
SOME BREATH & VOICE WORK

These exercises rarely yield quick results. They're self-educating, long-term games which sometimes give profound new insights into your own voice and how you use it when writing. Perform **all** exercises in a controlled, relaxed way. Avoid jerky movement or tension. **If anything gets painful - STOP! If you feel pain/strain in the throat, or begin to produce mucus - stop and rest/drink water.**

CENTREING YOURSELF:

- a. **STILLNESS:** Close eyes. Breathe naturally. Relax thoughts. Clear head.
- b. **BREATH:** Easy. Slow. Full. Free. Rhythmic: In through nose, out through mouth. In your head count to 4 breathing in through nose, hold for 2, out for 4 through mouth, hold for 2, REPEAT. Breathe deep into belly. Keep going for a few minutes.
- c. **POSTURE:** *"a state of readiness"*.
- Feet** - parallel, beneath hips. Weight slightly forward on the big toe.
Knees - not locked. Bend and bounce on them slightly. Unclamp **thighs**.
Hips - not thrust out or sideways: revolve pelvis.
Stomach - don't pull in! **Spine** - straight. *"When your spine goes, you age"*.
Chest - don't collapse it. **Neck and shoulders** (key area) - shake and flop.
Head - neither tucked in, pushed forward or pulled back.
Jaw - unclench, lift chin slightly. Clench and unclench **Face**.
- d. **PLACE YOUR PALM WHERE YOU THINK YOUR VOICE COMES FROM - your imagined centre.** Continue to breathe as above.
- e. **NOW SAY "AHhhh"** as you expel breath with mouth open. Rediscover source of sound with your hand. Is it lower than you thought?
- f. **BE AWARE of TENSIONS, LACK of POSTURE** = Restricted delivery. How you stand, move, breathe - all important to emotion and connection to audience.

BREATH and POSTURE

Important areas:

- * **The Breath and how you Support it.**
- * **The Body and its relation of parts.**
- * **Keeping the Voice free and placed forward.**

BREATH AND SUPPORT. Many voices get "stuck" or damaged because of lack of support. VOICE soon loses fitness (within a few days!)

Discerning habits of Poor SUPPORT:

- 1/ Breathe in but then begin to speak before you are ready. Feel the tightness.
- 2/ Breathe in, hold back and then speak (too late). Note how abdomen is clenched and chest too high. (Common fault.)
- 3/ Breathe out, THEN try to read a line - remember this horrible feeling! When you feel that way in a reading, BREATHE! If you feel panicked or locked, sigh out silently and calmly wait for the body to ask for breath.
- 4/ Speak "oh" from deep stomach. Clench shoulders; repeat. Note thinness of the sound as it moves up the tensioned body. Unclench and repeat "oh". Better?

BREATHE INTO THE SPACE.

This, strangely, aids connection to the audience. Access the (empty!) venue & breathe TO the perimeters.

START TO DEVELOP YOUR OWN RELAXATION RITUAL BEFORE READINGS... e.g.:

- * *Hydrate fully (avoid coffee, fags, alcohol, aspirin, cold or fizzy drinks).*
- * *Breathe fully.*
- * *Push against the wall.*

- * *Sigh!! Say a long Doctor's "Ahhh!!" * HUM a tune, deeply, changing notes.*
- * *Free up lips, tongue, face. "Kiss" the far wall from where you are.*
- * *Shake, loosen up - esp. Knees/ Neck/ Shoulders/ Jaw.*
- * *Gentle stretches. Nothing vigorous! Relax.*
- * *Make a huge smile; drop your jaw by two fingers (keeping smile) and feel breath.*

You can't engage an audience emotionally if you're not relaxed, breathing. Become aware of a column of breath moving freely through the body. A simple "hum" or "ah" frees the breath up. If you tighten up DURING a performance remember to breathe - deep and SLOW into the belly.

3 "VOICES" (RESONATORS)

The voice is like a tool bag. We don't realise we have hammers, chisels, saws, a vice. (!) We only see the bag. WE ALL HAVE AT LEAST 3 RESONATORS - sophisticated actors may have five or more.

TRY A few HUMs from: *CHEST/BELLY.* *THROAT.* *HEAD/NOSE/FACE.*

Most of us are shallow or constricted breathers. This often skews the voice to THROAT. The HEAD resonator is the most free and clear & projects most effectively - but it is often the most "alien" to us. Don't confuse this with the "Nose" resonator.

a. FIRST: BREATHE NATURALLY in "CENTRED" MODE (4/2/4/2 routine).

b. THEN: HUM from CHEST, then THROAT, then into HEAD. It helps if you lift the tone as you move CHEST/BELLY -> HEAD, but the effect is much MORE than just tone.

c. NOW: Try these manoeuvres:

1/ As you breathe out, HUM *from the CHEST* (lower chest/belly). Repeat x6 on the out breath. Use PALM to FEEL the vibrations on forehead, throat, chest/belly. This hum is full of abdomen. Don't force it, feel the air column freely flowing.

After 6 hums, STOP, but keep deep breathing. Don't let spine slump or chin drop.

2/ NOW hum *through THROAT*, x6, again feeling forehead, throat, chest/belly as you hum out. This HUM is a controlled use of the lungs and throat.

3/ NOW hum *into the HEAD* (not the nose), again feeling all 3 sites. This HUM resonates into the forehead. Some of you won't feel a vibration.

4/ Keep trying HEAD, to feel your forehead vibrate. Then try humming into the NOSE or LIPS/FACE and hear/feel the different qualities of sound.

5/ NOW READ LINES OF POETRY (keep your chin level) using each of the 3 resonators: use your hands to feel for resonance. For different poems, which centre feels best?

HOLDING THE THOUGHT

DON'T READ EACH LINE OF A POEM AS A DISEMBODIED PHRASE! Is the start still there in the middle, and the end somehow inevitable? Do the words and THOUGHTS flow, link up, move easily? Or is it a set of disconnected lines? In pairs, read short texts to your partner - they stop you when they feel you've "lost" the text. If you're having trouble holding the thought, try to:

- * Speak text in a **monotone**. Then (same text) with an **exaggerated range** - swinging tone wildly. Then just speak it from centredness.
- * Speak selected lines of your poems with very **different emotions**. Langour, anger, boredom, anxiety....
- * **Mouth the text** with no sound.
- * **Read sections of one another's texts.** Note the different qualities and emphasis of the other person's voice.