



Beginner Voice
for new learners



Learning how to sing: Notes for parents

The benefits of singing lessons!

Singing lessons really build our confidence and teach us how to get the best out of our voices. Learning how to sing is just like learning how to play another instrument. Vocal training is about learning how to support and place the voice and controlling the muscles that allow us to do this. It demands commitment, hard work and practice to achieve great results. Many of the most famous singers have taken a number of years to learn their craft and build up their vocal technique.

Many people are able to sing well naturally with very little formal training. However, their performances will always be limited by the degree of technique they have. If they perform regularly using bad, untutored technique, permanent damage could occur.

How can singing lessons help?

In the early days your child will be discovering what their voice can do and exploring expressive qualities of a wide range of songs. They will also be learning how to warm up and exercise their voice before singing, how to breathe properly, how to place support and project their voice. It would also be beneficial for them to join a choir or singing group if they do not belong to one already, so they can explore their voice further and experience the pleasure of singing with others. (Please check with Musica Kirklees or ask your child's teacher for details of choirs in their area).

How can parents/carers help?

Please talk to your child about what they have been doing in their lessons. Ask them about the songs they are singing and give them an opportunity to sing them at home for you. It also really helps to have a specific location at home for practice and to get them into a routine of practicing several times a week. Encourage and support them, especially when they are finding something difficult or when they are performing in a concert. If you have any questions or concerns make contact with the teacher through the **Practice Diary**. The practice diary is a useful way of recording your child's progress and what must be practised during the week. It also allows your child to tick the days on which they have practised and for you to make comments.

How soon can you expect to hear improvement?

Generally, you should be able to hear improvement by the end of the first term. However, students do progress at their own rates and some may find certain aspects of learning to use their voice more difficult than others. Really good breath control from the muscles, for example, can take a while to master and develops over time. It's important to be patient and to keep trying. The more your child practises the sooner you will be able to hear improvement!

This table should give you an idea of what your child is likely to cover in their first half-term of singing lessons:

| | |
|--------|--|
| WEEK 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct posture • Warm-up exercises – pitch & rhythm • Work on extract of first taught song – accuracy of pitch, intonation, rhythm |
| WEEK 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reminder of posture • Warm up exercises – humming into open mouthed vowels • Pulse and metre - clapping • Listen to a song of choice |
| WEEK 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up exercises • Breathing exercises • Work on taught song from week 1 – phrasing, breath management, support • Following the notated sheet music – phrases and breath marks |
| WEEK 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up exercises – tongue twisters • Breathing exercises • Work on taught song – diction, vowels and consonants |
| WEEK 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up exercises with dynamic shaping • Breathing exercises • Work on taught song – interpretation and dynamics • Paying attention to dynamic markings in notated sheet music |
| WEEK 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up exercises • Breathing exercises • Sing through/performance of first taught song & song of their choice <p><i>Discussion of the options for the next song to start working on after half-term break</i></p> |

Looking after your voice

Your voice is a precious instrument. The vocal chords/folds are little muscles that need to be looked after. When you take singing lessons you will learn to control your vocal chords and learn how to breathe correctly and support your sound. This is important as it will help you get the best from your voice and will help to prevent injury. Below are a few tips to help you look after your voice:

