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he lines that an actor speaks must be heard clearly. Every word must be understood by cast members and audience alike. Thus, the voice is the foundation of an actor's art. Effective vocal communication is important not only onstage, but also at home, in the classroom—wherever you want people to understand what you are saying.

A voice that is used effectively conveys a wide range of emotions and reflects a person's personality, moods, and attitudes. A well-trained actor with an effective voice knows the importance of the following ten elements: relaxation, breathing, quality, pitch, flexibility, articulation, pronunciation, volume, rate, and projection.

If you were fortunate when you were younger, someone encouraged you to develop good speech habits. If this happened, you will probably have more success in theatre class than those who need to change bad vocal habits. Unfortunately, most people fall into the category of those who need vocal improvement. Take a moment now to list in your journal what you like about your voice and what you think needs improving. In this chapter, you will learn about the elements that make up an effective voice. You will also put a plan into action with drills, exercises, and activities to develop and improve your voice.

“

Know you how much the people may be moved by that which he will utter?

William Shakespeare

”



Relaxation and Breathing

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Define relaxation and breathing.
- ◆ Understand the function and importance of relaxation and breathing.
- ◆ Participate in drills, exercises, and activities for developing and improving relaxation and breathing techniques.

Warm Up



Which method helps you relax?

- music
- silence in a room
- daydreaming
- exercises
- all of the above

In your journal, explain your answer.

relaxation

freedom from all bodily tensions.

posture

how we sit and stand.

Relaxation

Before using your voice onstage, you must prepare your body by becoming relaxed. Most people do not know how to completely relax. **Relaxation** means freedom from all bodily tensions. It gives the actor a deeper level of awareness and provides the energy needed for the stage.

Being relaxed does not mean having a body like a wet noodle. The body and mind must be keenly alert and ready, yet calm and free from distractions and tension. Relaxation requires that you shut out any wandering thoughts about yourself or others. It also means ignoring unusual sounds, interruptions, and any other distractions. You can train both your mind and body to reach this level of relaxation with the exercises provided in this lesson.

Relaxation will give you physical and mental control and focus onstage, which in turn will help you achieve your theatrical goals. Relaxation techniques will also improve your **posture** (how you sit and stand), which is essential in controlled breathing. Finally, relaxation

For the best possible performance, you need to be relaxed. Actors use a variety of relaxation exercises to prepare for their performances.



will improve the sound of your voice and make your movement smoother onstage.

ACTION

- 1. Musical Relaxation.** While listening to music, lie on your back on the classroom floor. Relax each portion of your body by picturing the muscles with your mind's eye. See them relaxing as you breath slowly and deeply. Start with the top of your head and move down to your toes.
- 2. Away With Tension!** Listen to music provided by your teacher and experience the difference between tension and relaxation. Start with the top of your head and move down to your toes. Tighten up the muscles and then completely relax. Concentrate on each section of your body by seeing the muscles in your mind's eye change from bright red to soft pink as they relax. End up completely relaxed, and remain that way for 5 minutes.
- 3. Space Walk.** While standing in the classroom (find your own space to perform without bumping or disrupting other students), pretend that you are in space. Move completely relaxed, as if you were floating. Explore the feeling of complete freedom but with the control of slow motion.
- 4. Silence is Golden!** During complete silence, sit at your desk for 3 minutes. Relax your entire body. Sit upright, but roll your head down and let your hands dangle by your body. In your mind's eye, see your body completely relaxed during these 3 minutes without interruptions.
- 5. Body Parts in Motion.** While listening to music, do the following relaxation exercises three times each: shoulder shrugs; shoulder rolls

forward and backward; head rolls forward and backward; arm swings forward and backward; waist stretches to the left and right; massage your neck and shoulders; leg swings one at a time to the sides, forward, and backward; foot stretches up and down; massage your feet and hands.

