

Welcome



Our voice is a powerful means of communication. How we articulate sounds, our pitch, tone, pace, use of pause, emphasis and inflection all communicate many cues as to who we are, where we come from and even what our intentions are. We can project our power, or perhaps lack of it, through our voice and those who listen to us can make judgements about many aspects of our life and whether they are 'buying in' to what we are saying.

Communicating effectively is a life- long skill. We build our confidence when we correctly enounce sounds, pronounce words and to speak with an effective voice that is heard clearly, is interesting to listen to and above all wins us what we are seeking.

This will give you an introduction to techniques and exercises to improve your speaking voice and help you achieve your goals. More resources are available from my website.

CHAPTER ONE -Relaxation

Relaxation in terms of speech doesn't mean ready to fall asleep, it is simply adjusting small parts of our body to ensure we can breathe properly and produce the best speaking voice we can. If there is undue tension in any muscles that are used for breathing or voice production then the speech produced will have some fault, for example, a hard tone or harsh breathing. The outcome of the speech produced will not be as effective, or as clear, as it could be.

If we are too tense we cannot think clearly, and what we want to say may come out all jumbled and senseless. Being tense means we cannot control our voice and make it sound the way we want. This can be very detrimental, especially if we are going to speak in public, or convince someone about something.

Some reasons why we may feel tension:

- We worry that the listener may not like what we have to say
- We might be concerned that what we have to say isn't suitable for the audience
- We're not sure what the words that we're saying mean
- We're not sure that we can express our ideas clearly
- We might be worried that we're going to forget our memorised work
- We are worried that we won't be loud enough for everyone to hear

Some signs of tension can be:

- Screwing your hands into tight balls
- Shoulders pulled up close to the ears
- Jiggling from foot to foot, or shaking a leg or arm
- Breathing in noisily through the mouth
- Over gesturing
- Saying um or ah
- Blinking rapidly
- Licking lips

A few simple exercises can help.

Part One: Visualisation and body relaxing

Lie down and close eyes. Always start with breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth, three times at normal speed.

1. Now breathe deeper into the lungs imagining the air you are breathing is yellow, warm, bright yellow. Imagine the air is going all through your body, down to the tips of your fingers and toes. When you breathe out, imagine the air is grey-black. All your negative thoughts of the day are leaving your body with that grey air. Breathe in yellow, fill up your entire body, and breathe out grey. Repeat three times.
2. Stand up and stretch your arms up over your head, trying to reach the roof. Hold this position for two seconds, then allow your body to break at the waist, so your arms should flop down and your head hang free between your arms (bend your knees slightly as you do this). Very slowly, start pulling yourself up into standing position again. Your hands should hang freely by your sides as you stand tall.
3. Slowly look down so your chin is on your chest. Raise it slowly until it feels like your head is balanced between your shoulders. Look up to the roof then back to the 'normal' position. Now look over your right shoulder as far as you can and slowly bring it back to the centre. Look over your left shoulder and bring it back to the centre.

NOTE: YOUR HEAD AND NECK ARE NOT A BALL IN SOCKET LIKE YOUR ARMS AND SHOULDERS, SO DO NOT ROTATE YOUR HEAD AROUND IN A CIRCLE AS THIS MAY CAUSE DAMAGE. IF YOU HAVE ANY PAIN IN YOUR HEAD OR NECK BEFORE YOU DO THESE EXERCISES, SEE YOUR DOCTOR FIRST.

Part Two – Face relaxation

1. Try to move your hair forwards and backwards.
2. Wriggle your ears.
3. Twitch your nose.
4. Move your eyebrows up and down as fast as you can, move one of your eyebrows up and down at a time.
5. Pretend to cry, then laugh.
6. Open your eyes wide and laugh. Then pretend to cry. Go back to laughing.

Part Three – Voice relaxation

Voice relaxation is essential for good speaking. Many people trap their voice at the back of their throat (this is something we will explore later in the chapter in relation to pitch and tone) and this can give the effect of the words being swallowed down, as opposed to coming out of the mouth clearly. When this fault occurs, their throat and jaw are usually very tense giving the voice an almost tight sound. You cannot produce clear, resonant tone when you have tension anywhere in your throat, jaw, lips, tongue, hard and soft palate.

