your recordings over the next few weeks practice sessions to hear the improvement in your voice.
5. Say "le" and "la" out loud, with the vowels pronounced in the Italian manner (say "le" rather than "lay-ee" and "la" rather than "la-uh"). Join the vowels "a" and "e" together with the "l" in an arc of sound, flicking your tongue briskly to make the "l" sound as short as possible. Practice this exercise for a few minutes. Say the Italian vowel sounds a, e, i, o, u, prefixed by the lip consonant "m". Pronounce these sounds in the following fashion: "ma" as the "a" in father; "me" as the "a" in gate; "mi" as in machine; "mo" as the "o" in more; "mu" as the "oo" in school. To produce the right "m" sound, spring your lips apart to allow the vowel sound to flow and be projected. Keep the flow of your breath constant throughout the exercise.

VOCAL EXERCISES

Start in the middle range and avoid straining. If it hurts, or feels uncomfortable, stop and consult your teacher. Drink room temperature water throughout. Give yourself a break in

between each exercise. As with the breathing warm ups, there is no right or wrong number of times to repeat these exercises, but be thorough.

Vocal exercise 1. Start on a note that is comfortable for you and slowly sing "me may moh mah moo", all on the same note. Go up note by note. As you get higher, make sure the sound doesn't get lost in the back of your throat. Remember to use your diaphragm to avoid a weedy, "heady" sound. Then, try it using different notes, making a tune. E - D - C - D - E - - C - - or whatever. Descending down the scale: D - C - B - C - D - - B - - C - B - A - B - C - - C - - Go down as low as you can, but don't strain your voice.

Vocal exercise 2. Starting with a comfortable note, follow this pattern 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1-3-2-4-3-5-4-2-1 OR: C-D-E-F-G-F-E-D-C-E-D-F-E-G-F-D-C Sing this on "ah", then go up one tone, and "la", then up one tone on "me", then up one tone on "mah", then up one tone on "fah", Do the same, starting again from C, going through the vowels: "ah", "eeh", "iih", "oh", "ooh". Feel your mouth opening into the vowels.

Vocal exercise 3. Starting within the most comfortable range for you, slowly go up and down like a police siren, throughout all your vocal range, with an "ng" sound. Breathe as slowly as possible, and snatch a breath when you run out, trying to ensure an almost perfect, continuous line. You can do this exercise forever! Try different variations, like trying your lips buzzing together, or with your tongue trilling, or try different sounds, like "ooh"ing.

Vocal exercise 4. Say the following vowels in the listed order: "EE - AA - AH - OH - OO". Now say each vowel again, only imagine that each syllable is grounded, or has a central point, somewhere inside your mouth. We'll refer to this certain central space as "X". This "X" is going to move in your mouth. Can you determine the direction? If you can't visualize the "X" moving from the front to the back of your mouth as you recite the vowels, try saying them again, but this time, over-exaggerate your lip and facial movements to form a "wide EE" to a very round "OO." This experiment should do the trick to show you how different vowels change the shape and the "central point" inside your mouth.

RESONANCE

Since changing the size and the shape of a resonating cavity changes the tone of your voice (and your mouth is the all important Oral Cavity), it becomes more obvious of how the pronunciation of words and controlling articulation effects singing. Once this concept is understood, the question usually changes to...so how can I become a master of resonance and maintain complete control over my voice? Here are a few tips to get you started on the right track:

1) Determine your favorite and least-favorite vowel. This usually translates as the vowel that is the easiest to sing over all pitch ranges (favorite) and the vowel that gives you the most difficulty over all pitch ranges (least-favorite). (If your challenge is a certain vowel in a certain pitch range, this will work for you too!) Once you determine your favorite vowel, use it to your advantage. Sing exercises on this vowel first. Then work through each vowel until all of them are as "easy" as your favorite vowel. This may take several or even many practice sessions, but if you can sing it on one vowel you can sing it on any vowel. Sometimes it just takes learning how to readjust certain singing mechanics to accommodate the physical changes in the voice instrument. If you are really trying to sing a specific song, use this exercise with it. Sing the song on your favorite syllable (preceded by a consonant) and then continue to practice it until you are comfortable on all the notes in all the ranges. Then move to the next vowel in line. Once you are done with all the vowels, or begin to get tired, sing it one last time or two on the words. You should begin to notice

a difference within a few practice sessions.

