



LESSON 2

Quality, Pitch, and Flexibility

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Define quality, pitch, and flexibility.
- ◆ Understand the function and importance of quality, pitch, and flexibility.
- ◆ Recognize and break bad speaking habits.
- ◆ Participate in drills, exercises, and activities for developing and improving an actor's voice quality, pitch, and flexibility.
- ◆ Begin developing good speaking habits for a lifetime.

Warm Up



List three people whose voices you admire. Why?

quality

the voice element that makes one person sound different from everyone else.

Quality

Quality is the voice element that makes you sound different from everyone else. People recognize you from the unique sound of your voice. You don't have much choice regarding the quality of your voice. But you can eliminate (or at least lessen) annoying habits that produce poor voice quality. Examples of poor voice quality are huskiness, nasality (sounds produced by allowing your breath to pass through your nose when you talk), and a thin, weak quality.

Voice quality and emotional state are closely connected. Your emotions are reflected through the quality of your voice. For example, people can tell if you are happy or angry, depending on whether your voice is pleasant or unpleasant. Even when you aren't aware of it, your voice quality reflects your personality and moods.

As an actor, you will need to use a variety of voice qualities to interpret and portray different characters. When you speak onstage, your voice quality will reflect your character's emotional frame of mind. It is necessary to have effective voice qualities to develop the character that you portray.

ACTION



- 1. Quality Warm-Ups.** Roll your head forward, backward, and sideways. Massage your face and lips to loosen the muscles. Relax your tongue, jaw, and throat by yawning slowly. After physically exercising these areas, mentally prepare these body parts before you participate in the exercises to improve your voice quality. To be mentally prepared, focus on keeping the face, lips, tongue, jaw, and throat relaxed for adequate control.
- 2. Emotional Survey.** Using different emotions, say these words: yes, no, it's okay, finally, sure, great. Suggested emotions to use are: happy, sad, fearful, angry, and jealous.
- 3. Louder, I Can't Hear You.** Say the following words quietly at first.

Then repeat them louder and louder, then finally stronger using more breath support. Practice using your best voice quality.

may won play wink tune
say sun clay sink loon
day done way rink moon

Warm Up



In your journal, describe the tone of your voice. (Is it too high, low, shrill, or nasal?)

pitch

the musical tone of a voice.

vocal folds

muscular membranes in the larynx that produce sound.

inflection

the rising and falling of pitch. Inflection adds meaning, color, and rhythm to spoken words.

Pitch

Pitch is the musical tone of your voice—how high or how low you speak on a musical scale. It is one of the voice elements that gives meaning and color to speech. Pitch is determined by the vibration of your **vocal folds**, muscular membranes located in the larynx, or what is often called the “voice box.” The faster the folds vibrate, the higher the pitch. The slower the folds vibrate, the lower the pitch. The shape and size of the vocal folds also make a difference in the tone of a person’s voice. The loss of your voice after two hours of yelling at a football or basketball game is the result of strained muscles—your vocal folds. They are swollen and vibrate very slowly when you try to speak, causing a low pitch, often hoarseness.

You can find your pitch by matching your voice against the scales of a piano. Once you find your pitch, remember that this is the level that is best for you personally for the richest tone and greatest ease in speaking. You are born with this pitch, and not much can be done to change your natural pitch. But you can learn to manipulate your pitch for the stage.

Two common flaws onstage are a thin, high tone and a monotone. A high, thin pitch can be corrected with concentration and a conscious effort to lower your speaking tone. A person who speaks in a monotone (speaking without a change in pitch) needs **inflection**, the rising and falling of pitch. Vocal inflection is essential for the actor. Besides giving the voice variety in its pitch, inflection adds meaning, color, and rhythm to words. Inflection makes a voice interesting. When you listen to a teacher who never changes pitch—talks in a flat monotone—it’s hard to pay attention; your mind wanders. But a teacher who uses inflection effectively can stimulate your mind for hours.

ACTION



1. Which Pitch Did You Use? Say the following three times, changing your pitch each time.

- a. Yes.
- b. No.
- c. I don't know.
- d. I knew that.

