

Reclaim the Power of Your Voice: Singing and Speaking Exercises

by Andrea Decker

What words do you think of when you hear or see the word “voice?”

Sound Speaking Power
Talk
Singing Voting
Expression Unity Political Action

We often associate the word voice with having power, confidence, and freedom. When we have a voice, we get to express our opinions. But how many of us feel nervous when we have to sing or speak?

In this lesson, you’ll learn some exercises to help you feel more powerful when using your voice.

Start with some stretches.

1. Sit in a comfortable position in a chair, your back away from the back of the chair. Let your head fall gently forward on your chest. Exhale. Then swing it slowly over towards your left shoulder. Let it hang as though you’re about to fall asleep. Relax here for a few breaths. If you want to yawn, let yourself yawn! Next, bring your head upright again and repeat the stretch, this time swinging your head gently to the right.
2. From the same sitting position, let your head fall back with your mouth open. While your head hangs, let it move gently from side to side as you breathe. After several breaths, bring your head back upright.
3. Stand with feet about shoulder-width apart. Exhaling, keep your arms straight and lift them parallel to the ground, palms facing down. Inhaling, turn your palms facing up and lift your arms so they’re straight above your head. Feel how tall, big and powerful you are. Then, exhaling, fall forward to touch your toes, knees gently bent. Let your arms and head hang down and pay attention to your breathing. After a few breaths, try shaking your head as if saying “yes” and “no.” Feel whether your neck is hanging free. Then hang for several more slow breaths. When you feel relaxed and loose, slowly raise up your body, letting your head hang loose until the rest of your back is straight.

Now let's make some sounds.

1. Put your hand up to your ear and pretend like you're talking on a cellphone. Your friend just told you some really surprising news! Say "Huh!" into the phone as if reacting in surprise. Do it ten times in ten different ways, each time remembering how surprised you are.
2. Now pretend like your friend on the phone is telling you about something annoying that happened to them. You agree that it's so frustrating! Say "Uh huh," as if in agreement, ten times in ten different ways into your "phone."
3. Pretend like your friend just told you a really funny story. You can't stop laughing! Laugh into the pretend phone, "huh-huh," a giggle. Keep laughing for ten seconds! Try laughing up high in your voice, then down low.
4. Now pretend like your friend has said something you don't quite believe. Pretending to be suspicious, say "Huuuhh," an extended sound, sliding down, into your phone. Repeat "Huuuhh" or "Hmmm," sliding your voice down, ten times in ten different ways. You don't believe your friend is telling the truth!
5. Finally, pretend you're crying into the phone. Make a crying or whining sound as if you're sobbing. Try sliding it around your voice. You are so sad! Keep pretending to cry for ten seconds.

Put your pretend phones down. Why do you think we did these exercises?

Did you know our vocal chords have many other purposes besides making sounds? In fact, their original purpose was not vocal at all! Scholars think humans started making vocal sounds in response to strong emotional situations, like expression pleasure while eating or crying out when in pain. **When we do exercises that connect your voice to emotions, we reestablish the link between your voice and emotional expression.**

What's the difference between these emotional expressions and singing?
When we sing, we stretch out these sounds and make them last longer.

1. Try saying "huuhhhh" again, this time like you're sighing. Do it quickly the first few times, then try to maintain the feeling of sighing while stretching out the sound.
2. Now try sighing "huuhhhh" again, this time aiming to hit the notes of a major scale, "sol-fa-mi-re-do." It's okay if you don't sing the notes perfectly. Focus instead on keeping the sighing feeling and aiming for the right notes.
3. The next time you have to sing something, try practicing it on a "huh" first. For example, sing "Happy Birthday" as if you're laughing, then as if you're crying. **You'll be amazed how much stronger your voice will be and how much easier singing will become!**