



**Fun Exercises to Build Skill**

**voice**coaches

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# VOCAL HEALTH... IT'S THAT IMPORTANT!

As a voice actor, your voice is everything. It's your resume, your livelihood, and your "tool of the trade." And while there are certainly many other important parts to building success as a voice actor, from skill-building and industry knowledge to job preparedness and effective self-marketing, in the end, it all begins with your voice. Your voice is what makes you YOU - and as a voice professional, it's your job to take care of it.

Every profession requires its own set of tools to get the job done. A carpenter needs saws, screwdrivers, and good-quality building materials. A good pizza maker starts with a kitchen full of fresh

ingredients and a working pizza oven. As a voice actor, your tool is your voice - and your ability to do your job depends on how well you take care of it. And unlike many other professions, your voice is not only the primary tool you use to do your job - it's also how you get that job in the first place!

In the case of most jobs, you might send in an application or a copy of your resume to be considered. From there, you might complete an interview, or in the case of film and television, a series of auditions for a specific role. Voice acting is different - the hiring process begins and ends with your voice. In the case of many voice over jobs, you'll be considered for work based on your voice over demo. Your demo contains a sample of your voice performing several different types of voice over content. Voice over professionals use demos to get a gauge of an individual's unique voice personality and strength range. They then consider whether that individual's voice is the best voice for their project.

Your voice over demo is your resume, and you're being hired based on what that demo sounds like. When the day of your session comes around, the expectation is that you'll be able to consistently deliver the level of performance your demo indicated. And that means that you need to take deliberate steps to make sure that when the time comes, you can satisfy those expectations.

A carpenter sharpens their tools. A pizza maker gets fresh

ingredients and cleans their oven. As a voice actor, you have your own responsibility - to develop good vocal health routines so that your voice is there for you whenever you need it.

## WHY WARM UP?

The good news is, vocal health isn't a mystery. By developing a few simple habits, you can help ensure your voice is in top working order no matter the circumstances. And that's where warm-ups come in.

Your voice is a finely-tuned system made up of muscles and body parts that work together to take air from your lungs and transform it into comprehensible speech. Simply put, warm-ups are exercises that help to "wake up" this system of muscles and organs. Think of this the same way you would stretching and loosening up your muscles before exercise. You would probably be nervous if you saw a professional athlete break into a sprinting race before doing a single stretch first, right? Without the proper preparation, they might not be able to perform their best - or worse, they might even injure themselves.

As a voice actor, one of the main ways you can prevent injury and make sure your voice is ready for every performance opportunity is to develop a warm-up routine. We're not talking about devoting hours and hours to warm-ups here - a few minutes and a simple,

consistent routine will do the trick. There are many ways to warm up your voice, and if you asked a hundred different voice professionals about their preferred warm-up routines, you'd probably get a hundred different answers. The important thing here is that you pick a routine that works for you and stick with it. Consistency is key!

## BENEFITS OF WARM-UPS



### VOCAL HEALTH

Warm-ups are your way of waking up your voice, easing your muscles into “performance mode,” and making sure that your vocal system is functioning comfortably and effectively.

Your voice is made up of a complicated system of muscles and organs that need to be able to work together in order to produce consistent voice. By warming up, you're giving those components a chance to reacquaint themselves with each other. Warming up stimulates blood flow and promotes flexibility. It also helps to lessen muscle tension and remove excess mucous that might block your voice from working its best.





## SKILL-BUILDING

Warming up can also be a great opportunity to devote some time to skill-building exercises. You're already committing to a few minutes of voice work... why not use it as an opportunity to practice your cold-reading

skills or work on your articulation? The tongue twisters at the end of this book are a great example of exercises that will not only help to warm up your voice, but also increase your confidence with important voice acting skills like reading accuracy, articulation, and performance.



