

Singing Guidelines

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Note: Singing Guidelines are a *supplement* and **not** intended to replace any personal voice lessons or coaching. It is recommended that all singers continuously seek outside feedback from a good Voice Teacher or Coach.

The Purpose of “Warming-up” Your Voice

1. **To get into the proper mindset for singing**; freeing your mind of daily distractions / stresses so that you can focus on vocal technique and to communicate visually and vocally the appropriate emotional delivery.
2. **To stretch and limber up the muscles used for singing**, both abdominal muscles as well as vocal muscles, and to engage proper support using a freely produced sound.
3. **To mentally and physically review the basic fundamentals of singing**; emotional communication, posture, support, resonance, vowels, intervals, etc. so that the mind, body, and soul are ready to deliver the best performance possible.

Singing Guidelines When Warming-up Your Voice

1. Always sing with purpose while focusing on correct vocal fundamentals as well as communicating an emotion, such as joy, happiness, excitement, etc.
2. You should feel absolutely no strain or pain from the shoulders on up; neck, jaw, lips, tongue, etc. You may or may not feel your abdomen or lower back muscles; this is OK as these muscles are big and will strengthen through regular correct singing.
3. Warm-up using correct posture; see **Posture** below. Use the **Resonation Tool**; gently squeeze the corners of your mouth/cheeks inward with your fingers; this helps open the resonators in the back of your throat to create a freer sound.
4. Begin vocal exercises on a comfortable pitch / note. At and near the beginning of vocal warm-ups, do not sing too high or too low in pitch. If singing through a song, select a song that is not rangy for any voice part.
5. Use quiet to medium-loud, supported, dynamic levels; do not sing any bigger than medium loud (mf) volume levels.
6. Rest often when warming up.
7. Slow incremental sliding from pitch to pitch is one of the best ways of vocally warming-up the voice. Imitating a siren is also a great tool.
8. Open your mouth when you sing; exception: when singing fast passages, open your mouth only as far as you can successfully sing without interrupting the smooth lyrical delivery of words and without slowing down the tempo.
9. Make sure that your waist area is unrestricted; anything tied around your waist, i.e. Belt. Allow the waist, abdomen, sides, and back to expand for low deep breathing; no chest or shoulder breathing.
10. Standing is best for singing and warming-up your voice. When sitting it is ideal to sit on the edge of the chair, both feet on the floor with your knees slightly lower than your hips, and your upper torso is upright and pivoted slightly forward from the hips. Do not lean back in the chair when singing.
11. Warm up time is typically 10 to 30 minutes. For bigger voices, this may take more time and for lighter voices, may take less time. Experienced singers may be able to warm up faster.

Warm-up Your Voice

Imitate a siren on an *ōō* vowel; sliding upward into the upper voice then back down through the lower voice.

Starting on a comfortable pitch or an easy song:

- **Hum**; with your lips lightly touching, open your mouth with space between your molars and slowly slide from note to note.
- **Sing on a sustained “N” (singable consonant)**; with the tip of your tongue lightly touching the gum ridge just behind your upper front teeth, open your mouth with space between your molars and slowly slide from note to note.
- **Sing on a vowel**; with no tension in your lips, open your mouth with space between your molars and slowly slide from note to note and with the corners of your mouth tucked slightly in. For the *ōō* vowel, use minimum lip tension when forming an *ōō* shape with 90% of the *ōō* vowel formed in the back of the throat. For the *ēē* vowel, use just enough tension to keep the corners of your mouth tucked in; avoid spreading the mouth sideways like a grin or smile.
- Alternate the humming, “N” or vowels with any combination of the following; this engages/connects your support:
 - **Staccato notes**; very short notes with space, no sound between.
 - **Brrr’ing or Bubbling**; the sound of a child imitating a truck sound, your lips are flared and vibrating together. Those unable to Brrr or Bubble may be able to do so by gently squeezing in the corner of the lips.
 - **Singing a sustained “V” sound**.

Singing Guidelines

Posture

1. Visually display attitude, expression, and purpose; always communicating an emotion.
2. Vowels are tall; the mouth is open North/South with corners tucked slightly in. Mouth posture should look natural.
3. Tongue is smooth, rounded, and blunt; the tip of the tongue is retracted straight back into the tongue.
4. The smooth, rounded, and blunt tongue is positioned toward the back of the mouth and up; highest tongue position is on the ēē vowel then moves very slightly down and back through vowels eh, ah, oh and to the lowest vowel ōō.
5. Ribs are expanded – whether singing or breathing.
6. Feet are positioned shoulder-width apart.
 - a. One foot is slightly ahead of the other; Riser Location: Stage Right – right foot forward, Stage Left – left foot forward.
 - b. Toes pointing slightly outward.
 - c. Weight is forward – balanced equally on the balls of both feet; approximately 70% balls of the feet, 30% heels.
 - d. Posture needs to be buoyant and knees un-locked.
7. Head, neck, and back are in alignment (straight).
 - a. Jaw drops open, as opposed to head going up or back; chin is not jutting forward.
 - b. Shoulders are down, back, and relaxed; like hanging on a hanger.
 - c. Long back of the neck and short front of the neck.
 - d. Back is straight and pelvic is tucked under.
 - e. Arms and hands are hanging at the side of the body and relaxed; thumbs are down and to the front.
8. Smile with your face; from nose up, with cheeks and eyes activated; mouth is for singing, open North/south position.
9. Lips are slightly flared away from teeth. Mouth posture looks natural; no tension is visible.

