

## How to Use the Vocal Exercises.

The Vocal Exercises are a compilation of exercises that I have used over the years in my vocal studio, for choirs I have directed, and for personal use.

These exercises are as effective for choirs as much as they are for the individual singer because they are based on the premise that the foundation of good blend is in establishing similar proper vocal technique and tone models. The exercises seek to achieve pure, energized, lyrical tone with sufficient range and expressive power.

They are progressive, not so much in terms of level of difficulty, but rather in considering when to sing them during a vocalizing session. Exercises on the first page are good starters. Any of the exercises on page 2 are healthy to sing after having warmed up a little. The exercises on page 3 are useful once the singer(s) has been vocalizing for a few minutes. Some are more difficult than others and should be selected by the choir director or teacher according to the appropriate level of study.

Singers are to sing the exercises at the beginning of a lesson or rehearsal, but these exercises are not merely warm-up exercises. Each exercise has a specific function in enabling the singer(s) to sing at his/her most beautifully and healthfully. There are specific exercises for flexibility, lyrical line, range, clarity, dynamics, etc. Singer(s) will benefit if he/she has a clear idea of the purpose of each exercise. Sometimes it is helpful to sing a particular exercise right before a song that offers a similar vocal challenge.

**The exercises are worthless, however, if there is not a thorough understanding of the use of the breath.** A teacher or choir director will need to guide those singers who need assistance in this important, basic area of singing if these exercises are to be helpful. This applies to all types of singers – classical, jazz, and pop.

One does not sing all of the exercises at one session, of course. It is best to choose several from each page, covering all the challenges of basic technique. A ten-minute to twenty-minute session will suffice. However, in the case of the injured voice, or if someone has not sung for quite some time, the exercises can be sung for a full lesson period as a healing therapy or stepping stone toward singing text again.

Vowels are sung as: a – “ah”; e – “ay” (without diphthong); i – “ee”; o – “oh” (without diphthong); u – “oo”. Each exercise is given a suggested dynamic, tempo, phrasing, and rest for breath.

**A reminder – these are vocal exercises with a purpose. The singer(s) is to be mindful when singing: Start each exercise in mid-range, then repeat with proper breath up a half step. Continue this pattern in several more keys, then begin at your starting tone and repeat the phrase with proper breath down a half step. Continue this pattern in several more keys. Singers are encouraged to use the exercises in conjunction with the specific pieces they are studying. Teachers and choir directors are encouraged to create their own exercises based on this series to suit the needs of their singers.**

## Notes on Each Exercise

**1. Wake-up call.** Sing on one breath with subtle crescendo and no accented tones. Establishes the cycle of breathing: preparation/deep inhalation; expansion as needed; singing of phrase/exhalation while maintaining feeling of expansion and as lower muscles (lower abdominals, gluteals, etc.) support the sustaining of the tone as needed. Keep vowels pure. Excellent exercise to make one conscious of the importance of the deep breath. Singing on “La” is good for loosening the jaw – the jaw is relaxed and open and does not move while the tongue does the articulating. This exercise is also good for being aware of the balance and deportment of the body.

The exercises #1 through #10 (except #3) are to be sung through mid-range only.

**2. Wake-up call.** Connection from tone to tone. Singing on “v” demands feeling of large expansion, use of lower muscles to support the tone. Feel buzz in lips and face throughout phrase – more important than whatever tone is produced. An obvious way to learn about breathing technique. Singing on mixed vowels or “v” establishes the cycle of breathing.

**3. Wake-up call.** Established top edge of tone – good exercise for heavier voices, young breathy voices, and those with ample vibrato. Use pointed, bright tone, not a particularly pretty one. Tones are detached. Can sing phrase throughout vocal range. Breathe through the mouth, quickly and deeply. There will be no feeling of expansion. It is okay to sound a little shrill.

