**RESOURCE PACK**

**Vocal Exercises**

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**THE EXERCISES**

**ICE BREAKER**

1. **Name game – say your name with an action.**
2. **This is a focus exercise. You need to count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,6, 7, 8, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1**

**Counts 1, 5, 9 can then be replaced with actions or sounds chosen by the group.**

**Warm Up**

Warm ups are important as the voice is a muscle. If you go straight into using it (or over-using it), that is where damage can be done. The purpose of the physical warm ups is to prepare the body to take the stance that is the most supportive for vocal freedom, as well as to get the mouth and jaw loosened in order to be able to articulate more clearly.

1. **Physical**

* Head rolls (side to side, look right/left, circle head)
* Shoulder shrugs (one at a time/together/forward/back)
* Shoulder rolls (one at a time/together/forward/back)
* Circle the wrists
* Shake out the hands/clench and flick fingers
* Twist from the waist (watch out for “flying” arms!)
* Shake out the legs
* Circle ankles
* Shake whole body
* Stretch up so body is tense then drop the arms, the head/shoulders, the waist and then down to the floor – come up slowly – vertebrae by vertebrae into “Neutral”

The neutral position is important because it is the position we must take when reciting poetry, prose or when sight reading (not an acting piece). This position allows our breath to flow freely and support the voice aiding **projection** (volume and expression of voice). It also means that we must use the voice in order to bring the written words to life as gestures are not made. It also assists stage presence by giving the actor a strong stance.

*When I stand in* ***Neutral*** *position. My feet are approximately shoulder width apart. My body weight is evenly distributed to the right and left, but I am also leaning slightly forward. My pelvis is above my instep, my torso above my pelvis. My shoulders are back and down and in line with my breastbone. My head is in a medial position (not jutting forward or pressed back).*

The warm up also releases tension which enables us to be more creative – and not be “blocked” by the stresses of the day. Less tension also lowers the risk of accidents in a physical performance. The warm up relaxes the muscle which in turn helps to breathe more easily. The ability to breathe easily is one of the most important parts of drama as breathing supports our most important asset – the voice.

1. **Jaw Dexterity and Posture**

Chewing and yawning – making large jaw movements allow the freedom needed for articulation.

Try saying “No no no (yawn)”

Vibrating the lips – “horsey noises” also relax the mouth into the most comfortable (non tense) speaking position)

Squeezing (tensing) and relaxing allow the actors to feel the difference in their bodies when they are tense and when they are relaxed. The actor needs to perform somewhere in between – s/he needs to be in control to the tips of their fingers, but not so tense that the voice or movements are affected.

**POSTURE**

Posture is important because correct posture enables the air to flow freely through the vocal cords. This assists with projection and clarity.

***Some exercises which may assist with good posture:***

* *Imagine you are pushing against a wall about one foot away from you, at shoulder height. Gradually release the effort and let the arms fall to your sides.*
* *Stretch the arms out to the sides, extending them as far as possible. Hold this wide stretch then release the arms, allowing them to fall heavily to your sides.*
* *Stand on the balls of the feet, arms hanging by your sides. Gradually lower the heels, but imagine there is a string holding your body tall and well balanced even though the heels are nearing the ground.*

**Common postural fault**s

* **Slumping** – where the rib cage is allowed to sink towards the pelvis, and the spine is rounded. This affects the efficiency of breathing
* **Round shoulders** – the back is rounded and hunched – again breathing is affected.
* **Military stance** – pushing the torso forward and upward – this encouraged shallow breathing.
* **Raised shoulders** – shoulders that are raised towards the ears produce tension in the throat and affects vocal quality.
* **Leaning back** – if the weight of the body is too far back, the abdominal and other muscles have to compensate to balance.
* **Head push** – most common in singing – this can affect vocal quality.

1. **Breathing and breath control**

Breathing is fundamental to the actor – when we are born we take our first breath, when we die we “breath our last”. The breathing method used in drama is **intercostal diaphragmatic breathing**.

Air enters the nose/mouth and then travel down the **trachea** (windpipe) down the **bronchal tube**, through the **bronchii** and into the lungs. The **diaphragm** moves downwards and outwards, and the **intercostal muscles** lift the ribs outwards to make space for the air (the air does not push the ribs out!). The more air we breathe, the longer we can sustain our speech – this is particularly important in verse speaking.

When we breathe out, the reverse happens – the **diaphragm** moves up, the i**ntercostal muscles** release the ribs, and the air is pushed out through the **bronchii, bronchus, trachea** and mouth/nose. If the **vocal cords** are relaxed while we breathe there is no sound.

**Some common faults to watch for:**

* **Clavicular breathing** – where shallow breaths are taken into the upper part of the chest. It is often accompanied by a raising of the shoulders. The breathing capacity is underused.
* **Abdominal breathing** – More common in boys – ribs hardly raise at all, and the breath is taken immediately by the diaphragm – the result is diminished breath capacity and little control over breathing.
* **Noisy breathing** – If the student is breathing correctly and adequately the method should lead to a noiseless inspiration of air.

