

Rachel MORE

5 Tips To Help You Sing Better

Welcome! I am delighted that you have chosen to take a step towards singing better as I know you will soon come to realise that it is something that is already within you and you need just to take a deep breath and start to let it out. Here I am going to share with you 5 of the main ways to help you sing better.

1

The Power of Stillness

The first part to learning how to use your voice well is to start from a place of body awareness and stillness. It is in the stillness that we can start to build your voice. You see your voice is part of you, it is carried around in you, linked to all the other parts of your body and unlike a guitar or piano it can be affected by our mood on a given day for example whether we have a cold, how much sleep we had the night before and so on.

So, stop what you are doing and just start from a position of stillness. **Here goes!**

- 1) Find your most comfortable chair, one that ideally you can sink right back into and relax.**
- 2) Place your hands on your lap and close your eyes.**
- 3) Take a breath through your nose and feel that breath enter your body like a zap of energy and hold it for a few seconds then exhale with a deep sigh as loud as you can. Feels nice doesn't it!**
- 4) Try it again for 2 more times and this time try and get a deeper breath. Don't worry for now about how you are breathing I will show you how best to do that in the next tip. As you breath in, be aware of any tension in your body and imagine that your breath is acting like a soothing balm taking it away. Try and imagine a big black piece of velvet in your mind's eye to shut down any thoughts that could distract you.**

Take time to do this as what you are doing is connecting with the greatest engine you have in your body, your breathing machine. We so often overlook this and don't take the time out just to be aware of it.

In my next tip I will be sharing with you just how magical this breathing can be for singers. By mastering it you will feel more confident, sing for longer and feel great!

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The Engine

In the previous tip I explained how important it is to start from a place of stillness. I am now going to delve deeper and show you how you can improve your breathing technique which will make you feel as well as sound great. It is no wonder that Doctors are prescribing the very same method I am going to show to you to patients to help with eliminating anxiety, reducing blood pressure etc.

Did you know we were born breathing this way? If you ever look at a newborn baby or a pet dog or cat you will see their chest stays completely still and their tummy moves up and down rising and falling with every breath. This is called abdominal breathing as it is taking the air further down into the body, with the chest and shoulders staying still and the stomach moving out on the in breath (inhale) and then back in on the out breath (exhale).

It can take a bit of time to master but once learnt and practised it will become automatic and you will notice a big, big difference in the way you talk as well as sing so even if you try singing and decide you don't really want to continue to master all the techniques this will benefit you anyway, so that's worth something isn't it!

So, let's start now with you standing up Ideally in front of a mirror so you can check for yourself to see what you are doing as I can't see you!

1) Stand with your legs hip width apart

2) Your weight needs to be eventually distributed in both legs

3) Stand up on your tip toes and then connect your feet flat back down on the ground but softening your knees slightly as you do so moving your weight towards your toes rather than how most of us stand with the weight back towards our ankles. Wriggle your toes, you should feel them gripping the floor beneath you.

4) Next bring your right hand over and place your thumb in your tummy button and then place your fingers flat against your tummy underneath your tummy button horizontally.

5) Now take a deep breath through your nose keeping your shoulders straight and aim to push your hand away from your tummy as you do so – it's like you are inflating a rubber ring around your middle! Hold for a count of 3 and then breath out through your mouth with a big sigh. Try this 6 times more. You may start to feel a bit light headed but that is normal as you are taking in deeper air into your body which is good.

In my next tip I will show you another way to get this working easier for you and you will be starting to make some sounds.

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Let's Make Some Noise!

Ok so we have looked at getting you ready to sing and start to become aware of your breathing and how to stand. The correct posture is crucial for optimising your voice, whether spoken or sung.

One of my former students was a teacher in a mainstream secondary school and wanted help to project her voice over the din of her sometimes exuberant pupils! She was very petite and quite quietly spoken. By adopting the breathing technique, and one of the singing techniques used by singers in the theatre world, she stunned her pupils one day by calling out to them in the loudest, booming, most powerful voice! She laughed as she recalled one of her most troublesome pupils almost fall off his chair with amazement and from then on he towed the line and she had a much more peaceful time in the classroom!