**4. Flexibility.** Legato with skips. For experiencing use of lower support muscles. Much like #2. Cycle of the breath.

**5. Flexibility and legato.** Much like #4.

**6. Energizer! Articulation.** Sing with spirit. Beginners may sing with an “h” in between vowels if voice does not move easily or sliding occurs. The goal is to sing without any “h” so that each tone is identifiable within a smooth phrase. Generally, the exercise is successful when each tone is sung in the same rhythm as the vibrato, pure tones are used, and the breath is deep.

**7. Flexibility. Legato skips.** Much like #4 and #5.

**8. Clarity.** Singing with the “top of the tone”, much like #3. Not meant to be sung with full-bodied tone. Sing “Mi-ne-mi-ne-mine” when voice is feeling “fuzzy” or lethargic. Sing “Ri-re-ra-ro-ru” with flipped or slightly rolled “r”. If one cannot sing the “r” in this manner, then use a soft “d” – the rolled “r” will eventually come. Connect the lower body to the “r” just as one does singing the “v” in #2. “Zing...” is excellent for the voice that needs a little nasality to the sound, i.e. one that is hollow-sounding. Also good for evening out a too wide vibrato. Using “hunga...” (pronounced “huhngah”) is to be sung with a very succinct difference between the open vowels (“uh” and “ah”) and the nasal sound (“ng”). Through singing the exercise with “hunga...”, one learns to associate the sensation of the risen soft palate with free, open tone as well as to differentiate between nasal and open tones.

**9. Clarity with leaps. Intonation. Connection of tones.** One sings this exercise as if it were a step-wise phrase. The leaps are not thought of as one note being higher than the other, but rather, as one note being more demanding of energy than the other. In fact, if the singer slightly emphasizes the repeated higher tone, making sure the lower tones are not given any heaviness, then clarity, good intonation and smooth connection of tone occurs.

**10. Even tone. Chewing exercise.** Keep pure vowels – try not to insert “w” or “y” between each vowel. Think of “high cheek bones” and “smile behind the eyes” or think of yawning so that only tongue makes changes and the jaw is opened slightly and relaxed. Let jaw be. Mouth shapes vowels quite subtly.

**11. Purity of vowel. Range.** Sing seamlessly. If breathy or singing with “h”, try singing on “du” or “ba”. Observe shape of phrase – fullness in the middle, less intense at beginning and end of phrase. “O” remains pure throughout – never “uh”.

- 12. Flexibility, smoothness and connection of tone. Energizer!** Very good warm up, especially if initially fatigued. Keep “i” and “a” on same tonal pathway. Allow for space in mouth as you sing in higher key. Sing quickly with loose jaw.
- 13. Clarity. Precision. Efficiency.** Good for curtailing heavy vibrato or too much weight in the voice. Mouth shape changes subtly. First tones involve slight emphasis – no need to push.
- 14. Staccato. Coordination. Purity of tone. Range.** Feel gentle pulse in belly button area. Do vowels as a sequence. When singing phrase on higher tones, use all “a” vowels. This exercise can be sung in all areas of the voice. If unable to sing with clarity, try each vowel with a “b” in front of it.
- 15. Same as 14.** Just a little more advanced. Good for range-building.
- 16. Same as 14.** Good for those who do not yet have much of a range.
- 17. Power exercise. Brilliance. Warmth and Fullness of Tone.** Feel slight “kick” or “lift” in lower abdominals at first tone. Sung powerfully but jaw is relaxed and loose. Make sure that one does not preface the “y” sound with an “ee” sound. Those with vibratos that are too wide or over-emphasized must be especially mindful in singing this phrase.
- 18. Warmth and full tone. Legato.** As you sing the phrase into higher keys, think a little “aw” in the “ah” vowel, but don’t forget to do so while managing a deep and expansive breath! This is an expressive, romantic phrase, but the “I” of love must be on time and not allowed to dawdle!
- 19. Even tone. Legato phrasing.** Sing with no accented tones but with blossom in middle of phrase. Good for building range, singing with skips, and keeping on the same tonal pathway for all vowels. Mouth shape changes subtly. Allow the tongue to do the work – think the vowel, but don’t make (manufacture) the vowel.
- 20. Floating the tone. Legato.** Same as #19 with a flexibility exercise attached. If you are able to do the second part of the exercise well, then you have done the first part correctly.
- 21. Energizer! For Range! “Throw-away exercise.”** This is a wonderful exercise for the choir director or voice teacher to teach shy altos and singers who swear they have no range. Just don’t let the singer(s) see the keyboard! The “mi...” part of the exercise is sung lightly and feels right in front of the mouth. One can sing this exercise to the extreme high ranges (but don’t start there). Last tone is not sustained. Sing very quickly. No tone is accented, but high tone has “ping”. Establishes cycle of breathing on the quick breath through the mouth. Singer will not feel wide expansion. Inhale quickly and deeply as if on an “ah”. Wonderful “last” exercise to sing just before performing.
- 22. Coordination. Invigorating the tone. Brilliance. Warmth.** Must be very sure of technique before attempting exercise. Last held tone is powerful without being heavy. Must be well supported. This is a good exercise for young, but well-disciplined voices whose vibratos are just coming into being.
- 23. Freeing the tone. Floating the tone.** Sing dolce. Good for emerging vibrato. Croon. Crooning is good for the too heavy voice. Advanced singers: Sing last tone as messa di voce.