Following are some exercises to help relax those areas to help produce a beautiful voice - choose one or two to practise every day after your posture and visualisation exercises.

1. Yawn. Open up your mouth really wide, breathe in while trying to keep your shoulders down. Breathe out of your yawn with a full-size 'ahhhh' sound. Do this again, finishing with a big 'hummm'.
2. Keep your lips closed but drop your jaw as far as it will go without opening your lips.
3. Say these words in an exaggerated way, really dropping your jaw and keeping your mouth wide - father, car, barn, hang, lone, fast, farms, past.

NOTE: If you are going to be speaking in public, or you are nervous for any reason about speaking to others, choose your favourite exercises and practice frequently before the event. Even minutes before giving the speech or making that phone call...it will help!

CHAPTER TWO - Posture

Poor posture can be one of the underlying reasons for poor quality of speech because it can really affect voice and breathing, which are two elements that are crucial for clear speech. If our posture is incorrect our lungs cannot expand properly, we can't breathe properly and we can't produce clear speech. Poor posture can also cause undue tension in an area like your throat, which can affect the quality of your voice.

Before you continue with any other speech exercises, start with a few postural exercises. These are very simple exercises that you should do daily, at any time of the day.

POOR POSTURE

Usually, poor posture is due to bad habits, but if you have concerns about your posture, because of a medical condition, see your doctor before you start any of these exercises.

Our posture changes hugely as we age. If we watch a toddler we can see how they move with grace and poise, but we can soon see that their posture starts to degenerate around the age of five or six, just when we start school. Many factors of everyday life can affect our posture, most of which include some sort of stress, tension or prolonged activity in one place. For example, sitting for long periods of time, leaning over the desk to write, carting around very heavy bags full of books or laptops.

We actually place more stress on our back when we sit, so the exercises include sitting in a way that supports our spine. As we usually slump back when we sit, it's a good idea to have seats that have backs that slope forwards, to help stop this slumping.

We need to be very aware of our posture and exercise daily, and really all day, to keep our posture at its best.

SOME COMMON FAULTS

- + Slumping shoulders down towards the abdomen so the spine is rounded, which will affect breathing.
- + Rounding the shoulders so they stick forward and cause tension in the neck.
- + Pushing the trunk of your body too far forward and up – like standing to attention in the army. This also affects breathing.
- + Pulling your shoulders up around your ears, like you've just been given a fright. This will produce tension in the throat and affect your voice.
- + Leaning back and putting all your weight on your heels. This will cause you to tense up your abdomen so breathing will require extra work.

EXCERSISES TO HELP CORRECT OUR POSTURE

Simply becoming aware of how we stand, sit and walk throughout the day can be a big help towards correcting our posture. Following are some exercises to start with, before continuing with your other speech exercises.

1. Stand with feet hip width apart, arms hanging loosely at your sides. Come up onto your tip toes and slowly lower your heel, so your weight is evenly balanced on three points - the ball of your foot underneath your big toe, the ball of your foot underneath your little toe, and your heel.
2. Put a finger on top of your head and push your head up against your finger. Pull your tummy button in towards your back. Take your finger away but keep standing straight and tummy pulled in.
3. Put a straight backed chair in front of the mirror. Sit on the seat making sure you can feel both your sitting bones on your bottom as you sit, feet on the floor with weight on the three points from exercise one. Repeat exercise two, but in sitting position. Note - try to maintain this when you sit at school or work.

Don't forget, practise these exercises every day, just choose one or two first thing in the morning and remind yourself throughout the day to sit or stand correctly.

CHAPTER THREE- Breathing

We breathe, really, without giving it much thought. We involuntarily use some muscles that cause us to breathe without our deliberate control. However, breath is the 'motor power' of the voice and it needs to be a steady, controlled flow.

Good breath control is only achieved by developing the accepted, correct method of breathing, which is the basis of good, effective voice production. Faulty methods lead to tension in various muscles, lack of resonance and weak projection.

If we want to use our voices effectively, we need to learn how to control our breathing for our benefit. We need to know the correct process of breathing.

Technical bit – The correct process of breathing is 'intercostal diaphragmatic', simply meaning to use the diaphragm along with muscles controlling the ribs, known as the inner and outer costal muscles, which are short and extend between the ribs, for breathing. The whole process of breathing is called respiration.

