



# Knowledge Transfer

## Voices That Work

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# Module 1

“An Introduction to Voice”  
Basic Voice Exercises

BY KATE PRINGLE

The full list of modules available are:

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"An Introduction to Voice" Basic Voice Exercises – by Kate Pringle

### Module 2

The Universal / Generic Voice – by Veronica Allardice

### Module 3

An Example of Good Practice: "The Reflective Practitioner" – by John Tucker  
Derived from "Female to male transgender project" Spring 2006

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Best Practice in Lesson Planning for Bespoke / Client Focused Training – by Emma Brown

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The Importance of Spoken English Skills Training in the Business Setting – by Phil Bliss

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# Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in all areas of our lives can be dependant upon how confident we are as users of our voice. As individuals we possess a broad array of skills and talents but the inability to get our thoughts, our feelings, our desires and our messages across effectively to our “audiences” can hold us back. The ability to retrain our own voices and the voices of others can be challenging, empowering and creatively very exciting.

In the article that follows, an experienced voice and professional development trainer offers advice on techniques and strategies that will allow you to develop your own style of training to be most effective for the groups you are working with. We hope that by studying and putting into practice the approaches described, you will be able to enable your trainees/learners/clients to benefit from coaching that is integrated into personal and professional development programmes.

There are some important messages and caveats to bear in mind as you approach the material and work practically on your own voice and the voices of others. The following is a bullet point list of things to consider when you begin to integrate elements of voice coaching into your practice.

1. **Accessibility** – An understanding of the voice and the physical and psychological factors that effect how well we communicate is accessible to all trainers and can be incorporated into any training delivery. However, professional voice coaches undergo a significant amount of training. It is recommended that the practitioner undergo specific training before seeking work as a “voice coach”.
2. **Health and Safety** – Voice training is a physical process. As such, you must ensure that the health and safety of your group is supported. Those whose voice is damaged by prolonged misuse should be referred to a medical professional or speech therapist in the first instance.

3. **Making it your Own** – The theory and practice of voice training has been evolving for many years. There are no perfect or ideal exercises for any one group or situation. Take the exercises you think would work for you and make them your own.
4. **Being Patient** – The way we speak and communicate is hard wired by our experience. The muscles of speech and some of our thought processes therefore must be retrained. This process will take time and may happen in small increments or larger steps. Make sure you record progress and keep your trainees moving forward through feedback and encouragement.
5. **Reflecting on your Practice** – As a trainer, it is important that you reflect on your methods of delivery, how you connect with your training groups and what works/what doesn't. Again, take the material presented and use it so it suits your own development as a trainer to the benefit of your learners.

## Approaching the Material

- > All modules contain questions to prompt reflection and discussion of issues raised in the text.
- > Symbols in the margin show where listening (ear) speaking (mouth) and physical (body) exercises are featured.
- > If you wish to obtain other modules in this series of articles about voice training, please refer to other titles shown in the inside front cover and contact [kt@cssd.ac.uk](mailto:kt@cssd.ac.uk) for copies.

If you have any questions or comments about the material or ideas presented, please contact Charlie Cunningham or Paul Nicholl at The Central School of Speech and Drama (CSSD) on 0207 559 3936 or email [kt@cssd.ac.uk](mailto:kt@cssd.ac.uk).



# Module 1

“An Introduction to Voice”  
Basic Voice Exercises

BY KATE PRINGLE



# Introduction

Why invest in the development of our voice? From my experience, at the heart of voice work is the development of confidence; confidence to use your voice to speak out, speak up and reach others in the process. Anything that builds confidence in oneself must have a place in all forms of training and more importantly a place in life.

In all aspects of life we need to be able to communicate. Communication as a means to understand, problem solve, share, develop and grow. As humans, we receive messages through the body, from what we see, feel and hear. All of these live physical pulses are at our disposal. However in today's highly technical and visual society the art of conversation is at risk. It is time to reinvest in our tradition of speaking to one another. It is time to be present.

