

# **Vocal Technique Training for Choir Members**

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# Vocal Technique

## Training for Choir Members

### Resources:

Chipman, Betty Jeanne. *Singing with Mind, Body, and Soul: A Practical Guide for Singers and Teachers of Singing*. Tucson: Wheatmark, 2008. Print.

"Connect." *NAfME Music Education*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 July 2013.

Cooksey, John Marion. *Working with Adolescent Voices*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1999. Print.

Heirich, Jane Ruby., Jaye Schlesinger, and Joan Morris. *Voice and the Alexander Technique: Active Exploration for Speaking and Singing*. Berkeley, CA: Mornum Time, 2005. Print.

McKinney, James C. *The Diagnosis & Correction of Vocal Faults*. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1982. Print.

Miller, Richard. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer, 1986. Print.

Stultz, Marie. *Innocent Sounds: Building Choral Tone and Artistry in Your Children's Choir*. Fenton, MO: MorningStar Music, 2007. Print.

Thurman, Leon., Welch, Graham. *Bodymind and Voice: Foundations of Voice Education*. Minneapolis: Voice Care Network, 1999, n.d. Print.

"VoiceCare Network." *VoiceCare Network*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 July 2013. (Graduate level St. John's course: Bodymind and Voice)

### Many thanks to:

- **Dr. Jerry Doan.** Professor of Vocal Performance/Pedagogy, ASU Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, School of Music, Tempe AZ. (Graduate level ASU course: Vocal Anatomy and Physiology)
- **Amy Perciballi.** Mezzo-soprano, Voice Teacher and Advisor, Singer in The Phoenix Chorale, Phoenix AZ.

# Vocal Warm-ups

- Develop voices. From: Jeffery Bauman
- See and hear them; turn into teachable concepts
- Use warm-ups to address issues.
- Take time to explain and label; reinforce and refine.
- Model efficient and inefficient. Students model for each other.
- Teach singing and refine vocal technique, opening choir to greater lit, expression, and experience.
- Explain standards.

## **Goal:**

**Send each student  
to the next choral experience  
a better singer with  
more understanding of voice –  
its limits, its full potential.**

# Warm-ups = group voice lessons

Teach singing.

Choose **1 concept** each class.

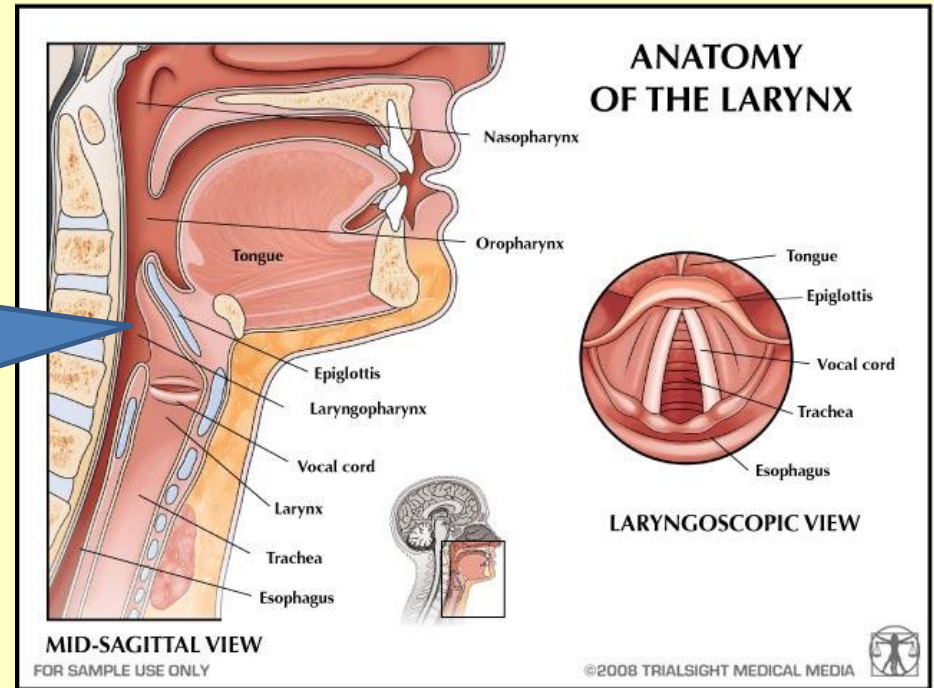
- Warm-ups:
  - Body: alignment, energized readiness
  - Release tension: body, shoulders, neck, head, tongue, jaw
  - Efficient breathing: for air and shape throat
  - Range: explain registers, safely extend range
  - Teach, reinforce, and refine vocal technique.
  - Singing across all registers: slow & sustained; rapid patterns, intervals, loud/quiet
  - Vowel and consonant shaping

