

# Using Your Voice to the Best Effect

**I**f we are to become effective speakers we must be aware of

- ?? how the voice is produced
- ?? how the voice should be used
- ?? how the voice can be enhanced.

**Being unaware of these essentials is like trying to build a house without a firm foundation.**

## How the voice is produced

The organs used in producing speech are vocal chords, tongue, lips, lower jaw, teeth, palate, and the lungs.

Flexing the diaphragm pushes air out of the lungs which in turn is forced over the vocal chords causing them to vibrate and produce sounds. The quality of the voice is greatly influenced by how we use our tongue, lips, lower jaw and palate.

Although we all have the ability to speak, for many of us there is the need to enhance our natural abilities. Most of us can sing, but the difference between the trained and the untrained singer is considerable. Like many other skills, practice makes perfect.

We need to be aware that the voice has many qualities which need to be addressed individually such as volume, pitch, clarity, pronunciation, resonance, light and shade, word formation and breath control to name but a few.

## How the voice should be used

As a general rule you should use a firm and strong voice. Why?

- If you are to succeed as a speaker you must be heard by the entire audience.
- It will give you confidence as a speaker.
- It will create the impression that you know what you are talking about and that you mean it.
- It will discourage others from talking whilst you are doing so.

It is important to remember to project your voice but this should not be confused with yelling.

When we speak our body should be relaxed but we need to have firm control of the head, neck and chest.

**Inflections** are essential and reading gives you the opportunity to practise this art by using punctuation effectively to enhance meaning.

**Emphasis** is extremely important. Consider the following sentences :

*I want the black one.*

*Don didn't say Stan stole five dollars.*

Depending on which word is emphasised it can alter the entire meaning of the sentence.

**Tone** gives the voice its character - i.e. mellow, rich, strident or reedy.

**Pitch** should generally be low rather than high, otherwise it is difficult to vary to great effect.

## How the voice can be enhanced

Most voices can be enhanced by using exercises. A few of the common ones are listed below,

- **Breath control**

Breath control is the most important exercise of all as shallow breathing produces weak and ineffective speaking.

Try slow, deep-breathing exercises for periods of 5 minutes taking no more than 20 breaths in that time.

Inhale while slowly counting to three, filling your lower lungs. Feel your ribs expanding, slowly let your breath out and recite in a slow and measured voice a piece of poetry. See how far you get using one breath.

- **Resonance**

This can be improved by the simple act of humming. This will reduce hoarseness and clear your nasal passages.

Repeat the words **enemy, men and many.**

Practise this phrase "**The Rangoon Gang banged the Hong Kong gong until it rang with thundering boom around Kowloon**"

- **Articulation**

Articulation gives speech its degree of clarity. To improve your articulation firstly work on your vowels, "A, E, I, O, U ". Try to give them their maximum value.

Practise and exaggerate the following words:

**calm, rain, sigh, cool, owl, all & fur**

Consonants, the rest of the letters, tend to be beginnings, sustainers and finishers of words. These can best be practised by the use of tongue twisters which also provide useful practice in word separation. Try these

~~///~~ **She stood on the balcony inexplicably mimicking him and welcoming him in.**

~~///~~ **As the sun shines on the shop signs, she seeks a shot-silk sash shop's summer sale.**

~~///~~ **Meals on Wheels deals meek meatless meals in Whitsun's witless wheatless weeks.**

- **Flexibility (Using the organs of speech)**

The tongue can be exercised by rapid repetition of letters such as r r r r r r **and** d d d d d d (this will also involve the palate and teeth)

Lips can be exercised by repetition of ee, oo, ah or horse noises.

The lower jaw can be exercised by repeating "**My mouth is round like a cow chewing its cud.**"

The palate may be exercised by repeating words like "King Kong, King Kong," "Gong, gong," and "Ng, Ng, Ng."

These exercises will assist in the correct vocal development of words and sounds.

- **Vocal variation**

Varying the volume of your speech will greatly enhance your ability as a public speaker. Practise by reading aloud passages from poetry or novels where the author changes the mood from love to hatred, anger to consolation, happiness to sadness or any other change of emotion.

**Being aware of how the voice is produced and how it should be used is important. Practising the exercises outlined may assist you to become a better speaker.**