

Our Exclusive Sound Advice Vocal Warm-up

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“Elocution is oratorical or *expressive* delivery, including the graces of intonation, gesture, etc.; style or manner of speaking or reading in public; as, clear, impressive elocution. Eloquent diction.” - Oxford English Dictionary



Developing and keeping your vocal skills agile is a constant in this business. Much like any muscle, if you don't work them regularly they will atrophy and cease to work for you when you need them most. This is why warming up is vitally important to your professional credibility and overall confidence.

The fact that you're able to re-create what you have on your demos with very little effort ultimately demands you keep your vocal skills sharp at all times. Yet, if the only time you are working your chops is when you arrive on our doorstep to coach or record a session, then your career will begin and end at our front door.

You're ultimately responsible for whether you succeed. How well you're able to deliver what's promised from your demos has to be your prime mission. It takes dedication.

So, with that, here are the keys to kingdom. (Try not to lose them in the couch.)

Your Vocal Regimen

This process is exclusive to **Sound Advice** and designed to offer you the greatest command over your vocal skills, especially when maintained as a steady regimen. These techniques are designed to assist every talent *regardless of skill level*.

Make it your goal to do this warm-up *at least three to five times a week*, ideally in the morning, to develop a greater mastery over your articulation and diction. If you do, you'll develop greater vocal agility, which will make you a far more valuable voice talent and actor.

The goal here, as with all our training, is to give you good habits to develop and rely on.

This warm-up should take about 20 to 30 minutes, so be sure to allot the time for it. To achieve the very best results follow it with a good 20 to 30 minutes of cold reading, or practicing one or more of the exclusive vocal techniques imparted during your initial coaching sessions with us.

We strongly encourage you to practice this Vocal Warm-Up standing in front of a mirror, especially for the first month to establish a stable receipt point for your communication (namely YOU). After a few weeks, you can then relax that requirement and do your vocal warm-up in the shower, or while you're driving in the car on the way to work, to your agents, or a session. So, stand facing a mirror as you voice this Warm Up.

Be sure to remain well hydrated. We recommend you have tea-temperature hot water available to sip during every session, as well as during your Vocal Warm Up, to gently slough off the "cobwebs" from your vocal chords. Add a couple tablespoons of honey to your hot water if your throat is irritated, if you're recovering from a cold or flu, or simply for added benefits of soothing your throat. Lots of cool or cold water before and after each voiceover session, just as you would before and after a standard physical workout.

Okay, START!

1. Get yourself into **neutral**; lose all tension

Purpose: To make a habit out of returning to a stable, relaxed state prior to uttering a sound. It's the best habit to get into!

- a. Get yourself centered and relaxed (from the ground up) before making a sound.
- b. Exhale completely to ensure your breath is well-supported to avoid shallow breathing.
- c. Allow your mouth go slack by leaving it slightly agape and loose.
- d. Allow your body to back up your voice. In other words, gesture in a fluid motion to take your attention off your mouth and to avoid mouth noise.

ALWAYS come back to **neutral** *prior* to attempting each take, and as you proceed through each of the following exercises.

2. Vocalize an "OOO" siren from **low-to-high** (never *high to low*)*

Purpose: To smooth out vocal cracks in your voice (which are technically breaks in your pitch) using a smooth vocalized scale, also known as a *glissando* or a *gliss* (example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ts6pD9pRqos>) from **low-to-high ONLY**; to get you to use your body to back up your voice through gesture (and to take a good deal of your attention off giving your mouth full responsibility for creating all your sound); to fine-tune your diction and build your vocal agility.

- a. Keep your head level rather than tilting it upward while going up the scale.
- b. Vocalize an “OOO” sound in a slow, steady and deliberate scale, **from low to high ONLY**.
- c. Motion upward with your hand to coincide with your voice; your body backs up your voice.
- d. *Do not speed. Slow down, take your time* to allow for more control and build agility.
- e. Your sound should taper off (or soften at the end) once you reach the top of the scale in order to avoid employing tension in your throat and mouth.
- f. Repeat 8 to 10 times in a row.

