

Guide to Vocal Exercises

Introduction

Vocal exercises are the only way to really develop and strengthen your voice. You should aim to do 15-30 minutes of vocal exercises every time you practice your singing, and the rest singing songs.

All the exercises should be performed with proper breathing and abdominal support, and open your throat up with the yawning position on the open vowels (like aaahhh). If you don't know how to do these things then book a lesson with us or any vocal coach, they're easy techniques to learn. It's a good idea to have at least one vocal lesson to make sure you're performing all the exercises correctly to make sure you're getting the most benefit from your practice time.

If the backing track goes too high or low for your voice, don't strain to reach the note. Concentrate on pushing from your diaphragm and if the note is out of your range just don't sing it, just stop the track and move onto the next exercise.

If your voice hurts then stop singing, you're done for the day. If it carries on hurting then see a singing teacher or ear nose and throat specialist before you sing any more.

Warmup

This exercise actually develops your tuning, resonance and general vocal production. We call it a warmup because it's gentle on your voice so it's a good one to start with.

Concentrate on pushing hard from your tummy and opening up your voice with the yawning position.

Big Yaa

Great for developing a big, rich voice. Concentrate on pushing from your tummy and yawning. Place low (imagine all the notes are much lower than they are - see the Coosee exercise) and try to sing the exercise as loud as you can.

Sliding 5ths

This exercise develops vocal dexterity and helps to smooth out your 'break points'. Great for beginners. Concentrate on sliding slowly and smoothly from one note to the other without 'jumping'.

Sobbing

Sobbing, and the next exercise, twanging, are extreme ends of the vocal tone scale from very mellow (sob) to very bright (twang). Practicing them will allow you to find more tones you can use with your voice so you can better find the right sound for the song.

For sobbing, start with a big, open sound with lots of yawn, then make it as whiney and sad as possible. Try to sound like you're sobbing, just like the name says.

Twanging

The opposite end of the tone scale, twanging helps you develop bright tones like most pop music and the brattish musical theatre sprechengesang (speak-singing).

Try to make your sound as thin and harsh as possible. Try to sound like kids in the playground teasing each other with the nya nya nya sound.

Whatever your genre, practice both sobbing AND twanging. The aim is to develop the range of tones your voice is capable of, not to develop one tone and stick with it forever.

Coosee

The coosee exercise is a *placement* exercise which develops your ability to 'place' notes high or low. Generally we want to place high notes low to stop them feeling strained, and low notes high to give them clarity.

Physiologically, placement is very complex, involving movement of the larynx, soft palette, the jaw, and changing the resonance and focus of the sound. To do it is really easy though. To place a note high, just imagine it's really high, regardless of its actual pitch. To place a note low, imagine it's really low. It helps to look up when you're placing high and down when you're placing low. Imagine you can 'see' the note on the floor or above you and sing through it.

To do the Coosee exercise, place the high notes at the start of the exercise low, and as you go on and the notes get lower, gradually place them higher so that at the end of each repetition you're placing as high as you can.

AEIOU

AEIOU (Ah, Air, Eee, Oh, Ooo, known as 'The Italian Vowels') is a *focus* exercise, meaning you're moving where the sound is focused in your mouth and throat as you move through the sounds. A is focused right at the back of the throat, then the sound moves forward to the palette for E, all the way to the lips for I, back to the throat for O and to the lips again for U.

Most of us naturally focus too far forward or back and learning to focus the sound anywhere in your mouth opens up our sound and makes a huge range of tones available.

It takes time to learn to feel the focus of the sound in the mouth or throat so don't worry if you don't feel it at first. Just do the exercise and try to feel the sound moving back and forth and eventually you should connect with the feeling. Like all techniques, it's best learned with a singing teacher guiding you.

Dynamics

This exercise is to develop your dynamic range, or more simply the ability to sing quietly.

Slide from the first note up to the second and back down again using an nnnnggg sound. Don't put any power into it, just keep it easy and natural.

When you get back to the first note, do the same thing again with an aaah sound, but don't put any more power into it than you did the nnnnggg sound. Keep the sliding aah sound quiet, the aim is to learn to control your voice while singing quietly.

Skipping

This is a challenging tuning and breathing exercise. Perform it with a yaa sound.

Take a deep breath at the start and a small breath at the top before you come back down. The skill is in hitting all the notes accurately and in performing the whole exercise without running out of breath.

Vocal Exercises for Children

Kids don't have the same co-ordination and control over their body as adults do, so the philosophy behind doing vocal exercises for children is to use exercises that encourage good technique without having to explain to the child what to do other than sing along.

Using a ha ha ha sound, for example, will build diaphragm strength and get the child used to engaging the diaphragm for singing, a skill which they will develop conscious control over when they are old enough to be taught how to isolate this muscle.

The great thing about kids and singing is children will instinctively sing in a way that will not damage their voice, and won't push and strain to reach a note but just drop down to a pitch they can sing at comfortably. As such all singing is good for kids, and just singing regularly with your child and encouraging them to sing for themselves is the best thing you can do until they reach their early teens and are old enough to start developing more consciously controlled vocal technique.

Don't forget we're here to help so contact us via the website for any advice.