6. **Smile!** Smile in an exaggerated manner several times to stretch and relax your face muscles. Repeat this activity, using a frown instead of a smile.
7. **Facial Massage!** Massage your face, and completely relax your facial muscles.
8. **Sleepy Time!** Yawn several times to relax the jaw.
9. **Going Up, Going Down!** Sit on the floor of the classroom and get comfortable. Pretend that you are in an elevator. Start at the twentieth floor and slowly go down. There will be pauses at each floor, but you will not get off. Finally, at the first floor, pretend to get off in a completely relaxed state of mind and body. As the leader calls out the different floors, feel your body get more relaxed at each floor as you go down.
10. **Country Time!** Stand in the classroom (find your own space). Raise your arms up and reach high into the air. Stretch higher and higher. Bend over and relax your body as if it were a limp doll. Remain in this position, and let your arms dangle for 1 minute. Slowly come up, relaxing each part of your body as you rebuild your backbone while gradually straightening up. As you completely stand erect, pretend that you are alone in the country, standing under the most beautiful tree you have ever seen. Smell the country air. Hear the birds. Feel the country grass soft beneath your feet. Stretch your body to the left and to the right. Stand up on the balls of your feet and look to the left and to the right. Look forward and behind you. See the gorgeous countryside with its hills and valleys, flowers, and cool streams. All of a sudden, a beautiful horse comes up to you. Jump up on the horse and ride bareback. Gallop in the wind. Relax and enjoy the ride through the country. Guide the horse back to the tree and get off. Lie down and pretend that a cloud comes down to take you back to the classroom.

Warm Up



Read the introduction of this chapter aloud. How far can you read without taking a breath?

breathing

the necessary process of inhaling and exhaling air to live.

diaphragm

the muscle located between the abdomen and the rib cage.

Breathing

As you know, **breathing** is the necessary process of inhaling and exhaling air to live. As a young actor, you must learn to control your breathing. Controlled breathing gives the performer enough power to carry the voice and be clearly heard.

Onstage, you need to inhale more deeply than you do in regular breathing, which translates into using more muscles. This type of inhalation allows you to build volume and vary your vocal sounds without running out of breath or straining your voice. Exhaling should also be stronger and with more control than in your everyday breathing. Your muscles, especially the **diaphragm** (the muscle located between the abdomen and the rib cage), must be used to supply the air

Developing breath control is always essential onstage. It is especially important in productions that require singing or dancing, such as in this production of *The King and I*.



breath control

the amount of force you use in inhaling and exhaling.

you need to create sound. **Breath control** is how much force you use in inhalation and exhalation.

Controlled breathing will help you develop an effective voice onstage and provide the support you will need to sustain you through performances. But another reason controlled breathing is so important is that it influences the body and its movements. When actors first begin performing onstage, their movements are often awkward and unnatural. They always seem to be out of breath after speaking several lines. But after developing breath control and practicing their breathing exercises every day, most actors notice that they have more energy onstage. Their body movements are then more effective as they rehearse and perform.

ACTION

- 1. Book Rest.** Lie down on the floor in the classroom. Rest a book on your diaphragm (the muscle between the abdomen and the rib cage). Watch the book rise when you inhale and fall when you exhale. Continue this exercise for about a minute.
- 2. Observation Time.** Observe closely the difference between everyday breathing and breathing while speaking. Observe inhaling and exhaling for both types of breathing by placing your hands on your stomach, just below the rib cage. Also notice changes in upper body and lower body tension as you breathe.
- 3. Air Release.** Breathe deeply and inhale slowly. Hold your breath and release the air slowly, counting 1 to 6. Repeat this process to see how well you can control your breathing as you say the numbers.

4. **Ha, Ha, Ha!** Slowly inhale and hold your breath for 10 counts. Exhale on the sound of “ha.”
5. **Ah!!!!!!** Slowly inhale and hold for 10 counts. Exhale on the sound of “ah.”
6. **Snake.** Inhale as if you were about to speak. Now exhale and make the sound of a snake—“s-s-s-s-s-s.”
7. **Pucker Up!** Pucker your lips, and hold the tip of your finger in front of your lips. Quickly inhale and blow out a stream of air. Concentrate on producing a steady, smooth stream of air each time you repeat this exercise. Feel the difference in the air on your finger when there is a change in the stream of air.
8. **Phrases.** Slowly inhale. Next practice saying phrases, working on your breath control. Suggested phrases are: good morning, good luck, break a leg, nice day, good show, and thank you.
9. **Using Poetry for Breath Control.** Read Jack Prelutsky’s poem “Life’s Not Been the Same in My Family” to practice breath control. See how far you can read without taking a breath.

Life’s Not Been the Same in My Family

Life’s not been the same in my family
since the day that the new baby came,
my parents completely ignore me,
they scarcely remember my name.

The baby gets all their attention,
“Oh, isn’t she precious!” they croon,
they think she looks like an angel,
I think she resembles a prune.

They’re thrilled when she giggles and gurgles,
“She burped!” they exclaimed with delight,
they don’t even mind when she wakes us
with deafening screams in the night.

They seem to believe she’s a treasure,
there’s simply no way I agree,
I wish she’d stop being a baby
and start being older than me.

10. **Poetry Scavenger Hunt.** Find three other poems that would help develop your breath control.
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