** It may come as a surprise, but according to speech pathologists, randomly running scales high to low will actually incorporate ‘cracks’ (known as ‘pitch breaks’) in your voice: the very thing we’re trying to avoid, alleviate and eliminate. Therefore, to correct this issue, and strengthen your voice overall, they recommend running gradual, easy glissandos **low to high ONLY**.*

NOTE: *You will most likely hit a crack or two in your voice during these exercises. Be sure to **add two to three more scales/glissandos** to the total number of scales you’re doing in order to correct the issue and instill proper ‘muscle memory’. Each scale that follows will have far less, if any, pitch-break quality. Each additional scale will further smooth out your sound, and strengthen your voice and muscle memory in a beneficial way.*

3. **Loosen up your lips**

Purpose: To further warm up your front articulators while easing and avoiding placing any added tension in your face, lips, and mouth.

- a. Pinch your top lip (at the base of the philtrum) and make clockwise circles while putting a “ba-ba-ba-ba” sound behind each rotation. Shake it out. Repeat for 20 to 30 seconds.
- b. Pinch your top lip again, but this time make counterclockwise circles for another 20 to 35 seconds, while making the same “ba-ba-ba-ba” sound behind this motion.
- c. Repeat the same actions with your bottom lip.

4. **Buzzing the lips**

Purpose: To warm up your front articulators using a *glissando* again from **low-to-high ONLY**; to get you to use your body to back up your voice through gesture, while smoothing out pitch breaks (cracks) in your voice and keep your voice supported and sounding younger, longer.

- a. Keep your head level rather than tilting upward as you gradually voice the scale, low to high.
- b. Make a motorboat sound with your lips (like a child would do) by placing a subtle hum just behind your lips.
- c. Do a scale *low to high* while buzzing your lips, while gesturing up the scale with your hand. (Your body backs up your voice.)
- d. The sound should simply decay (fade away) at the top of the scale rather than end abruptly.

e. Repeat *at least* 8 to 12 times.

NOTE: The first week or so attempting this exercise can be challenging. You may find your buzzed-lip sound the entire expanse of your lips. You'll be expelling far more air than sound when you directly buzz your lips. Your sound will not be specific enough to achieve the effect we're going for, and achieve the results we're trying to master. Should this occurs, hold up two fingers about an inch or so in front of your mouth, as if you are pretending to smoke. Aim your buzzing-lips sound between your two parted fingers. Get some sound behind your lips. Keep trying. Add a scale from low to high behind it the buzzed sound. Take your time. Don't be afraid to make a mess.

If you find buzzing your lips is difficult and discover you're not buzzing your lips at all, then you're centering your sound *too far back in your mouth* or possibly in your throat at present. Keep your head level rather than tilting upward as you gradually voice the scale, low to high.

Make a motorboat sound with your lips (like a child would do) by placing a subtle hum just behind your lips. Slowly and deliberately hum a scale *low to high* while buzzing your lips. The sound should simply decay (fade away) at the top of the scale rather than end abruptly.

Repeat *at least* 8 to 12 times.

Be sure to gesture up the scale with your hand as you vocalize. Your body backs up your voice. (Or it doesn't. When it doesn't you're only acting from the neck up and the result tends to be stilted, stiff, and flat.)

Don't be discouraged if you don't find the buzzing your lips exercise naturally intuitive. Riding a bike wasn't immediately intuitive either. It took some time a due-diligence, but few of us remember learning to ride a bike. So keep at it!

Children the world over buzz their lips for 3 to 4 years as their ability to articulate speech develops. So we're going back to basics here. If a child can do it, you can too. And if you're having a tough time buzzing your lips, then you're mumbling or swallowing your sound to some extent and you don't even know it. So stay the course.

Sound follows thought. Place your attention just out in front of your mouth by about 3 to 4 inches. With continued application of this exercise alone, your articulation will sharpen, and your diction dramatically more specific.

5. Stick out your tongue in a long, full stretch, as if a doctor is looking down your throat, as you say, "Aaahhhh"

Purpose: Since your tongue is one of the longest muscles you have, you need to stretch it before working it out; doing so will allow for greater dexterity of articulation, elocution, stamina and diction, and ultimately will *decrease* the opportunity for mouth noise.