# Thumbnail of Voice Anatomy / Function

- Internal muscle groups of Larynx

- Closers back and sides
- Openers back
- Lengtheners front
- Shorteners sides

Talk about structures; show video.



- Vocal cords

- Thicker / Thinner

- Breath

- In: diaphragm et al.
- Out: abs et al.

(Video)

- External muscle groups

- Neck, under chin raise/lower stabilize larynx

Can support or interfere during singing.

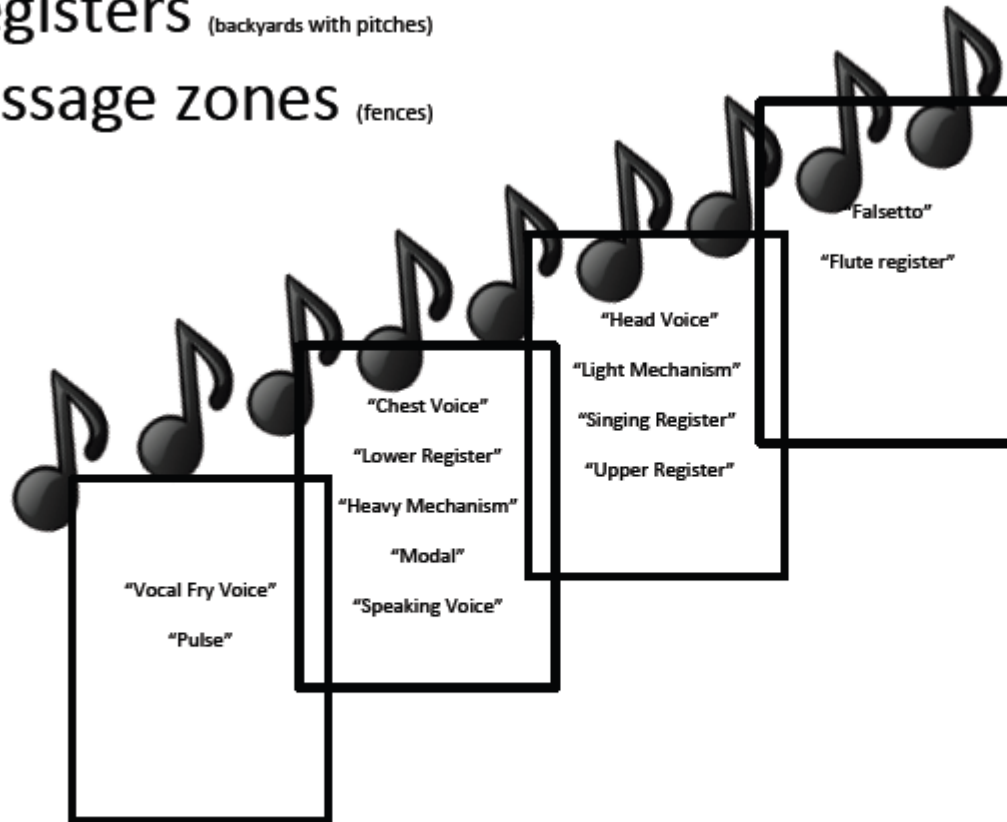
- Lubrication of cords.

# Vocal Registers and Range

Registers (backyards with pitches)

Passage zones (fences)

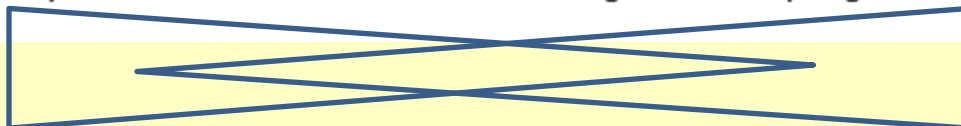
**NOTE:**  
High/Low  
is a human  
construct



Outline from:  
VoiceCare  
Network

Mix

Only shorteners    More shorteners    More lengtheners    Only lengtheners



# Refine Vocal Technique

## Extending a voice full range safely

Students explore areas with kinesthetic feeling and sympathetic vibrations or lack. and then verbalize.