**24. Floating the tone. Legato.** Another “crooning” exercise – sing it while you clean house or wash the car! A way to keep the voice loose and easy feeling – especially if you’ve been singing lots of formal, intense literature. Try not to insert any “h” between the vowels. Keep the momentum and steady pace. No need to sing at extremes of range.

**25. Floating the tone. Legato.** Same as #24 only a bit more advanced. This one is good for the ear, too, since you do not end with the same tone with which you begin the exercise.

**26. Flexibility. Colortura.** Just make sure you are fully warmed up when you sing this exercise! No tone is accented including the dotted quarter! Maintain the purity of the vowel throughout the melisma – the vowel does not change.

**27. Connection and even tone.** You can sing this exercise at the beginning of your session. It’s easy on the voice to insert it here as a simpler, legato exercise amongst more demanding exercises. The mouth hardly changes shape from one vowel to the next. The “i” vowel should never be “spread” with lots of upper teeth showing anymore than the “o” vowel should not have upper lip covering all the upper teeth. A gentle, relaxing exercise with loose jaw. Do not insert any “y” or “w” between the vowels. Chewing exercise like #10.

**28. Range. Flexibility. Connection and even tone.** Like #27 with added range and speed. The dynamic change is quite subtle, but there is definitely a curved phrase shape. Be sure to begin lightly so that there is no difference in tone from the lower notes to the higher notes. End lightly as well. Never think you are going higher with the phrase, rather you are going out with the phrase.

**29. Range. Flexibility. Looseness of jaw. Articulation.** This exercises “works” when each tone fits into the speed of the vibrato. There should be no “h” inserted between any of the vowels. By the same token, there should be no sliding tones. If unable to articulate, sing a “b” before each vowel. If still unable to sing with proper articulation and even tone, sing with a consonant and vowel before each tone (eliminating the melisma.). Then try as written again. Begin lightly and cleanly with gradual crescendo to high tones and gradual decrescendo on the descent. Advanced exercise.

**30. Looseness of jaw. Intonation. Even tone.** Similar to #9 and #27. Gently emphasize repeated tone. Let jaw establish gradually increasing space. Do not manufacture vowels – just think them and let the tongue to the work. Slight crescendo to phrase.

**31. Lightness and even tone. Clarity.** The “zi” of the exercise is not meant to be full-bodied or pretty in sound. It is using the top part of the tone. As such, you can sing the phrase into the higher keys. Much like #3. Wonderful for the heavy voice.

**32. Coloratura. “Rossini exercise.”** For the advanced voice. Make sure you are warmed up before singing this phrase. Has an operatic sensibility, i.e. one must incorporate flexibility, lightness, clarity and a full-bodied sound to be effective.

**33. Singing with text. Purity of Vowel.** A good exercise at the end of your vocalizing session. Now you are ready to sing with text. Are the vowels pure? Are the consonants quick and sharp? Can you sing with legato and still be understood? Mid-range exercise.

