

Ideal Vocal Practice

An 'ideal' vocal practice really just means paying attention to your voice and your body and using both mindfully. We are all on a path of discovery and often things show up in ways we aren't expecting. Try to be open to possibility and if something doesn't happen the way you intended, get any useful information you can out of it and keep going!

This is meant to be a guideline to help you consider your body, the different parts of your voice and how to bring them together into a whole, vibrant, functioning instrument!

Pick and choose a couple of exercises from each category to make your own personalized vocal practice.

You've got this, I believe in you.

1. Set Intention:

a. What do I want to focus on today?

i.e. am I preparing for a song? What style is the song in? Do I need more chest voice or head voice in my mix (example: belt vs. classical). Do I just want to work on my chops? (clarity, flexibility, dynamics, etc.)

b. How do I want to treat myself in my practice today? (examples: slow down and have patience with myself? With compassion? With focus and encouragement? With humor?)

2. Posture:

a. How am I sitting/standing?

b. Can I breathe easily?

c. Do I feel my feet connecting to the ground?

d. Am I collapsed anywhere or hyperextending?

3. Warm Up Whole Body: 1 minute of movement of your choice (make it fun if you can)

a. dance it out

b. jog in place

c. roll down

d. spirals

e. finding your feet circles

4. Tongue/Jaw Loosening

a. di/lo tongue stretch

b. clean teeth with tongue with lips closed

c. say 'Boston' followed by slides on [ba] or [o]

d. Tongue twisters (red leather, yellow leather, etc)

5. Connecting to Breath Actively

- a. Inhale and exhale with fingers up to lips on an 'f' (no phonation), feel what muscles 'wake up' in this exercise
- b. f's or hiss on slow release of air
- c. panting fast then slow: little dog/big dog

6. Combining Sound with Airflow

Patterns: 123454321, slides 151, slides octave, slides 131, chromatic scales, major scales

- a. Bubbles or raspberries
- b. Humming
- c. 'ng' hum
- d. 'v' slides
- e. straw phonation or Lax Vox

7. Speaking Vowels Clearly Means Singing Vowels Clearly

- a. speak first ninenanonu (could try tapping with fingers forward and backwards on cheeks while speaking or singing) random pitches chest and mix voice, stay pretty close to speaking range (ex. Bb-Bb octave range)
- b. speak first 'I had cereal for breakfast today' random pitches chest and mix
- c. 'drat that cat' for chestier mix quality
- d. Ah sirens (epiphany for chest) first no particular pitches then pattern: 151 or 131
- e. say 'Boston' then sirens on [ba] , [o] or [æ] pattern:151

8. Getting Voice Moving With Vowels

Remember: Bright/Strengthening vowels are [i] and [æ] Darker/Rounder vowels are: [a], [o] and [u]

- a. [i] pattern: 12345432123454321
- b. slides on [i] patten: 151
- c. staccato [ju] [ji] pattern: 123454321
- d. chromatic scales on multiple vowels/multiple dynamics (i.e. loud and soft)
- e. major scales 15191 on multiple vowels

9. Connecting to Head Voice: finding resonance in head voice

- a. whimper like a puppy
- b. call out 'woo!' like you are at a concert
- c. Buwuiwui/shuwuiwui nose pinch pattern: 5544332211
- d. airflow finger into uuiwuiwuiwuiwuiwui pattern: 5544332211
- e. (for F 5 and above) fast taps on open [o] into uui same pattern as above
- f. [ju hu] staccato pattern: 13531
- g. [u] sirens pattern: 131
- h. [i] legato then staccato pattern: 8531358531
- i. mielaou' pattern: 1358531358531 (tip: you can also separate this into two exercises mi i i e e e i and la a a o o o u)

10. Finding/Extending Chest Voice:

- a. **finding:** 'hey mom' (calling mom to you from downstairs) then pattern: slide 5-1
- b. **finding:** 'woah' pattern: 54321 (tip: try adding a 'cry' at the beginning if it feels too heavy)
- c. **extending:** 'buh' pattern: 8538538531 (tip: if feeling tight, make sure your inhales are not too big or release a little air before making sound)
- d. **extending:** 'mielaou' pattern: 1358531358531 (tip: you can also separate this into two exercises mi i i e e e i and la a a o o o u)
- e. **extending:** vi ve va pattern: 54321 54321 54321 (on each syllable)

11. Finding Mix (or strengthening head mix)

Quality: whiney, obnoxious, ferrel cat. For more chest balance: stay in full chest longer going up, for lighter quality let voice get softer in volume as you ascend in pitch.

- a. 'njæ' pattern: 13531
- b. 'ow' pattern: 13531
- c. njæ slides pattern: 151
- d. 'æ' slides with tongue resting on lower lip 1-8-1
- e. 'whiney mom!' slides pattern: 51
- f. 'uh' slides pattern: 181

Additional tips:

1. My breaks/passaggi feel huge today!

- a. try reducing volume until it feels manageable/smooth
- b. notice which register feels weaker today and do an exercise that helps you connect more to that part of your voice, then try again
- c. focus on [æ] or [a] and use straw under tongue to release base of the tongue tension
- d. go slow!

2. I have so much tension today!

- a. notice where it seems to be in your body
- b. use gentle touch to remind your neck, shoulders, jaw, etc to calm down
- c. try doing a lie down for 5 minutes
- d. roll down three times (rolling up slowly arms and head are the last thing to come up, knees bent as generously as needed)
- e. try coordinating the whole body by doing an easy exercise (bubbles ,raspberries, etc) and while standing on one foot 'pop bubbles' with the other three limbs (remember to see the bubbles you are popping) switch feet regularly
- f. 20 minute, easy yoga video on youtube (I like yoga with adrienne)

Part 2: Working on a Song...

STOP!

Did I already:

- a. learn the rhythms?
- b. learn the pitches/melody?
- c. (if in foreign language) translate and learn pronunciation?
- d. learn what my song is about?

If I have done all of these, proceed:

- a. siren speak the phrases in rhythm
- b. 'fake slow motion shout' words if in chest or chest mix
- c. try singing phrases on one vowel or syllable. ie wee, duh, oo, bah or whatever is feeling the best that day. (tip: does my voice feel breathy and disconnected? try [i] or [æ] does my voice feel tight or tense? try [hu] or [ja] or [ga] both airy and tense? [gi] or [wi] [w] slows air down [h] send more air through)
- d. try singing phrases on only the vowels in the words

*watch for diphthongs only sing one vowel at a time, make sure vowels aren't being distorted when followed by [r] and [n] and [ng]

* notice if you feel like you are using too much force and try reducing the volume and/or reconnecting with the ground. If you have tried to reach a certain note and it isn't working by the third try, go back down in pitch or try doing something completely different in another part of your voice and see if you can approach it another way.

*sound not clear? do I know what vowel I am intending to communicate?

I feel really good about my song!

Great! Now can I sing it with meaning?

- a. Who am I in this song? What is my character's goal in this song? Who am I talking to? Where am I? What am I feeling? etc.
- b. dynamics: happen more fluidly when they are connected to our intentions. Am I loud in this section of the song? Why? Angry? Excited? etc.
- c. What is my body doing? Am I letting the emotion come through without creating a collapse or excess tension in my body? Am I gesturing/moving with intention?

When we do the work to help the instrument in our bodies thrive and soar and connect that to our story telling or our truth in the song, then we have created something wonderful and much greater than the sum of its parts.