Extend range: Why this order?

1. Chest voice — A3 to D4 up to E4 or F4
2. Higher head voice — D5 or C5 down to A4 gross-motor coordination
3. Middle range. — D4 to B4 more fine-motor coordination / building new neural network
4. Highest register only when ready. — D5 on up to A5

Use: **NG** w/ released, dropped jaw & loose jaw; lip buzzes in sirens; rolled r's; straws; even speak phrases in higher range. Release jaw, tongue, neck tension. Thins vocal cords; little tension of external muscles of larynx.

Use caution here! Why?

# What Am I?

## Voice Classification

- Assume medium first.
- Don't be in a hurry! Voice not fully developed till age 25/28. Everyone develops differently.
- 1<sup>st</sup>: vocal freedom in limited range. It is critical to start here!
- “Vocal longevity bears direct relationship to vocal comfort.” - McKinney
- Students misclassify themselves, adopt inappropriate vocal image. Result: develop vocal faults / habits / difficulties down the road.
- Hold frequent voice check-ins



# Use Pitch, Vowel, and Dynamics to Strengthen the Voice

## VERTICAL

Created by  
Dr. Jerry Doan  
ASU  
School of Music

	Lengthener muscles	Shortener muscles	Closer muscles
pitch	Use higher pitches	Lower pitches	higher sounds require more adduction
dynamics	Use softer sounds	Louder sounds	louder sounds require more adduction
Vowels Consonants	<u>h</u> oot and <u>n</u> ote Ke <u>en</u> V TH, Hum	<u>h</u> ey, <u>f</u> ather, <u>w</u> et <u>a</u> t	bright or open vowels Require more adduction

For discussion of  
*pilot consonants*  
see Miller.

# Use Pitch, Vowel, and Dynamics to Coordinate the Voice

## HORIZONTAL

Created by  
Dr. Jerry Doan  
ASU  
School of Music

	Lengthener muscles	Shortener muscles	Closer muscles
pitch	Use higher pitches	Lower pitches	higher sounds require more adduction
dynamics	Use softer sounds	Louder sounds	louder sounds require more adduction
vowels	<u>h</u> oot and <u>n</u> ote <u>ke</u> n	<u>h</u> ey, <u>f</u> ather, <u>ke</u> n <u>w</u> et <u>a</u> t	Bright or open vowels Require more adduction

Singing a song is one large coordinating experience. Sing songs and notice  
What students need.

# The Child's Mind

- Children: natural copy cats w/ preconceived ideas of singing from models and immature thinking. Your model? Their Models? Who do they listen to?
- All children MUST misunderstand and miss-attempt new ideas and skills. Expect it; plan for it. Critical part of learning. Target practice: “let’s refine this.”
- Muscle/neural network - VERY strong memory. To make change:
  - Stop, notice, explore.
  - Experience choices & explore them, self-correct.
  - Practice new choices to habituate.
  - Takes time! Give it time.
  - **(Group process with extending range?)**

# Differentiation

- You cannot teach alone.
- Students bear responsibility too!
- Teach, label, model, and guide them in self-awareness.

**Singing is: choices, subtle changes.  
Students CAN learn their own voices.**

- Process:
  1. Teach, label, and model.
  2. Work: extremes, opposites, and possibilities
  3. Students: notice – feel and hear – and recognize what is happening.

4. Experiment with changes, feel and hear again.

5. Give visual and aural feedback.

– Each child must discover own way.

– Students then talk.

i.e. pair share to cement it in body-mind

**They will all be different. Don't assume all students will physically feel what you feel and hear what you hear.**

No body-mind is the same

- Partners monitor each other. Give feedback.
- Small groups or sections sing  
**Students' sounds and habits will be hidden!**  
**Must hear themselves sing alone and/or**  
**in small groups**
- Others watch, listen, share observations.
- All are learning! Teach respect.

- All students:
  - Different places
  - Progress at different rates
  - Reach standards at different times
  - May not achieve until next teacher

But...

