

## **(VOC4C002R~001) 24103916 Musicianship Skills Vocal Technical Portfolio**

### **WORD COUNT:**

1647 words + 10m 4s video.

### **Introduction**

Prior to singing, there are a variety of exercises and techniques you can utilise in order to release tension and improve your vocal performance. These can range from physical exercises to aural exercises such as warm-ups and cool-downs, which can vary in difficulty, however they all offer unique benefits for singers. Warming up the voice and body before singing is like the process for athletes, of preparing the muscles and joints for heavier and specific use, helping to minimize overall muscular effort. *"When the forces are at its minimum, then technical control is at its optimum"* (Jenevora Williams, 2012).

In this reflective essay, I will evaluate the importance and effectiveness of the various physical and aural exercises that I have demonstrated with my clients, focusing mainly on posture.

### **First Exercise - Shoulder Rolls, Raises And Drops**

Recent studies of classical singers showed that some neck and shoulder muscles contributed to the regulation of singing pressure. The study also showed that when the singers were observed in arias from their standard repertoires, they showed consistent use of the neck and shoulder muscles (Viggo Pettersen et al, 2005).

Furthermore, Pamela S. Phillips (2020) stated that to find the right position of balance for the shoulders whilst singing, move your shoulders up and then drop them down, as doing so can help you figure out how far up or down your resting position needs to be (which should be in the middle). Whilst raising and dropping the shoulders, it is beneficial to inhale as the shoulders raise, and exhale as they drop. If your shoulders hunch or round forward, this means your chest is collapsed, making the releasing and opening of the torso for the breath more difficult. Finding your resting position is important as the balancing of your head directly affects the muscles in your neck. Some of the main muscles you use whilst singing are in your neck/throat, (such as the various muscles in your larynx) so these need to be warmed up and exercised before any vocally strenuous activity. (Pamela S. Phillips, 2020). Another shoulder exercise that I have come across during my vocal training is Shoulder Clocks. This is an exercise where you roll your shoulders backwards and forwards with the thought of the hands on a grandfather clock. Your neutral and balanced shoulder position would be at twelve o'clock and then you would roll your shoulders forwards (clockwise) and hit every hour on the clock to initiate the full roll of the shoulders, then repeat this backwards.

Using these theories, I decided to use shoulder rolls, raises and drops with my clients in order to release tension in the shoulders and neck, allowing us to feel more relaxed during singing. I chose to use this specific exercise, not only because it is strongly supported by research, but

also as I have experienced the benefits that they have first-hand as part of my participation in vocal training and teacher training pathways.

### **Second Exercise - Chewing**

The second exercise I demonstrated was a chewing motion exercise, aiming to release tension in the jaw and face to be able to drop our jaw when singing certain sounds. The jaw has five muscles that allow it to function when the mouth is opening, closing, chewing, and moving from side to side. When common motor functions like chewing, yawning, or talking produces loud pops, clicking sounds, or in some cases both, it can become extremely painful and can often lead to a condition called TMJ (temporomandibular joint dysfunction). This condition affects the ability to use one's jaw comfortably and effectively (Jimenez, 2024). To prevent and relieve jaw tension, I conducted a chewing exercise which included acting as if we were chewing something very dramatically, like a cow on its cud, with scrunched up and stretched facial expressions to stretch every muscle in the jaw and mouth, and to release tension in these areas (Manahan and Manahan, 2011). I have also found in my personal practises that this makes my jaw feel more mobile whilst singing. For sounds that require the jaw to be placed in a dropped position, it is essential for the jaw to feel loose and relaxed so that it is able and comfortable to move around freely with no constrictions.

