

Voice Class

Voice Class

*ROLLO FISHER, MONROE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE*



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PART I
FACULTY RESOURCES

I. I Need Help



Need more information about this course? Have questions about faculty resources? Can't find what you're looking for? Experiencing technical difficulties?

We're here to help! Take advantage of the following Lumen customer-support resources:

- Check out one of Lumen's Faculty User Guides [here](#).
- Submit a support ticket [here](#) and tell us what you need.
- Talk and screen-share with a live human during Lumen's OER office hours. See available times [here](#).

PART II
UNIT I

2. Basics of Singing 4: The Rules of Good Singing

In Lesson 1, posture and breathing technique were addressed. They are the foundation of good singing. However, good posture and proper breathing do not a good singer make. There are rules to good singing, which if followed, will allow the singer to produce the best sound of which he or she is capable. These rules apply to any style or genre of music, and can be modified slightly depending on the song. The rules are, in no particular order: 1. The rule of punctuation; 2. The rule of the steady beat; 3. The rule of syllabic stress; 4. The rule of dynamic phrasing; and 5. The rule of text emphasis.

The rule of punctuation is simple. In the text of the song, if there is a punctuation mark, breathe or pause there. In written music, punctuation marks, such as a comma or period, are prominent throughout the music. When preparing a piece from a recording, research the sheet music to find the punctuation. Unfortunately, most websites that offer the lyrics to the song do not include the punctuation. Sheet music previews show the punctuation without buying the music. If the punctuation cannot be found, but the lyrics exist online, read the text aloud and find the natural pauses. The standard form of lyrics online is in poem form:

The water is wide
I cannot cross over
But neither have I
Wings to fly

The tendency is to breath after every line of text, which may be correct, but also may be too many breaths. Consider the Star Spangled Banner and how most people sing it:

Oh say, can you see (breath) by the dawn's early light (breath) what so proudly we hailed (breath) at the twilight's last gleaming? (Breath)

If I remove the breaths, the text appears as one thought:

Oh say, can you see by the dawn's early light what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?

Try speaking the first version with pauses for the breaths. You may notice you sound like a popular TV character from a sci-fi series from the 1960's (To go where no man has gone before). In general, singing a phrase with intended punctuation as either breaths or pauses will be enough places to breathe.

The rule of the steady beat deals with taking musical phrases and making them interesting. Whatever the steady beat is (most popular songs have 4 beats a measure, so there are 4 steady beats a measure), if there is a note longer than the steady beat, go somewhere dynamically. An example using the Star Spangled Banner would be this:

Oh say, can you **see** by the dawn's early light what so **proudly** we **hailed** at the twilight's last gleaming?

The song is in 3/4, meaning there are 3 beats in a measure, with the quarter note getting the beat. The notes longer than a steady beat are in **bold**. For each of the bolded parts, the note must either get louder or softer, depending on where it lies in the musical phrase. Look and listen to the musical example *The Water is Wide* in Vocal Assessment 1 module. The first verse demonstrates the typical musical arc:

Oh the water is **wide** I cannot cross **o'er**,
And neither have **I** wings to **fly**.
But give me a **boat** that can carry **two**,
And both shall **row**, my love and **I**.

The first bolded word of each line gets louder (crescendo), and the second bolded word gets softer (decrescendo). If the words on notes longer than a steady beat do not get louder or softer, the musical phrase is boring.

The rule of syllabic stress involves singing words with the same stresses as one would speak them. If a word is spoken with the wrong syllabic emphasis, it may not be heard as that word. If I speak the wrong emphasis on the wrong syllable, it sounds like a foreign language. The correct emphasis on the correct syllable communicates the right ideas. Singing words is no different. Many singers will sing notes that are higher in pitch louder, and lower in pitch softer. Occasionally this does not fit the rule of syllabic stress, which causes confusion in understanding by the listener.