- You laid foundation.
- Gave training
- Modeled and explained
- Helped individuals become aware and discover
- Trust process

Note: How long does it take me?

Once-a-week class, at least 6 months.

Give them time, and give yourself time.

# Healthy speaking/singing for a lifetime

- Voice is delicate instrument
- Good speaking leads to good singing. They are one and the same.
- Must be protected and supervised carefully.
- **Choose music appropriate for students.**
- Musically and vocally, where are they **really**?
- **YOU** must take care of their voices.

## **DO NO HARM!**

- No extreme volume or pitch.
- No singing:
  - too high for too long
  - too low for too long
  - too loud for too long



# Healthy voices for a lifetime.

- Limit extended rehearsal singing.
- Vocal muscles **must** have rest!
- Humans must have fluids!
- Consider limiting choirs students participate in.
- Do not sing if sick.
- Train students to recognize own symptoms.
- Hoarseness = swollen tissues. Drink fluids; be quiet; re-examine behavior pattern.

**With care, humans can sing well into their 80's.**

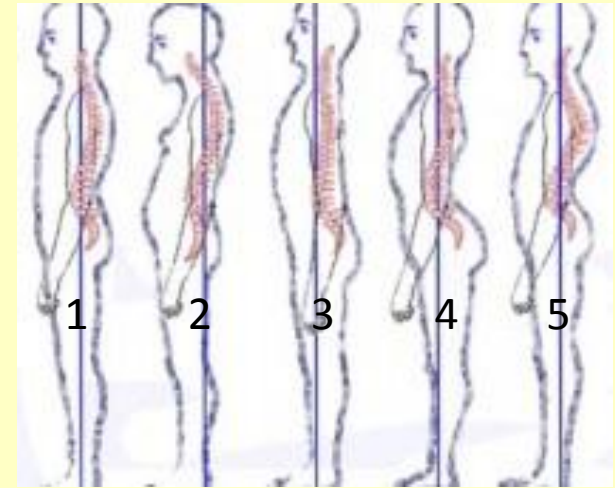
**DO NO HARM!**

# Refine Vocal Technique

## BODY ALIGNMENT SUPPORTS SINGING:

Imaging vertical line through center, not back bone

Your words matter!



1. Floating, buoyant, aligned  
lightness, easy alertness

2. Arms straight above head

Bobble head feel; slowly release  
arms. Think: head back, up.

Show off gold-star stickers.

3. Ease. Lie on floor on your back. Experience flexibility.

4. Lift and float.

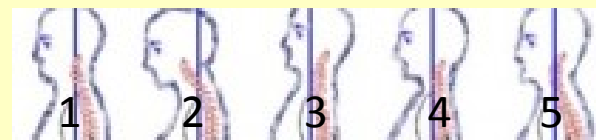
5. Lift and forward. Open shutters. Smell fresh air.

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Neck and head alignment supports singing

1. Back of neck long; front, short.

Head as balloon



2 Head too heavy!

Find lifted place with  
ears over shoulders.

Up, back. Ball/scarf larynx suspended from skull

3. Release. Add movement.

Experiment with opposites.

4. Floating, tiptoeing.

5. Turtle. Up, forward. Walk and sing – high swan  
arms. hands down. Tall and relaxed.

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Release tension in:

**Shoulders** – back and comfortably down. Lie down

**Neck** – balanced place

**Head** – balanced place

**Tongue** – wide and flat; laying on lower jaw.

Touch bottom front teeth.

**Jaw** – swinging hinge; down and comfortably back

Marshmallows between back molars. Lie down

“Duh” “Kah Kah” Puppet jaw.

Tongue glued to lower jaw.

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Efficient Breath: Air for Singing

Experience: (inhale, suspend, managed slow exhale, silent renewal)

1. On hands and knees. **Large** breaths.

Notice movement.

2. Breath in: allow bellybutton release to floor.

3. Suspend: throat open = wide, open tube Quiet "s"

3. Breath out: bellybutton back toward spine. Slow

4. Partner work: hand-over-hand, upper tummy.

Breathe in – hands out. Breathe out – hands in.