To develop the voice a practical approach must be taken. No amount of reading or philosophising will actually change and improve the physical vocal apparatus. This work is about doing.

Below is a series of basic vocal exercises to introduce you to using the voice within training. I have set the progression into five areas:

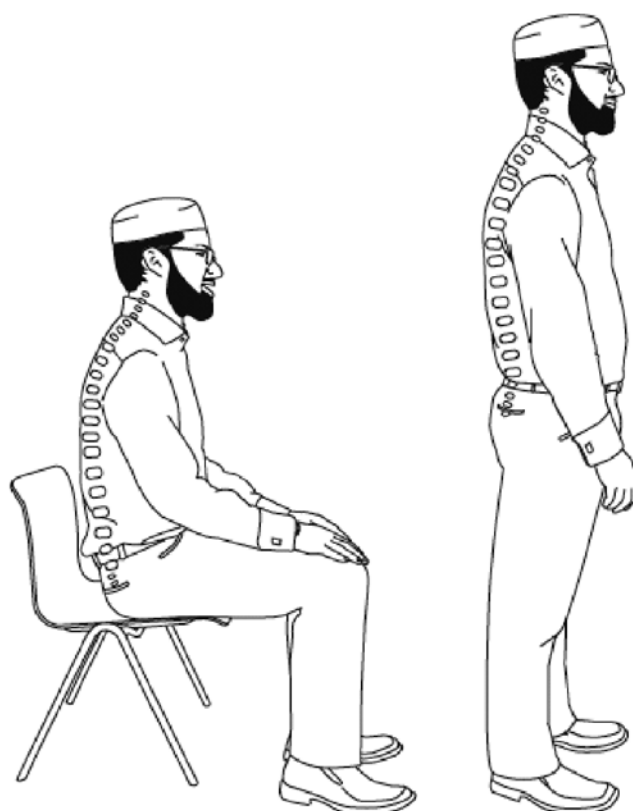
## **BODY, BREATH, RESONANCE, ARTICULATION, COMMUNICATION**

In each area there are exercises to explore. Depending on the time you have to work on your voice you could do all exercises, one from each group or work on a specific area to focus and develop on individual needs. Let's start:

## Body

1. As babies, we develop the ability to vocalise sounds and then words. This is a complex process that requires the engagement of the physical body. The major contributors to this process are breath and the vocal folds. However, for speech to be effective, contributions from the rest of the body are needed. The interdependency of breath, vocal manipulation and correct posture supports and allows instinctive communication.
2. The body houses all the organs and structures for speech. But like every house a strong central support is needed to anchor other elements. The spine is this central support and directly or indirectly every organ in the body is attached to the spine. Therefore in order for breath and the act of voicing to be effective, we must begin by taking care of the spine. See 'Diagram 1' of the spine (the standing figure) to help you understand the exercises described below.

**DIAGRAM 1**





## Alignment



1. Stand with the feet parallel and a little bit apart. The feet should be underneath the point where the leg bone joins the pelvis. Find a centred position feeling balanced throughout the body. Close your eyes and gently rock the weight forward and backwards. Come to a place of stillness in the centre of your feet.
2. Starting from your feet imagine a triangle in each foot. Draw a line from the joint of your big toe to the joint of your little toe. From these outside points join the lines together to make a triangle to the centre of the heel of the foot. You could also massage these points to bring a physical awareness to them.
3. Allow the feet to spread into the floor and imagine they have roots. Ensure the weight is balanced. It makes sense that if we take the structure of the triangle then two thirds of the weight will be towards the front of the foot, leaving the body in a ready position to move.
4. Take the focus to the knees. Allow the knees to be soft with a sensation that the joints are bouncy and not locked. Straighten the legs by locking the knees and then relax them. Find a comfortable place where the knees are neither locked nor too bent and the thigh muscles are relaxed.
5. Swing the pelvis under and back a few times slowly coming to a central place with the lower part of the spine, the sacrum and the coccyx dropping down towards the floor.
6. To begin to connect the breath to the ribcage, place your hands on the sides of your ribs below the armpits. As you breathe, feel the ribcage swing open. Imagine a balloon within the ribcage and abdomen. As you breathe in the balloon expands and as you breathe out the air is released from within it. The balloon expands and contracts the body in all directions, front, back and sides.
7. Imagine a string attached to the top of your skull pulling you up into the air. This will allow the neck to be long and free. The chin is parallel to the floor. Looking ahead the focus is fixed on a distance just above eye line. Breathe easily and relax.
8. Massage the facial muscles, particularly the point where the jaw joins the skull just in front of your ears. Let the muscles in the face be soft and relaxed. Try to allow an open expression to invite others in.
9. Finally, imagine you are a doctor's skeleton hanging from a coat hanger, all the bones falling in line on top of one another. You should now feel relaxed and rooted to the floor (grounded).

