

Vocal Technique 3

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VOCAL TECHNIQUE 3

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Foreword

To be a successful singer you need to have a strong grasp of language and expression to perform at the top of your game. The goal is to create an emotional connection between you, the music and the listener. This task may seem daunting but the rewards of a strong and emotional performance are infinite. The best way to draw out your best performances is to know your instrument better. Be sure to maintain good vocal health and an awareness of your vocal needs. Vocal health is essential for a long and successful career. Proper use, awareness and exercise can maximize your vocal freedom and expression.

It is common for a young singer to have a beautiful voice, but it is rare that they are able to form a direct connection with the audience, unless their technique is "on point." Part of this technique is to be understood clearly. If the audience can understand your words, they are more likely to understand your emotion and expression. This is key! People want to hear what you have to say, and how you feel about it. Exercising the proper use of language and sounds will greatly deepen your emotional expression. The more you connect with the audience, the more they will love you. This book is meant to give you the knowledge and guidance to express yourself more artistically with the voice. With this knowledge, your vocal technique and vocal health will become stronger and you will have a long and successful singing career.

As you train your voice, be sure to keep these points in mind to ensure the safety of your instrument.

- Keep your voice hydrated. Drink plenty of water.
- Do not overuse or abuse your voice. Do not yell, scream, whisper, strenuously vocalize or clear the throat
- Get plenty of rest. Sleep and vocal rest can do wonders to heal and maintain the voice.
- Avoid smoke, dust, fumes, caffeine, orange juice, dairy and any other material that may produce excess mucus or irritation to the vocal cords.
- Practice good vocal technique at *all* times. You carry your instrument with you every day; avoid anything that may cause damage.
- Relax, practice healthy technique and enjoy your love of singing!

Introduction to Vocal Technique 3

Vocal technique through diction and language study can improve a performer exponentially when the knowledge of communication is applied properly. It is important to use many tools when vocalizing, to maintain vocal health and to be emotionally understood. Whether a vocalist is a native speaker or singing in a language other than their own, it is important to learn the proper vowel and consonant sounds in order to perform them consistently and with precision. This book will cover the necessary skills to improve the unique workings of language and expression in music.

Lyrics must be shaped through the voice using a multitude of muscle movements. This book will teach vocalists to sing clearly and accurately in several musical genres and styles. To begin the study, the *International Phonetic Alphabet* (IPA) will be introduced. This will assist in understanding proper vowel shapes, consonant use, diphthongs and triphthongs and poem recitation. In connection to the International Phonetic Alphabet, the American Standard Pronunciation will be discussed, providing the reader with exercises and resources to improve diction.

The balance of speech and singing stresses in American English diction will be analyzed in excerpts from popular music from the past and present. To study the organs of speech and how to speak properly may save a singer from serious vocal damage. Therefore, vowel preparation is necessary and glottal attacks must be eliminated. This book will utilize a Shakespeare recitation to assist in applying healthy speech technique.

The voice is a complicated structure of ligaments and muscles that are used to produce language and shape the voice's tone. Vowels and consonants make up the basis of the tonal and language functions. There are many anatomical differences that occur while singing vowels, each may vary based on the spatial placement in the mouth. There are front, back and mixed vowels. Practicing each type of vowel and applying it to new music repertoire will ensure and strengthen good vocal technique. There are also several ways to produce consonants. The different styles and their benefits will be discussed and practiced through exercises and musical application.

Diphthongs and triphthongs may occur in all languages, thus they are an important part of the IPA, and their use must be understood. Included in this book are exercises in English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Latin, German and French using the IPA. Each language uses different techniques of language production, and to gain the knowledge of their unique qualities is to gain versatility as a performer.

The study of language and diction will allow vocal fluidity, versatility and health, but how you use language to express the lyrical content gives singers a distinct tone, emotional depth and vocal style. Use this book to be better understood and to be strengthened as a performer, both technically and artistically.