5. Bellows. Focus on expanding waist! Lie down, book on epigastrium area.

6. ~~Catch breath~~ = renewal: jaw, direct air deep

7. Shoulder movement? Work with partner and hands.

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Efficient Breath: Spaces for Singing

Experience:

1. “Silent breath” shapes throat – release jaw 1<sup>st</sup>.  
2<sup>nd</sup> fog window. (Ah, U or OH)
  2. Open throat, allow bellybutton to come out; air will automatically come in silently!
  3. Ghost sound allowing tongue, throat, mouth to remain, draw belly button toward back.
- Breathe in vowel before singing. Especially renewals
  - No need to change anything for singing. Just sing.
  - All students at different developmental place here!

Many will have uneven air flow.

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Breathy sound 1

- Too much air out at once while vocal cords not closed

Suggest:

- leaky tire: F, SH, or S, quiet sounds. “slow air down; don’t let it all out at once.” **ALMOST** blow bubbles. Developmental skill! Don’t let them tense throat / jaw / tongue. Remind them to “let go” in those areas.

Note: you are asking them to engage their abs – their “support” called breath management.

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Breathy sound 2 & 3

- Not enough air at onset vocal cords not coming together. They forget singing takes more air than speech.
- Closer muscles not strong enough for air used.

Suggest:

(Developmental)

1. Hum with teeth together. Feel buzz in front of face. mask use medium-loud sound since softer singing is finer muscle control for closer muscles.
2. Keep lips together; open teeth. Keep buzz in roof of mouth by nose.
3. Release jaw to **mee** then to **ah**. Imagine buzz still there!
4. Teach hard - glottal - onset, "h" onset, and soft middle- onset.



# Refine Vocal Technique

## Breathy sound 4

- Not engaged
- Very timid / emotional issues and needs
- Anemic concept of tone from vocal models

Suggest:

- Fun! Play! “Use more energy/air”
- Opera singer
- Zooms Vee’s
- Sing with plank, standing one foot, or light calisthenics.
- Speak the phrase in pitch range with elongated words.
- “The Bicycle”

# Refine Vocal Technique

## A pushed / forced vocal sound

- Understanding / misunderstanding of singing
- Modeling?
- Emotional issue / needs
  - Lots of external muscles, too much breath energy.
  - See chin rising or falling or neck strain.

Suggest:

- “Efficient singing feels easy in throat. Let’s explore!”
- Ng singing with rabbit teeth and nose. Singing in straw.
- Whoop bent over.
- The “Whoop”
- “Sing in own bubble.”
- “Sing as if younger.”
- Re-explain resonance areas again.

# Refine Vocal Technique

## A pushed or forced vocal sound

- Explain: power and intensity come slowly over many years.
- “Nobody is alike.”
  - I.e. same height, not same size clothes
  - Voice is what it is.
  - No copying.
- “Vocal cords must get thinner as pitch rises.” (rubber band)
- Think pitch, breath in, trust larynx to make correct sound.  
(You will NOT feel it!)
- Exercise on OO or EE vowels. Why?
- “Practice singing to a young child.”
- Vocal models

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Nasal sounds

- Soft palate down.

Suggest:

- Inner smile. “Smile at yourself, don’t let others see.”  
“Pretend something is funny; don’t let teacher see!”
- Exercise: use pilot consonant K, B or G with OO.
- Exercise: Ding – gah or NG-gah
- Exercise: Mee and plug nose. Bend over. Why?
- Exercise: Yah, Yah Why?
- Imagine lifting back molars as sing.
- Beginning yawn.
- Vocal models

# Refine Vocal Technique

**Loud chest-voice singing rising to sudden quiet head-voice singing.**

- Weak lengthener muscles
- Static larynx adjustment in chest voice or head voice

Suggest:

- See process for strengthening head-voice range and coordinating middle range.
- Remind: each note is different combination of muscle actions.
- Suspension toy.
- Vocal models

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Un-projected singing

- Developmental: strength and coordination
- Breath issue
- Understanding of how to sing out
- Under-conditioned voice

Suggest:

- Faster air
- Strength and coordination exercises
- “Send your voice out to...”
- “Sing on your air.” “Keep air flowing.” (Roll hands while singing.)
- Toy microphone; sing to four walls, some closer others further out.
- Vocal models
- Sing at home every day to condition muscles.