So, let's start:

This is best done when you have no-one else around so you feel less inhibited and can really make some noise!

1) Start by taking those 3 deep breaths in the way I demonstrated (remember tummy out then tummy in)

2) On the breath in I want you to imagine you are dropping a ball off a mountain, a big red ball, and you are going to mimic the way it sounds as it drops down. So, saying “ooo” (rhyming with “who”) let’s go – “oooooooo”.

3) This ball is a bouncy one so it is going to come right back up so you can catch it – so let’s make the sound as it travels from the bottom of the cliff back up to you this time sliding upwards so going from a lower sound to a higher sound.

The sound you have just made is your own, natural, uninhibited singing voice. How did it sound to you? Don't worry it is not meant to sound that great, it's a raw sound from within.

Practise bouncing that ball down and up the cliff and in my next tip we'll start to make it sound better.

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Bring It Forward!

One of the other great ways to immediately improve how you sound whether speaking or singing is called ‘forward placement’. This is when you direct your voice to the edge of your mouth (i.e. to your lips). This results in your voice sounding clearer and stronger.

There are **two sounds** you can use straightaway to help you achieve this:

The first one is humming. I want you to hum one of your favourite songs. If you can't think of anything right now try something with a familiar tune such as *Happy Birthday*. Hum along to it and be aware of bringing your voice forwards towards your lips – your lips must be just touching but not pursed together and you need to feel a tingling sensation on your lips as you hum away. If you don't get that straightaway then stop, relax your mouth by breaking into a smile and try again.

When you've got it lets **move on to the second** which is the most common, effective sound all singers have in their armoury and one that is often underused and that is the “ooo” sound.

To get the “ooo” sound working well stand if you can in front of the mirror and move your lips into an ‘o’ shape – and now make the sound “ooo” rhyming with “who”. Try singing the same song you used for the mmm sound. How does that feel? You should still feel a tingly sensation.

Why not choose a song you enjoy listening to, and have maybe tried singing along to, that is not too challenging and practise singing along to it on a hum and then on an “ooo”. This will help you to match the melody without having to sing the words at this stage and also help your voice sound clearer and louder without having to force your voice. Once you have had a go at this sing it through again, this time using the words, and you should notice a difference in the sound you make. It should sound fuller and more flowing.

If you can't think of anything suitable to sing don't worry I will give you some help with this in the next tip.

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Finding Your Song

As I mention in my blog *Can't Sing Won't Sing* so many people are put off from singing because they don't think they can, have been told they can't or simply have lost confidence in their ability.

One of the things I have discovered in all my years of teaching people to sing is when I ask them who they like to listen to you often find it is Adele, Whitney, Beyoncé, Ella, Frank Sinatra, or a host of other people we hear on the radio. So often when we hear these skilled singers who have learnt all the techniques in the singer's toolkit you can feel like you can't even begin to sound as good as them. But, guess what, you can!

I cannot stress strongly enough that you are going to feel underwhelmed if you try singing along to your favourite artist because chances are they sing too high or too low for you so you can't reach the notes and *match* them. Also, they are using a variety of tried and tested techniques from the *singer's toolkit* that you haven't yet had experience of.

We are going to stop that right now! Instead you are going to choose a song that's in a more easy to reach part of your voice and the place to start is to start lower and choosing what I call a 'neutral song'. This is a song that sits in a comfortable part of the average voice, being neither too low or too high, that you can sing along to and feel good doing so.

Some examples of these neutral songs are Carol King's *You've Got a Friend*, *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow* or *It's Too Late*. Carol King is an amazing songwriter but she hasn't got the widest vocal range in her armoury, so all her songs are comfortable to sing along to. Give it a go. You can access the song right now on YouTube just type in the song title, artist and lyrics and you can get singing straight away.

Well done!

I really hope you've enjoyed these tips and found them useful. I'd love to know how you've got on and / or whether there is something you'd like more help with. Whatever it is, do drop me a line as I'd love to hear from you.

Here's to uncovering your voice!

Rachel

www.rachelmore.com