- Your voice needs to be lubricated, **drink plenty of water** and bring it to lessons.
- Try to **avoid drinks that contain a lot of caffeine**. Caffeine is found in drinks like coffee and tea, but in many fizzy drinks, energy drinks and colas. It can dehydrate your voice.
- **Avoid coughing hard** to clear your throat before singing if you feel like you have a frog in your throat. This can actually be damaging for your vocal chords. Try swallowing instead of clear the phlegm and **drink water instead**.
- If you have a cough, **try breathing deeply from the bottom of your diaphragm** to avoid tickling your throat.
- **Avoid dairy** before singing - it can contribute to phlegm.
- **Don't use medicated throat pastilles and lozenges before you sing** when you have a sore throat or cold. These can mask the pain and don't cure the problem. They can cause more damage if you use your voice after using them. Use mouthwash, non-medicated throat sweets, drink water and **rest your voice**.
- Try not to spend long periods of time around people smoking and **don't ever smoke**. Passive smoke can irritate your vocal chords.
- **Try not to shout**. When speaking loud support with your muscles not your throat.
- If you use your voice a great deal both singing and speaking, try to **include periods of rest or periods of silence for your voice**. This should be spread throughout the day – say 5 minutes every hour.
- Low blood sugar can affect your performance ability. Make sure to **have a snack or light meal** before a performance.
- If you are serious about becoming a singer, you must look after yourself by keeping fit, eating sensibly and getting enough rest. Your instrument will only be as good as you are feeling. If you are tired or stressed your voice might feel



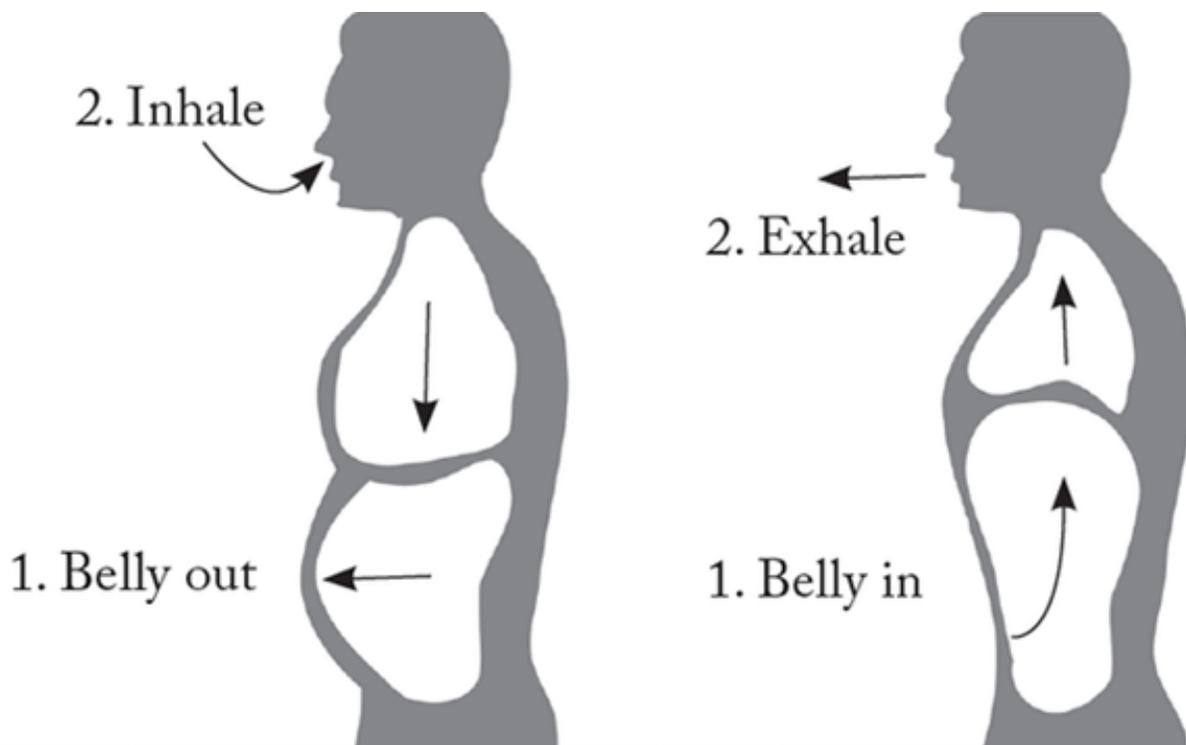
tense too so try to do some exercises to relax your face and throat and breathe deeply before singing.

How does the voice work?

It is important to understand how your voice works. We only have one voice each and misuse can do irreparable damage. It's so important that we know how to take care of it.