## HELP WITH NERVES

Beyond the physical benefits, warming up can also help you mentally prepare yourself for a

recording session. Using your voice deliberately and consistently is a great way to get your head in the game before a session starts. And beyond that, by taking the time

to make sure you're giving yourself the best chance of a good performance, you can fight any pre-session jitters you might have with the knowledge that you're being proactive. You're taking the time to prepare, and with that preparation comes the reassurance that you're doing everything you can to offer your best self to the client - a fact they'll appreciate as much as you do.

## BODY, BREATH, VOICE

Warm-ups are important because they can help you to prepare for a session in a multitude of ways. When we're talking about warm-ups, it's helpful to think about them in terms of three focus areas: the body, the breath, and the voice. A good warm-up routine stretches and stimulates these three focus areas in a balanced, systematic way, ensuring that every part of your vocal system is warm, flexible, and ready to perform at its best.



### THE BODY

First thing's first: loosen up! Your vocal system isn't just about your lungs and vocal chords; there's also a whole network of muscles,



ligaments, and tendons that help to produce voice and shape sound. Stretching these muscles ensures that your vocal system is adequately warmed up and supported. Not to mention, during a recording session you might want to gesticulate with your arms and body in order to settle into a more natural, conversational reading style - and you wouldn't want to pull anything! Here are a few quick exercises to help you loosen up your body and wake up your muscles. **Please note: you should never attempt or continue any warm up (or any vocal behavior) that causes discomfort.**



**Neck and Shoulder Rolls** - Go ahead, give yourself a quick stretch! Rolling your neck and shoulders can help to loosen up your neck, throat, and shoulder muscles, which in turn will help your voice to be more relaxed and ready to read. Again, care should be taken to avoid any movement that causes discomfort.



**Face Massage** - This one might sound a little odd, but give your face a little massage. In gentle circular motions, massage your cheeks, forehead, and jawline, as well as the muscles in your neck. You can also try scrunching up your face, holding it for a few seconds, and then relaxing. Doing so will help to loosen up your delicate facial muscles,

which do a lot of work shaping the air from your lungs into articulated speech.



**Tongue Stretches** - Stick out your tongue!

This one is not only helpful, but might even get a few laughs out of your friends or family members if they're around. The tongue is part of a system of muscles and organs called the "articulators," named for their role shaping air from your lungs and articulating speech. By waking up the tongue, you're helping to make sure your articulators are getting good blood flow and ready to work.



**Fake Yawning** - Pretend you just woke up (maybe you don't even have to pretend!) and try to fake the biggest yawn you can.

Make a yawning noise and open your mouth wide. If you're feeling it, try stretching your arms and shoulders as well. Yawning like this opens up your throat and helps your voice to resonate more deeply.



**Smiling** - Similar to yawning, smiling helps to loosen up the muscles in your face and ready them for action. Beyond the

physical stretching benefits, there's also some psychological research to support the idea that making yourself smile can actually trick your brain into feeling happier. The physical act

of smiling causes a chemical reaction in the brain, releasing certain hormones including dopamine and serotonin. These hormones can help to increase feelings of happiness and reduce feelings of stress - a great exercise for mentally preparing for a recording session, or just going into the day with a little more energy!



## THE BREATH

The next part of your vocal warm-up routine should focus on your breathing. After all, the first step toward forming speech is getting air! When you breathe in, a large muscle in your abdomen called the diaphragm moves

downward, pulling air into your lungs and then pushing it out through your mouth and nose when you breathe out. In order to produce consistent speech, your body needs to be able to breathe consistently and evenly. Here are a couple exercises that focus on breathing. **Again, you should never attempt or continue any warm up (or any vocal behavior) that causes discomfort.**



**Breathe Deeply** - It's as simple as that: take a few slow, deep breaths. Make sure your body is in a comfortable position. If possible, stand up while performing this exercise. With your back straight and your shoulders and chest relaxed, slowly breathe in through your mouth for a few seconds. Think consciously about bringing the air you're breathing down into your abdomen, deep into your diaphragm. You may find it helpful to place a hand on your stomach; if you're breathing correctly, you'll feel your hand move out as your stomach expands outward with a deep inhale. After you've taken a deep inhale, slowly exhale for a few seconds. If you'd like, you can make a hissing "sss" sound as you exhale for added breath support practice. Repeat this cycle several times, breathing in and out and focusing on keeping your breath even and consistent.