- a. **Keep your head level**, rather than leaning forward, craning your neck, or moving your head down as you voice the sound.
- b. Make an elongated “aaahhh” (as in “apple”) sound as you hyperextend your tongue out of your mouth in a long stretch.
- c. Your hand gesture should coincide with the movement of your tongue. Again, the body backs up the voice.
- d. Be sure to place your sound out in front of you, *rather than swallow it or center it in the back of your throat.*
- e. Open up the back of your throat with the elongated “aaahhh” sound, as if a doctor were looking down your throat. The sound should *never* have a choking quality or be focused/directed through the back of your neck. Instead this is done without tension.
- f. Let the sound soften at the end rather than tightening. (Creating tension such as this is known as a glottal stop. Avoid it. Keep everything easy but hyperextended.)
- g. Repeat 6 to 8 times.

6. **Placement of Sound— “The Lucille Ball”**

Purpose: To develop greater control over placement and focus your sound. This exercise allows you to confidently discern the difference between a nasal quality and a fully articulated sound. Based on the principle that “sound follows thought.”

- a. Hold your nose and do your best “Lucille Ball” by concentrating your sound up and through the mask of your face (i.e. *into your sinuses and out through your face*) thereby creating a very nasal-y sound with a “neeee-ahhhh” sound. Your tongue should gradually extend outward in a stretch on the “ahhh” portion of the sound. Allow your hands to gesture accordingly for support to allow your body to back up your sound.
- b. Continue holding your nose, but this time *redirect the focus of your sound* out in front of you rather than up into your face/sinuses. The sound shouldn’t contain any nasality. The sound is strictly an “aaahhh” sound. Your tongue should gradually stretch out fully as you vocalize.
- c. Repeat the above sequence the same in every way, *except this time don’t hold your nose*; the sound should virtually be the same whether or not you’re holding your nose.
- d. Repeat 4 times *each*: Holding your nose, into your mask/sinuses, then out in front of you; tongue extends both times to a full stretch as you go. Then, *without holding your nose*, place the sound up into the mask, then out in front of you; again the tongue extends to a full stretch both times as you go.

7. **AAhh, AAww: The Tongue Stretch**

Purpose: To give you a good final stretch of the tongue, allowing you to open up your fully supported voice while placing your sound out in front of you, even over an obstacle such as your own tongue.

- a. Keep your head level. Don’t lean forward with the stretch of your tongue, or move your head down with your sound. Just level, steady, and easy.
- b. Hyperextend your tongue out in front of you with an “aaahh” (as in “apple”)

sound using full sound; avoid any swallowed or constricting quality.

- c. Bring your tongue back into your mouth, letting it relax in your mouth. Leave your mouth agape, with an “awww” (as in “awning”) sound.
- d. The object is to maintain proper placement of articulated sound (out in front of you) with ease and with full support of your diaphragm, regardless of whether your tongue is sticking out, fully extended, or lying slack and relaxed in your mouth.
- e. Your hand gesture should motion outward as your tongue is extended or back coinciding with your tongue placement.
- f. This exercise is done spiritedly, rather than slow and methodically, but always with attention on precision and accuracy.
- g. Repeat 6 to 8 times.

8. LA-NA-DA-TA-GA-ING-KA (This useful element is credited to seasoned pro, vocal coach and vocalist Raven Kane. I have no idea where she came upon it, but it’s a terrific addition to this regimen.)

Purpose: This exercise develops cleaner, more agile enunciation through repetitions, isolating and articulating each sound by systematically concentrating them out in front of you, using only your tongue to do so.