The first unit of this book will discuss English pronunciation with a list of excellent resources and the International Phonetic Alphabet will be introduced. A short analysis of consonants, vowels, triphthongs and diphthongs and how they each are noted in the IPA will also be included.

Chapter 1: References for English Pronunciation



The English language has many varying regional dialects and forms of pronunciation. The goal of a performer is to be understood readily by the broadest audience. In order to do so, one must become familiar with the most widely understood forms of English. Typically these styles of English are used by television news anchors, media performers, theater performers and vocalists in order to bring accessibility and clarity to the general public.

There are two main schools of study for neutral pronunciation in the English language.

- British English, also known as British Received Pronunciation (RP) or General British (GB).
- American English, also known as American Standard (AS) or General American (GA).

British English Resources

British Received Pronunciation (RP) is the form of standardized accent spoken in the United Kingdom and may sometimes also be described as a non-regional pronunciation. Although it is only spoken by a small percentage of the population, it is widely recognized and related to high society, yet differs from “the Queen’s English.” It can be heard as “BBC pronunciation,” as all of the station’s media personalities use this form of pronunciation, or “Oxford English,” since most Oxford University members have this traditional accent. General British is a new form of British pronunciation, which describes a more current update of the most commonly-used accent in the United Kingdom. There are several excellent resources listed below to strengthen both RP and GB pronunciation.

- *The Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary*, edited by Peter and James Hartman. This is the 7th edition of this book. It covers both English and American pronunciation, but is more highly acclaimed for its British English guides.
- *Gimson’s Pronunciation of English*, by Alan Cruttenden. This is the 7th edition of this book since 1962, and has reinvented itself by transitioning from RP use to GB use as the principal accent. It includes access to a companion website that provides online videos to cross reference with the text.
- *Oxford Dictionary for Pronunciation for Current English*, edited by Clive Upton, William A. Kretzschmar, Jr. and Fafal Konopka. This covers pronunciation for modern Received Pronunciation (RP).
- *Everyman’s English Pronouncing Dictionary*, edited by Daniel Jones. This is the reference book used for the Cambridge Dictionary (listed above) as well as an excellent resource for British Received pronunciation.
- *Longman’s Pronouncing Dictionary*, edited by J.C. Wells. Includes extensive guides designed to assist non-native speakers with an included CD-ROM.
- *The Pronunciation of English*, by Daniel Jones. This book is a standard textbook for foreign students in university who are studying the English language. It includes phonetic transcriptions for RP and illustrative texts.

Chapter 2: International Phonetic Alphabet

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is the standardized method used to notate oral language created by the International Phonetic Association. It includes symbols that represent all parts of oral language including phones, phonemes and intonation. It helps create distinctions between words and syllables which may provide clarity to the meaning and context of expressions. The values of each symbol are allowed to vary from language to language, so that each language may be described by the same system.

The general idea of the IPA is to describe each distinctive sound with one letter. If the sound is complex, it may not adhere to this rule. Most languages have unphonetic characteristics, or words that do not sound the way they appear. English has many unphonetic characteristics; for example, "cow" and "low" are spelled similarly but are pronounced with different vowel sounds.

A wonderful example of the complexity of the English language is a poem by an anonymous author, entitled "The English Lesson."

Ex. 1.1

The English Lesson

I take it you already know
of tough, and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble, but not you
on hiccough, through, slough and though.
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps
To learn of less familiar traps?
Beware of heard, a dreadful word
That looks like beard and sounds like bird.
And dead; it's said like bed, not bead!
For goodness sake, don't call it deed!
Watch out for meat and great and threat,
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt)
A moth is not a moth in mother,
Nor both in bother, broth in brother.
And here is not a match for there,
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear,
And then there's dose and rose and lose –
Just look them up with goose and choose,
And cork and work and card and ward
And font and front and word and sword.
And do and go, then thwart and cart.
Come, come, I've hardly made a start.
A dreadful language: Why, man alive,
I'd learned to talk when I was five.
And yet to write it, the more I tried,
I hadn't learned it at fifty-five.