## Roll Down

1. Slowly drop the head on to the chest feeling each vertebra curl. Continue rolling down towards the floor letting the weight of the head lead. Feel each individual vertebra within the spine opening and curling over. Let the arms hang free and the knees be bent. As you are flopped over take three deep breaths. Slowly roll back up tail to head, stacking each vertebra on top of the other. Repeat.

DIAGRAM 2



## Explore



1. Chose a set of stretches that work for you. Breathe into each stretch listening to your body and using the breath to relax and lengthen the muscles.
2. Finish by shaking the body out: arms, legs, head, back and bottom. Come back to a neutral stance.
3. Slowly you will find balance and natural alignment within your body. For more detailed bodywork look at Alexander Technique and the work of Moshe Feldenkrais.

### **BREATH – “within breath there is: ear, heart, earth, heat, the beat”**

*“There is an old saying: ‘Ordinary people breathe through their chest. Wise people breathe through the hara and the skilled person breathes through the feet.’”*

Oida, Y & Marshall, L *The Invisible Actor* (p89), Methuen 1997

On the following pages are a few exercises for connecting to your breath. Throughout the exercises try not to let the shoulders and the upper part of the chest move. Concentrate on releasing the stomach and focusing on the movement of the lower parts of the ribs. Take your time with the exercises; ensure that you are noticing changes. The most important thing is that you do not force or push the breath. The muscles should work of their own accord. Breath capacity will come over time.

## Bear Hug

1. Cross your arms over your chest reaching the hands towards the back to the shoulder blades. Do not hold yourself too tightly but with enough resistance to allow the muscles to be worked.
2. Breathe in slowly through the nose allowing the muscles in the ribcage to expand and the stomach to release as the diaphragm contracts.
3. You should also feel expansion in the back where the hands are. Remember to keep the shoulders and upper chest relaxed.
4. Breathe out slowly through the mouth allowing the muscles to come to a natural place of rest. The breath should be silent as you breathe through an open relaxed throat.
5. Breathe slowly in and out three more times. On every other breath re-cross the arms so the other arm crosses over on top.
6. Keeping the arms crossed breathe in through the nose and flop over on the out breath. Stay rolled over for three breaths, arms still folded across your chest. Release the arms to the floor and breathe easily. On an out breath roll slowly up to standing. Repeat this two more times.

**DIAGRAM 3**



## Cat Stretch

1. Place yourself on all fours. Knees should be directly under your hips and hands underneath your shoulders. Try to feel the body in alignment as you did when standing.
2. As you breath in and out allow the stomach to release naturally on the in breath, just as animals do in this position. On the out breath the muscles will recoil naturally.
3. Using the image of a cat, on an in breath let the head release and curl the head down under towards the tail, rounding the spine.
4. On the out breath arch the back starting from the coccyx all the way through vertebra by vertebra to the head.
5. Repeat the stretch a few times becoming aware of the freedom within the muscles spreading of their own accord. Relax and encourage the breath to be deep in the abdominal region.