The rule of dynamic phrasing utilizes the rule of the steady beat in the greater picture of the music. Singers sometimes will simply sing phrases loud or soft, without any thought of where the phrase goes. Most phrases begin soft, get louder, and end softer. This increases the level of interest for both the singer and the listener. Essentially, always think of singing as a journey, not a destination. Singing notes, rhythms, and words without consideration of where the musical phrase is going is a series of destinations without levels of importance. An example would be to sing all notes the same way, which does not give interpretation of the meaning of the song. If there is growth and dissipation through the musical phrase, it mirrors speaking the words without music. The use of musical line, or journey, adds another level of meaning to the words above mere speaking.

The rule of text emphasis is deciding which word in the musical phrase is the most important, and then growing dynamically to the word and getting softer after the word is sung. The singer must determine which word is most important in each phrase, and sometimes that is a difficult process. Consider this phrase of words:

Any way you look at it

Speak the phrase six times, each time altering which word is most

important (speak that word the loudest). You will notice the phrase changes meaning slightly depending which word is emphasized. Going back to the first line of the musical example *The Water is Wide*:

Oh the water is wide I cannot cross o'er

Speak this phrase, changing emphases on the words. Incidentally, words such as “the” rarely are emphasized. You might notice the phrase feels different if “I” is emphasized versus “cannot.” Using this rule musically, grow the phrase to the emphasized word, and sing softer after the emphasized word. Speaking each phrase out loud and experimenting with text emphasis will give the singer greater ideas for musical interpretation.

Practicing music utilizing these rules alone will give the singer tools to communicate any song with greater musicality and interpretation. However, practice makes permanent (not perfect). If a song is practiced one way repeatedly, it takes at least four times as long to unlearn “bad habits” and sing musically. I would suggest trying these techniques both with a familiar song, but also a new song. We will use *The Water is Wide* as one example of a new song.



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2. What are two things you found most interesting about the content of the video?
3. Watch the two videos in “Other Videos” named *The Water is*

Wide and *The Water is Wide Something is Wrong*. What rules were followed in the first video? What rules were broken in the second video?

4. Name 3 positive things you do while singing that relate to this concept.

5. What 2 things can you improve on relating to this concept?

3. Basics of Singing 3: How to Learn a Song

There is a multitude of ways to learn a song. Depending upon a person's culture and background, one or more ways were already enculturated before that person came in contact with any formal education system that taught music. Young children are exposed to music through their parents, either singing to them or playing it for them in a variety of mediums. In today's society, toddlers can manipulate a smart phone to play a youtube video of toddler tunes. A person is exposed to music in some form anytime there is interaction with the outside world. You can hear music in commercials, in stores, video games, even rings of a cell phone. With that said, what are the typical ways most people learn a song?

First, the general population of people learns by ear. For many generations, music was not written down, but passed on by rote (someone who knew the song would sing or play it for others, and they would copy it). Today, one hears the piece of music on some media device, and over time can sing along with the song. There are advantages and disadvantages to this method. First, an advantage is the ability to practice wherever the person is, with access to the song a smart phone away. Second, the body of music out there to hear is nearly infinite; access has never been easier than today with many ways to freely listen. Also, one can listen to different singers performing the same piece to get different takes on how to perform the piece. One disadvantage of this method is the singer's desire to try and copy the original artist's voice. No matter who it is, that performer's voice is unique, as is the singer trying to copy. In order for the singer to copy the original artist, a contrived sound is created with tension in the throat. Try singing like Louie Armstrong for more than 10 seconds and you will instantly feel the extreme of this issue. Another disadvantage of this method is lack of

creativity on the part of the learner. If one only learns from someone else's style of singing, one's own interpretation of the text and music is lost. If you have ever listened to the same song with different singers, you will notice variations in the performance. Finally, a disadvantage of learning by ear is time. If a piece of music must be sung in a great hurry for an event, then the ability to read the music fast becomes invaluable. To put this in perspective, imagine you become a famous singer. A large media corporation such as Disney calls you up and wants you to perform on the soundtrack of their next movie. The company flies you to their studio, send you to the booth with the sheet music, sets up the microphone, and is ready to record. You ask to hear a recording of the song first, and are met with blank stares. There is no recording, because you are the first. Now a great gig was lost, and your reputation is tarnished.

