

The Breathing for Singing Course

Sneak Peak:

The 3 Ways to Last

Through a Phrase

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The 3 Ways to Last Through a Phrase

In this video, we'll be covering 3 ways to last through a phrase. This is an over-arching, big-picture angle to organize all the different breathing techniques with singing. Remember, when you're working on these exercises, it's not just about lasting through a phrase, that's just the easiest place to see improvement in the skill. Most singers, most of the time, need to work on breathing technique for singing. You will find all kinds of side benefits when you are working on your breathing, you'll find new volumes are easier, unhelpful tension is reduced in your throat, singing higher/lower gets easier, your stamina improves, all kinds of things! So you absolutely do want to work on these techniques, even if you find that you are lasting just fine through your phrases.

Some singers are able to last through a phrase simply by excess tension and rigidity in their throat and body (AKA me as a high school choir singer). If at all possible, try your best to emphasize and work towards lasting through phrases as a natural "side effect" of staying open and free inside your body and throat. This is the point of the breathing technique, this is what allows flexibility, power, and fullness/richness of tone in your voice. We will go into further detail later on this course on how to do that. So only last up to the point that you feel free and open, avoid squeezing or pushing to get to the end of the phrase.

So there are 3 main ways to last through a phrase:

1: Taking in Enough Air for a Phrase.

Either releasing tension so air can re-enter, taking a consciously larger inhale, or taking in air more often in your song.

2: Slowing Down the Outflowing Air.

Have your entire body move more slowly so that (hopefully) the outflowing air moves out more slowly.

3: Turn More of Your Air into Sound

Sing without breathiness and avoid any milliseconds of silence between notes where air often escapes within a phrase.

The Inhale:

If you get rid of your air, don't inhale, and then try to sing, it'll be difficult to sing! So in this breathing course, we'll be looking at helpful and unhelpful ways to inhale for singing, as well as ways to find which ones work for you. Even right now though, you can take a look at your song and see if and when an extra inhale and/or larger inhale might be helpful.

Slowing Down the Exhale:

If you release and/or push your air out too quickly, you'll naturally run out of air. Many singers mistakenly believe that to sing, especially at powerful volume, it requires pushing your air out. This is totally opposite to how your voice works. The louder the sound, the smaller the volume of air is escaping. Later in this course, we'll do an experiment to notice this in our voice.

If you hug yourself and sing, you can get a sense of the space you have inside for the air when you sing. The slower you feel the ribs moving, the slower (usually) the air will move making it easier to last through your phrase. You can also get a feel for if you are holding, pushing, etc.

Turning more (or all) of the air into sound.

If you speak or sing with a breathy sound, not all of the air that is coming up to your vocal folds is being turned into sound, so most people tend to (not always) run out of air more quickly. Of course, if you work on the other skills like slowing down the outflowing air and more frequent/helpful inhales, then that might not be the case.

There is a sneaky way in which “air leaks” can show up without you necessarily noticing it: whenever the volume drops as you move between pitches or hold on to a pitch. You can have a hand right up to your lips and feel that difference as the volume drops and see if you can notice that.

Even though breathing is an incredibly complex topic, it doesn't feel complicated. Most of our work in breathing is removing the “clutter” of extra tensions, movements, lack of energy, etc until we get a smooth, easy exhale and inhale. So what to do when you're trying to notice all the finer details of breathing and you feel lost? Come back to this video, and think of breathing in these 3 simple ways, and see which one seems to help.

For instance, sing through your phrase, and ask yourself: which would I like to try on this phrase? Slowing down the exhale, taking in more air, or turning more air into sound? You may notice for instance, that a particular phrase is challenging to last through and you're singing breathy. So you can try the vocal fold/cord closure videos and see where that takes you.

Vocal Fold/Cord Settings

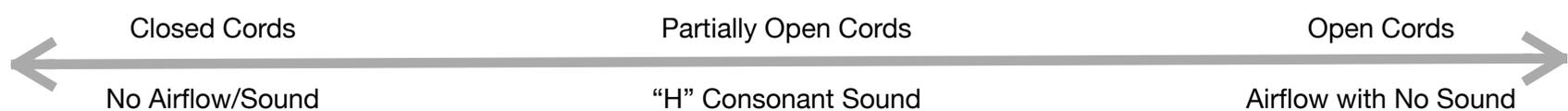
Get to know the setting so you can turn all of your air into sound

Let's get to know the settings of the vocal folds in singing. Let's start with the difference between the voiced and unvoiced sounds.

Voiced sounds involve the clapping motion of the cords and you'll hear a resulting tone. Unvoiced sounds do not involve the (rapid) clapping motion of the vocal cords so you don't hear an accompanying tone. If I whisper and I don't use any tone, then you'll just hear the vowels and consonants. Now I could turn some of the air into a pitch, and at that point it would be a "voiced" sound. If you can hear if I'm higher or lower in pitch, then it's voiced a sound.

