

## Vocal Technique 1

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# VOCAL TECHNIQUE 1

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# Foreword

Whether you have been singing all your life or just starting out, proper vocal technique is essential to a successful singing career. Therefore, to be a great singer you need to have the tools, teachers, vocal technique and experience to take care of your voice.

Unlike any other instrument, your voice is carried around with you all day, every day, which makes it more vulnerable to damage when used improperly. This also gives you the unique opportunity to learn more about your instrument and expand your ability in every moment. Vocal health requires special attention to how diet, environment and sleep can affect your voice.

A few simple rules to follow:

- Drink plenty of water to keep your voice hydrated.
- Do not smoke. Smoking can ruin your vocal chords over time.
- Avoid yelling, screaming or excessive talking.
- Get plenty of sleep. Sleep can restore your voice and body.
- Avoid foods that cause vocal disruption.
- Be aware of how the weather can affect your voice.

This book is meant to give you the knowledge, confidence and guidance you need to have a lifetime of meaningful and healthy singing.

## Chapter 1: Studying the Voice

The voice is a unique instrument. While many instruments study technique through strumming, using appropriate embouchure, and the utilization of changing mouthpieces or reeds, the voice is controlled through body awareness, healthy practices, vocal technique and knowledge. The voice is capable of a wide range of tones and expression. Throughout history, instrumentalists have endeavored to mimic the sound of the human voice. Every voice has a distinctive tone and timbre. Voices sing and speak through emotion—an emotion that we hear. The voice can be expressive in both singing and speaking. It can evoke pain, sorrow, happiness, and can even change in tonal quality through vocal fry, grit, belting and other stylistic techniques, which will be discussed later in this course. The ability to master emotion while singing engages the audience and makes you relate to your listeners. To become a great singer, one needs to acknowledge the difference between good and bad technique. This book will help you become a better singer and a better listener. It is designed to advance your singing skills. You will learn the basic physiology of your instrument: how and why the voice works, the “dos and don’ts” of singing, and how to take care of your voice. Your voice cannot be replaced. The voice only has two vocal folds, which means we need to take special care of our voices.

Music is a passion. To be a better singer, you must fully immerse yourself: eat, sleep, and breathe your craft. Attack your weaknesses. Practice diligently, using technique on passages that need improvement until your weakest phrase in the song becomes the strongest. It will be helpful to keep a log of your practice schedule, and very advantageous to record yourself during practice sessions. These two activities assist you in keeping track of your warm-ups, being aware of your breath support and any other problems you may have with intonation.

Through this course, you will learn effective practice habits to keep track of your own personal vocal progression; to utilize the breath; to fill the mask; and to use appropriate placement, projection, and other vocal techniques that will put you on the path to sustain vocal longevity during your career as an artist and prevent vocal injuries. Singing with an amazing and distinctive tone is important, but taking care of your voice leads to a steady career.

# Chapter 2: Tips for Getting Started

## Setting Goals

Becoming the singer that you want to be takes time and practice. Developing a list of short term and long term goals will be beneficial for your journey. Whether you want to focus on breath support, belting or mastering a song, any goal is important. When making goals, some questions to ask yourself are:

- *What would I like to achieve as a singer?*
- *What problems do I have when I'm singing?*
- *What do I need to improve?*
- *How can I effectively use my lesson and practice time?*

If you don't know what you should work on or are worried that your goals are wrong or misguided, do not be discouraged! Your vocal path is a self-evaluation of your success towards becoming the artist and singer you want to be. If you are experiencing trouble discovering what you want to create as goals for yourself, talk to your private instructor. They are available to guide your success towards becoming a better singer and a better artist.

## Perfect Practice Makes Perfect

Sometimes during a lesson, you may understand a concept (i.e. breathing through phrases), but are unable to physically reciprocate the idea. Do not fret. This is where practicing comes into play. Rome was not built in a day, and one lesson definitely does not make you sound like Whitney Houston. Achieving your personal goals takes time. Be patient and you will be able to overcome the issues you encounter. Keep in mind that although practice is crucial and developing practice habits is important, over-practicing is heavily discouraged. The voice is a muscle. When we practice, we have our own warm-ups and repertoire we work on.

Just like setting goals for your overall vocal progression, goals should be made each time we practice. Time management is crucial. Singing for over an hour without a proper vocal warm-up will damage your voice in the long run. Imagine running a marathon without ever conditioning and warming up your body. You would cramp up and would be at high risk for injury. The same thing can happen to your voice, which could lead to permanent injuries.

Let your goals be something you can accomplish in each practice session, such as focusing your tone, working on the bridge of a song or filling your mask. Most importantly, if you are practicing and it hurts, please **STOP**. Never work through the pain. Your voice is tired and needs rest. It is better to have vocal health than belt out a note fifteen times in a row.