There is nothing wrong with learning music by ear. However, being able to learn a song several different ways gives the singer an edge over other singers, and increases the learning curve. Here are other methods to learn a song other than by a recording with the vocals: 1. Learn by rote; 2. Speak the text out loud; 3. Use sheet music; 4. Sing along with a karaoke track; 5. Sing a cappella; 6. Record yourself; and 7. Solfedge.

Learning by rote simply means someone sings a line of the song and you sing it back. Cultures have taught music in this way for millennia, and some religious groups still use this method today in services where a leader sings a line, and the congregation responds. If learning a song by rote, typically a person sings a line (or phrase), then sings a second phrase, puts them together, sings a third, adds that, and so on. Many people who teach groups to sing use this method.

Speaking the text of the song out loud is a technique for understanding the meaning of the lyrics, as well as a way to decide what is the most important word of each phrase (more on that later). The act of speaking it audibly is important for this technique to have its full effect. Try looking up the lyrics to a song you know already somewhat well. Speak the text, and then listen to the song. You may

notice the meanings of parts of the song seem different. You are now linking meaning to words that were not important before you underwent this exercise. This can also help with memorization of songs.

Using sheet music to learn a song is standard practice in most formal voice lessons. Music reading literacy is like reading literacy; it opens up new ways to learn material, sometimes more quickly. If you have never read music before, it can be daunting to look at a piece of music. There are many instructional methods out there to learn how to read music. Just learning the note names and how long you hold a note (rhythm) is just the beginning (like learning the alphabet). A simple open resource can be found here: <http://www.wikihow.com/Read-Music>

Singing along with a karaoke track is a method to utilize after you feel comfortable singing the song with the vocals behind you. Some singers feel very confident singing with the vocal track behind them, and then when it is removed, suddenly their voice goes away. This is due to a subconscious method for singing where the singer is hearing the voice and then following it a split second later. I call it “cheat-singing.” You are only cheating yourself when using this, because as soon as the other vocal is not there, you are stuck. Singing with a karaoke track, or a live accompaniment if available, eliminates cheat singing as an option (unless the accompanist is playing your notes and you are cheat-singing to that). The track also assists the singer in reminding them of the right pitch centers, something not available if the singer sings without any accompaniment, or a cappella.

There is an advantage to singing a cappella. Without anything to use as a crutch, the singer is forced to sing solo. This exposes any vocal issues that were hiding behind either the accompaniment or the other vocalist. It can be hard to diagnose all issues listening and singing at the same time. That’s where recording yourself is useful. Very few people actually enjoy listening to themselves sing. One of the reasons is because when you sing, you hear yourself both through your ears and in your head. In a recording, the singer hears

how he or she sounds to everyone else. This can be discouraging, but useful as a tool to improve. Video recording is a better method than just audio, because any physical issues that occur can be diagnosed as well (ex. You see your head leaning forward when trying to sing a high note).

Solfedge is a system to learn music developed by a Hungarian named Zoltan Kodály. He created a system of syllables for notes in the scale (Do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do), which in turn help the singer know what direction the note tends to move. It helped save Hungarian folk music, which was in danger of disappearing altogether. Once a singer learns the system, singing a phrase for the first time becomes easier (cue *Sound of Music*). This is an excellent method for sight reading music. Excellent sight readers can look at a piece of music, and sing it correctly the first time without hearing it. Professional sight readers are employed all around the world, in church choirs, radio choirs in Europe, and media companies.

One method of learning a song by itself is not better or worse than another. However, if the singer uses the best of all methods, he or she can learn music well and quickly.



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4. Name 3 positive things you do while singing that relate to this concept.

5. What 2 things can you improve on relating to this concept?

4. Basics of Singing 2: Warmups and Practice Technique

Warming up the voice before singing a song is similar to warming up before an athletic workout. Sure, you can work out without warming up, but the effectiveness of the workout is diminished, and there is a better chance of straining a muscle. Since singing is a physical exercise, it should be approached no differently. There are different schools of thought when approaching the length of time a singer should warm up. No less than 5 minutes is advised, but too much more may not be productive. The warm up should also fit what the singer plans on practicing. If the song has a difficult run, then singing a warm up similar to the run will ready the voice for that passage. Remember, the goal is to eliminate any extra tension in the voice, and this gives the singer muscle memory of what is to be practiced.