- a. Again, keep your head level, leave your mouth slack. Leave your mouth still and open about half an inch or so.)
- b. Vocalize: **LA-LA-LA-LA-LA...** using *only* your tongue to create the sound. *Isolate the movement of your jaw in order to force your tongue to create the fully articulated sound.* Focus the sound directly out in front of you with each vocalization. Avoid sending the sound into your cheeks, the back of your throat or up into your nose and sinuses. Repeat at least 10 to 12 times.
- c. Observe each vocalization in the mirror to ensure keeping your mouth and jaw as motionless as possible and relaxed. Concentrate the sound 4 to 6 inches directly out in front of your mouth, forcing your tongue to articulate each sound as you proceed.
- d. Next, while continuing to isolate the movement of your mouth and jaw, forcing your tongue to articulate the sound, Vocalize: **NA-NA-NA-NA-NA.** (Again, avoiding any nasality. Focus your sound directly out in front of you, rather than up in your face or back in your throat.) Repeat at least 10 to 12 times.
- e. Vocalize: **DA, TA, GA, ING, KA.** Speak as deliberately and concisely as you can. Once more, keep your jaw still, and your mouth slightly agape. Again the objective is to force your tongue to articulate these sounds as clearly, concisely and carefully as you can. Your sound will become more and more articulated with each repetition. Place your sound directly out in front of your mouth.
- f. Repeat this exercise in its entirety 6 to 8 times through. Do it with purpose—the results will astound you.

You’ve now completed your Vocal Warm-Up. You should have far greater stamina and cleaner diction even after a single application of these exercises in their entirety. Just imagine what continued application of this regimen will do for you.

Best advice: keep going!

Two Weeks to Create a Habit

A single vocal work out is one thing. Vocal fitness takes time. It's really about proper conditioning.

Experts say it takes two weeks to create a habit. It's no accident then that it will likely take at least that to make a habit out of this warm-up to gain some of the greatest benefits from these exercises, just like any workout. Then again, it may take a month or more before you see the difference for yourself.

The key here is consistency. So, stay with it. You have everything to gain from it if you do.

Follow Up

Follow the **Sound Advice** Vocal Warm-Up with cold reading a book out loud, such as a children's story like any written by Dr. Seuss or *Alice in Wonderland* for an additional 20 to 30 minutes to increase your cold-reading skills.

Dedicate yourself to this regimen *no less* than three to five times a week to keep your vocal skills sharp and to tone your cold-reading muscle.

A Word About Wind

When you first find yourself in front of a mic in a booth, you're likely to find yourself surprised to discover just how much you sound like Darth Vader—at least, every time you take a breath. Undue attention on your breathing can introvert you, and we don't want that. Instead, direct your attention outward, rather than inward.

Here's the thing: Breathing is an involuntary action. You're going to do it no matter what.

Of course, *shallow breathing* can and should be avoided by allowing yourself to come back to neutral (a fully relaxed state) by exhaling completely prior to going into the next take. Your objective is to make a habit (a muscle memory) of returning to neutral, this grounded state, before uttering a sound.

As for placing undue attention on your breathing, and whether you need to do anything else beyond focusing your attention on the performance at hand, all I can say is: There's a learning curve here.

Relax. Get yourself into neutral. Exhale and GO. Your breathing will manage itself for the most part. Breathing deals with phrasing as much as anything, which is an entirely different subject. (We focus on phrasing during coaching, which all but eliminates undue attention on when and where to breathe.)

Noteworthy

It's worth noting our **Sound Advice Vocal Warm-Up** is compiled in large part from surveys of several certified speech pathologists, completely independent of one another, as well as from a handful of extremely successful voice talent who swear by these techniques.

Speech pathologists (speech paths) in particular know the true value of drilling vocal combinations in order to develop and correct articulation and diction. This is precisely how speech paths can effectively assist a four-year-old with a stutter to speak with fluidity,

and someone who's survived a stroke to regain his ability to speak. Imagine what these exercises can do for *you* assuming you aren't playing through such obstacles or handicaps. These exercises will allow you to master your vocal prowess provided you dedicate yourself to making this warm-up part of your weekly regimen. You have to make it your business to do so.

Follow our recording of this Vocal Warm Up to support proper placement and tonal goals. We hope this Warm Up will become a reliable resource for you for many years to come, and assist you in making a routine of delivering the most concise enunciation and elocution possible, that's rich, well-supported, fully articulated of sound.

Best wishes!

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