EXERCISES AND WARM UP

FOR

VOICE, DICTION, AND VOCAL DYNAMICS

75 EXERCISES FOR ACTORS

this exercise booklet accompanies the video series on the actor’s campus at www.actorsfoundryonline.com

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WHY WARM UP YOUR VOICE...?

Both stage and film actors need to have vocal control and volume control. On stage, an actor needs to have the vocal ability to reach out to an audience and sustain the voice through an evening of theatre - and then repeat it nightly.

On film, the microphone loves full rich and resonant tones...and the ability to go quiet in volume without “grounding out”. As well, an actor needs to sustain a voice that has continuity throughout the day, and throughout a week of filming.

Actors need to have well tuned and sustainable vocal instruments.

Even more so, actors need to be vocally “warmed up” because a cold instrument will impede connectivity and shut down emotions. When an actor is resonating and free in their voice, they don’t need to work as hard to connect with the other actors. Moments, emotions, and actions flow easily from the actor. In this way, a “cold” instrument is a check-out mechanism.

A warmed instrument is a bridge to connection.

Lastly, an actor who is vocally warm, and clear in speech, and open to dynamics is an actor who CAN BE UNDERSTOOD. An actor serves story and audience. A clear, connected, communicating actor serves story and audience best.

These exercises start with breath, and then work through sound, articulation, melody, dynamics, and finally evolve into dialogue.

IT STARTS WITH BREATH

Children know how to breathe and make sound. That’s why babies and children are so loud. Overtime, we adults are traumatized into NOT breathing correctly. We “suck it up” and “shove it down” and UN-LEARN what we knew how to do naturally as infants. We put our breathing into our necks and shoulders and chest, not into our lower lungs as we did when we were children. We become tight. We become clenched. And we become detached from our natural breathing and it’s major mechanism: the diaphragm.
Inside you is a muscle called the diaphragm which acts as a “push down” mechanism. Sustainable at all volumes and over any amount of usage.

The **thoracic diaphragm**, or simply the **diaphragm** (Ancient Greek: διάφραγμα diáphragma “partition”), is a sheet of internal skeletal muscle[2] that extends across the bottom of the thoracic cavity. The diaphragm separates the thoracic cavity containing the heart and lungs, from the abdominal cavity and performs an important function in respiration: as the diaphragm contracts, the volume of the thoracic cavity increases and air is drawn into the lungs.


When you breathe in, it pushes down on your guts, making more room in your lower lungs to bring in air. When you breathe out, it relaxes, pushing the air out of you.

That muscle works to bring in air (the active work...like the bicep muscle lifting a weight), and relaxes when it exhales (the passive work...like the bicep dropping the weight).

When you make sound, it only happens on an exhale. In other words...making sound is a PASSIVE exercise.

But most people think they need to work too make sound. They smash their vocal folds and screw up their necks and push from the chest. That’s because they have forgotten how to breathe. When you learn to breathe correctly again, sound comes easily. Naturally. Powerfully. The voice becomes rich and clear and sustainable at all volumes and over any amount of usage.

During the process of un-learning the bad habits of negative breathing ... in returning to natural breathing and the authentic voice ... tensions, stresses, blocks, emotions and memories may be unleashed. Enjoy the ride!
GETTING GOING: ACTORS START ON THEIR BACKS ON THE FLOOR

Get some water. You may like to use a yoga mat. You will need a book as a headrest.

- lie on your back, knees up, feet flat on the floor with a supported back
- you may need to place your book under your head to ensure a straight spine
- hands on your instrument: right hand at the rib cage split, the top of your rib triangle...left hand above the pubic bone
- between our hands is your breathing instrument...it should expand when breathing in
- breathe in and out through mouth
- above and below your hands, your body shouldn’t move...do NOT breathe into the shoulders and neck and top of chest
- practice incorrect breathing for one second: breathe into the neck and chest and shoulders through the nose...hold it feel how tense and horrible that feels...never do that again!
- "blowing the candle" out is emptying out...exhale and empty out the instrument
- repeat each exercise three times, take a break and drink some water whenever you need

BASIC BREATHING

EXERCISE 1: RELAXATION EXERCISE

- get relaxed on the floor, stretch, knees to one side, then the other
- your 5 points are: jaw, neck, shoulders, back, legs
- breathe and focus into one point at a time...soften and loosen
- 1: jaw, 2: neck, 3: shoulders, 4 lower back, 5 legs
- in order, out of order, focus on each point of relaxation
- floating on air, sinking into warm, deep sand..
EXERCISE 2: IN AND OUT FULL BREATHS

- “blow the candle out” and breathe in and out on 5 counts
- gentle, easy - don’t push - for some, this is the first time working the diaphragm muscle

EXERCISE 3: IN AND OUT ON CATCH BREATHS

- “blow the candle out” breathe in on 5 catch breaths
- “in, in, in, in, in....out, out, out, out, out”
- Sigh. Relax. Repeat.