Firstly, you use your rib muscles to start expanding your ribs out and up before you take a breath. When you inhale air, through the nose or mouth, it travels down the pharynx, then through the larynx, then trachea in the bronchial tubes, then finally into the lungs. At the same time, the diaphragm, a large, umbrella shaped muscle, descends about 10cm, and the ribs, which the intercostal muscles expand by lifting the ribs out and up to allow more capacity in the lungs (you need ample capacity for speaking). We then exhale and the abdominal muscle (a muscle which serves as a floor for the diaphragm and a roof for the abdomen) pushes the diaphragm back to its normal position (known as abdominal press) and the ribs resume their normal position. These two movements together push the air steadily out of the lungs, up the trachea, through the larynx, pharynx, and back out the nose or mouth. **It is important that the expiration of air is steady, smooth and controlled for good voice production.**

This method ensures complete control over the outgoing breath and good breath power. Of course, you need exercises and practice to gain the control required for really effective speech. To make sure you are using the correct method of breathing, you need to make sure of the following signs:

- Chin is sitting in correct position
- Shoulders straight
- Normal back
- Good balance

Note - you will find this information in the 'Posture' chapter.

There are many faulty methods of breathing, such as:

1. Shallow breathing (or clavicular). This is when only the top section of the lungs are filled with air. This happens quite naturally when you undertake some forms of exercise, like cycling or running. This causes tightening of the throat and chest muscles and can lead to injury of the voice.

Signs that this method is being used:

- Drawn in chin
 - Harsh voice
 - Stiff and protruding chest
 - Shoulders moving up and down
 - Hollow back
 - Weight on toes
2. Abdominal breathing. In this type of breathing the ribs are not expanded and the air is only taken into the base of the lungs. Because the ribs are not fully used, the outgoing air is uncontrolled and the result is breathiness. Visible signs include:
 - Breathy voice
 - Undeveloped chest
 - Forward shoulders
 - Rounded back
 - Protruding abdomen
 - Weight on heels

There is also noisy breathing, when someone sucks air in through partly closed teeth, or, if there's tension in the throat it will constrict and block air. If a speaker runs out of breath while speaking they may not have enough control over their breathing muscles. Once again, with weak breathing muscles a speaker may find they are not loud enough to be heard, or they start loud but trail off at the end. This is due to lack of control and capacity, so it is very important to practise breathing exercises (after relaxation and posture) every day.

The following are exercises that are to follow on from relaxation and posture. Choose 2-3 new ones EVERY DAY. If you feel faint while you are doing any breathing exercises, it's time to take a break and breathe regularly. All these exercises should be in standing position unless otherwise stated. When you are standing, make sure your posture is correct - see the "Posture" chapter for details on this.

1. Hold your hands in front of your body, so your arms look like a circle. Raise them up and out until they are stretched over your head. Breathe in while you do this. With arms in the air, pant like a puffing dog, in and out three times. Bring your arms down as you slowly release the rest of your breath.
2. Take a deep breath in, slowly through your nose. Laugh a big, loud HA, HA, HA and exhale the rest of your breath. Do this twice.
3. Stand with your arms loose at your sides. Move them up to shoulder height horizontally and then, as you breathe in to the count of five, raise them to join in the middle above your head. Count to three in your head and bring your arms back down to your sides to the count of ten.

CHAPTER FOUR - Voice Production

The voice is amplified by the resonators and speech is formed by the articulative organs.

In the following chapters we will be covering the following:

- Exercising our resonators so we can deliver a richer tone
- Exercising the organs of articulation to produce a clearer sound
- Working on pitch, pace and tone so our voice is not too high or low, and we can vary our pitch to create more interesting speech
- Finally, work on forward placement to direct your speech to a certain point

To make sure we have good voice production, it is necessary to have good control over outgoing breath, as well as to make sure we have a clear, resonant voice, good articulation and projection and to develop interesting delivery through good modulation.

We have covered how to gain good control over our breath in the previous chapters on relaxation, posture and breath control.

The following chapters will have various exercises to ensure you have developed all the necessary features for good voice production.

The most important point is that this is not just a one off. You must continue to practice these exercises throughout your LIFE!

We know how we breathe correctly and we can see how voice (or sound) is produced. We now have to continue through the chapters starting with RESONATION to go on with developing our beautiful speaking voice using more exercises.

