

The people who designed these handouts invested a lot of time and creativity in putting them together. They may be used within Region 31 for educational purposes but if you wish to use them as a teaching aid in another region or another musical organisation, please contact the author to obtain permission.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH PVI (Personal Vocal Instruction)

1. What are the aims of a PVI?
 - ✓ **Above all, it needs to be confidence-boosting**
 - ✓ To help the singer become more aware of good habits in her / his singing
 - ✓ To give some specifics which can help her / him improve

2. What would *you* want to improve about *your* singing?
 - ✓ Posture / alignment
 - ✓ Breathing and stamina
 - ✓ Intonation
 - ✓ Accuracy
 - ✓ Tone
 - ✓ Dynamic range and quality
 - ✓ Singing correct target vowels
 - ✓ _____
 - ✓ _____

*You will probably find that with most singers the primary areas to concentrate on are **posture (alignment) and breathing***

3. Some tips before you start
 - ✓ Greet the singer and make her / him feel at ease before starting to sing. (S)he will feel very nervous (as those of us who have had PVI's will know!!)
 - ✓ Do a little vocalising with her / him just to warm up her / his voice, then drop out when you feel it is appropriate.

*Suggestions : 1354321 then up / down a semitone
534231271 then up/ down a semitone
1324354231271 then up / down a semitone
Am sure you can think of some other simple exercises!*

- ✓ Keep your body language positive throughout
- ✓ Don't "crowd" the singer – give her / him some space!
- ✓ Always have something positive to say about the singer
- ✓ Give only 2 or 3 specific areas to focus on
- ✓ Give loads of praise for just being there!
- ✓ Give some simple exercises which can help improve a specific area
- ✓ Provide closure to the PVI with a summary of the areas you covered
- ✓ Give some homework and ideally arrange to meet again soon.....

ALIGNMENT, BREATHING, “FACIAL POSTURE”

Alignment :

1. Here’s a useful rap (Debbie Connelly)

Toes..... pressed
 Kneesflexed
 Pelvis.....tilted
 Ribcage.....lifted
 Shoulders.....relaxed

2. Or in other words (taken from Bay Area Showcase PVI Handbook)

We sing with the whole body – from head to toe

- Correct body alignment demands that
 - ✓ The singer’s weight should be forward towards the balls of the feet with one foot slightly ahead of the other, and the feet approximately shoulder width apart
 - ✓ The knees should be flexed and the pelvis tucked slightly
 - ✓ The head remains level yet should have the freedom to move easily from side to side
 - ✓ The chest is high and wide with the sternum lifted
 - ✓ The shoulders are relaxed and the elbows lifted slightly
 - ✓ No tension in the hands or fingers
 - ✓ The jaw should be relaxed, as just before a yawn. Tension here is likely to cause similar tension in the throat and tongue/

3. The Barbershop Harmony Society handbook on improving vocal techniques suggests

In general, the singer should “stand tall”, a feeling of being lifted from the back of the head by a large rubber band. This total sensation of lifting should make the singer feel that he / she has grown several inches in height. Do not raise heels from the floor.

Posture check list for singers

Skill	Well done	Focus here
Feet approximately shoulder width apart, one foot ahead		
Weight on balls of feet		
Knees flexed, pelvis tucked		
Chest wide, sternum lifted		
Shoulders relaxed		
Elbows slightly lifted		
Head level with floor		
Jaw aligned, not jutting		

Breathing :

1. Breathing technique

Here are some exercises designed to show whether the singer is using the correct breathing technique. Model first, then ask the singer to do them...

- i. Ch ch ch to 7, breathe on 8. Repeat at least 4 times to assess breathing technique
- ii. Dead battery exercise (vvvvvv 3, breathe, vvvvvv 3, breathe, vvvvvv 7 breathe)
- iii. Hissing 3 – 5 – 7 – 13 in rhythm (Sandi Wright)
- iv. Correct breathing technique using the Brava technique (Get rid of all the air....)

Breathing should be tension free (not *noisy* inhalation), relaxed yet energised posture and breathing, no shoulder movement or upper chest tension. If any of these are evident then homework could be the production of the correct breathing technique whilst doing the above exercises.

Check list – breathing technique

Possible problem area	Focus here
Tension in upper body	
Shoulder movement when breathing in	
Noisy inhalation	
Tension in neck and throat	
Check alignment	

Check list – correct breathing

Skill	Well done	Focus here
Abdominal breathing – expand during inhalation, contract during exhalation		
Ribcage remains comfortably expanded during most of the cycle of breathing		
Quick breaths happen more easily when the singer uses all the air at the end of each phrase		

2. Breath management

Two good exercises which the singer can do on a regular basis to monitor progress in this area....again, make sure you model first.