For some, this may all you need to work on right now.

SIMPLE HUMS:

EXERCISE 4: IN AND HUM

- “blow the candle out” and breathe in on a 5 count, and then a very gentle “hum”.
- elongate the “h” and “m”...almost no vowel: “hhhhhummmm”.
- let the voice die gently. No pushing. Repeat.

EXERCISE 5: IN AND HUM AND TAP

- repeat exercise 4, on “hum” gently tap your chest, loosen the muscles

EXERCISE 6: IN AND HUM WITH JAW CHEW

- repeat exercise 4, on “hum” gently chew with your jaw

Again, for some, this may all you need to work on right now.
SIMPLE AHs AND OHs:

EXERCISE 7: IN AND HUM ENDING IN “AHHHH”

- repeat exercise 4, on end of hum, add a gentle and dying “Ahhhhh”
- “hhhhhhuummmmmaaaaahhhh”...
- do not glottalize (ground down in throat...the glottis is the opening between the vocal folds)

EXERCISE 8: IN AND “AH”

- blow the candle out and breathe in on a 5 count
- sigh gently and quietly on a long “AH”
- start and end with breath: “HHHAAAAAAAHHHHH”

imagine sound is a surfer...breath is the wave...surfing through the vocal folds

EXERCISE 9: IN AND “AH HAH!”

- repeat exercise 8, adding “AH” before “HAH!”
- make sure that it starts with breath and ends with breath
- gentle and quiet “HHHAAA HHHAAAAHHHHH!”

EXERCISE 10: IN AND HUM AND “OH”

- repeat exercise 7 with “OH” instead of “AH”

EXERCISE 11: IN AND “OH”

- repeat exercise 8 with OH”
- don’t forget: start with breath and end with breath
- gentle and quiet...no pushing...no glottalizing
- let sound gently die
EXERCISE 12: IN AND “OH NO!”

- repeat exercise 9 with “OH NO!”
- don’t forget: start and end with breath
- “HHHHOOOOHHHHNOOOO!!!”
- let sound gently die

EXERCISE 13: DIRECTED “AH” AND “OH”

- eyes open
- keep one hand close to chest while pointing to the ceiling with finger
- repeat exercises 7 through 12

- with each sound: slowly drive the hand towards the ceiling.

- again repeat exercises 7 through 12
- this time with each sound drive hand to wall behind past the head

- again repeat exercises 7 through 12
- this time with each sound drive hand to wall to the right, and then again to the left

*And again, this may all you need to work on right now.*
HA, HO, WAH, WOH:

EXERCISE 14: HA HA HA HA HA

- blow the candle out and breathe in on a 5 count
- sigh gently and quietly on 5 “AHs”
- start and end with breath: “HA HA HA HA HA”
- remember: always let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

EXERCISE 15: HO HO HO HO HO

- blow the candle out and breathe in on a 5 count
- sigh gently and quietly on 5 “OHs”
- start and end with breath: “HO HO HO HO HO”

EXERCISE 16: WAH WAH WAH WAH WAH

- blow the candle out and breathe in on a 5 count
- sigh gently and quietly on 5 “WAHs”
- start and end with breath: “WAH WAH WAH WAH WAH”

- the “W” sound is very very soft...let the jaw hang slack and loose
- remember: always let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

EXERCISE 17: WOH WOH WOH WOH WOH

- blow the candle out and breathe in on a 5 count
- sigh gently and quietly on 5 “WOHs”
- start and end with breath: “WOH WOH WOH WOH WOH”

And again, this may all you need to work on right now.
CATCH BREATHS:

EXERCISE 18: CATCH BREATHS AND “HA”

- repeat exercises 14 using catch breaths instead of five count

- blow the candle out and breathe in 5 catch breaths
- IN IN IN IN IN...and then “HA HA HA HA HA”
- start and end with breath

- remember: always let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

EXERCISE 19: CATCH BREATHS AND “HO”

- repeat exercises 15 using catch breaths instead of five count

- blow the candle out and breathe in 5 catch breaths
- IN IN IN IN IN...and then “HO HO HO HO HO”
- start and end with breath

EXERCISE 20: CATCH BREATHS - HUM AND CHEW - AND “MAH”

- repeat exercise 4 with catch breaths
- “in, in, in, in, in”...then “HUM” then chew, adding “MAH” at the end
- “hummmmmm - chew -aaaaaahhh”
- let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

EXERCISE 21: HUM AND CHEW AND “MOH”

- repeat exercise 20 with “MOH”
NASALS:

