Vocalize!

45 Accompanied Vocal Warm-Ups that Teach Technique

Composed and Arranged by Andy Beck
Come Now, Let Our Voices Ring

For many singers, the healthiest part of the voice is in the middle range. This exercise begins in that “sweet spot” (for most) and gently descends. Be cautious not to add extra weight as the notes go down, but rather float like a feather to the lower pitches.

Optional: Sing only the vowel sounds of each word, drawing attention to mouth shape and space.

I Just Want to Sing

This simple exercise is a great way to capture the attention of singers at the start of rehearsal. It serves as a cue to “sing correctly” every time. Be mindful of everything you know about good vocal technique, and apply it throughout.

Optional: Try to perform the four-bar phrase in one breath.

Sing a Joyful Song

Without forcing the jaw or tongue, allow the mouth to be open both inside and out on words like “song,” “long,” “joy,” and “fa la la.” Avoid closing on consonants such as “ng” and “l.”

Optional: Massage the sides of your face and the muscles where the lower jaw attaches in back. Loosen everything up as you vocalize.
Warming Up Our Voices

Sing four-bar phrases, breathing only at rests. Add Curwen hand signs when singing solfège syllables. (See page 20.)

Alternate Lyrics: Now rehearsal’s starting, ready for some fun: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 3, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Feet Are Firmly Planted

Good standing posture is absolutely essential for good singing. Follow the lyrics closely as instructions for proper alignment. Check yourself as each body part is mentioned, relaxing into position and avoiding tension.

Relax, Release

The popular gym workout phrase, “no pain, no gain,” has absolutely no truth for singers! Never allow strain or tightness in the body or throat. Instead, strive for comfort from head to toe.

Optional: Perform this exercise while swaying gently from side to side. Release your legs, knees, arms, elbows, shoulders, neck, and head.
Roll Your Shoulders

One of the first places that we hold physical tension is in our shoulders. Move slowly and with purpose while singing this exercise, circling the shoulders in each direction, releasing any tightness.

Raising and lowering the chin while singing places unwanted pressure and strain on the neck and throat. So, it is important to maintain a level and balanced head throughout your full vocal range.

Optional: Balance a choir folder or book on your head while singing this exercise.

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Drop Your Jaw

Follow the lyrics closely and do as they say, creating vertical space inside the mouth and rounded lips. Be careful not to force the jaw or lips into position, but rather allow them to float easily from one shape to the next.
My, Oh Me, Oh My

As written, this exercise presents mostly open vowels connected by the letter “m,” which helps to bring the voice forward. Feel free to change the consonants or vowels based on specific goals.

Suggestions: “Why, oh we, oh why” will add the roundness of “oo” at each “w.” A rolled “Rye, oh Rio, rye” will relax the tongue. “Fye, oh fee, oh fye” insures that breath is flowing at the onset of tone.

Nee, Neh, Nah, Noh, Noo

Sing with pure vowels while connecting each and every note to create a legato line. Allow the jaw to float easily into each new position, using relaxed lips to form round sounds.

Optional: The letter “n” helps to develop resonance, but the director may choose to call out other initial consonants (voiced or unvoiced) during each key change.

With a Joyful Tone

Keep the attitude of this exercise joyful and light while maintaining a quality sound. Even though the music is bright, strive for warm vowels by visualizing tall oval shapes at the core of every word.

Optional: Experiment with different volumes. No matter what the dynamic range, the integrity of vowels should be consistent.
Breath Support

Prior to singing, take a deep breath, allowing the abdomen and diaphragm to fully expand while the chest and shoulders remain relaxed. Support your voice by connecting to a controlled, firm exhalation. For this exercise, breathe only when you see a rest.

Optional: Place your hand on your abdomen to draw attention to breathing. As you sing, push lightly with that hand, creating a comfortable amount of resistance.

Flying, Sighing

Be sure to inhale completely on each rest, allowing the voice to ride firmly on the breath as you sing. Be aware that changing from one note to the next is best achieved when facilitated by the breath.

Optional: Experiment with sliding from pitch to pitch. This may help to create a true legato line supported by the breath.

Resist Caving In

As you inhale and fill with air, the front, sides, and back of the torso should fully expand. When you sing, carefully “budget” and “spend” the air—avoid deflating too quickly.