## Selecting Repertoire

When picking out repertoire, be practical. Start with a song that is simple and slowly build your way up to work on that special song you have always wanted to perform. Choose songs that showcase your singing talent, and if you're having trouble finding that perfect song, ask your private instructor. As a singer, it is very important to know your range. A *vocal range* is the measure of the distance between two notes that one can sing. Depending on how many octaves you can reach and how low or high those pitches are categorizes your *voice type*. So, if you are a tenor, chances are that a bass solo will not be appropriate repertoire. Below is a basic guideline of ranges for each voice.

## Ex. 1.1 High and low pitches for each vocal range

Soprano



Mezzo-soprano



Contralto



Tenor



Baritone



Bass



The image displays six musical staves, each representing a different vocal range. Each staff begins with a single note on the left and ends with a single note on the right. The notes are positioned at the extremes of the staff to illustrate the range. The Soprano staff uses a treble clef with a low note on the first line and a high note on the fifth line. The Mezzo-soprano staff uses a treble clef with a low note on the second line and a high note on the fourth line. The Contralto staff uses a treble clef with a low note on the first space and a high note on the third line. The Tenor staff uses a bass clef with a low note on the second space and a high note on the second line. The Baritone staff uses a bass clef with a low note on the first space and a high note on the first line. The Bass staff uses a bass clef with a low note on the first line and a high note on the first space.

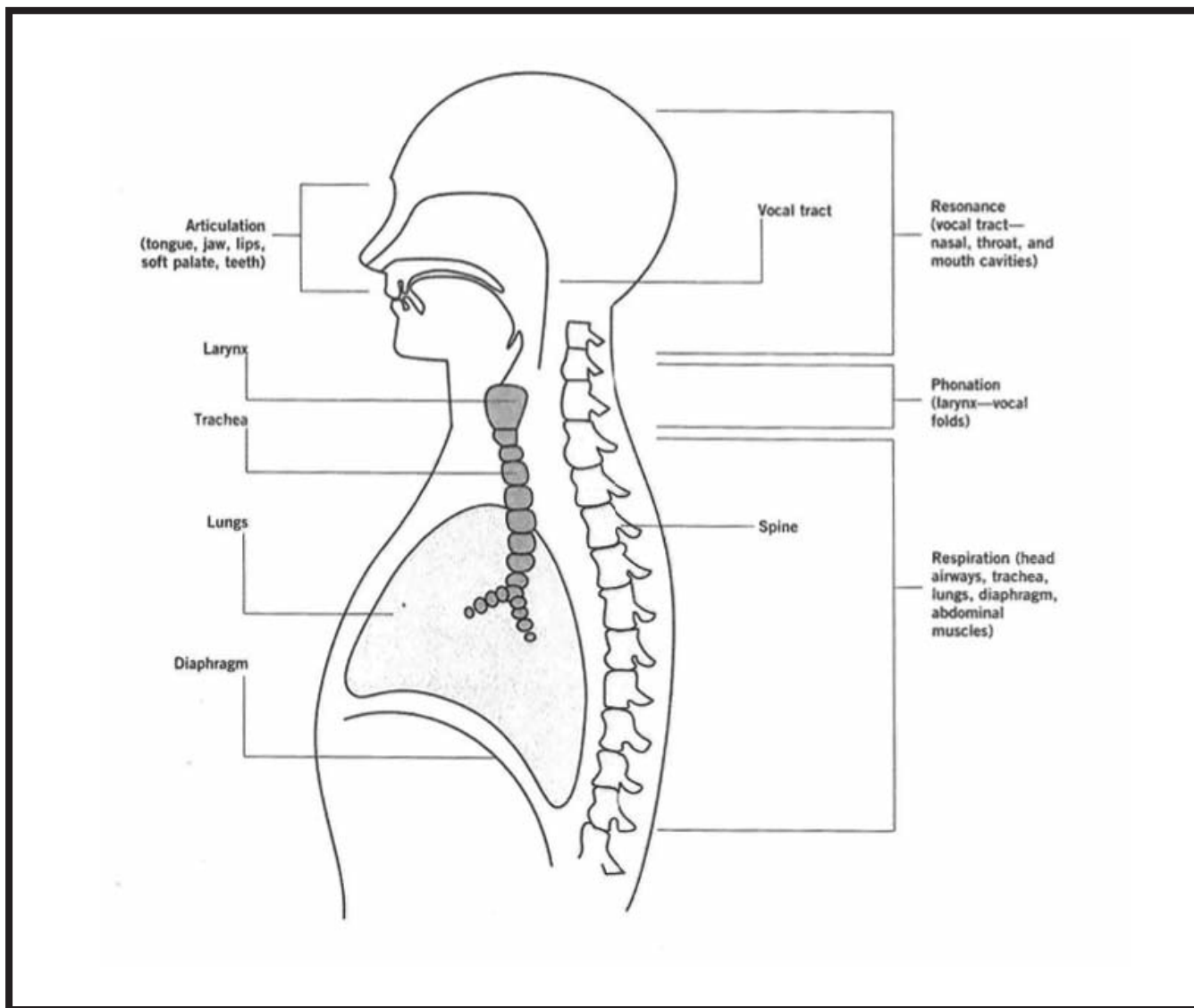
Also, when selecting a song/repertoire, find something that incorporates your love for music and concentrates on the technical aspects to improve your voice. Remember to relax when singing, and don't become stressed when something is not working vocally. Your practice room and private lesson sessions are a haven. You are in a learning environment, and it is okay to make mistakes.