**Lip Trills** - Try to make the "B" sound while keeping your mouth closed. Your lips vibrate quickly to make a buzzing sound. If it helps, you can use your index fingers to push your cheeks upwards at the corners of your mouth to help you produce this sound. This is a great way to practice maintaining strong breath support. See how long you can support a sustained lip trill - and don't worry, this gets easier with practice! As you

improve, you can also experiment with adding sound to your lip trills by trilling along to a conversation or a melody. With regular practice, you'll notice an improvement in your breath support and vocal stamina.



## THE VOICE

The third and final area of focus for a good warm-up routine is, of course, your voice! Now that you've got your blood flowing and your

breath has been deepened and supported, it's time to wake up your speech articulators. The next few exercises will do just that, leaving you warmed-up and ready for anything a recording session throws your way!



**Humming** - Humming is a great way to loosen your muscles and wake up your voice gently. Humming helps to get your resonators going, which can really help to restore vocal tone quality, especially when you're waking up after a night's sleep. For continued practice, you can try humming along to a song, a conversation, or even a piece of copy.



**Vowel Practice** - Remember “A, E, I, O, U, and sometimes Y”? Vowels are a huge part of speech, and in order to deliver a voice over that’s conversational and persuasive, you’ve got to make sure your voice is ready to produce clear vowel sounds. Try preparing for this by chanting your vowels, holding each syllable out for a few moments. As you’re doing this, your “A” sound should become “Ahhhh” as in the word “are,” your “E” sound should be “Eeeeeee” as in “easy,” “I” should be “Iiiiiii” as in “eye,” “O” should be “Ohhhhhh” as in “woah,” and your “U” sound should be “Oooooo” as in the word “you.” Try to transition from one vowel sound to the next as smoothly as possible. By cycling through these vowels, you’re practicing using the muscles in your neck, mouth, face, and nasal cavity to produce vocal tone with greater clarity, consistency, and articulation.



**Copy Reading** - While you’re warming up your voice, you might as well take the opportunity to warm up your brain as well! Find a piece of copy you have lying around - it could be anything from a newspaper or magazine article to a segment of an online news story on your phone or computer - and try to cold-read it, focusing on delivering the copy with as few mistakes as possible. Doing this will not only help with

your vocal clarity and articulation, but it will also improve your cold-reading skills. As a voice actor, it's rare to receive the copy you'll be reading prior to a recording session... so when it comes to voice acting, the ability to cold-read is incredibly important. The tongue twisters in the next section of this book are a great resource for both warming up your voice and honing your cold-reading skills.

## TONGUE TWISTERS

*“Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers”*... remember those patterns of words and phrases you used to tie your tongue into knots when you were a kid? Well, as it turns out, tongue twisters are more than just silly and amusing - they also provide many great benefits for vocal clarity, diction, and the strengthening of the muscles that produce speech. Because of this, they're also a great way to warm up your voice before a recording session! And besides that, they're just plain fun.

We've collected a few of our favorite tongue twisters below, starting with shorter phrases and working up to some more challenging examples. Begin by reading the tongue twister slowly, and then try to increase your speed. Once you can say a tongue twister through correctly, try repeating it two or three times in a row for an even bigger challenge. And most importantly, remember to breathe and don't forget to have fun... laughter encouraged!



## SHORT TONGUE TWISTERS

Just starting out? Here are a few short tongue twisters to get you going. Once you can say one correctly, try repeating it a few times in a row for an added challenge!