Special Challenge: Do not breathe after the word “phrase.”
Take Time to Breathe

Inhalation should never occur through a constricted throat. Many times, the need to rush a breath creates an unwanted “gasp” for air. Try to allow ample time in your phrasing to refresh the air supply with ease.

Optional: Place one thumb under your chin near the throat to monitor the inhalation. Keep a relaxed throat as you breathe.

Don’t Want to Be Throaty

There are many words used to describe vocal tone, both positive and negative. Some good ones include: warm, rich, and round. Some unflattering ones are: strident, forced, or nasal. This exercise mentions a few ideas to work toward, and others to avoid. Ultimately, singers should strive to develop a free and natural sound, one that is uniquely their own.

Just One Voice

Unify the registers of your voice with consistent support throughout the range. Avoid over-singing or under-supporting on any notes. A legato line and light approach may help to cover “breaks.”
Never Louder Than Lovely

Even at your fullest volume, never force the voice. Beauty is so much more important than volume. The lyrics of this exercise provide fundamental rules for singing at any dynamic level.

Never louder than lovely. Never stronger than sweet.

Never more volume than beauty. Singing like this is a treat.

Project

For many developing singers, there is a fine line between a healthy projected tone and shouted over-singing. Visualize a point on the far wall of the rehearsal room. With firm breath support and an open resonating space in the mouth and throat, be sure that your voice carries to that point.

Project, project, you have to sing it out. Respect, respect, be careful not to shout. Use a well-supported tone, and you’ll find your voice has grown. Project, respect, project.
Consonants Are Planned

Place the final consonant crisply on the cutoff of each phrase.

Optional: Hold the palm of your hand in front of your mouth as you sing. Feel a light burst of air as each consonant is pronounced.

The Lips, the Tongue, the Tip of the Teeth

The title of this exercise reminds us that good diction is achieved by using these critical parts of the mouth. Enunciate clearly as you sing.

Seashells

Sibilant consonants (those that create a hissing sound with the tongue on the roof of the mouth) can be problematic if overdone. Treat every “s” with care, extending the vowel of each syllable to its fullest length, avoiding a “leaky tire” effect.
Woodchuck

This favorite childhood tongue twister makes an excellent diction workout for singers. Strive to make every word understood, even at this fast tempo.

For Fun: Make it a brainteaser! Rest every time you have the word “wood.” Now, rest every time you have the word “chuck.” Or “could.” Or “much,” and so on!

Dynamics Are Fancy and Fine

Observe the dynamic markings. Contrast is the key, but be careful not to over-sing when loud or under-support when soft. Perform with your very best tone quality, no matter what the dynamics are.

Sing Legato, Sing Staccato

Practice a smoothly connected legato, versus a sharply detached staccato. Demonstrate the contrasting articulation with gestures: painting a smooth arc with your hand for legato, and tapping an index finger into the opposite palm for staccato.
Sing We Sforzando

Before performing this exercise, try to sustain the highest pitch at your fullest forte, then try it at your softest pianissimo. How quickly can you get from one to the other? Add a controlled crescendo after the initial attack and you’re ready to go!

Note: Sforzando may be abbreviated \textit{sf} or \textit{sfz}. When followed immediately by \textit{p}, the correct notation is \textit{sfp}.

\begin{align*}
\textit{mf} & \quad \text{\textit{sfp}} & \quad \textit{mf} \\
\text{Sing we sfor\text{-}zan\text{-}do!}
\end{align*}

We Are Crescendoing

Follow the dynamics closely. Imagine seven numbers on the volume dial of a music player. Each measure you sing is one level louder or softer than the previous measure.

Optional: Count up or down on your fingers as you change dynamics.

\begin{align*}
\textit{p} \quad & \textit{cresc. poco a poco} \\
\text{We are cres\text{-}cen\text{-}do\text{-}ing as we as\text{-}cend, grow\text{-}ing loud\text{-}er the} \\
\textit{f} & \text{\textit{decresc. poco a poco}} \\
\text{higher we climb.} & \text{\textit{We’re de\text{-}cres\text{-}cen\text{-}do\text{-}ing}} \\
\text{as we de\text{-}scend, go\text{-}ing soft\text{-}er and soft\text{-}er this time.}
\end{align*}
A Diphthong Song

A diphthong is defined as “the sound created when two vowels combine in a single syllable.” When singing a diphthong, sustain the first (or “primary”) vowel sound for the majority of the note’s duration, gliding to the secondary vowel only at the very end.