# Chapter 3: The Singing Process

Singing is made up of three common elements. These elements work together to create a sound. The three common elements of singing are:

- Generator: Breathing
- Vibrator: Sound production
- Resonator: Tone enhancer

Ex. 1.2 Cross-section of upper body





### **Generator: Breathing**

Your *generator* is the power behind the voice. Utilizing the breath can affect how long you can hold a phrase or note, how much pressure is added to the phrases, and it supports the body's posture. The generator involves the respiratory system of the body: lungs, trachea, diaphragm and abdominal muscles. When we use our generator, we breathe deeply through our lungs and engage our diaphragm and abdominal muscles to hold and support the air that comes through our trachea. Our body becomes a gas tank for our voice. Depending on how we utilize the air we breathe (and how much we have taken in) establishes a foundation for our sound, our phrasing and so much more.

### **Vibrator: Sound Production**

The *vibrator* is made up of two vocal folds also known as the *larynx*. The larynx (voice box) can produce sound and can vary the pitch and volume based on the attack and intensity of air passing through it. Our vibrator is our sound production center. Our vocal folds are two very thin and delicate membranes that rub together to produce sound. Although small, they are extremely important to our voice.

### **Resonator: Tone Enhancer**

The final element, the *resonator*, is made up of the vocal tract, nasal, throat, and mouth cavities. The resonator enhances our vocal tone and can alter where we place the tone. While other instruments utilize mutes, pads, or electronics to manipulate their tone, the voice is the only instrument that can naturally change its quality. We can simply sing with a frown or a smile and our tone changes. Where we place the sound in our face changes the tonality of our voice. The voice can sound bright, dark, warm, thin, etc. all because of our resonator. When working on finding our own voice with appropriate technique, remember that it is extremely important to fill the mask when singing to effectively utilize our resonator. Inappropriate use of our resonator could lead to vocal damage.

### **Articulators:**

*Articulation* and diction are extremely important in singing. When articulating, we are using words to help express the feeling behind our voice. Our articulators distinguish how we shape sounds that we utilize when we engage our *vibrator*, *resonator*, and *generator* and form them into words. Our *articulators* consist of our mouth, teeth, tongue, lips, cheeks and hard and soft palates.

Our articulators can also be utilized with or without sound. How? Whether we are forming words with consonants or vowels, our articulators will make a sound with the air we use. For example, saying, "take" and "that" are both words that start with the letter T, but they make both a voice and unvoiced sound. In this way, our articulators distinguish and form the sounds we make with words. Stylistically altering vowels and emphasizing stresses of words and lyrics also demonstrates how our articulators work. Even singing the same song in three different keys can change the way we pronounce our vowels and consonants.

Try the following examples:

Ex. 1.3 Lyric example

First staff of music: Treble clef, 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of four quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, followed by a whole note G4. A slur is placed under the first two notes. The lyrics are: I \_\_\_\_\_ love to sing.

Second staff of music: Treble clef, 4/4 time signature, key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of four quarter notes: F#4, G4, A4, B4, followed by a whole note C5. A slur is placed under the first two notes. The lyrics are: I \_\_\_\_\_ love to sing.

Third staff of music: Treble clef, 4/4 time signature, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The melody consists of four quarter notes: F#4, G#4, A#4, B4, followed by a whole note C5. A slur is placed under the first two notes. The lyrics are: I \_\_\_\_\_ love to sing.

Ex. 1.4 Major scale exercise

C major scale:

Scale exercise in C major, 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of two phrases, each with a slur over the notes. The first phrase is C4-D4-E4-F4-G4-A4-B4, and the second phrase is B4-A4-G4-F4-E4-D4-C4. The lyrics are: Mah \_\_\_\_\_ mah \_\_\_\_\_

Do you hear or a feel a difference?

Depending on how we articulate and dictate our lyrics when we sing can also affect our vibrator, resonator, and generator (which we will discuss in Unit 6.)