**Some breathing exercises** [[1]](#footnote-1)

* Breathe in for a count of 3 (through the nose). Breathe out to a count of 5 through the mouth. (Repeat a few times then extend to a count of 8, 10, 12, 15.)
* Repeat the exercise, but count the numbers on a whisper as you breathe out.
* Place the hands on the lower ribs and feel them swing out as you breathe in – breathe out on an OO sound or a hum. (if the hum- place a hand by the nose and feel the vibration – this is the **resonance cavities** working)

***A short digression about resonance cavities***

***Resonance*** *is the co-vibration in the head and chest. It produces a musical and vocal tone. The resonance cavities are filled with air, and the air vibrates with the cavities acting as a sound box for the sounds produced by the correct formation of the* ***organs of articulation*** *(“tip of the tongue, the lips and the teeth”). The cavities are: the* ***trachea****, the* ***larynx****, the* ***upper pharynx*** *(back of the nose), the* ***lower pharynx*** *(back of the mouth to top of larynx), the* ***mouth*** *(****hard palate*** *for brilliance of tone/****soft palate*** *and* ***lower pharanx*** *for tone colour), the* ***nose****, the* ***paranasal sinuses****, the* ***thorax****).*

**Resonance Exercises**

Breathe in for a count of 3 (watch that you are breathing from the diaphragm – NOT the shoulders/chest!) Release the air through a hum on a note that is comfortable. Feel the vibration in your nose.

Repeat the above and choose a higher note – feel the vibration in your forehead. (Do not raise the head).

Repeat the above and choose a lower note – feel the vibration in your chest. (Do not lower your head).

1. **Articulation and vocal clarity**

Air leaving the lungs passes through various passages to the **larynx** at the top of the **trachea**. In the larynx are two pieces of elastic tissue called **vocal cords**. When we speak, these cords are brought together and the air passing between them sets up vibrations. The vibrations are passed onto the column of air which becomes **voice**. The vibrating columns pass through the **resonators** which give the voice **tone quality**.

For correct speech we not only need sound, and tone quality but also the use of our **organs of articulation** which help us annunciate words. The **organs of articulation** are: the **tounge**, the **teeth**, the **lips**, the **hard and soft palate** and the **teeth ridge (alevolar ridge)**. Our speech includes **vowel sounds** and **consonant sounds**.

Consonants are the most important elements of vocal clarity.

**Vowels** are uninterrupted sounds made by the shaping of the lips and positioning of the tongue. There are 24 vowel sounds in total: **Open Monopthongs:** OO (Boom); AW (Born); AH (Barn); ER (Burn); EE (Bean); **Shut Monopthongs**: OO (Book); U (But); O (Box); A (Bat); E (Bed): I (Bit); **Dipthongs (double sounding vowels):** OH (Bowl); OW (Bound); OI (Boy); I (Bite); AY (Blake); EW (Beauty); AIR (Bear); EER (Fear); OOR (Boorish); **Tripthongs (dipthongs plus the neutral vowel as in THE):** OUR (Bower); IRE (Fire); URE (Cure)

**Consonants** are interrupted sounds made by the contact/partial contact of the **organs of articulation**. They are important because speech depends on them for its distinctness and firmness. Consonants may be **aspirated (unvoiced)** and **explosive** eg: **p, t, k**; or **aspirated** and **sustained** eg: **wh, f, th**; or **vocal (voiced**) and **explosive** eg: **b,d,g**; or **vocal** and **sustained** eg: **m,v, z**.

**Consonants:**

**The consonants exercise can be done in a rhythm eg. Bbb/ppp/bbb/p**

b/p

f/t

z/s

g/d

m/n

ge/ch

*The vowel circle – this exercise brings together breathing as well as forming shapes with the mouth:*

*Ah-ae-ee-or-oo*

**Example Exercises for the lips**

* Say OO-EE (and continue repeating)
* Pass the pens and pencils please
* Betty baked a better batch of buns

**Example Exercises for the tongue**

* Leave the lazy lion alone
* The butler stopped to eat a toffee
* Let's eat a lot of tomatoes today

**Example Exercises of the soft palate and back of the tongue**

* I think he got a drink from the tank
* Bring your gong along
* I'm pulling a long length of string

**Example Exercises for the mouth and jaw**

* Many an anaemone meets and enemy anaemone

**Some tongue twisters**

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper

A peck of pickled pepper, Peter Piper picked

If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper

Where's the peck of pickled pepper Peter Piper picked.

I’m not a pheasant plucker

I’m a pheasant plucker’s son

I’m only plucking pheasants

‘Till the pheasant plucker comes.

* When does the wrist watch strap shop shut? (repeat x 5)
* Rubber buggy bumpers (repeat x 5)

*(These can be practised holding the tongue - working the lips - and then releasing the tongue!)*

**ARTICULATION WITH ACTIONS!**

*To sit in solemn silence in a dull dark dock*

*In a pestilential prison with a lifelong lock*

*Awaiting the sensation of a short sharp shock*

*From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block*

1. M Morrison, Clear Speech [↑](#footnote-ref-1)