### **Third Exercise - Tongue And Jaw Massage**

Thirdly, my clients and I performed a tongue and jaw massaging exercise with the aim of toning and relaxing the jaw and tongue muscles to prevent tension issues such as Tongue Root Tension, and to help for vowel formation whilst singing. Facial exercises give overall tone to facial muscles and allow for relaxation. To perform a tongue and jaw massage, you must massage the jaw line from the tip of the ears to the centre of the chin with your fingertips using small and gentle circular motions underneath the tongue (Manahan and Manahan, 2011). Another reason I felt strongly about the importance of this exercise was due to the evidence provided by author Carla LaFevre in "Journal Of Singing". Within this journal, LaFevre states *"The tongue consists of a sizeable number of muscles, the contractions of which have the ability to affect negatively or positively articulation, resonance, and efficiency of phonation. Thus, optimal use of this organ is central to developing and maintaining a healthy, successful vocal technique. The interrelatedness of the intrinsic and extrinsic musculature of the tongue, jaw, velum, and larynx potentially enables the tongue to impact the function of each of these phonologic components. As a result, a pedagogic approach that focuses directly on the tongue can have a wide-ranging effect on technical outcome"* (Carla LeFevre, 2011). This information helped me to learn how important exercises such as tongue massages are for singing, and how much the tongue plays a part in our voice.

### **Fourth Exercise (Vocal)**

To warm up the vocals, I taught an aural warm-up for the voice based on the major scale. Whilst researching effective vocal exercises, I discovered evidence that a "nyah" sound warms up our nasal tone and higher register. *"This one is good for high notes. "nyah", a nasal sound"* (Oren,

2025). Whilst conducting my exercises, I decided to instruct my clients to perform a vocal warm-up alongside myself, whilst having the voice ascend on the major scale in a nasal “nyah” sound to access a whiny noise (similar to a mixed register) to access the twang in our voice, and descend in a “nah” sound on the major scale for a clearer and more resonant tone, similar to a classical singer.

*“As you go up and down on the melody with these exercises, don't think about going up or down- even if the melody is! Think about going to the sides. Hold an imaginary rubber band and stretch it to the sides” (Oren, 2025).* To include this analogy in my practical work, I described the “nyah” sound to my clients as a “smiley sound” to encourage them to imagine a big grin across ones face whilst making the sound, similar to the analogies idea of “going to the sides” and “holding an imaginary rubber band and stretching it to the sides”. I also used this similar analogy to have my clients imagine this sound as a lighter and happier sound, as opposed to the other sound being described by myself as a rich and mature tone with a dropped jaw. Prior to starting this exercise, I ensured that my clients had their correct posture for singing, and told them to imagine that they are being held up by an imaginary piece of string, that their shoulders are not slouched and that their knees are not locked. I also wanted to discourage my clients from straining their voices, with one of them being female and one male, I realised that their vocal ranges and flexibility would be different, so I reassured them that when the pitch gets too high for them, to stop singing. Also mentioned was vibrato, I wanted my clients to feel comfortable in the room and encouraged to practise any techniques or natural vocal habits they have as long as they are healthy, so I made sure to remind them if they would like to add some vibrato on the end of the phrases then this was also completely fine, and it would definitely fit well with the more classical tone as we were descending on the “nah” sound.

## **Adaptations**

For different demographics (such as older and younger) I would conduct these exercises differently. For older demographics, I feel that I would be much more detailed in my instruction, explaining the reasons for the exercises and sometimes the science behind them in order to help the client feel like there is a purpose for these exercises and that it is making a difference, whether they are physically using their voice or not. With the younger demographic, I would explain less about the science behind the exercises as not to disinterest the children, but I would still explain briefly. I would make a lot of the exercises into games of who can chew the largest, who can raise their shoulders the biggest and inhale the biggest breath, and making songs about different exercises such as the tongue massage and possibly using words for the major scale rather than just singing one phrase all the way through, like the popular "Mummy made me mash my M&M's" alternative which is sung on the major scale. This would keep the children engaged and having fun, rather than seeing warming up for singing something that is boring, they can relax and have fun.

*“Children are intrinsically motivated to play, which makes it fertile ground for learning and developing new skills. During play, children can take charge, making choices about what they do and how. Play can be a highly social activity, allowing for opportunities to learn from and about others” (Zosh et al., 2017)*

## References

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