

Targeted Vocal Exercises

Connie de Veer – Associate Professor – Voice, Acting
 Illinois State University
 AmSAT certified teacher of the Alexander Technique

Always first address issues of use. It's almost without exception the cause of vocal disorders.

Breathiness

- Huh huh – move deliberately from an aspirate sound “h” to fully phonated “uh”
- Sing the text, then speak it. The energy needed to sing is greater, usually, than that for speaking, so we often get in touch with how much energy is actually required for speaking.
- Speak one word of your text on one breath. I suggest you do this on all fours to allow your belly and ribcage as much space as possible. Make sure to keep the head aligned on top of the spine. Strive to get fully on your voice with each word. Notice if you're holding your breath before you speak or taking more breath in than you need.

Backward placement/throatiness

- Blow through lips, descending pitch
- Heee on a siren pattern
- Horizontal yawn into KAAAAAH
- Middle of the voice* - Explore the sensitive, vulnerable voice that resembles a lost little child. It resonates in the area of the upper lip and middle of the face. Awakening this area often brings tears and a deep emotional feeling that frees the voice, creating more nuances of vocal quality and expressivity.

Tight jaw

- Refer to the hip opening exercises in the Comprehensive Vocal Workout. There is a connection with inflexible hip flexors and a tight jaw.
- Place hands on jaw muscles, making sure to use palms, not fingers. Gently massage.
- *Jaw drop*: Allow the jaw to drop gently (avoid over-opening, as this will tighten already tense muscles) down and back.
- *Jaw Walk*: Allow jaw to be passive, direct upper jaw up and off bottom jaw (like a Pez dispenser), with your hands (jaw remains passive) bring bottom jaw up to meet top jaw. Continue until head is back as far as your neck's strength and comfort will allow (Do NOT force). Reverse to return to upright position
- *Jaw Shake*: hold bottom jaw with thumbs and gently shake jaw vertically on a sigh of relief. Make sure this movement is quick and relatively small, especially if your jaw is very tight.

Tense tongue

- Massage tongue root under chin
- Tongue moving sound forward: Tip of tongue behind bottom front teeth, moving front/middle of tongue up towards upper gum ridge: Hee yuh
Hee yuh Hee yuh
- Hold tongue while speaking text, then speak text without – notice difference.

Pitch limited to upper register

- Free hips and abs – see Comprehensive Vocal Workout
- Initiate a horizontal yawn, lifting the soft palate and keeping the lips in a soft smile. Don't complete the full yawn. Then close lips, speak *maaaaah* – keeping an open throat and free neck. Allow the resonance to awaken in the chest.
- Lie on back or on all fours – root breath, awaken chest resonance by tapping the chest with your whole hand while exploring the lowest part of your pitch range, gently at low volume. If it hurts, stop! This often stimulates profound emotions and sounds of grieving and wailing.
- Plie in second position, bounce into bent knees while producing a rich, full *haaaaaaah*

Limited melody pattern and/or repetitive patterns

- Melody mirror – Find a partner. Partner A will speak their text while partner B hums their melody pattern. This reveals limited pitch or repetitive pitch and rhythmic patterns.
- Speak a line of text. Then hum what you just heard. Speak the line again, trying to change the pattern you just heard yourself hum.
- Dance/move the piece while singing it like a bad operatic soprano. Brings resonance out of throat, expands range, connects breath.

Nasality

- Exaggerate nasal resonance by holding nose and speaking
- Move from nasal to mouth to throat resonators – mee-mee-mee (very nasal)-may-may-may (moving gradually into face, throat and mouth resonators) -mai-mai-mai (chest resonance up to skull – at the top of the pitch scale).
- Inhale on kuh, then exhale Nggggg – ahhhh – The Archer

Glottal Attack/hoarseness

- Free (even tire out) your whole self; Make sure teeth aren't touching in back; Root breath deep in belly; Refresh Alexander's directions – *neck free, head to go forward and up, and back to lengthen and widen*; produce a quiet, but fully on voice – huh-huh
- Exercises below, especially 1, 2, and 3.

The following may be done with any piece of text. Like most exercises, they address more than one condition:

1. Dance/move and speak the piece moving only in a curvilinear way. Exaggerate open and rounded sounds. Opens the throat, eases a hard attack, slows down too fast a rate of speech
2. Repeat the above and add an image or metaphor that activates your sensory preferences, such as “spread butter,” “ paint the room.”
3. Dance/move while speaking only the vowels. Connects breath to speech, helps with breathiness, nasality, and too hard an attack.
4. Move and speak the piece using Laban effort shapes:
 - a. Glide
 - b. Press
 - c. Wring
 - d. Dab
 - e. Flick
 - f. Float
5. Move and speak the piece in your middle voice. Allow it to not sound “good.”

* See Linklater’s Freeing the Natural Voice, chapter 14