

Breaking the Sound Barrier: Speaking Through the Mask

Does your voice get tired from lecturing with a mask on?

Do you wish you could project your voice more easily?

Are you concerned that you are not reaching your students?

Lecturers are professional voice users, but we often take speaking for granted until we encounter acute or gradual voice loss. After almost two years of teaching from home, the return to the classroom has been particularly challenging as we adjust to lecturing with a mask on. For the muscles of the larynx, these conditions are comparable to going to the gym after spending two years on your couch. Your voice is one of your most valuable assets, and you can learn how to take care of it, use it more effectively and project it more efficiently.

Join Dr Irene Feher from Concordia's Department of Music for a lively interactive one-hour session where Irene will share valuable insights and resources on vocal hygiene, fitness, and projection, as well as a daily vocal warm up and cool down routine.

A 30-minute Q&A session will follow.

To learn more about Irene, go to www.livingyourmusic.com

Cultivate Awareness

Ex. 1. Discovering kinesthesia; have your hands at your side: let your index finger touch your thumb, release it, let your middle finger touch your thumb...your ring finger...your pinky finger. Continue the sequence one finger at a time. Notice how your fingers feel and move. Notice which ones move more easily. Notice how much pressure you are using, notice how the contact feels. Continue the sequence more quickly, quicker quicker...

.....slow down.....raise your hands so you can see them and continue the sequence. Now that your visual sense kicks in the kinesthetic sense fades.

Ex. 2 Sense your weight-bearing spine in the center of your body.

Many think the spine is only in the back, try holding yourself from your back. Others think the spine is fragile and that we hold ourselves from the front, try that. Then imagine the spine as the center of your body.

Ex. 3

Balancing the head on the neck

Use your hands and NOT your neck muscles. Place your right thumb on the tip of your chin and left index finger on the base of your skull. Rock your skull up and down with your hands. Notice tension, is your chin jutted forward?

Let go for a moment, place your right thumb at the bottom of your lower teeth and the left index at the base of your skull and gently rock.

Develop a Resonant Voice **Helpful Check List**

Dynamic Postural Alignment

- How is the relationship between my head and neck?
- Are my eyes facing forward?
- Is my sternum collapsed forward or am I holding it too high? (locked knees and lower back pain are a giveaway for the latter)
- Are my shoulders released?
- Are my hips and pelvis feeling balanced over my legs as they support my torso?
- Are my legs shoulder-width apart?
- Are my knees unlocked?
- Do my feet feel grounded?
- Do I feel open, energized and confident?

Breathing

- Is my breathing relaxed and sufficiently deep?
- When I inhale are my abdominal muscles rigid or do I feel an easy flexibility and expansion all around my ribcage.
- When I speak, does my body feel balanced?
- Do I feel as though I am supporting my voice from the center of my body (4 finger-widths below the navel in the center of the body, an area known as qi, or chi in Martial Arts)?
- Am I taking enough time to breathe between phrases?

Articulation

- Does my jaw feel relaxed and loose on the hinge when I speak? (It is not clenched or jutting forward)
- Are my tongue, jaw and lips flexible and able to move independently of one another?
- Does speaking feel easy?

Hearing and sensing the voice

- Do I feel anterior oral vibrations?
- Am I straining to hear myself or do I trust that my voice is resonating out in the room in front of me? (a resonant sound is about arm's length at about eye level, always vibrating above the lips)

Vocal Exercises

Use these daily to maintain vocal fitness

Develop vocal endurance, flexibility, and strength

Use them as warm ups and cool downs before giving long lectures

SOVT (Semi-Occluded Vocal Tract) exercises encourage healthy balanced phonation resulting from optimal vibration of vocal folds.

Phonation happens when vocal folds convert aerodynamic energy from the lungs to acoustic energy.

- Promote vocal economy
- Coordinate vocal fold vibration for flexible efficient voicing
- Reduce vocal fatigue

Quick Reminders:

- Don't try to be loud
- Use your whole voice: your high voice and your low voice.
- Don't worry if your voice "cracks" when you go up and/or down
- Your voice should not go into your nose – you can do a nose test by pinching and unpinching your nose, the sound should not change
- Don't overthink – the exercises may feel a little odd but they should feel good

Do about 10-15 minutes of these at the beginning of the day

Do about 5 minutes before you teach

Do about 5 minutes after you teach

Vocalize through the following semi-occlusions by sliding your voice around from low to high then high to low and then on a favorite song of yours:

SOVT exercises without prop

- Humming and chewing using M, N or L
- Tiny oooooh and eeeeeeh vowels
- Index finger in front of tiny oooooh vowel
- V's, Z's,
- Rolled R's, raspberries or lip trills
- Wave in a cave – cupped hands
- Blowfish – creates a good stretch in the pharyngeal area just above the larynx

SOVT Exercises with props

- Card kazoo – like the index finger in front of an oooooh vowel
- Cupped phonation – paper or Styrofoam cup with a tiny hole at the bottom
- Vocalize through straws
- Vocalize through straws in water

Babbling, Beatboxing, Singing or Tongue-Twisters

These activities keep your muscles of articulation (tongue, jaw, lips) flexible and strong