- i. In chest register (eg start on a B below middle C) sing numbers on scale tones doh, ray, doh, ray, doh etc as long as you can on one breath on a *mf* dynamic
- ii. In head register (eg start on an A above middle C) : do the same

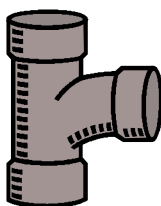
It is always good advice to get rid of all the air before taking a new breath, and this may help the singer improve his / her breath management.

Other exercises you can suggest to the singer to improve breath management :

- i. Sipping (sip to 5, hold for 5, hiss out to 5) Steadily increase to 10, 15, 20, 25
- ii. Variation on sipping (sip to 5, hold for 5, “fog” a mirror to 5, then increase as above)
- iii. Hissing – after taking in a breath , hiss the air out in a steady stream while mentally counting to 5, then increase to 10, 15, 20, 25 etc
- iv. “Bubbling” – try to “bubble” God Save the Queen or Happy Birthday.....see how far you get before it goes splat! Try to get a bit further each time. Bubbling is a fantastic exercise to be repeated on a regular basis – the better your breath management the better you will bubble!

Some mental imagery to help with breathing technique

- ✓ Think of inhaling as in the beginning of a yawn
- ✓ Inhale the vowel “oh” with a relaxed , open throat
- ✓ Imagine what it is like to step into the North Sea (or a cold shower) on a hot day. The result is a sudden gasp of air down deep.
- ✓ Imagine drinking a pint ofair!
- ✓ Allow the air to enter through relaxed lips
- ✓ Imagine that the air is going in through a large pipe down the back of the neck (Lori Lyford ‘s excellent DVD “Breathing to Sing” is a MUST! Available from SAI or Primarily A Capella)



Facial posture :

Our facial expression is valuable for more than showmanship alone! Good faces enhance good sound.

- i. Develop the “inside smile” which will lift the muscles which control the soft palate and will enable better resonance for the singer.
- ii. A relaxed jaw contributes to a freely produced sound and to better flexibility in singing
- iii. The tongue should be relaxed, lying easily (fat and lazy) in the bottom of the mouth, with the edges of the tongue resting softly against the lower teeth
- iv. Practise singing the 5 primary vowels (ah, eh, ee, oh, oo) without changing the position of the forward part of the tongue



TUNING AND ACCURACY

Some exercises to practise this :

- o *Sing up and down a major scale then 12131415161718 etc.*
- o *Another good exercise is the following vocalise 12345 54321 154535251545321 154535251545678*
- o *To reinforce the tonal centre reinforce the key of the song either by a “drone” or using an electronic pitch pipe*
- o *If chromatic intervals are a problem use the warm-up 151 13531 123454321 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 where “& “ is the chromatic interval. Blow the pitch at the end of the exercise to see if the singer has stayed in pitch*

What are the causes of poor intonation?

- Sometimes the external conditions can contribute (eg acoustics, humidity, poor ventilation, air conditioning, time of day!)
- Sometimes it is ourselves (lack of attention / concentration, lack of energy, failure to listen properly, anxiety or nervousness, insecurity of voice part, failure to *think* the interval correctly, poor concept of tonal centre / key of song, scooping, improper vocal production, repeated notes in a phrase, breathing technique, incorrect target vowel, part balance issues, “dumpage”).

What can we do to help?

Possible factor	Focus here
Alignment	
Inadequate breath support	
Incorrect tone (especially when singing <i>ff</i> or <i>pp</i>)	
Poor concept of tonal centre	
Incorrect target vowel	

VOWELS, DIPHTHONGS, CONSONANTS

Sing these twelve words slowly on a comfortable pitch, holding all target **vowels**.....

Look two doors down – it's that yoyo from Maine we met

There are 12 target vowel sounds in American English, all contained in the sentence above.

Make the mirror your best friend to check if you are doing it correctly!

Never underestimate the value of **unison** singing within the chorus or quartet to establish the correct vowel sounds.

Try the following exercise to help consolidate the main target vowels:

Meh mee mah moh moo (change the consonant and pitch)

Diphthongs – remember the 90:10 rule. (90% target vowel followed by 10% secondary vowel eg. lane = LEH – een)

Consonants – are there to give meaning to the sounds you utter but strive for vowel-to-vowel singing and avoid over articulation.

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