Like any instruments our voices need energy before they can function and as with all wind players, our energy comes from our breath. Do not underestimate the power that good breathing will have on your voice; it is irreplaceable. To highlight this try running up and down a staircase, or simply around the house, then try to sing. As you will see, it's impossible to make a decent sound when you are panting and not inhaling properly.

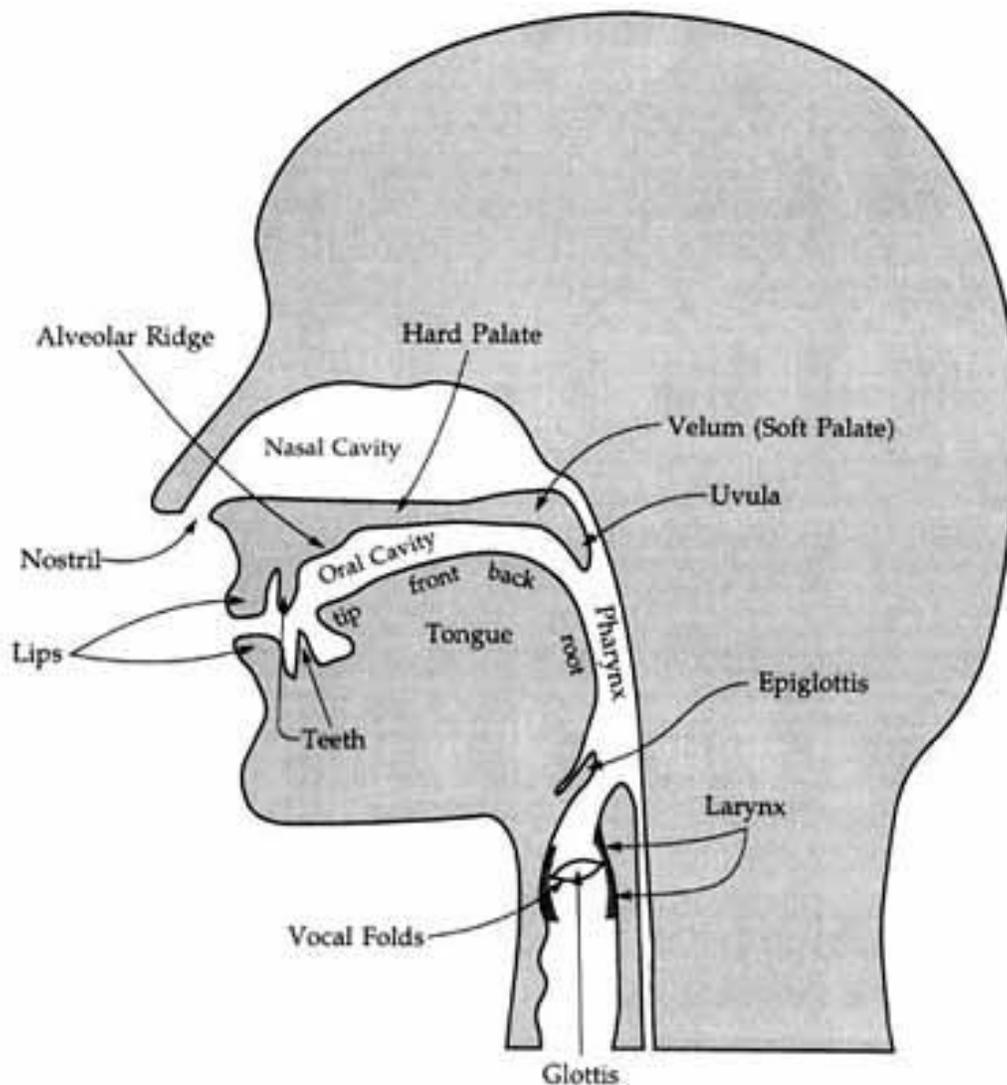
When singing you should stand in a neutral posture, feet slightly apart, weight distributed evenly through both feet, arms by your sides; then breathe deeply. As you do the diaphragm will expand outwards.