**DIAGRAM 4**



## Resonance



1. Resonance is the amplification of the sound produced at the vocal folds. When the sound vibrates in the throat and mouth, it produces vibrations known as resonance. The areas where resonance is concentrated are in the chest, head, nose, throat and mouth. However it is always beneficial to imagine and sense that the whole body can be a resonating chamber to allow the sound to grow inside yourself.
2. Before working on resonance yawn a couple of times and notice the space being opened up at the back of the mouth. This is the soft palate lifting. If you hum and yawn at the same time you will feel sound vibrating in this open space. You can exercise the muscles for the soft palate by saying the sounds k, g, ng (phonetically). You will feel the back of the tongue and soft palate come together and release.
3. The following exercises can be done with a partner or on your own. It is particularly helpful to work with a partner as they can check for tension and give you feedback.

## Humming into body parts



1. With your partner you will explore sending resonance to different areas of the whole body. Take time to experience the vibrations either internally or externally.
2. Begin by lightly humming any note as long as it feels comfortable. Keep feeling the space in the back of the throat.
3. After a minute have your partner place a hand on the upper chest, neck or head. Somewhere where it is easier to send the resonance.
4. As you hum concentrate on sending the humming to the area where the hand has been placed. Don't force this action. Visualise and physically allow your vibrations to shift internally within the body. You can change the note at any time to help explore the moving sound. Take time to place the voice. Each area will have unique sounds.
5. Experiment with sounds in other areas of the body and feedback to each other.
6. Do this exercise for a minimum of three minutes. The longer you explore the exercise the more change you will notice in the quality of your sound.
7. It is important to take your time during this exercise. The person humming needs time to first sense the hand on the body and then to focus on directing vibrations to this place. You may not feel vibrations in certain areas. Don't worry. Just enjoy exploring the sense that sound can travel through the body.

The exercise can be developed and is more challenging by placing both hands in different areas on the body.

## Back vibrations

1. Sitting back-to-back begin by becoming aware of your partners breathing. Explore breathing in synch and then alternating your breath.
2. Introduce some humming, placing vibrations into your back. Send the sound through your back into your partner's back. As above you can explore sending the vibrations into different areas of your back.
3. Take turns to hum. Then allow the exercise to develop so you both make the sound together. You can explore being on the same note, complimentary sounds and discordant sounds.
4. Start to open out the sounds to vowels. Try to feel the vibrations on your lips before you release the sound. Vocalise the vowels *AH, AW, OO, OH, AY, EE, I*.

## Chest, Oral and Head resonance

1. As you become more confident with your sound start to specifically focus the voice into the above three areas. Explore the transitions between them as well.
2. Humming, then opening into *AH*, become conscious of the vibrations within the chest. Beat your chest gently and have a partner beat your upper back to shake up the voice and encourage the vibrations to this area. Explore different pitches. Speak some text feeling the vibrations and sound coming from this place. Keep the throat open and relaxed. This is your lower resonance. It is rich and weighty carrying emotional content. It can lack clarity within the word.
3. Humming, send the sound forward onto your lips so that you feel them vibrating. Move the vibrations around your mouth like you are chewing them. Sense the vibrations in different parts of the mouth; soft palate, hard palate, teeth, cheeks and lips. Focusing the sound in the mouth release the sound onto *OO, OW, AW*. Encourage the sound onto the lips before you send it out to various places within the space. Be careful not to let the voice explode out on to sound. Imagine it freely gliding out. As above explore different pitches and then move into some text. This is your middle resonance. It balances out the voice and has clarity and authority. It can lack softness and edge.
4. Humming, focus the sound into your head: nose, forehead and crown. Open the sound out onto *EE, AY, I*. Feel the sound bright and energised. Throw the sound to various places within the space. Explore different pitches and move gradually onto text. Ensure the voice is natural and connected to you. This is your upper resonance. It has brilliance, power and focus. It can lack sincerity and sound metallic.
5. Finally explore a balanced use of lower, middle and upper resonance. Keep connected to your breath and the energy within you. Discover new possibilities each time.