As you can see from this example, the English language has a lot going on! It is one of the most difficult languages to learn. The IPA will help interpret the intricacies of English pronunciation, as well as most foreign language pronunciation.

IPA Qualities

- It is made up of the conventional Roman alphabet as well as many new symbols.
- Each letter of the alphabet represents one sound, and always the same sound.
- Each word of IPA is enclosed with brackets [] to distinguish from the original spelling.

Singers must be able to switch back and forth between the pronunciation of several languages. The IPA helps vocalists to see similar and/or recognizable sounds in each language. For example the “oo” vowel shape [u] may occur as French in the word “douce” or in English as the words “soon,” “moon” or “wound”.

Ex. 1.2

THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 2005)

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC) © 2005 IPA

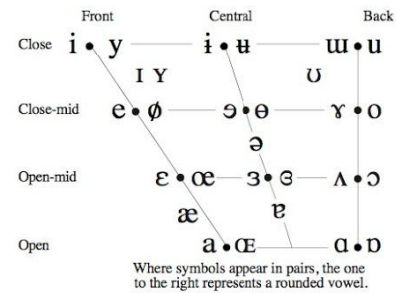
| | Bilabial | Labiodental | Dental | Alveolar | Post-alveolar | Retroflex | Palatal | Velar | Uvular | Pharyngeal | Glottal |
|---------------------|----------|-------------|--------|----------|---------------|-----------|---------|-------|--------|------------|---------|
| Plosive | p b | | | t d | | ʈ ɖ | c ɟ | k ɡ | q ɢ | | ʔ |
| Nasal | m | ɱ | | n | | ɳ | ɲ | ŋ | ɴ | | |
| Trill | | | | ʀ | | | | | ʀ | | |
| Tap or Flap | | ⱱ | | ɾ | | ɽ | | | | | |
| Fricative | ɸ β | f v | θ ð | s z | ʃ ʒ | ʂ ʐ | ç ʝ | x ɣ | χ ʁ | ħ ʕ | h ɦ |
| Lateral fricative | | | | ɬ ɮ | | | | | | | |
| Approximant | | ʋ | | ɹ | | ɻ | j | ɰ | | | |
| Lateral approximant | | | | l | | ɭ | ʎ | ʟ | | | |

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

CONSONANTS (NON-PULMONIC)

| Clicks | Voiced implosives | Ejectives |
|--------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| ◌ ɸ | ɓ Bilabial | ʼ Examples: |
| ◌ ǀ | ɗ Dental/alveolar | ɸ' Bilabial |
| ◌ ǃ | ɟ (Post)alveolar | t' Dental/alveolar |
| ◌ ǁ | ɠ Palatoalveolar | k' Velar |
| ◌ ǂ | ʄ Alveolar lateral | s' Alveolar fricative |

VOWELS



OTHER SYMBOLS

| | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| ɱ | Voiceless labial-velar fricative | ç ʝ | Alveolo-palatal fricatives |
| ɰ | Voiced labial-velar approximant | ɻ | Voiced alveolar lateral flap |
| ɰ | Voiced labial-palatal approximant | ɥ | Simultaneous ʃ and x |
| ħ | Voiceless epiglottal fricative | | |
| ʕ | Voiced epiglottal fricative | Affricates and double articulations can be represented by two symbols joined by a tie bar if necessary. | |
| ʔ | Epiglottal plosive | | |