Breathing

Ribs are always out (Expanded) – whether singing or breathing.

1. Expand, all around, below ribs on inhalation and contract inward, all around, below ribs for singing.
2. Contraction inward initiates sound.
3. Constant firm, but flexible, motion inward while singing; abdominal area is barely moving for experienced singers or a greater amount of movement is acceptable for beginners.

Sound

Goal: A consistent and expressive sound that is freely produced and is resonant, full, rounded, and open with ring, shimmer, and intensity.

To improve the sound, check the following:

1. Does the sound have attitude, expression, and purpose?
2. Is the posture correct and is the mouth open?
3. Does the sound have support? Use staccato, bubbling, or sing an energized “V” sound.
4. Are the vowels tall; the mouth is open North/South with corners tucked slightly in?
5. Is the head in the proper position; jaw dropped rather than head thrown up or back? Bow head down slightly.
6. Is the tongue smooth, rounded, and blunt with the tip of the tongue retracted straight back into the tongue and is positioned toward the back of the mouth and up?
7. Are the ribs remaining expanded when breathing or singing?
8. Is the waist below the ribs (abdomen, sides, and back) expanding during inhalation? Is it smoothly, firmly, and consistently contracting inward below the ribs during singings?
9. Is the volume growing (lifting) through phrases?
10. Is there less resonance when singing lower notes and more resonance when singing higher notes?
11. Is there less resonance when singing quiet and more resonance when singing bigger sounds?
12. Is there intensity, shimmer, and ring in the sound on top of resonance as all great sounds have ring and resonance?
13. Is more air being used when singing; use more air for a more open free sound? The result should not be an airy sound.
14. Is all singing free of glottal attacks? Using glottal attack can cause damage to the voice but can be used sparingly for expression purposes.