## Articulation

**Think about the muscularity of forming words. The lips, jaw, tongue and soft palate all contribute to the act of speaking. The basic clarity of the word is needed to carry content and intention within space.**

### Face gymnastics



1. Massage the face and the jaw. Yawn and release the jaw. Tense, stretch, squeeze and release the face. Gently shake the face like it is rubber.
2. Blow the lips like a horse. Add sound to this gliding up and down between your highest and lowest notes (this is your pitch range). Isolate the muscles within your lips protruding and circling them. Separate top from bottom lip.
3. Roll your tongue in and out. Place the tip of the tongue behind the bottom teeth and stretch the tongue out from the root. Touch your chin and nose with your tongue. Circle the tongue slowly cleaning the outside of your teeth aim to keep the lips closed. Point it out like a spear; relax it on the bottom lip.
4. Hang your head over and let the tongue flop out of your mouth. Shake the head and the tongue from side to side.
5. Exercise the soft palate as before with phonetic sounds k, g, ng.

### Consonant Energy

1. Working through the majority of consonants, explore the sounds and shapes formed within your mouth. Develop this by finding the different shape, energy, quality and effort of each consonant within your body. Inhabit the sounds within the body.
2. Note how each sound, movement, physical shape makes you feel. Trust your instinct. Shapes that the sounds create will be different from person to person. Your response is as valid as the next person's.
3. Since sounds have different qualities, they will give you different physical and emotional responses.
4. Do the same with short vowels, long vowels and diphthongs.



# Communication

**Reading from a chosen text e.g. a poem, an excerpt from a narrative, explore the possibilities of: *Sound, Rhythm, Space***

**Consider:**

pitch/intonation, stress/inflection, volume/quality, pause, intention/interpretation

*Speak very loud/oratorical*

*gentle/intimate*

*Speak in head/oral/chest voice*

*explore the transitions*

*Speak from far away/from nearby*

*outside/inside spaces*

Listen to the vowels and consonants within the words allowing the emotion and the intellect within the words to reveal themselves. Look at how different sounds confer meaning. A good writer chooses sounds within words.

Taste the sounds of words

*Sing, chant and intone your text*

Think about the movement of writing with the same equivalence as body movement. Use the body to deliver your speech with and without the words. Shape the words with movement for instance walking and changing direction on certain sounds.

Let the text move you and the movement be the impulse to speak.

Movement initiates sounds

Share your communication with real/imaginary audiences, such as:

Children

Politicians

Wedding guests

Family & friends

Business meeting

Your intended audience

Listen for moments where the speech connects with emotion.

Using the above apply what you have discovered to inform your communication. Explore any piece of text in this way before you give it to your audience. Discover and rediscover the joy within speaking. Working with confidence and freedom will eventually become a part of everyday speaking extending your communication possibilities.

## Reflection

"At the heart of voice work is the development of confidence." Why do you think vocal exercises might lead to an increase in confidence?

In the section on resonance, the author discusses how different types of resonance confer emotion, authority, focus etc. Look at your own voice and write about where your resonance lies in different situations. Note down feedback from the group you are working with.

Try these exercises out with your group. Make a note of the difference it makes to the sound of the voices in the group.

Note down vocal qualities of someone in your group who has used these exercises. What differences do you notice in the feedback compared with someone who has not practiced the exercises?

## Health and Safety

Vocal – "Care" – be careful not to damage your client's voices.

Make a list of key points relating to vocal care. These will help you be compliant with Health and Safety and avoid damage to your client's voice.

**Remember: ASK AN EXPERT IF YOU ARE UNSURE.**

## Notes

1. The Hara is the vital centre of the self. The hara designates the part of the lower abdomen and pelvis region near the genital organs. It is an area located one and a half inches below the navel and one and a half inches inward toward the spine. This point also happens to be the body's central axis (centre of gravity / balancing point).

## Bibliography

Oida, Y & Marshall, L, *The Invisible Actor* (p89), Methuen 1997

### Further voice reading:

Berry, C, *Voice & the Actor*, Virgin Publishing Ltd 1999

Houseman, B, *Finding Your Voice*, Nick Hern Books 2002

Rodenburg, P, *The Right To Speak*, Methuen 1992