CHAPTER FIVE - Resonance

The general function of the resonators is to produce tone.

The three main resonators are:

1. The back of your throat (pharynx-pharyngial resonance).
2. The hollows of your nose and cheeks (nasal resonance).
3. The mouth (oral cavity-oral resonance).

Less important resonators are the upper cavity of the chest, the larynx, and the forehead.

When a current of air is passed through a hollow space, a resonant pitch is heard. Each hollow space has its own resonant pitch, which depends on the size and number of its openings (orifices). If the initial sound is intensified in our resonating cavities, then a true balanced tone can be achieved.

To make sure the full resonance is achieved in the pharynx, it is necessary to see that there is no tension in the neck and the correct breathing method is used to make sure the passage is opened to its full extent. We have covered exercises in chapters one to three to make sure this is the case.

For nasal resonance, it is imperative that the soft palate and tongue are active so that they are capable of opening or closing the passage into the nose as required. It should be opened for the nasal sounds, M, N, NG, and closed for all other sounds.

For oral resonance, it is important that each vowel is formed with its own particular shaping, ensuring that the correct resonant pitch is achieved. The hollow space most actively concerned with vowel formation is the mouth. Each vowel possesses a note of a definite and distinctive pitch, which is the result of breathing out through the resonance cavities in this position. As each vowel has a different sound, then the mouth has a different shape and each also has a different resonant pitch. As we carry our accent in our vowel sounds, exercises for vowel formation will be covered in a following chapter.

Say these exercises one at a time. Choose as many, or as few, as you like, so if time is short then two will be suffice.

The following exercises are for pharyngeal and nasal resonance.

1. Drop the jaw several times and say – Mah Mah Mah.
2. Say this really fast - ing, ing, ing, ing, ing.
3. Hum 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' very gently. You should feel a tickling on your lips which should be very lightly pressed together with teeth slightly apart. Don't forget to stop to take a breath at the end of each line.

Baa Baa Black Sheep
Have you any wool?
Yes sir yes sir
Three bags full
One for the master
One for the dame
One for the little boy
Who lives down the lane.

CHAPTER SIX- Articulation (vowels and consonants)

Articulation is taking vowels and consonants and combining them into words.

Once the sound is resonated (practise in previous chapter) it is then formed into words (which are made up of vowels and consonants).

Words are formed by the articulative organs - teeth, tongue, lips, hard and soft palate (roof of mouth and back of throat). Each sound is produced by a definite position of one or other articulative organs, and if the shaping is not made properly, the sound produced will be inaccurate. We need to exercise our organs of articulation so we can produce a clear, clean, correct sound when we speak.

Vowels are formed mainly by the shape of the lips and the tongue. In some cases, we need to drop the jaw. For practise, we divide the tongue in to three positions - FRONT, CENTRE, BACK.

Say the following words so you can see where your tongue is positioned.

FRONT: Speed Hid Had

CENTRE: Hut Hard Heard

BACK: Hoot Hook Hawk Hock

Keep the tip of the tongue down when you practise vowels.

The quality of voice is heard through the formation of vowel sounds, so keep up the resonance practise to help work on quality, before your vowel practise.

When you follow the instructions on the shape of your mouth when making certain sounds, have a look in a mirror so you can see what the shape looks like.

1. Say these sentences without voice (as in silently):

You look for John's aunt's hut

Her back fence is neat

2. Say the same sentences above, out loud, but without consonants.

Exercises for consonants

Consonants are formed by two organs of articulation partially or completely contacting.

For example:

P and B are formed by the two lips contacting

T is produced by the tongue and teeth meeting

K, G, NG, is produced by the back of the tongue and soft palate meeting

SECTION ONE - Repeat the three you have chosen five times, getting faster and faster:

- a) Lee Loo La
- b) Pee Poo Pa
- c) Dee Doo Da
- d) Vee Voo Va
- e) Ree Roo Ra
- f) Flee Flu Fla
- g) Tee Too Ta

SECTION TWO:

- Pass the pencils please, Paul
- Why will you worry when it is windy?
- Put the tip of the tongue to the top of the teeth
- Red leather: Yellow leather
- Shall we shut the shop?
- I'm thinking of drinking some milk
- Birds sing in spring

CHAPTER SEVEN - Modulation

Choosing the right 'voice' to use in particular circumstances.