Singing Guidelines

Concepts to Think About When Singing

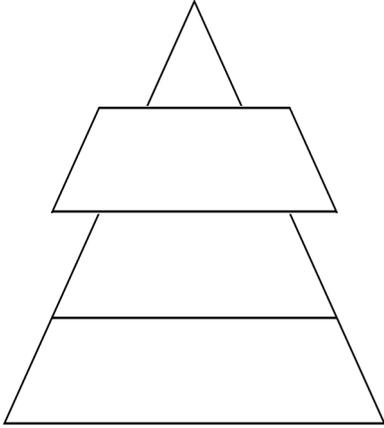
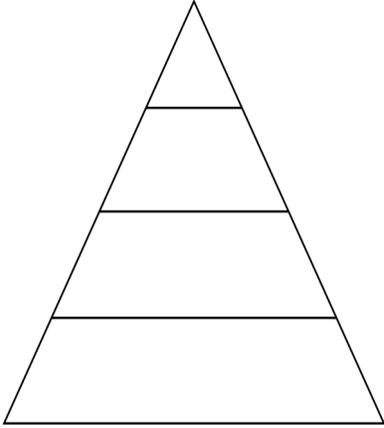
1. Are you having fun, communicating expression, heart, emotion, and with feeling?
2. No audible breath should be heard. The exception would be for an emotional effect or a quartet lead starting a song; called “the singers breath”.
3. The tip of your tongue should never touch or be placed near the lower gum ridge or teeth. There should be no spoon shaped or “V” shaped dips in the top of the tongue. The tongue muscle under your chin should be soft; not tense, stiff, or hard.
4. It is better to start with a rounded, full, dark sound that is freely produced, and then add intensity and ring than to start with a bright sound and then try to add resonance.
5. When you are singing a resonated, more correct, and freer sound, you will not hear yourself as easily because the sound goes out your mouth and away from you. An incorrectly produced sound, one that is tight and/or strained, can be heard much easier because it resounds through your head to your inner ear; if you can’t hear yourself easily, you are singing more correctly.
6. All vowels should be resonant and positioned close to each other sound wise; very little physical movement should occur from vowel to vowel.
7. Always keep your mouth open on all vowels and “singable consonants;” exception: your mouth should not be wide when singing many words fast. When singing fast passages, open your mouth only as far as you can successfully sing without interrupting the smooth lyrical delivery of words and without slowing down the tempo. To find your open mouth position, open wide like a yawn, then close slightly. Your mouth is now in the fully open position for the Ah and Oh vowels and will close toward the middle position for the rest of the vowels.
8. Many musical or vocal problems start or originate a few notes before the “problem area”. Concentrate your efforts on the few notes just before the “problem area” to solve and correct the “problem areas.”
9. Avoid clearing your throat unless you absolutely have to; if needed, do it gently.
10. Next to coughing, smoking is the worst offender.
11. If singing at any time becomes easy, you are singing more correctly.
12. When singing a freer sound, you may feel like you have no control of your voice. This lack of vocal control “OK” and temporary as your ear will quickly learn to control your voice instead of the incorrect controlling of your voice by muscle feel.
13. Try using more air and dynamics, lighter non-singable consonants, and more emotion, feeling, and heart.
14. Your lips should only use minimum tension necessary to form the “oh”, “ee”, and “ōō” vowels with a slight flaring of lips away from your teeth and a slight tucking in on the corners of your mouth. The lips should appear to have no tension at all and should look relaxed and natural.
15. Physical exercise of the whole body will help relax and warm-up your voice.
16. It is more important how your voice feels, freely produced with no tension, as apposed to how your voice sounds to you. Your voice should always feel free.
17. Singing higher in pitch:
 - a. Try using all vowels with a blend of ə, ōō, ēē, and/or darker sounds when singing higher.
 - b. Try bowing your head downward as you sing higher in pitch.
 - c. Try positioning you hand near your ear; place the palm of your hand on top of an imaginary cantaloupe, then place the imaginary cantaloupe next to your ear, your elbow will be straight out from your ear with your thumb positioned toward your head.
 - d. You can also use as a tool, the **Resonation Tool**: gently tucking the corners of your mouth/cheeks inward with your fingers. Adjust the amount of gentle squeeze depending on the pitch; when singing higher in pitch, gently squeeze more and squeeze less for lower pitches.
18. Here is how you can transfer resonation into vowels and songs by using the **Resonation Tool (RT)**: gently tucking the corners of your mouth/cheeks inward with your fingers.
 - a. **Vowels** – Starting with the Resonation Tool, sing a vowel sound on any comfortable pitch and then release the RT; there should be no change in the resonation sound. Most singers learning how to resonate their sounds need to darken the vowel three times as much when not using the RT as when using the RT. Repeat again starting with the RT, singing a vowel and then releasing the RT while maintaining the same resonation. Try maintaining the resonation while singing other vowels.
 - b. **Song** – Start with the RT and begin singing a song. After resonating the sounds with the RT, release the RT while maintaining the same resonation that you had when using the RT. Keep alternating between using/not using the RT; sing a phrase or two using the RT and then a phrase or two without the RT. The resonation should be seamless and unchanging whether using or not using the RT. When using the RT, remember to gently tuck the corners of your mouth/cheeks inward more and more going upward in pitch and squeezing less and less going downward in pitch.
19. Take private voice lessons or get coaching for outside feedback/awareness to continually learn and grow musically and vocally.

Singing Guidelines

Improving Expressive Sounds for Barbershop Singing

Check the following:

1. Is there attitude, expression, and purpose in the sound; always communicating an emotion?
2. Is the tempo consistent?
3. Are the rhythms accurate?
4. Do the vowels occur on the beats/rhythms?
5. Are the intervals accurate?
6. Are the vowels pure: eh, ēē, ah, oh, ōō, etc (primary vowel duration 95% and diphthongs at 5%)?
7. Are unisons, octaves, roots, and fifths sung perfectly in tune?
8. Are perfect 4th and 5th intervals in chords reinforced volume wise?
9. Is there more of a balance in volume where major seconds occur in chords?
10. Are the consonants sung/articulated lighter than vowels?
11. Do the consonants occur as grace notes, just before the beats/rhythms of vowels?
12. Are singable consonants (L, M, N, ng, V, Z) energized? Do not explode into vowel after energizing.
13. Are duets sung with equal volume?
14. Is coning occurring; singing with more volume when descending in pitch and singing with less volume when ascending in pitch at all dynamic levels?
15. Are dynamics following the plan and executed with finesse?
16. Is there a lift on held notes; a slight increase in volume?
17. Is there any vibrato in the sound? The style of Barbershop singing requires no vibrato in order to lock and ring the chords; Exception: The Lead or melody singer can add slight vibrato on the last half of held notes for expression purposes or when singing solos, use expressive vibrato typically found in soloist.

Word	Definition
Coning ▲	<p>Coning is a volume relationship to higher and lower pitches sung within your voice part; Example: higher pitches are sung quieter in volume and lower pitches are sung bigger in volume. Coning applies to all voice parts and is applied to all expressive volume levels in a song; Example: ppp = ▲, mf = ▲, fff = ▲.</p>
Barbershop Balance	<p>The Barbershop balance volume relationship between parts and can be visualized by a cone ▲ with the Bass part being the most dominant, then the Bari, then the Lead, and last the Tenor. Within this cone, the melody, which can be sung by any part, must dominate slightly outside this cone (see Lead dominant example in diagram A) unless there is a duet (see the duet balance relationship in diagram B); Note: if all parts are singing, the duet would dominate slightly outside this cone.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; text-align: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>A. Lead has Melody</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>B. There is a duet between two parts</p> </div> </div>