



**A quick and simple guide for teachers on how to care for and  
enhance the voice in the classroom**

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## Vocal use

In order to effectively and efficiently use our voices we need to be aware of and appreciate the demands we place on it and recognise and adjust our behaviour to support vocal longevity.

- Tension/Stress (shoulders/neck/jaw ache will in turn increase an unbalanced tension in the voice) – be aware of any tension creeping in during the day. Massage/stretch affected area. Yawn-sigh to stretch vocal cords.
- Habitual throat clearing/coughing – get family/friends to remind you when you do it. Sip water, dry swallow or gentle cough instead
- Avoid shouting or prolonged loud talking (this can cause your vocal folds to swell/bleed). If required to do the above in the classroom make sure you diaphragmatically breathe through the vocalization, water is to hand and you stretch the vocal cords as soon as possible
- Tired/sore voice due to prolonged use – take 5 minute vocal rest-breaks as frequently as possible throughout the day – do not go on complete voice rest for prolonged periods unless you have a confirmed diagnosis of laryngitis
- Avoid whispering when on any type of vocal rest as this can cause supraglottic hyperfunction – use a ‘soft’ (confidential) voice instead
- Emotional upset can affect laryngeal tension – look at ways to channel and release any emotional upset. This will vary from person to person but try to find an outlet to suit you (mindfulness is an excellent example)
- Warm up your voice daily – even during school holidays. Vocal cords are muscles and need regular exercise! Incorporating a 5-10 min warm-up into your week-day routine should reduce the risk of ‘back to school vocal fatigue’

## Vocal Health and Hygiene Sheet

Making small, yet informed, changes to your lifestyle choices can have significant positive changes on how your voice sounds and feels. In order to incorporate these changes into your long-term lifestyle we recommend a 'common-sense approach'.

- Increase water intake (frequent sips throughout the day – particularly when vocal demands increase). Frequency is much more important than volume consumed. When in the classroom, sip water every 5 minutes
- Reduce/give up smoking or vaping – this includes passive smoking
- Reduce alcohol consumption (alternate alcoholic drinks with water or add non-caffeinated mixers to neat spirits). Alcohol makes the vocal cords and larynx dry and can also irritate the mucous membranes that line the throat
- Avoid spicy food – particularly late at night. If you enjoy spicy foods, consume with water
- Avoid heavy meals just before bedtime (if this is unavoidable then add an extra pillow to alleviate any potential acid reflux)
- Avoid or reduce caffeine (swap to herbal non-mentholated/de-caffeinated substitutes or alternate caffeinated drinks with water), unfortunately, many fizzy soft drinks also contain caffeine so check the label
- Avoid any menthol sweets – this includes any 'cough' or 'throat' sweet containing menthol (a known ingredient to strip the vocal cords of vital lubrication) – chewable blackcurrant pastilles are an excellent alternative
- Reduce any aerosol spray usage, or increase room ventilation if necessary
- Steam to alleviate vocal fatigue/tension (important to steam with water only)
- Humidify your environment – place a bowl of water by bedside/radiator, or if possible sleep with window marginally open.

## 10min daily vocal warm-up example

### Body

- **Shoulder rotations**
  - Left shoulder clockwise then anticlockwise x 5 in each direction
  - Repeat with the right shoulder and then both shoulders together
- **Shoulder shrugs**
  - Raise both shoulders up to the ears – hold for 5 seconds and release. Repeat 5 times.
- **Head tilts**
  - With relaxed shoulders, turn head towards right shoulder (ensure only the head and neck move). Feel the stretch on the left side of the neck. Repeat on the other side.
  - Repeat 5 times.
- **Head tips**
  - Gently drop head onto chest – hold the stretch for 5 seconds.
  - With a relaxed jaw gently tip head back – hold the stretch for 5 seconds.
  - Repeat head drops and tips x 3 times.
- **Jaw and mouth stretches**
  - Lion/Mouse technique – stretch mouth wide open (imitating a lion's roar), then switch to a mouse's face immediately, by scrunching up your face to look small and meek. Switch quickly between the two 5-6 times.
- **Throat massage/stretch**
  - Using both hands, place two fingers on either side of the larynx now gently stroke downwards. Be sure to only use downward movements along the side of the neck only.
- **Tongue stretches**
  - Teeth and gum cleaning – with the tongue! Don't forget the hard to reach places.
  - Imagine you've just eaten a donut without licking your lips. The sugar has gone everywhere! Now use your tongue to clean it all off.

## Breathing

- Complete breath control – breathe in for 10, hold for 5 and breath out for 10 x 3 (increase the count time if comfortable)
- Diaphragm bounce – Think of the diaphragm as a trampoline – now pant silently feeling the diaphragm ‘bounce’ up and down. Do this for 30 seconds.
- Alternating ‘sss’ sound and ‘zzz’ sound on one breath (try also with ‘fff’ and ‘vvv’)
- Using a comfortable pitch and volume chant (intone) count on one breath. Aim to increase this with practice (alternatively use months of the year or days of the week)

## Voice

- Humming – first in agreement, then in appreciation then up and down a scale, then to a nursery rhyme or favorite song.
- Siren up and down using different **vowels** then ‘**ng**’ (as in **going**)
- Lip and tongue trills – try this up and down a scale (lip trill – blowing raspberry/tongue trill – rolling ‘r’)
- Strong staccato ‘hah’ ‘hah’ ‘hah’ on one pitch then continue whilst moving up & down a scale. Try also with ‘hey’ ‘hey’ ‘hey’ (feel diaphragm ‘bounce’ on every sound)
- Resonance exercises (resonance is the vibration of the voice passing through amplifying spaces in the chest, larynx, mouth and nasal passages)
  - Using hands and fingers for biofeedback, hum to feel the resonance - visualize the sound in each of the above areas and pat/tap the area to physically feel the vibration and enhance the resonance
- Tongue twisters for articulation
  - Red lorry yellow lorry, red leather yellow leather (x3)
  - Sushi chef (x3)
  - Unique New York (x3)
  - Eleven benevolent elephants (x3)
  - Or any others you enjoy!

**Yawn-Sigh if you feel any vocal tension**