2) Learn the concept of shaping the back of your mouth – use it as a resonating control instead of a slave to the vowel you are singing. Start by making yourself yawn. Become conscious of that big space that becomes available inside your mouth as your brain commands the opening to widen so more oxygen can be provided. To be a master of resonance, you need to learn to consciously widen that space without forcing an uncontrollable yawn. The wider that space remains in the back of your throat the easier it will be to access all of the remaining resonating cavities. Learn to use the front of your mouth and lips to form the necessary consonants and shapes to round out the proper vowel, but keep the size and shape of the back of your mouth more consistent. The end result will be that your sound will become more consistent. Right now, be sure you understand the concept of why this should work, even if you have no idea of how to make it happen. Make sure to have the necessary understanding of anatomy; spend enough time on it to be able to “feel” the individual parts of your anatomy and know the muscles which control the relevant actions described herein.

3) A simple trick to get you started right away is to think about adding more “Ah” to the back of your throat. Here are a few examples: Sing the word “life” on any pitch. Now sing it again, but consciously put more of an “ah” into the word, concentrating on the back of your mouth. Try it now with the word, “love.” Love is a word used in many songs and many times it is sung like this: “luuuuhvvvvvve.” This pronunciation does not take advantage of your resonating power and closes to the “v” before giving the vowel proper attention. Try it again with this kind of idea, laaaahhhhhove. Remember that more than anything else, the “ah” should be more of a sensation and mental thought process. Your audience will simply hear a nicer sounding “love.”

4) Avoid tension in the lips, jaw and face and develop dexterity. Do relaxation exercises to warm-up your facial muscles during your vocal warm-up. Include lip diction exercises. These could be tongue twisters or singing exercises concentrating on different consonants followed by different vowels. Do these exercises with the understanding that the more control you have over your facial muscles, the more control you have over your diction. Always remember that tension takes away from control and always reveals itself in your singing tone. Don’t overlook tension in any area of the voice instrument.

5) Take responsibility for your own vocal development. Becoming a master of resonance is just a portion of what it takes to become a master of singing. All of the mechanics of the voice work together as a team ... and you are only as strong as your weakest link. Practice all of the above with various mouth shapes & sounds and take note of how your voice sounds with each, the position of your tongue and the feeling it creates in your body. Watch yourself in a mirror and ensure that you remain relaxed whilst you practice - do not tense your neck, shoulder or throat muscles during these exercises.

Lesson 8: ENUNCIATIONS

The holy grail of singing probably lies in enunciation. How can you move your audience if they cannot hear your message? Improper enunciation is an indication of improper breathing, improper use of the face, jaw and tongue and/or wasted vocal energy.

Improve your pronunciation of consonants (L, M, P, T, D, F, G, J, N, S, V, Z) by regular practice. Your tongue is very important in formulating consonant sounds. To produce the sounds "L", "D", "N" and "T", curl just the tip of your tongue backward. Start with your tongue positioned behind your upper teeth. Begin forming the "L" sound while holding your tongue against your gums behind your upper front teeth. Finish your sound by dropping the tip of your tongue down. As you finish the sound, your tongue should remain behind your teeth, now positioned directly at the center of the opening of your mouth, and your jaw will drop slightly.

The production "M" and "P" should not involve your tongue. Instead, this sound is produced by the lips. Your tongue is not greatly involved in this sound. Keep the tip of your tongue pressed gently against the gums behind your bottom front teeth. Your lips should be relaxed; the tension of your lips will regulate the volume of the accompanying "popping" sound. If your "M's" and "P's" are accompanied by a loud popping sound, you are too tense. Solve these problems by pushing less air or relaxing your lips.

"F" and "V" are formed by holding your bottom lip against your upper teeth, pushing air while beginning your vocalization, and simultaneously dropping your jaw while allowing your bottom lip to roll outwards and down. Keep your tongue down on the gums behind your front bottom teeth. Excessive popping will occur if you try to force your lip down with air or if the timing between your air and lip motion is off.

"S" and "Z" are trouble spots for many singers. Start these consonants by smiling. Holding your lips slightly away from your teeth will reduce the hissing sound and remind you to form the sound with your lips. Keep your tongue behind your bottom teeth. Unfortunately, the quality of these sounds can be affected by your dental structure.

"G" sounds are formed by lifting the rear portion of your tongue until it comes into contact with your soft palate. The pharynx should also be slightly lifted. The front portion of your tongue should be down, with the tip resting behind and below your front teeth. As the sound is formed, allow your tongue and pharynx to drop to a relaxed position. You should be able to feel the sound created against the roof of your mouth. You can control the color of these sounds with the placement of your lips. "J" sounds are made in a similar fashion, but with the whole tongue held at the roof of the mouth. As the "J" sound is formed, allow just the first inch of the tip of your tongue to drop downwards. The sound should be formed behind your upper front teeth. A box shape of the lips, formed by lifting the upper lip and rolling the lower lip forward and down will create a thicker sound on these consonants. Smiling will create a lighter sound.