**Jaw Matters**

Always begin each stage of the preparation and the warmup itself by checking your posture, standing easy and relaxing your jaw.

Be kind to your jaw. It has been working hard all your life to keep you safe behind its guardrail. Give it a break. Send it to the Bahamas for a rest. It will thank you for it, eventually.

When your jaw is released, you are able to create more space in the mouth, which allows for a more resonant sound, and provides more room for the tongue to be flexible and agile. A relaxed jaw means relaxed facial, mouth and throat muscles, including the lips and the soft palate, so that they will be in a better position to allow for more accurate placement of the combinations of lips, tongue, teeth, jaw and palates. Your vocal sound will vibrate more freely via a relaxed jaw, and you will have more volume, for no extra effort.

Release the jaw by letting it go, letting it drop down until you can slip 2 fingertips between your teeth without straining. Encourage it to stay open for several seconds. This takes time.

Breathe Easy

• Now, allow a little breath in through your open mouth and throat, silently — wait — allow it back out(silently) — wait. (repeat 4 times) [Notice how open your throat is, without any effort involved. The more relaxed your jaw becomes, the easier it is to open the throat].

Notice how the air goes in and comes out easily through the open throat]

• Allow a quick, silent breath in — wait — keep throat open as you gently allow breath to flow out through the open throat for 4 beats. Repeat 4 times

• Allow a quick, silent breath in — wait —vocalize the breath for 4 beats at it flows back out. The sound you will make is the central vowel, the schwa, almost like 'er' but even more floppy and relaxed. (repeat 4 times).

Repeat several times, noticing how easy it is, how you don't need a lot of air to go in each time, and how the air goes in and comes out silently through an open throat. (If your throat gets dry, swallow and refresh it any time you like)

This exercise allows you to recreate the circumstances of your natural, autonomous (unconscious) breathing process, but in a state of awareness (mindfulness) so that you can build on it.

Check your posture, check your jaw (two fingertips space between your front teeth), slip your tongue tip out of your mouth and leave it resting on the outside of your bottom lip.

Repeat the breath exercises, as far as you can, while aiming the tip of your tongue further and further down towards your chin. The more relaxed your jaw, the further out your tongue will slide. It's a great stretch, and starts the process of releasing tension at the back, and the root of your tongue. This will give you greater flexibility when you come to work on speech sounds, and words generally.

• Next, allow that quick, silent breath in — wait — but this time make an SSS sound as the air flows out. Hold the SSS for 4 beats. Relax. Repeat 4 times.

• Do the same, but th

Notice that you are now making sounds that occur in speech. Breath and Voice are as one.

is time make a ZZZZ sound for 4 beats. Repeat 4 times.

Practise Being in Your Breath until you are comfortable that your breath flows easily, your shoulders and upper chest stay free and relaxed, and your lower abdominal muscles are the ones supporting your voice.

You can extend these little sequences to challenge your breathing support muscles to work harder, but aiming for 8 seconds, or 12 seconds. Take it easy. Build up the strength gradually, just as you would at the gym. You wouldn't try to emulate a professional body builder unless you'd worked your way up to it.

Now you are ready to convert all of that breath into sound

**How Voice Works**

A HEALTHY VOICE is created by air flowing — not pushed — between the vocal folds. The flow of air needs to be in the form of a consistent supply of air pressure in the lungs. The consistency of supply is enabled by the powerful muscles between the ribs, and by deep core muscles in the abdomen, working with the diaphragm.

Voice requires 4 elements:

1: A want, or a need to express yourself;

2: Air (breath) inside the body, providing air pressure beneath the vocal folds within the voice box (larynx);

3: Vocal folds drawn parallel to each other, touching, with just enough energy in them to require the air pressure below to puff them apart, causing sound waves (primary tone). Vocal pitch\* is decided here, depending on the length and thickness of the vocal folds.

4: Different spaces and substances of the body to provide resonance. Yet more sound waves are created in various spaces such as the throat, mouth, sinus and nasal cavities, the chest, bones of the head etc. These secondary tones are deeper or lighter, depending on the size of the cavity and the size of the opening to that cavity, and this is called Resonance\*\*.