**Six sticky skeletons**

**Eleven benevolent elephants**

**She sees cheese.**

**Red lorry, yellow lorry.**

**Which witch is which?**

**Rubber baby buggy bumpers**

**Fresh fried fish**

**Willie's really weary.**

**Eddie edited it.**

**Specific Pacific**

**Three free throws**

**Blue bluebird**

**Flash message**

**Truly rural**

**Thin sticks, thick bricks.**

**Six Czech cricket critics**

**So, this is the sushi chef.**

**Pre-shrunk silk shirts**

## **SENTENCE TWISTERS**

Now that you've had more practice, here are a few sentence-long tongue twisters for some added difficulty. With consistent effort, these are a great way to help increase speech clarity and encourage precise enunciation.

**Six sleek swans swam swiftly southwards.**

**Scissors sizzle, thistles sizzle.**

**A happy hippo hopped and hiccupped.**

**Cooks cook cupcakes quickly.**

**Really leery, rarely Larry.**

**Near an ear, a nearer ear, a nearly eerie ear.**

**A snake sneaks to seek a snack.**

**Fred fed Ted bread and Ted fed Fred bread.**

**Green glass globes glow greenly.**

**Round and round the rugged rocks the ragged  
rascal ran.**

**I saw a kitten eating chicken in the kitchen.**

**Lucky rabbits like to cause a ruckus.**

**Lesser leather never weathered wetter weather  
better.**

**Six sick hicks nick six slick bricks with picks  
and sticks.**

**Send toast to ten tense stout saints' ten tall  
tents.**

**A skunk sat on a stump and thunk the stump  
stunk, but the stump thunk the skunk stunk.**

**Rory the warrior and Roger the worrier were  
reared wrongly in a rural brewery.**



## **UP FOR A CHALLENGE?**

**These tongue twisters are seriously silly and also extremely challenging. Once you've gotten the hang of one of these, try to teach it to a friend! Caution: may cause extreme laughter.**

**If you must cross a coarse cross cow across a crowded cow crossing,**

**Cross the cross coarse cow across the crowded cow crossing carefully.**

**Brisk brave brigadiers brandished broad bright blades, blunderbusses, and bludgeons - balancing them badly.**

**Imagine an imaginary menagerie manager managing an imaginary menagerie.**

**I wish to wish the wish you wish to wish, but if  
you wish the wish the witch wishes, I won't wish  
the wish you wish to wish.**

**Can you can a canned can into an uncanned  
can like a canner can can a canned can into an  
uncanned can?**

**Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,  
A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked.  
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,  
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper  
picked?**