Alternate Lyrics: Light rain, window pane. Outside, clouds divide. Go now, take a bow. Sing a diphthong song.

Flexibility

Sing lightly with a gentle pulse from your diaphragm on each pitch. Practice this tune with the words “da-ba-da-ba-da” to improve accuracy.

Listen and Blend

Listen carefully as you work to develop an ensemble blend. Match the volume, vowels, tone, and timbre of your voice to the others in the group.
Syncopation

When a note falls on the offbeat, syncopation is achieved. A subtle accent on each syncopated note will add energy and clarity to the rhythm.

Do Is Like a Rock

This exercise describes the shape of the Curwen hand signs used when singing Kodaly’s famous solfège syllables. Practice the signs as you sing. (See page 20.)

Optional: When you are confident with the signs, sustain the first note of each measure instead of singing every word.

Octaves and Seventh

Larger intervals can be difficult to tune. Be sure to sing in the center of each pitch.

Optional: Selected singers may sustain a low “do” for three measures at the start of each phrase. Others should match these “home tone singers” each time they descend to the same note.
One, Five, Four, Five

This exercise will develop vocal agility, center of pitch, and an understanding of major scale tones and diatonic intervals. In addition to the numbers provided, consider singing on solfège syllables or note names.

Sing a Half Step

The subtle difference between a half and whole step can have a great impact on successful sight-singing, music learning, and overall tuning. Learn the sound of each interval as you carefully practice.

All Through the Night

Sing as softly as possible. This requires a great deal of intensity and support and is much more challenging than singing at full volume.
Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes

Many of the diphthongs in this song occur over two notes. Be sure to sustain the primary vowel sound, extending it even into the second pitch.

Music in the Morning

This song features long phrases with short moments to breathe. Be sure to fill completely, but without tension, at each rest.
**The Turtle Dove**

This beautiful melody includes some large intervals and a wide vocal range. Strive for consistency of tone throughout.

\[\text{Fare you well, my dear, I must be gone, and leave you for a while.} \]

\[\text{If I roam away, I will come back again, though I roam ten thousand miles, my dear, though I roam ten thousand miles.} \]

**Hey Ho**

In unison, 2-part canon, and 3-part canon. Practice good vocal technique throughout.

\[\text{Hey ho, nobody home. Meat, nor drink, nor money have I none.} \]

\[\text{Still I will be very merry. Hey ho, nobody home.} \]
I Can Sing My Part

This exercise is a pep talk to encourage confident part-singing. Two independent lines ensure success, with the biggest challenge coming at the conclusion of each phrase where the harmony is constructed in parallel thirds.

PART I

I can sing my part, I know it by heart. If you sing with me,

PART II

We can sing perfect harmony.

Your notes are not mine, perfect harmony.

Your notes are not

but when they combine with the part I sing, harmony will ring.

mine, but when they combine with my part, harmony will ring.
Sing Alleluia, Allelu

Practice each part separately before putting them together. The contrasting rhythms and contrary melodic motion help to create vocal independence.

1st time - PART I only
2nd time - PART II only
3rd time - Both parts

PART I

\[ \text{Sing alleluia, allelu. Sing alleluia, allelu.} \]

PART II

\[ \text{Alleluia. Alleluia.} \]

3rd time - rit. to end

\[ \text{Sing alleluia, allelu. Sing alleluia.} \]

\[ \text{Alleluia. Sing alleluia, sing allelu.} \]
’Twas on a Silent Winter Night

In unison, 2-part canon, 3-part canon, and 4-part canon. Practice good vocal technique throughout.

’Twas on a si - lent win - ter night, the stars a - glow with ra - diant light, when

from the sky to earth be - low, there came a gen - tle fall - ing snow.

Zing-a Zing-a Zah

This exercise outlines the tonic chord and the first five pitches of a major scale. Though rather simple, it will help to improve intonation, vowels, flexibility, diction, and other vocal skills.

Zing - a zing - a zah, zing - a zah, zing - a zah, zing - a zing - a zing - a zing - a zah.

Zing - a zing - a zah, zing - a zah, zing - a zing - a zing - a zing - a zah.
Curwen Hand Signs

- Ti
- La
- Sol
- Fa
- Mi
- Re
- Do