As you start singing the vocal chords vibrate. This process, alongside the resonating in the throat, mouth and nasal cavities, and the support of the abdominal muscles, will create your singing voice.

Your vocal folds, or vocal chords as they are commonly called, are two muscles (also made up of what is called Reinke's space, ligaments and Laryngeal glands) lying across the top of your windpipe.

In order to feel them in action, place your fingers gently over your throat and speak or sing. You should feel a very fast vibration; this is your vocal folds at work. When they are working they come together and vibrate very quickly. In order to view them in action, a laryngologist would have to place what is known as a laryngoscopy into your throat. This instrument takes very fast photographs of your vocal folds, as these cannot normally be picked out by the naked eye.





Communication

The human voice is perhaps the most expressive musical instrument. It has the power to convey a wide range of emotions both through words and expression. It can make a huge range of sounds from soft whispers to great shouts, high squeals to low growls and everything in between! The best singers learn what their voice can do and learn to sing with expression, captivating an audience.

Pitch

Pitch is a word that is used to describe how high or low the music sounds. Songwriters often choose the pitch of the song to portray a mood or emotion. Some songs start low pitched and get higher as they go along. Listen carefully to your favourite songs to see how the pitch changes and if it returns to the same place. Your teacher will help you find songs at the right pitch for you.

Tempo

Tempo is a word used to describe the speed at which a piece of music is sung or played. Emotions such as joy, anger or happiness might be expressed with a faster tempo. Sad songs and some love songs might tend to be at a slow tempo. Songwriters usually give instructions about the tempo of the music. Sometimes they give a metronome marking eg 120 beats to one minute. Some writers use Italian words to describe how you should perform the music. Your teacher will explain the words you come across in your pieces.

Rhythm

Rhythm is the word used to describe the combination of duration of sounds in music. Every piece of music has a “pulse” or “heartbeat”. This pulse might have 2 or 4 regular beats in a bar, or it might be irregular or syncopated.

Irregular rhythms are sometimes funkier. Dance music and jazz may have irregular rhythms. When you sing and perform you need to be aware of the rhythm in music.

Duration

Music is a combination of notes played or sung at different pitches, volume levels and speeds. Each note played may last for a different length of time – known as duration. There may be fast flowing notes or long drawn out notes. You will need to know how to determine the length of a note, so that you can plan where to breathe when singing.

Dynamics





This word is used to describe the volume of a piece of music i.e how loudly or softly you should sing. This might change within a song that might start softly and gradually get louder or vice versa. Songwriters usually give careful instructions to tell the singer what to do. They may use Italian words and symbols to tell you what to do.

Tone

Music is often described as having a certain 'character' e.g bright tone colour or sad tone colour. Eg. An oboe has a sad tone. The human voice has a great variety of different tone colours when performing. Learning to sing also involves learning to produce an attractive tone of voice. Over the coming weeks you will learn how to place your voice to make a warm and resonant sound that will please listeners.

Repertoire

Learning to sing correctly involves establishing a secure technique and this takes time and dedication, as does learning any instrument. In the early days it is important to follow the guidance of your teacher who will suggest songs that they think are most suitable. These won't necessarily be your favourite songs but you must trust that they will be selecting repertoire which won't put pressure on your vocal chords.

Discuss repertoire with your teacher and they can give you a list of songs to work on.