It is the combination of vocal pitch and resonant pitch that make up the sound of the voice. Because everyone is built slightly differently, every voice is unique.

\* Vocal pitch means how high, or low (especially in singing, but also in the tune, or intonation of your voice). Think of how your voice gets higher when you are excited, or lower if you are unhappy.

\*\*Resonance determines the colour, or quality of your voice. Think of a rich, dark, chocolaty voice, or a fine, bright, silvery voice. You can have them both, or any colour or quality in between.

When you speak, sound vibrates throughout your body. Whatever your body is doing affects how you sound. The more vibrations you create, the more easily they are conducted through your body, the more voice you have.

Sound waves are conducted well by less dense substances. Air, for example, is a great conductor or sound. Wood is pretty good too. But concrete is not.

The human body is made up of a huge variety of substances, and some of them better conductors of sound than others.

Bone is a good conductor, but tensely constricted muscle is very bad. Floppy muscles are not very good conductors, but engaged muscles are. The more flexible your muscles are, the more space they can create inside your body, and the more full-bodied you will sound. So it is important to understand, and to be responsible for what is going on inside your body.

Tense, or constricted muscles not only limit the vibrations that you can create, and therefore share, they also limit the amount of space you can create in your body. For example, a tense, tight jaw keeps your mouth cavity small, and stops your sound vibrations from flowing freely out into the room to be shared with your listeners.

Tight shoulders, neck and abdomen all contribute to limiting the volume and the quality of the sound.

Your spinal column needs to flow up through the centre of your back in its natural curves — but not overly curved — so that your rib cage has maximum potential for movement as your lungs expand and contract, and so that your core muscles have optimum room for manoeuvrability.

**How Speech Works**

Speech requires 5 elements:

1 to 4 from How Voice Works

PLUS

5: An agile, flexible set of articulators (lips, tongue, teeth, jaw and palates) to shape the vocal sound into speech sounds (phonemes) that combine into words that are combined into phrases, sentences, paragraphs.

Clear, articulate SPEECH occurs when the changing shapes inside the mouth and throat shape the VOICE into clearly differentiated speech sounds. These changing shapes are caused as the mouth opens due to movement of the lower jaw, or the lips change shape or position, or the tongue moves into different positions within the mouth, in close or distant proximity to the teeth, the teeth ridges, the hard or soft palate, or the soft palate itself moves higher or lower. These movements happen in a range of combinations, allowing for a huge range of speech sounds.

Speech sounds are defined as either VOWELS or CONSONANTS. When we talk about vowels and consonants with reference to speech sounds, we are not talking about letters of the alphabet.

Think about it this way: The letter "A" helps us to spell a word such as "at". It also helps to spell the word "mane". The sounds represented by the letter "a" in these words are completely different sounds.

So when we use the term vowel in voice and speech work, we are not talking about a letter of the alphabet. A vowel is defined as a speech sound shaped in the mouth by the articulators, during which the outgoing air is not stopped, re-directed, or interfered with in any way.

A consonant is a speech sound shaped in the mouth by the articulators, during which the outgoing air is either stopped, or redirected, or interfered with in some way.

**Voice Matters**

Working on your voice is the only way to improve your speech.

Train yourself to adjust your body as you speak, be aware of unnecessary and inappropriate tension in the body that may impede your freedom of movement and that certainly reduces the range of tone and colour in your vocal sound.

Build yourself up to a full-bodied, generous vocal sound, first with the Mini Vocal Warmup, then extending it into the Vocal Maintenance program.

As your voice grows, you improve your clarity of speech by training the specific organs of articulation (lips, tongue, teeth, jaw and palates) to be flexible, powerful and agile.

However, a well-balanced voice, or vocal sound is essential in the first place, to have a great range of vocal qualities, colours and tones available to be shaped into speech sounds.

A sound, healthy full-bodied voice expressing clear speech requires an open, mobile, relaxed and alert person (i.e. body and mind) — not sitting hunched or cramped, and keeping your arms and hands free. It also requires clarity of thought. In other words -

stand well,

stay open,

be present,

know your subject, and

care about it as you speak..