kp ts

DIACRITICS

Diacritics may be placed above a symbol with a descender, e.g. ɲ̥̄

| | | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------|----|-----------------------------|----|--------------------|----|--------------------|
| ◌̥ | Voiceless | ◌̤ | Breathy voiced | ◌̦ | Dental | ◌̧ | Dental |
| ◌̇ | Voiced | ◌̨ | Creaky voiced | ◌̩ | Apical | ◌̪ | Apical |
| ◌̈ | Aspirated | ◌̋ | Linguallabial | ◌̬ | Laminal | ◌̭ | Laminal |
| ◌̍ | More rounded | ◌̎ | Labialized | ◌̏ | Nasalized | ◌̐ | Nasalized |
| ◌̐ | Less rounded | ◌̑ | Palatalized | ◌̒ | Nasal release | ◌̓ | Nasal release |
| ◌̑ | Advanced | ◌̑ | Velarized | ◌̔ | Lateral release | ◌̕ | Lateral release |
| ◌̑ | Retracted | ◌̑ | Pharyngealized | ◌̖ | No audible release | ◌̗ | No audible release |
| ◌̑ | Centralized | ◌̑ | Velarized or pharyngealized | ◌̘ | | | |
| ◌̑ | Mid-centralized | ◌̑ | Raised | ◌̙ | | | |
| ◌̑ | Syllabic | ◌̑ | Lowered | ◌̚ | | | |
| ◌̑ | Non-syllabic | ◌̑ | Advanced Tongue Root | ◌̜ | | | |
| ◌̑ | Rhoticity | ◌̑ | Retracted Tongue Root | ◌̝ | | | |

SUPRASEGMENTALS

| | |
|----|------------------------------|
| ˈ | Primary stress |
| ˌ | Secondary stress |
| ː | Long |
| ˑ | Half-long |
| ˑ̇ | Extra-short |
| ˑ̈ | Minor (foot) group |
| ˑ̉ | Major (intonation) group |
| ˑ̊ | Syllable break |
| ˑ̋ | Linking (absence of a break) |

TONES AND WORD ACCENTS

| LEVEL | CONTOUR |
|------------|-------------------|
| ˥ | Extra high |
| ˨ | Extra low |
| ˧ | High |
| ˩ | Low |
| ˦ | Mid |
| ˧̊ | High rising |
| ˨̊ | Low rising |
| ˧̌ | Low falling |
| ˨̌ | Extra low falling |
| ˥˥ | Downstep |
| ˥˥˥ | Upstep |
| ˥˥˥˥ | Rising |
| ˥˥˥˥˥ | Falling |
| ˥˥˥˥˥˥ | High rising |
| ˥˥˥˥˥˥˥ | Low rising |
| ˥˥˥˥˥˥˥˥ | Low falling |
| ˥˥˥˥˥˥˥˥˥ | Global rise |
| ˥˥˥˥˥˥˥˥˥˥ | Global fall |

As you can see, many of the symbols are different from the letters we normally use. English has approximately 44 phonemes but only 26 letters. *Phonemes* are pronounced sounds that make up words. There is a “short A” and “long A.” There is also the A in “are” and the A in “all,” which are neither long nor short, and they’re pronounced differently by speakers from different regions of the country and of the world. IPA assigns a specific symbol to each phoneme depending on how the speaker forms that sound in the mouth, throat and nose. It analyzes the tongue, teeth and lip positions, and then associates the appropriate symbol.

Chapter 3: Consonants

Consonants are articulated with complete or partial closure of the vocal tract during speech or singing. Consonants form the onset and/or coda, the beginning and end of articulating words. The following consonants are part of the English (Roman) alphabet, and remain in brackets for the IPA.

Ex. 1.3

[b], [d], [f], [g], [h], [k], [l], [m], [n], [p], [s], [t], [v], [w], [z]

The English alphabet has fewer consonants than it has consonant sounds, so further symbols are used to differentiate the remaining sounds. The following symbols are used for these alternate consonant sounds.

