

The Five Best Vocal Warm-Up Exercises



Ingo Titze, Ph.D.

One of the pleasures of investigating the singing voice over the past thirty years has been the opportunity for me to visit the studios of many great teachers. With every visit comes a new understanding of an old principle. There are many variations of a few basic themes. This is certainly the case with exercises that are used for vocal warm-up and strengthening the voice in terms of range and flexibility. Opposite are five exercises (or perhaps groups of exercises) that have strong physiologic justification and are prevalent in the majority of studios.

Specific musical notation could be used to write out these exercises, but that would defeat the purpose of making them generic, i.e., making them *classes* of exercises. It's the variations that one can create with these classes that are ultimately as important as the exercises themselves, because students get bored with specific versions.

Exercise

1. Lip trill, tongue trill, humming, or phonation into narrow tubes (all partial occlusions of vocal tract) on glides, scales, or arpeggios, over wide pitch range
2. Two-octave pitch glides, first down only, then up and down, on high vowels /i/ or /u/; when going up and down (more advanced), a transition from low chest to high pure falsetto and, finally, a mixed voice are targeted.
3. Forward tongue roll and extension, vowel sequence /a/-/i/, scales
4. *Messa di voce*, proceeding from a partially occluded tract to high vowels, then to low vowels
5. *Staccato on arpeggios*

What Is Accomplished

- Gets respiratory muscles into full action rapidly;
 - Minimizes upward force on vocal folds because of positive oral pressure;
 - Spreads the vocal folds to vibrate their edges only;
 - Lowers phonation threshold pressure by providing an inertive acoustic load;
 - Stretches vocal folds to maximum length
- Also gives maximal stretch to vocal folds (first ligament, then muscle);
 - Provides maximum dichotomy between TA and CT muscles, then requires unity between them;
 - Avoids the difficult passagge;
 - Gets F_0 above F_1 for varying acoustic loads
- Creates independence between the phonatory and articulatory structures;
 - Loosens tongue and jaw;
 - Helps keep vertical larynx position stable during articulation
- Engages the layers of vocal fold tissue gradually in vibration, medial to lateral;
 - Helps singer match tension in muscle to tension in ligament;
 - Tests symmetry of crescendo versus decrescendo control under continually decreasing lung volume;
 - Makes all intrinsic muscles of the larynx work in coordination with changing lung pressure
- Elicits clean and rapid voice onset, establishing a dominant mode of vibration of the vocal folds;
 - Trains adductor/abductor muscles simultaneously with tensor muscles during pitch change

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