Repeat the activity. Be prepared to explain what you meant each time you said the word or words. For example, “yes,” can mean “I will do it,” “I’m not sure,” or “Sure” uttered sarcastically.

2. Rising and Falling Inflection. Say the numbers 2, 4, 6, 8, with a rising inflection. Say the numbers 2, 4, 6, 8 with a falling inflection. Repeat this drill several times.



An oscilloscope displays an electronic graph of your voice.

oscilloscope

an instrument that can be used to record voice vibrations and show voice patterns.

Warm Up



Say the following sentence three different ways by changing your voice:
“What happened to you?”

flexibility

the process of varying inflections of the voice.

poise

the effective control of all voice elements and body movements.

3. What Did You Say? Using gibberish (senseless chatter) and varying the inflection in your voice, explain the following.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a. how to get somewhere | f. how to operate a small appliance |
| b. what's in an imaginary box | g. how to play a sport |
| c. what someone looked like | h. where you are from |
| d. how to solve a math problem | i. who's in your family |
| e. how to cook an egg | j. an idea of your own |

4. Patterns. If your science lab has an **oscilloscope** (an instrument that records vibrations produced by charges of electricity), take turns reading this sentence: “It wasn't so much what he said as how he said it.” Watch the pattern of your voice on the oscilloscope. Compare all voice patterns in the class.

5. Would You Please Repeat That? Practice repeating this question—“What did you do?”—five different ways. Place emphasis on the different words in the question to make each way effective.

Flexibility

You will be able to keep the members of an audience on the edge of their seats if you vary your pitch and exhibit flexibility. **Flexibility** is the result of using the muscles in your face, tongue, jaw, lips, and throat in a lively manner. It is also a process of varying inflections as you speak. Vocal flexibility is created in a number of ways: using variety in the sounds of words; placing emphasis, or stress, on certain syllables, words, or groups of words in an unexpected way; phrasing words and sentences in a particular way; and using pauses, which provide the element of timing—not only for the actor, but also for the audience, helping them grasp what is being said.

As an actor, you may be hesitant to use pauses, but they are extremely effective in communicating onstage. A pause can be as meaningful as a spoken line. It can give an audience the interpretation of the script intended by the playwright.

Another skill that you need to develop is poise. **Poise** is the effective control of all your vocal elements and body movements. Poise can give you a calm, confident manner. But it can only come as a result of the self-confidence that you gain from your training in vocal elements and body movements.

Actors find as they develop flexibility that they are able to express the meaning of lines more clearly.

ACTION

1. It's a Date! Divide into pairs, a girl and a boy. Carry on a conversation asking for a date and accepting the date, using only first names as the dialogue. Vary your inflection for emphasis and interest.

2. Express Yourself with a Song. Sing the following songs as warm-ups, drills, exercises, activities, and fun.

- a. Happy Birthday
- b. Row, Row, Row Your Boat
- c. London Bridge
- d. This Old Man
- e. I'm a Little Teapot
- f. Old MacDonald Had a Farm
- g. Oh! Susanna!
- h. Yankee Doodle Went to Town
- i. She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain
- j. another song—your choice

3. Poetry Inflection. Read the following poem, "A Word" by the famous American poet, Emily Dickinson, three different ways:

A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.

I say it just
Begins to live
That day.

4. Short Statements. Practice saying the following short sentences. Concentrate on changing meaning when you repeat them, adding color and emphasis to different words.

- a. The world's a stage.
- b. You are my sunshine.
- c. You haven't seen anything yet.
- d. I never met a man I didn't like.
- e. Oh, what a beautiful morning.
- f. You can't do that.
- g. Come on down.
- h. United we stand.
- i. Divided we fall.
- j. Do whatever it takes.
- k. Take a risk.
- l. Make a difference.

5. Say It Again Sam! Repeat the sentences in exercise 4, assuming a different character each time. Make up your own characters—for example, a cowboy, a doctor, an old woman, a young child, a newscaster, an astronaut, a rock star, a sports hero, a movie star, a preacher.