Ex. 1.4

| Symbol | | Key Words |
|--------|------|--|
| [ŋ] | (ng) | in <u>si</u> ng, thi <u>n</u> k |
| [θ] | (th) | in <u>thi</u> n, <u>thi</u> rst |
| [ð] | (th) | in <u>thi</u> ne, <u>thi</u> s |
| [ʍ] | (hw) | in <u>whi</u> sper, <u>wh</u> en |
| [j] | | in <u>y</u> ou, <u>y</u> es |
| [ʃ] | (sh) | in <u>sh</u> e, <u>s</u> ure |
| [tʃ] | (ch) | in <u>ch</u> oose, <u>ch</u> urch |
| [ʒ] | | in <u>v</u> ision, 'a <u>z</u> ure* |
| [dʒ] | | in <u>G</u> eorge, <u>j</u> oy |
| [ɹ]** | | in <u>r</u> ed, <u>r</u> emember, <u>e</u> very (the burred r) |

Digraphs are a pair of characters used to describe one sound in the IPA. Digraphs may include "ch", "sh", "th", and "zh." Some digraphs may represent more than one sound. For example, the articulation of "th" sounds different in the word "this" and the word "thin". Therefore, the IPA uses different symbols for each.

Ex. 1.5

- This [ð]
- Thin [θ]

A complete list of digraph symbols is as follows.

Ex. 1.6

- <sc> normally represents /s/ (voiceless alveolar fricative) or /ʃ/ (voiceless postalveolar fricative) before <e> or <i> .
- <ng> represents /ŋ/ (velar nasal).
- <ch> usually corresponds to /tʃ/ (voiceless postalveolar affricate), to /k/ (voiceless velar plosive) when used as an etymological digraph origin, less commonly to /ʃ/ (voiceless postalveolar fricative) in words of French origin.
- <ck> corresponds to /k/.
- <gh> represents /g/ (voiced velar plosive) at the beginning of words, represents /f/ (voiceless labiodental fricative) or is silent at the end.
- <ph> represents /f/ (voiceless labiodental fricative).
- <rh> represents English /r/ in words of Greek origin.
- <sh> represents /ʃ/ (voiceless postalveolar fricative).
- <th> usually corresponds to /θ/ (voiceless interdental fricative) or /ð/ (voiced interdental fricative). See also [Pronunciation of English](#)
- <wh> represents /hw/ in some conservative dialects; /w/ in other dialects; and /h/ in a few words where it is followed by <o> , such as also [Phonological history of <wh>](#) .
- <zh> represents /ʒ/ in words transliterated from Slavic languages, and in American dictionary pronunciation spelling.
- <ci> usually appears as /tʃ/ before vowels.
- <wr> represents /r/. Originally, it stood for a labialized sound, while <r> without <w> was non-labialized, but this distinction was lost as two sounds merging into a single alveolar approximant, allophonically labialized at the start of syllables, as in *red* [r̥ɔc]. See also [Rhotic](#)
- <qu> usually represents /kw/. <q> is conventionally followed by <u> and a vowel letter.

Ex. 1.7

English vocalic digraphs

| | <...e> | <...i> <...y> | <...u> <...w> | <...a> | <...o> |
|--------|------------------------|------------------------------|---|--|--------------------|
| <O...> | <oe/oa> > <e> - /i/ | <oi/oy> - /ɔ:/ (SAE: /oə/) / | <ou/ow> - /əʊ/ɑ: / (oʊ/əʊ/ɔ: /ɔ:/) (AUS: /əʊ/ɑ: /; CDN: /oʊ/; SSE: /əʊ/) | <oa> - /oʊ/ɑ: / (US: /oʊ/) | <oo> - /u: /o(ʊ) / |
| <e...> | <ee> - /i/ | <ei/ey> - /eɪ/ɪ/ / | <eu/ew> - /ju: /u: / | <ea> - /i: /eɪ/ə / | |
| <a...> | <ae/ae> > <e> - /i/ | <ai/ay> - /eɪ/ɪ/ | <au/aw> - /ɔ:/ (US: /ɑ: /ɑ: /) (in loanwords: /ɑ: /) | (in Afro-American loanwords and proper nouns: <aa> (in loanwords from Chinese: <ao> - /əʊ/ɑ: /) - /ɑ: / | |
| <u...> | <ue> - /u: /u: / | <ui> - /i: /u: / | | <ua> - /i(ʊ) / | |
| <i...> | <ie> - /ɪ/ɪ/ / | | | | |