EXERCISE 22: MA MA MA MA MA

- blow the candle out and breathe in on a 5 count
- sigh gently and quietly on 5 “MAHs”
- start and end with breath: “MA MA MA MA MA”

- remember: always let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

EXERCISE 23: MO MO MO MO MO

- blow the candle out and breathe in on a 5 count
- sigh gently and quietly on 5 “MOHs”
- start and end with breath: “MO MO MO MO MO”

EXERCISE 24: NA NA NA NA NA

- blow the candle out and breathe in on a 5 count
- sigh gently and quietly on 5 “NAHs”
- start and end with breath: “NA NA NA NA NA”

EXERCISE 25: NO NO NO NO NO

- repeat exercise 21 with “NOHs”
- let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

EXERCISE 26: NGA NGA NGA NGA

- make the “NG” sound...as in “siNGiNG”...ngngngngngng
- now: blow the candle out and breathe in on a 5 count
- sigh gently and quietly on 5 “NGAHs”
- start and end with breath: “NGAH NGAH NGAH NGAH NGAH”
- remember: always let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

EXERCISE 27: NGOH NGOH NGOH NGOH NGOH NGOH

- repeat exercise 24 with “NGOHs”
NASALS WITH CATCH BREATHS:

EXERCISE 28: CATCH BREATHS AND MA

- repeat exercise 22 using catch breaths instead of 5 count
- blow the candle out and breathe in 5 catch breaths
- IN IN IN IN IN...and “MA MA MA MA MA”
- start and end with breath
- remember: always let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

EXERCISE 29: CATCH BREATHS AND MO

- repeat exercise 23 using catch breaths instead of 5 count
- blow the candle out and breathe in 5 catch breaths
- IN IN IN IN IN...and “MO MO MO MO MO”
- start and end with breath

EXERCISE 30: CATCH BREATHS AND NA

- repeat exercise 24 using catch breaths instead of 5 count
- blow the candle out and breathe in 5 catch breaths
- IN IN IN IN IN...and “NA NA NA NA NA”
- start and end with breath

EXERCISE 31: CATCH BREATHS AND NO

- repeat exercise 25 using catch breaths instead of 5 count
- blow the candle out and breathe in 5 catch breaths
- IN IN IN IN IN...and “NO NO NO NO NO”
- start and end with breath
FINAL ON THE FLOOR ON YOUR BACK EXERCISES:

EXERCISE 32: HHH ... MMM ... NNN ... NGG ... AAAHH

- breathe in for full 5 count
- start on a breath “Hhhh”
  - Hhh becomes hummmmm becomes nnnnn becomes nnnggg
  - then open moth and let HHAAAAAHHH flow out
- remember: always let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

EXERCISE 33: HHH ... MMM ... NNN ... NGG ... OOOHH

- breathe in for full 5 count
- start on a breath “Hhhhh”
  - Hhh becomes hummmmmm becomes nnnnnn becomes nnnggg
  - then open moth and let HHOOOOHHHH flow out
- remember: always let the voice die gently. No pushing. No glottalizing.

END OF ON YOUR BACK...

For some, this may all you need to work on right now.

Take a small break. Take a drink of water.
ACTORS LIE ON STOMACH ON THE FLOOR

- cup hands into triangle, place forehead on hands

- take deep breaths extending out butt and back and sides

- breathe into your lower back

EXERCISES: REPEAT ALL EXERCISES 4 THROUGH 33
(skip exercise 13)

For some, this may all you need to work on right now.

Take a small break. Take a drink of water.

ACTORS ON A CHAIR

- sit on a flat hard surface, or the end of an office chair

- push stomach forward, sit on the “sit bones”

- hands on instrument

- relax five points (jaw, neck, shoulder, back, thighs)

- breathe in and out of mouth
EXERCISES: REPEAT ALL EXERCISES 4 THROUGH 33

For some, this may all you need to work on right now.

Take a small break. Take a drink of water.

ACTORS ON THEIR FEET

- stretch, shake out, roll shoulders, roll neck, roll up from toes
- hands on instrument
- breathe in and out of mouth

EXERCISES: REPEAT ALL EXERCISES 4 THROUGH 33

Take a small break. Take a drink of water.

For some, this may all you need to work on right now.

ADVANCED EXERCISES ON FEET

Actors MUST have perfected exercises 1 through 33 on floor and feet and standing (99 exercises!) before moving to advanced exercises. Always working on a five count. Always starting with breath and ending with breath. Never glottalizing. Always relaxed, never forcing sounds.

EXERCISE 34: BOUNCE AND “AH” AND “OH”

- breathe in for five count
- bounce up and down with an “AH” on each landing
- relaxed and loose

- repeat with “OH”