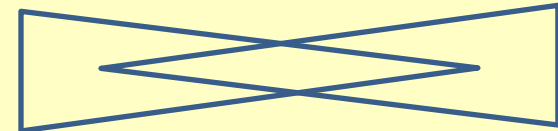
# Refine Vocal Technique

## Inability to sing in chest voice

- Preconceived idea of singing, vocal models
- Emotional issues: inhibited, wanting to appear non-pushy, introvert, fear of embarrassment
- Experiential issues: no full chest voice even when speaking

Suggest:

- Fry tone and add more air.
- Slow, sustained warm-ups from middle C to E4 with father, hey, or at vowels.
- “Sound is not as loud / bright as it sounds to you.”
- “Not using this chest voice to sing is like having two legs, but only using one to walk.” – Doan “This is part of your voice.”
- Remember: registers and muscle functionality needed for all areas of voice



# Refine Vocal Technique

## False vibrato

- Make voice bigger, brighter, older, more powerful.
  - Copying vocal models
- 4 ways to make vibrato: tongue tension, jaw tension, epigastrium area tension, or true vibrato with the intrinsic muscles.**

Suggest:

1. Feel: tongue, jaw, epigastrium area as sing.
2. See: Notice where tension happens.
3. Re-teach singing technique without tension and connected to managed breath.
4. Say “let go” to the unwanted tension if need.
5. Vocal models. Frame as teaching a palette...



# Refine Vocal Technique

## Lack of legato singing

- Disengagement from breath
- No concept phrase yet
- Pre-anticipating end of word or phrase
- Allowing consonants to close throat

Suggest:

- Sing full phrase – one breath – with lip buzz, ng or rolled R's. If sound stops, disengaged from breath. Keep breath energy even throughout. I.e. faucet image. Practice with slow quiet blowing.
- Each phrase goes somewhere; arrow.
- More air on skips up; faster air before skip
- Sing with continuous hand movements. Show phrase.
- Speak phrases: energized speaking in same range. (Julia Child.) Consonants need air too. Copy teacher.
- Draw phrases and sing as marker/finger/arm moves.
- Vocal models

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Chest voice range with little support

- Habit of speaking. (In chest-voice range, we often revert to poor speech habits.)

Suggest:

- Speak words elongated, energized while doing:
  - bicycle
  - plank
  - one foot lifted
  - simple jogging or other light calisthenics
  - Buoy on water image
- Sing, in range, continuous **Yee**.

Caution: do not sing in this range too loudly! Just sing well connected to your breath. Remember suspension and exhale phase of breathing?

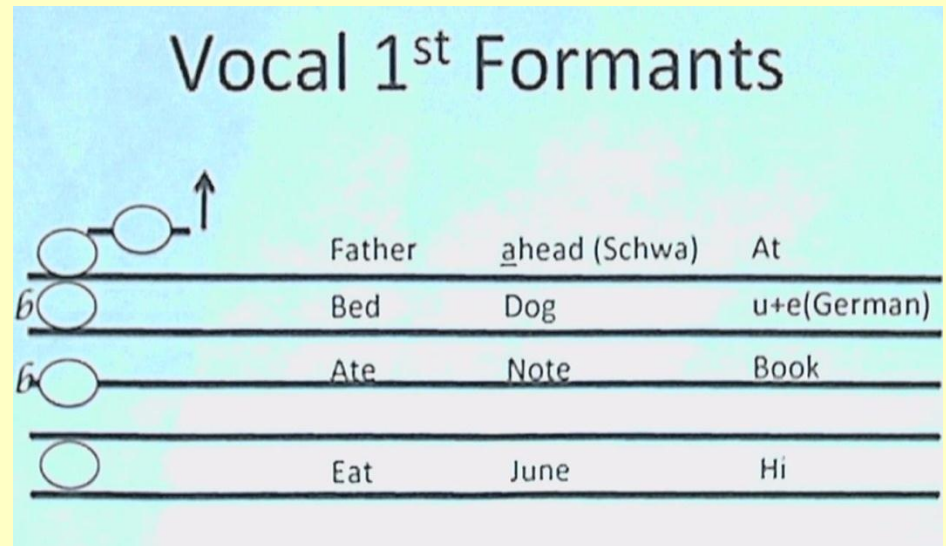
# Refine Vocal Technique

A too-tight or out-of-tune sound above B4.

- Not enough space for vowel
  - External muscles creating tension, interfering
    - vocal range issue strength of lengtheners or high/low
    - construct interfering with natural singing thinking brain
- getting psyched out

Suggest: -- Modify vowels toward more neutral vowel.

