

EVERYDAY VOICE TIPS

From Amy Hume, Voice / Dialect Coach

1. Have a good yawn

It's pretty common to yawn in a downward direction, pushing the jaw down. Instead, think about opening horizontally, almost as if you're going to smile. The wide opening provides an excellent stretch for your soft-palate and throat, and brings energy to the middle part of your face. It's even better if you expose your top and bottom teeth.

A good yawn stretches the soft palate and releases tension in the throat, creating more open space for the voice.

2. Centre the breath

Place one hand on your naval, and see if you can feel your belly move as breath comes in and out. Concentrate on letting the breath move your belly out into your hand as it arrives, and then the belly relaxes in as the breath releases. Your shoulders and chest should stay relaxed. Having your hand on your naval helps to focus the breath away from your shoulders and chest, and to centre the breath low in the body.

This exercise releases tension in the breath that can interfere with effective voice use. Breathing this way will help calm any nerves and help you feel grounded.

3. Hum gently

Feel the breath come in, and then sigh it out on a gentle hum. You can hum through your range or hum a favourite tune.

Humming is a massage for the vocal folds. It's a great way to start a vocal warm up and a good way to soothe a sore, tired voice as well.

4. Lip trills

Place your lips loosely together and release air steadily to create a trill, something like "brrr". If this is difficult for you, you can take two fingers and gently press on your cheeks to narrow the space in your mouth. Hold the sound steady and keep the air moving past the lips. Remember to keep the breath centred.

Next, repeat the trill gliding gently up and down through your pitch range. Stay in the area and volume that feels comfortable – it's not about being loud, nor being as high or low as possible.

This exercise releases tension in the lips and vocal folds, and helps connect breathing and speaking.

5. Tongue trills

Some may find this easier than the lip trill, others may find it more difficult!

Place the tip of the tongue behind the upper teeth, and gently release the breath on a trilled “r” sound. Think of sighing through the trill – it’s easy and relaxed; it is a pleasurable sigh of relief. Next, gently sigh up and down your pitch range on the tongue trill. You may like to visualise painting stripes upwards and downwards as your glide, drawing circles around and around, or writing your name in the air in front of you.

This exercise relaxes the tongue, and once again helps connect breathing and speaking.

6. Energise the articulators

Try these tongue twisters, making an effort to clearly pronounce the recurring sounds:

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

Giddy goddesses gathered together and gossiped in garrulous groups.

Billy Button bought a bunch of beautiful bananas.

World wide web. (repeat x 3)

Three free throws. (repeat x 3)

All these exercises are drawn from the work of Kristin Linklater (Freeing the Natural Voice 2006) and other leading voice practitioners.

It is recommended to consider practical training to further strengthen and develop your voice.