There are several components to a healthy warm up:

1. Physical stretching;
2. Breathing exercise;
3. Single note sustained on a vowel;
4. Simple narrow range exercise;
5. Articulator exercise;
6. Range extension; and
7. Longer, wider, faster.

Physical stretching allows for the release of any tension in the body, and warms up the muscles needed for singing. One area to focus on relaxing is the neck, where a lot of tension is naturally held and problematic for singing. When stretching the neck, do not

tilt your head backwards, or roll backwards, as that can counteract the release of tension. During stretching, be aware of your posture. Remember, the least number of muscle groups engaged equals less tension on the body and voice.

For the breathing exercise, a suggestion is to simply breathe in fully and out, focusing on a deep, low breath. Imagine you are a bellows from a blacksmith shop, with the spout your throat, and your ribs and diaphragm the expanding part of the bellows. A slow count of 4 seconds in and out is a good rule. This also provides muscle memory for the type of breathing necessary to sing. Begin then to breathe in on 4, and hiss the air out in multiples of 4 (8 seconds, then 12, etc.). Go through at least 4 sequences of these breath exercises. While hissing, place one hand on the “pant muscle” and the other around the bottom of your rib cage on the side. Your hand on the “pant muscle” should feel it fully engaged throughout the hiss, and the hand on your side can act as a guide to expand your breath. Besides a hiss, other types of sounds will work, such as “sh” or “f.”

Next, sing a single note in the middle of your range (a G is good if you are familiar with music notation) on a vowel. The “oo” vowel is a good one to start with as it is easier to keep round, tall, and free of tension. Try and hold the note also for counts in multiples of 4, changing the note higher or lower for a few steps as you increase the time.

A small range of notes is a common type of warm up. There are many types out there to try, so I will give a couple here. Usually, it is a five note scale going down (5,4,3,2,1 or G,F,E,D,C or sol fa mi re do, depending on your thought process). The exercise should be done with one consonant and one vowel, for example Na Na Na Na Na Na). You then move up a step and continue the same exercise, starting from the middle of your range up to a medium high part of your range. Then do a different vowel and constant starting from the middle of your range going down to a medium low part of your range. What vowel and consonant to pick varies on what you are working on in your song practice that day.

The next exercise works your articulators: your tongue, teeth, and lips. One of the great advantages singers have over instrumental musicians is the ability to communicate through words. Unfortunately, this can backfire if the audience cannot understand the words. Being aware of how to use your articulators differently in singing versus talking is imperative if the singer wants to be an effective communicator. One example of an exercise is a five-note scale going up and down using “ming” (holding the ng at the end of each one). Other examples are “flah,” “zing,” “blah,” “ping,” and “bah lah.” Again, which ones to use should be reflected by the music that will follow the warm up.

Range extension exercises can be tricky for the inexperienced singer, so when beginning these, be careful not to go too high too fast. One of the greatest difficulties singers encounter with tone is tension in the high parts of the voice. If you have not experienced your voice cracking on a high note, or sounding like someone squeezed your throat shut yet, chances are it will be happening to you very soon. We will talk more about how to avoid this in later lessons, but for now, remember to always do three things when singing high: 1. Open the throat in a yawn 2. Keep the diaphragm engaged (check that “pant muscle”) and 3. Approach with thinking “top-down” and not “up.” An example of a range extension exercise is an arpeggio up and down (C-E-G-C-G-E-C or 1-3-5-8-5-3-1 or do-mi-sol-do-sol-mi-do) on a vowel-consonant combination such as “nah.” You can also use different vowel-consonant combinations, or words (“I sigh to sing” or “O row the boat.”) Sing the arpeggio going up by step to the top and then bottom of your comfortable range. A rule to follow is to sing this exercise a couple notes higher or lower than your highest/lowest note in the song about to be practiced.