Reading music



| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Staff | 5 ruled lines grouped together, on which musical notes are drawn |
| Treble Clef | Indicates that the notes to be played are of higher pitch. Children and women <i>usually</i> sing in treble clef |
| Bass Clef | Indicates that the notes to be played are of lower pitch. Adult men <i>usually</i> sing in bass clef |
| Notes & Rests | Notes are made up of note heads and stems (sometimes the stems have tails too) and are placed on lines or spaces on the staff. Rests are placed on the staff to show where there is a pause or break – singers use rests to breathe. |
| Bars | The staff is divided into small sections in which notes are grouped. A bar is usually measured by a certain number of beats, for example 4 beats in a bar, as in the example above. |

| Notes | Name | | Value |
|---|----------------|-------------------|---------|
|  | Semibreve | Whole note | 4 beats |
|  | Minim | Half note | 2 beats |
|  | Crotchet | Quarter note | 1 beat |
|  | Quaver | Eighth note | ½ beat |
|  | Semi-quaver | Sixteenth note | ¼ beat |
|  | 2 Quavers | 2 Eighth notes | 1 beat |
|  | 4 Semi-quavers | 4 Sixteenth notes | 1 beat |

Breathing Exercises

Three candles

The 'three candles' exercise is to find the abdominal muscles used to support the airflow. Put one hand on your tummy (over the belly-button) and the other hand about a foot in front of your mouth with the palm facing your mouth. Then blow three times as if you were trying to blow three separate candles out from a distance. You should be able to feel the abdominal muscles working hard!



Balloon exercise

Try to keep your shoulders relaxed for this one. Fill up full of air (keeping those shoulders relaxed) and gradually blow the air out steadily through pursed lips - squeezing from the tummy all the time. Try to do this to three counts, then four, then five etc. The longer the counts the steadier you will need the airflow to be. See how long you can make the breath last!



Can you try these at home?

WHAT I'VE ACHIEVED

TICK EACH POINT WHEN YOU CAN DO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING:

- I CAN STAND IN THE CORRECT POSTURE FOR SINGING
- I CAN SING 3 VOCAL EXERCISES TO WARM UP MY VOICE
- I KNOW HOW TO PRACTISE AND MAINTAIN MY SINGING AT HOME
- I AM BEGINNING TO BREATHE DEEPLY AND CORRECTLY
- I KNOW HOW TO SUPPORT MY VOICE & CONTROL MY BREATH
- I CAN SING MY SONGS FROM MEMORY AT THE CORRECT PITCH
- I HAVE PERFORMED IN FRONT OF A TEACHER / A FRIEND
- I HAVE PERFORMED TO THE WHOLE CLASS OR SCHOOL
- I AM BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND THE THEORY OF MUSIC AND
KNOW SOME ITALIAN MUSICAL WORDS
- I FEEL I HAVE MADE PROGRESS

Vocal Warm-Ups for new learners

As mentioned earlier in the "looking after your voice" section of this book, your voice is a muscle that needs to be looked after carefully. When you dance or play sport you are encouraged to stretch and warm up your muscles. This is to help you avoid injury. For the same reason it is essential that we establish good habits and gently warm up our voices every time we sing. Below are some examples of exercises for you to practise as part of your warm up routine. Your teacher will guide you through these and introduce you to many other vocal warm-ups.

Exercise 1 - humming & resonance

Put your hand flat on your chest and hum the following exercise, connecting the notes together smoothly *legato*. Repeat this getting lower and lower each time. Can you feel your chest voice?



Now put your hands gently either side of your face and repeat the same exercise, this time getting higher and higher each time to the top of your range. Can you feel the vibration?



Exercise 2 - degrees of the scale

Practise singing the first five degrees of the scale using numbers. Get louder *crescendo* as you go up, and quieter *diminuendo* as you go down. Try this again with vowels instead of numbers: "ah", "ay", "ee", "oh" and "oo"



Then practise singing all eight degrees of the scale up and down in one breath. Try this exercise detached *staccato*. Your teacher will help you change key and explore your range.



Musical extracts

Short extracts from songs are fun and rewarding to practise as exercises. Practise singing these two extracts from the Sound of Music as one phrase. Can you do this in one breath? Remember to support your sound with good strength from your abdominal muscles and inhale fully before you start. Make sure to use lots of mouth movement to emphasise the vowels in the words and *crescendo* from soft *piano* to loud *forte*