**How much wood could a woodchuck chuck**

**If a woodchuck could chuck wood?**

**A woodchuck could chuck all he could**

**If a woodchuck could chuck wood.**

**Betty Botter bought some butter,**

**But, said she, “The butter’s bitter.”**

**“If I put it in my batter, it will make my batter bitter.”**

**“But a bit of better butter will make my bitter batter better.”**

**So she bought some better butter, better than the bitter butter,**

**Put it in her bitter batter, made her bitter batter better.**

**So ‘twas better Betty Botter bought some better butter.**

**She sells seashells on the seashore.**

**The shells she sells are seashells, I'm sure.**

**And if she sells seashells on the seashore,**

**Then I'm sure she sells seashore shells.**

**Yellow butter, purple jelly, red jam, black bread.**

**Spread it thick, say it quick!**

**Yellow butter, purple jelly, red jam, black bread.**

**Spread it thicker, say it quicker!**

**Yellow butter, purple jelly, red jam, black bread.**

**Don't eat with your mouth full!**

**Bobby Bippy bought a bat.**

**Bobby Bippy bought a ball.**

**With his bat, Bob banged the ball.**

**Banged it bump against the wall.**

**But so boldly Bobby banged it.**

**Then he burst his rubber ball.**

**“Boo!” cried Bobby. Bad luck ball!**

**Bad luck Bobby, bad luck ball.**

**Now to drown his many troubles,**

**Bobby Bippy’s blowing bubbles.**

**Through three cheese trees, three free fleas flew.**

**While these fleas flew, freezy breeze blew.**

**Freezy breeze made these three trees freeze.**

**Freezy trees made these trees’ cheese freeze.**

**That’s what made these three free fleas sneeze.**

## COOL-DOWNS

By now, you likely have a better understanding of why warming up your voice is so important, as well as some quick and easy ideas to put toward building and executing an effective warm-up routine that you can commit to. The purpose of warm-ups are to help you gradually stretch your voice from its neutral setting (how it acts on a baseline level) to your performance posture (how you need your voice to act in order to perform at a high level). When your voice is working within its performance posture, you're able to utilize its full spectrum of energy, emotion, and range - allowing you to deliver the best possible voice over product.

But what happens when the session is over, you've done your job well, and it's time to go home? You're off the clock, right?

Wrong! Taking care of your voice involves more than just warming up. While warming up is certainly a big step toward implementing an effective vocal health routine, there are still plenty of other things you can do to help take care of your voice, from hydration to proper rest and avoidance of vocal abuse behavior. Vocal hygiene is a process that never really stops, and as a voice professional, there are plenty of ways you can continue to learn more about your voice and how to protect it so that it can serve you for years to come.

One quick way you can build on your vocal health routine is by incorporating not just warm-ups, but also “cool-downs.” Like their name suggests, “cool-downs” are basically the opposite of warm-ups. While warming up is meant to bring your voice from neutral up to a level where you’re performance-ready, cool-downs are designed for the opposite: to bring your voice from performance posture back down to a more neutral level. Think of it like this: when you’re voice acting, you’re performing vocally at a very high energy level, and your voice is working very hard. You don’t want to walk out of the vocal booth when the session is over and continue to speak as if you’re still voice acting! That would be a huge waste of vocal energy, and after a while, it might even cause fatigue or stress to your vocal system.

Luckily, by bookending your session with a few quick cool-down exercises, you can help to bring your voice back down to an everyday speaking level and avoid potential strain or fatigue. When thinking about effective cool-downs, it’s helpful to remember the three R’s: *Relax, Recover, and Reflect.*



## RELAX

During a voice acting session, you’re using your vocal system in a way that is challenging and energy-intensive - and after the



session is over, it's important to give your voice time to relax. To do this, you might find it helpful to try some of the same techniques you used to warm up, like lip trills, shoulder rolls, body stretches, jaw loosening exercises, and deep breathing. Gently stretching your vocal muscles will help them to relax and keep things from tightening up.



## RECOVER

Another important part of cooling down is giving your voice time to rest. By resting your voice after you've exerted it, you're doing more than just allowing your muscles to recover - you're also setting up your

vocal system for your next session. Important parts of vocal recovery include getting proper sleep, drinking plenty of water and fluids, and avoiding vocal abuse behavior like yelling or talking too loudly during the time period directly after a recording session.



## REFLECT

Finally, many voice actors find it helpful to use their cool-down routine to reflect. As you're cooling down your voice, you might take a few moments to think about how your session went, what you liked the most about it, and

what you think you might be able to work on for next time. We're not just talking about your voice, either; reflecting on all parts of the process can be a great way to continue to improve as a professional in the voice acting industry. How did you feel about your performance? Were there parts of the process that you came away from the session particularly excited about? Are there any skills you feel you could improve on to make your next recording session even better? In between lip trills and shoulder stretches, take the time to make mental notes of these thoughts. You might even consider jotting them down in a journal for future reference.

By developing a vocal health routine that works for you, you're making an investment in your voice, your goals, and your future. Taking the time to learn about vocal health will pay big dividends down the line, because with consistent care, you'll be able to

count on your instrument for years and years to come. And when you take care of your voice, your voice can take care of you!

**As you continue to learn more about the field of voice over, we invite you to check back on our website [voicecoaches.com](http://voicecoaches.com) for regular updates. For the past ten years, we've published Voice Coaches Radio, a free podcast about all things voice over, also accessible via our website. In addition, we offer regular introductory seminars for individuals interested in pursuing the voice over field.**