

Teacher Vocal Health Workshop

SD71 Pro-D and District Fine Arts August 27, 2025

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- 1. How the voice works:** This video describes where the voice dwells in your body, how your voice works, and how ENTs, Laryngologists and skilled speech-language pathologists look at the vocal folds. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLgAQTmgZ6g>
- 2. Conditioning your body for your best vocal performance.**
 - A healthy voice lives in a healthy body. Eat, sleep, meditate, exercise, stretch and hydrate!
 - Maintain an upright posture with an open airway. Avoid working and speaking while hunched or bent over or while twisting your neck.
 - Do not allow hot, dry air (especially chemicals) to pass over the vocal tissues.
 - Dry throats can be soothed by sucking on hard, non-menthol candies or savouring mouth-watering fruits and vegetables like grapes, melon bites, cucumber or berries.
 - Do not suck on menthol cough or throat lozenges. Menthol is an irritant and can contribute to laryngeal irritation and coughing.
 - Be aware of reflux: manage reflux events and symptoms through diet, behaviour and medication.
 - Warm it up and cool it down. Any of the exercises in this handout can be done on the way to or from school or during a break. Mini-breaks can reset your voice before your next class.
 - Notice changes in your voice: hoarseness, chronic vocal fatigue and increased vocal effort are not normal. Voice exercises and vocal hygiene along with supports such as amplification, taking a good look at your commitments, pacing your vocal load, and addressing stress can eliminate patterns of vocal fatigue and voice loss.
 - **Seek an evaluation from an Otolaryngologist (ENT) or qualified Speech-Language Pathologist if your voice changes/problems persist for more than two weeks unrelated to an illness, or if a cough persists more than eight weeks unrelated to an illness.**
- 3. How to produce a strong, clear and effortless voice**

Remember that your voice is a full body affair but the main components are:

 - Respiration → Be Strong (i.e., Breath support)
 - Resonance → Be Clear (i.e., Shaping and toning of the sound in the spaces and tissues above the vocal folds, your face, bones, sinus, etc.)
 - Phonation → Be Easy (i.e., vocal fold vibration)
 - Articulation → Be Concise (i.e., Shape that air with good enunciation; you'll repeat yourself less)

Respiration: Breathing to calm your body and support your voice

- a. Calm:** Nasal inhalation 4 seconds; pursed lips exhalation for 8 seconds. Repeat 5x each hour starting early in the day. Start in bed with your hand on your abdomen. Count it out on your steering wheel/bike handles on your drive, or on your legs on your bus ride or walk into work. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/the-athletes-way/201905/longer-exhalations-are-easy-way-hack-your-vagus-nerve>
- b. Rib Cage:** Notice that your breath expands your lower ribcage vs. the upper chest/shoulders.
- c. Recoil:** Take a deep breath in then exhale with /f/ for as long as you can; Pause, relax your abdomen – allow breath in; Count to 50 – recoil breath when need to or want to – just let it happen.

Pause frequently to recharge your breath when you are speaking to avoid strain, breathlessness, and a creaky, tired voice. Pausing benefits those around you by allowing for comprehension time and opportunities to ask questions.

Resonance: Be clear by shaping and toning the sound in the spaces and tissues above the vocal folds.

- a. Lips/Nose/Face:** Check in with your voice: Where is the energy focused → throat, lips or face? Cup your hand over your mouth and nose and speak into your hands. Allow your jaw and throat to relax. Does your voice feel more forward? Use the agreeing sound 'Mmm Hmm' throughout the day to reset the placement of your voice.
- b. Tongue:** Remember that 2/3 of the vocal tract is tongue and that a tight tongue can put strain on the larynx. Stretch your tongue throughout the day using the 'tongue cheek circles', 'tongue chew', or the 'tongue roll out/bulge'. Then rest your tongue at the bottom of your mouth. Can't do it? Then...
- c. Jaw:** Drop your jaw. When you relax your jaw you open up space for your clear voice.

Phonation: Be easy and balance that vocal fold vibrations

- a. Why** we do these exercises? <https://www.voicescienceworks.org/straw-phonation.html>
- b. How** do you do Semi-Occluded Vocal Tract (SOVT) Exercises? Here are some examples for people with healthy voices that need a lift.

SOVT

Place your lips in a soft but complete seal around the straw.

Make a gentle 'oo' sound as if you are an owl, keeping the back of your mouth and throat open.

- Hold it steady.
- Slowly raise the pitch and lower the pitch on a glide.
- Rev the loudness using your abdominal muscles vs. your throat.
- Sing through the straw.

These can also be done into a cup of water, or prop-free with a lip bubble, tongue trill, zzz, mmm, vvv, ZHH (as in beige). Do them in a house, in a car, here or there...you can do them, while, you know.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FStqHThEY9M>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xYDvwvmBIM>

4. Strategies to support your voice throughout the day

a. Mini Voice Breaks (MOSS)

- **MOVE** SOVT exercises such as trills, bubbles, humming, zzz, mmm, vvv, etc., move your whole body, stack your domes (ears over shoulders over hips at the very least)
- **OPEN** your throat (spaghetti sip, 15-year-old in poetry class, yawn/sigh, suppress a giggle)
- **STRETCH** your whole body, your tongue (tongue roll out/bulge, tongue circles, tongue chew), your lips (pucker/smile), your neck (HOT Lips, side-to-side), open your shoulders and stand tall.
- **STOP!** Give yourself a short voice break! Even 5-10 seconds can help. Need longer? Use more text or media to support voice. **But don't stop using your voice completely!!**

b. Non-compete clause: assess noise sources

- close a window
- move away from a fan
- shut doors or block spaces that transmit sound outside
- do not speak over others, whether it is talking or the movement of chairs and belongings

5. Amplification systems to decrease vocal effort. Amplification supports voice use at normal loudness with occasional increases for emphasis. Loud voice use produces larger collision forces between the vocal folds which takes more effort, and can lead to inflammation and fatigue over time. Microphones should be placed within ¼ inch of the mouth.

6. Healthy Voices Live in Healthy Bodies

You are a vocal athlete! That means getting plenty of sleep, eating a healthy diet, and getting daily exercise.

Instagram accounts

@hitomburke

@surreyvoice

@cqvoice

@voicestraw (Mindy Pack)

@ckbvoice

@vocologyireland

@bettervoice.co

@thevocallabpodcast

So many-check @victoriavoiceswallowclinic to see who we're liking and following.

Feel free to get in touch if you have any questions about your vocal health. Thank you!

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