- Speak words in higher range with no external muscle tension.



# Refine Vocal Technique

## Flat singing

- Many possible causes!
- Most prevalent: vowel shape, inadequate breath support, weak head-voice muscles, coordination with lengthener muscles needs work, singing too long in too high a tessitura

Suggest:

- Lighter singing, loosen jaw
- Engage appropriate breath energy
- Inner smile
- Strength/coordination exercises
- If in passage zone, sing quieter and practice by slowing down phrase or start on higher part of phrase and come down first.
- Modify vowels
- Re-arrange melody! (I cannot stress this enough.)

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Sharp singing

- Too much air flow for pitch
- If in passage zone, muscle management issue with shortener muscles.

Suggest:

- “Sing in your own bubble.”
- Sing quieter on passage zone notes. Why?
- Re-work synergy of muscle engagement in warm-ups.
- Slow down phrases to practice. Why?
- See extending vocal range information.

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Out-of-tune singing

- Inattention to inner hearing of own voice
- Inexperience – no strong pitch neural network yet
- Inexperience singing registers

Suggest:

- Close ear and listen in head. Ear phone.
- Practice matching pitches. A LITTLE EVERY DAY!
- Explore/practice different registers.
- This will take TIME! Student should sing at home every day listening to self.
- Be patient!

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Overall vowels: too bright

- Too much emphases on front mouth space instead of back mouth/throat space.
- Vocal models / vowels too horizontal
- Exaggerated mouth opening

Suggest: re-balance spaces of mouth/throat.

- Imagine candy on back of tongue; don't let it touch roof of mouth, release jaw, inner smile. Sing!
- Beginning of yawn (Pretend in class; don't want teacher to see; keep your lips closed.) Oh before EE Sing! OO before AY. Fog on window pane.
- Feel more space in back of mouth with tongue still touching your front bottom teeth. Show picture. Think vertical vowels. Use hand in front of face.
- Exercise: Go with strong G. why?

# Refine Vocal Technique

## Overall vowels: too dark

- Too much emphases on oropharynx
- Tongue pulled back
- Vowels too vertical
- Too-thick vocal chords

### Suggest:

- Brighter vowels
- Imagine feeling them on front of face. Ng sirens
- “Sing out your eye teeth.”
- Thee – ah with sustained, voiced TH
- Show “rabbit teeth.”
- Zee – ah with sustained ZZ
- Vee - ah while showing “rabbit teeth”
- Tongue against bottom front teeth
- Loosen rabbit teeth to more subtle muscle engagement  
Lips held out from teeth



# Refine Vocal Technique

## Thinking too hard

- Too much information getting in way of singing
- Anxiety, other emotional issues
- Trying too hard
- Suggest:
  - Focus students' attention on the expressive qualities of the music, text and/or on the audience. (The brain can only think of one thing at a time.)
  - Movement: marching the beat as singing, showing phrases with arms, etc. Be creative!

Note: Conscious mind only gives intention.  
Subconscious mind does the singing work without  
“thinking.”

“Thinking” actually gets in the way of singing.

Example: high / low pitches

# Healthy speaking/singing for a lifetime

- Voice is delicate instrument. They don't know the damage they could be doing.
- Good speaking leads to good singing. They are one and the same.
- Must be protected and supervised carefully by you.
- **Choose music appropriate for students.**
- Musically and vocally, where are they **really**? Don't pressure them to achieve goals beyond their years or give them music beyond their range/strength.
- **YOU** must take care of their voices.

## **DO NO HARM!**

- No extreme volume or pitch. Save this for more advanced vocal athletes.
- No singing:
  - too high for too long
  - too low for too long
  - too loud for too long

This causes fatigue and strain. If appropriate music given, this is non-issue.

# Healthy voices for a lifetime.

- Limit extended rehearsal singing.
- Vocal muscles **must** have rest!
- Humans must have fluids!
- Consider limiting choirs students participate in.
- Do not sing if sick. Causes compensation because of one's intention, distressed the larynx further.
- Train children to recognize own symptoms.
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**With care, humans can sing well into their 80's.**

**Goal:**  
**Send each student**  
**to the next choral**  
**experience**  
**a better singer with**  
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