Have you ever listened to a speaker and thought "Boring!" Chances are they only used one tone of voice without changing volume, pitch, pace or emphasising words, so that their speech was monotonous and boring. In this chapter, we will learn how to make your voice sound exciting when you are speaking aloud. How to use your voice to be more persuasive and authoritative.

Section One

Pitch - The height or depth of your voice. Using a higher pitch than usual can create a sense of drama. A lower pitch can draw people in to listen more carefully and also leads to a more authoritative sounding voice.

Repeat these words on one long breath, trying different pitches.

High pitch

Medium pitch

Low pitch

EXERCISE ONE

Drea...M

Drea...M

Drea...M

Moo...N

Moo...N

Moo...N

Boo...M

Boo...M

Boo...M

Section Two

Pace - The speed at which we deliver our words. Increasing the speed of how we speak can show how excited you are. Slowing it down gives people more time to absorb what you're saying and this is very important in terms of listening to understand. When you practise these exercises record yourself so you can hear how slow or fast you are actually speaking.

1. Count in threes, increasing pace with each group.

1,2,3

4,5,6

7,8,9

10,11,12

13,14,15

2. Do the same but with the alphabet.

ABC

DEF

GHI

JKL

MNO

PQR

STU

VWX

YZ

Section Three

Pause - A stop for breath, to create meaning and a sense of drama.



Mark Twain.

There are many different types of pauses, but we usually know when to pause by punctuation like . , “ “ ? ! We must learn how to use pauses effectively so the audience can share our feelings.

Try these sentences below and pause when you see the – , then ask the person who is listening to you how it sounded. If you aren't sure how to pause, count two, three in your head, which will be a good starting point. Once you get comfortable with pausing it will become easier and you will pause depending on how you sense the audience is reacting to you.

1. “I can't believe that you are doing this, - it is really hurting my feelings”
2. “Stop! – Stop! – You will break it, - if you don't”
3. “What did you think of that?- That was pretty cool, - wasn't it?”
4. “And then, - around the corner, - came this big, - scary, - hairy, - yellow-eyed monster! – I ran as fast as I could – to get away”

Section Four

Emphasis and Inflection - The rise and fall of our voice. A rising inflection is when we ask a question. A falling inflection is when we are making a statement. It's important not to get into the habit of using a rising inflection when we are looking for affirmation as to what we are saying.

When we are reading we can see it's a question by the ? When we are listening to a speaker, we know they are asking a question by the rise in inflection in their voice at the end of the sentence.

1. Say each sentence three times and make your voice go faster, louder and higher each time, but make sure you voice DOESN'T rise in inflection at the end of the sentence that is not a question.
Where are you? Get out of here What are you doing?
2. Say each sentence three times and make your voice go lower, slower and quieter each time.
Where are you? Get out of here What are you doing?

2. Say the following sentences and you decide what volume your voice should be at:

“Shhh, I’m trying to watch the movie”

“Look out! A car is coming!”

“Are you looking for this? I found it over there”

CHAPTER EIGHT- Forward Placement.

Projecting your voice forward takes a lot of practise but is really necessary if you want your audience to hear you clearly and it is a very valuable tool as it means you can be heard and it also leads to your voice having more authority.

Start with the following, and then choose three or four exercises from each section.

Whisper the following sounds.

OO OH AW AH AY EE

1. Whisper them again but hold the sound to the count of five.
2. Say these sounds and hold the M sound to the count of five.

OO OO OO MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Repeat twice

3. Hum three short M sounds followed by one long M sound.

M M M MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Repeat twice

4. Hold your hand about 10cm away from your face and say “Ha ha ha” into your hand. Move your hand another 10cm and repeat, then another ten sentences and repeat. Keep repeating and imagine your voice carrying to the furthest away wall, then outside, then the back fence, over the road, to the neighbours.
5. Whisper “Hello, can I help you?” so everyone in the room can hear you.

It’s important to practise these techniques and exercises on a regular basis. If you wish to see changes in how you speak, it is very important to practise over and over.

Go to my website www.sayitclearly.co.nz for more resources.

Good luck and I look forward to hearing your feedback.

Miriam McKenzie

B.Ed, Dip. Tchg, ATCL (Practical Speech and Drama)