So we have two fields of possibility, one field where with various coordinations that are not voiced, and then various coordinations that are voiced.

Unvoiced Coordinations Continuum



Options on Unvoiced Movements:

If I have air flowing through the throat, but the vocal folds are totally apart, then you'll feel air flowing in and out, but you will hear no sound. You can have a hand in front of the mouth and feel the air flowing, but hear no sound.

If I have my vocal folds close to each other, but they are not producing a tone, then we get the pure “H” consonant sound.

If our vocal folds totally closed, then there is no sound or air flowing in or out. Hold your breath, open your mouth and feel no air flowing against your hand. So when we are holding back our air, sometimes we are holding back our air with our body, and sometimes we hold back our air by closing our cords, and sometimes a mix. We want the majority of the holding-back effort to be with our body, minority with the vocal cords.

Where these three settings are very important is in the pauses between your sung phrases.

Case Story: Sense Your Vocal Fold Settings to Sing Freely! ;)

I had a student who had an easy time with a particular phrase, until she sang that same phrase within the song. For some reason, she didn't have any air to sing that phrase after going through the other phrases of the song. It turns out that in between each one of her phrases within a song, she was closing her cords and not breathing. As a result, because you can't hear that this is happening (you have to be able to feel it) she didn't get any air in. However, once she could sense what it was like to have the cords apart between phrases, then she had a much easier time lasting through her phrases.

Vocal Cord Settings with Tone

With any voiced sound, we have many different possibilities as far as what mix of air and tone we have.

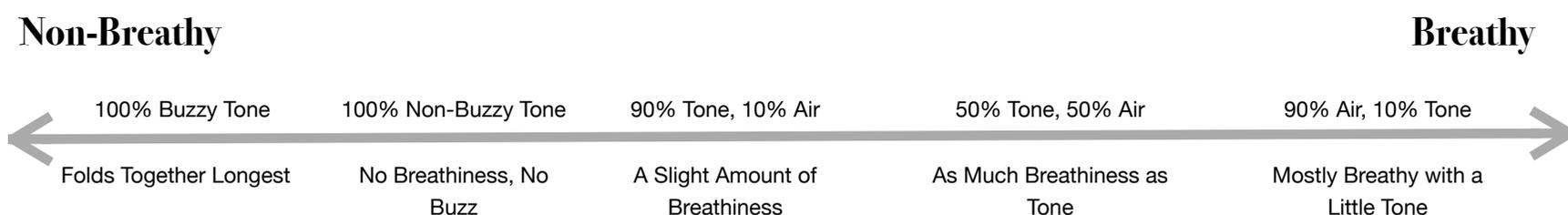
We could have 90% air flowing and just a little bit, like say 10%, of tone

We could have 50/50, and we could have 90% tone and just 10% air.

We could have 100% tone with a buzzy-like quality, or 100% tone but no buzzy quality in the sound.

If we were to think of this on a continuum, we could move from mostly breathy to buzzy and non-breathy. (See video example). As a singer, you want to be able to access this full range of sounds in your voice.

Voiced Coordinations Continuum



The breathy/non-breathy continuum exercise is one that you want to work with regularly so that the coordination in your voice gets better.

When you are singing, the vowel, the volume, the length of the phrase, the pitch and many more things will influence whether or not you turn all of your air into sound over each millisecond that you are singing.

As you are training the coordination, you are also training your senses to be sharper and more self-aware. So when you practice, although a non-breathy sound is usually the easiest when it comes to lasting through phrases (because it turns all of the air into sound), you don't want to only aim to hang out there. Instead you want to practice moving through the spectrum in your voice and it's this movement that helps you develop the fine, nuanced, dynamic and flexible con-

control in your voice. This then becomes an adaptable skill which can be applied when the song throws hundreds of movements your way...say the change of vowel, pitch, or multiple changes at once.

Macro Exercise for Breathy & Non-Breathy Sounds in Speech

Step 1: Pick something to read aloud

Step 2: Move between the spectrum of breathy to non-breathy.

In the exercise, you can read out loud a few paragraphs of a book, magazine, etc. and practice moving between the spectrum of breathy and non-breathy.

Then next, you can sing a song, record yourself, and see if you can hear and feel when you've moved more towards a non-breathy or breathy sound.

Macro Exercise for Breathy & Non-Breathy Sounds in a Song

Step 1: Pick something to sing aloud.

Step 2: Move between the spectrum of breathy to non-breathy.

You'll often find that singing non-breathy tends to make it easier to last through a phrase, all other variables equal.

When practicing between breathy and non-breathy, be careful not to sing too loud, especially on breathy sounds, as the only "healthy" volume for breathy singing is in the soft to medium soft volumes. You can't sing loudly and breathily in a healthy way. This is because it works directly

against how your voice makes louder volumes (by having more contact between the cords and having less air escape/breathiness).