

Vocal Union – Vocal technique exercises

Always begin by ensuring you have good, relaxed posture and build up the vocal exercises as you feel comfortable and at your own pace – 10 mins of practice a day minimum

Singing posture

- Make sure your feet are hip width apart
- Knees are soft
- Tuck in your “tail”/ straighten your spine and tuck in coccyx
- Shoulders back but relaxed
- Look straight ahead
- Stay relaxed but as if you are getting ready to “perform”
- Tall & elegant should be your mantra!

Stretch & prepare body

1. In your singing posture wiggle hips, elbows, shoulders and any part of your body that feels tense to relax it.

2. In your singing posture slowly tip your head back and look at the ceiling – you should feel a gentle stretch on the front of your neck

Now very slowly and gently lower your chin to your chest – you should feel a gentle stretch on the back of your neck - repeat gently 3 times to release neck and shoulder tension

3. Rub face gently with hands paying particular attention to the upper lip area and jaw to release facial tension – resume singing posture

4. In your singing posture rise slowly onto the balls of your feet imagining your head is attached to a rope which is being pulled to raise you slowly upward – gently return to normal position and repeat 3 times – you should feel taller (make sure your shoulders stay back but relaxed)

5. Vocal Fry: To relax your voice and gently warm it up drop your jaw and make a hardy audible “ahhh” sound

Breathing and breath capacity building exercises

1. Yawning stretch

- In your singing posture, raise your arms outward above your head whilst simultaneously breathing in deeply and silently through the mouth
- Feel your ribcage expand, lower abdominal muscles pull inward, pause for a moment holding the breath. Then, steadily yawn out the breath whilst lowering your arms in an exaggerated yawning stretch – this will begin to accustom you to being conscious of how you breathe for singing, make you more aware of your ribcage and abdominal muscles whilst also building those muscles, increase the amount of breath you

can take in and how you control your outward breath. It will also make you more alert as the extra oxygen enters your system

2. Drinking breaths/soft palate opener

- When you sing your soft palate raises – if you're not sure what this feels like, yawn, the soft palate raises to do this also
- The soft palate also needs to be open in order to maximize the amount of breath you take before singing a note or phrase. An un-raised soft palate results in noisy, rasping breath. If you can hear your in-breath, your soft palate is closed
- In your singing posture, imagine you have a drink in one hand. Place the other hand on your stomach. Silently “drink” in your chosen imaginary beverage (you will really be drinking in air) make sure the inward breath is steady, controlled and as silent as you can possibly make it. If you have done this properly, the back of your throat will feel cold from the air
- Once your ribcage is as expanded as you can manage and you have “drunk” all the air you can manage, slowly release the breath in a steady and controlled long out-breath (use your drinking hand to follow the air if it helps you visualise the breath but keep the other hand on your stomach). Don't repeat this exercise more than 4 times as it can dry the throat and make sure you drink water afterwards
- When you have mastered slow silent in breaths and controlled long out breaths (this may take a few days/weeks even) turn your attention to the expansion of the ribcage and the natural pulling in of the abdominals on the in-breath and then the out-breath

3. Diaphragm strengthener

- In your singing posture, find your diaphragm (in between where your ribcage meets) and place the fingertips of one hand on it
- Taking a silent, open mouthed deep in-breath exhale to “ha ha ha”, “va, va,va” and long “vvvvvvv” sounds
- Be aware of your diaphragm “bouncing” and the action of your lower stomach muscles. This exercise will strengthen both and contribute to your breathing practice.
- Repeat for no more than 1 minute and breath steadily and normally afterwards for 30 seconds

4. Breath, pitch & tone - quality control competition

- Find a note you are comfortable singing (on a piano or other pitched instrument so you can check you stay in tune) no lower than middle C
- In your singing posture, take a deep, open mouthed silent in-breath, expanding ribcage and feeling lower stomach pull in naturally
- Smiling (chubby cheeks up!), sing out the breath to “1,2,3, 4 etc” sung on your chosen note and to a steady pulse
- Each note must be of the best sound and pitch quality you can produce, once this begins to waver you have to stop – are you still in tune?
- Don't sing too loud or too quietly. Find a volume that's comfortable
- Note down what number you got to before quality wavered or you ran out of breath – compete with your personal best each time
- Repeat this exercise 2-3 times a practice session
- Try to be aware of your out-breath and what your ribcage and stomach muscles are doing as you sing
- There is a lot to think about here so concentrate week by week on one new element when you've mastered the previous one. Eventually your brain and body will master doing all of this at once and automatically but it does take time patience and practice! Break this exercise and others down like this:
 1. Initially focus on the in-breath
 2. Then focus on your ribs and stomach muscles on the out breath (keep ribs expanded as long as you can and your stomach will kick in to support the breath)
 3. Then aim to produce the best pitch and tone quality throughout
 4. Record your total each time and see how you improve as the weeks pass