Longer, wider, faster refers to the idea of singing exercises that combine all the previous ones into an exercise that imitates phrases in actual music. When we sing music, typically there is a musical idea, or phrase, which should be sung in one breath. This exercise prepares the singer for that final transfer to singing a song. One

example uses a vowel “ah” jumping from a low to high octave (C-C, 1-8, do-high do), singing a turn and then a scale passage down (C-C, BCDCBAGFEDC, 1-8, 78287654321, do-do, ti do re do ti la sol fa me re do). You would then go up a step and add a turn (C-C, BCDC BCDCBAGFEDC, etc). Each turn would lengthen the phrase. There are several variations on this exercise, but start there.

In essence, the warm up should not be skipped to simply start practicing the song because it is “boring.” You should change the type of syllables each warm up to reflect the song, again reinforcing good muscle memory habits for the practice to follow. Think of it as a way to reset your voice back to true voice before beginning to sing the song. Without this step, the bad habits formed before this course will continue to occur.



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4. Name 3 positive things you do while singing that relate to this concept.

5. What 2 things can you improve on relating to this concept?

5. Basics of Singing I: Posture and Breathing

Two basic elements of good singing are posture and breathing. Both of these are habits instilled since birth. However, the majority of people have both good and bad habits when coupled with the act of singing. For example, think about how you sit. Do you regularly sit in a chair, on the floor, or in some other way? Do you sit with your legs crossed, up, or down? When you sit, is your back straight, or are you hunched over in some way? Another example with breathing: do you ever think about how you breathe? Do you breathe deeply? Is it hard to breathe for any reason? These are some of the basic questions when becoming aware of your physical habits for the purposes of singing.

When you were a child learning to sit and walk, balance was a process. If you ever watch babies when they first learn to do either of these things, they do not get it right on the first try. The reason is that it takes several muscle groups working together to accomplish these physical tasks. In the nineteenth century, there was a man named F. M. Alexander, who was an actor. He experienced chronic laryngitis when he performed. Because acting involved projecting the voice regularly, he would get sore throats, and the doctors of the time could not determine the cause. He decided to figure it out for himself, and after studying how he spoke when he acted, he realized he was sticking his neck out as he got louder, causing tension in this throat. He would later develop what is known as The Alexander Technique, used worldwide to promote proper posture. (Go to <http://www.alexandertechnique.com/>).

Posture in essence is how we hold ourselves up, typically in a standing or sitting position. Your body utilizes different muscle groups when sitting verses standing. If you are in the best possible posture, you are using the least amount of muscle groups (free of

unneded tension). One common problem with singers is unneeded tension, especially in the neck area. This is caused by a number of factors, but the first one to check is posture. When standing to sing, place both feet about shoulder width apart (one can be slightly in front of the other for balance if necessary). Now the upper body should feel relaxed but aligned. One technique is to imagine there is a string coming out of the top of the back of your head, and someone is pulling just enough to keep you straight. Another technique is to put your arms above your head as if to stretch, then bring them down but leave your body in the same place as the stretch position. When in the sitting position, the upper body (the hip and above) should be in the same position as the standing position.

There are a few ways you can check to see if you are in correct singing posture. First, you can use a mirror, preferably a full-length mirror, and look in the mirror to see if anything is out of place. Second, you can video record yourself, and then look at the recording. Third, have someone you trust look at your posture. And finally, you can just see if you are balanced by placing a hardback book on your head, and not let it fall. One can also check proper alignment by lying with your back on the ground. This limits the number of muscles needed to stay balanced.

Balance of the muscle groups is key to proper posture. Most people habitually sit and stand in some level of bad posture, and this becomes evident if muscles get tired and you have to shift. Another technique to check balance is to stand on one foot for 10 seconds, then the other foot, without falling. The true test is to do either of these with your eyes closed (Don't try this without something to hold onto in case you lose your balance, like the back of a chair).

Breathing is another activity done without much thought. The human body is set up to automatically breathe no matter if the person is conscious of it or not. For singing, the issue is typically one of three things: not enough breath, tension in the breath, or lack of proper tension in the diaphragm. The diaphragm is your muscle that causes breath. The lungs merely transfer the oxygen

and carbon dioxide back and forth from the bloodstream. When you breathe in, your diaphragm expands, causing a vacuum in the lungs, and air fills the vacuum. When people breathe out in everyday life, the diaphragm relaxes, and air is pushed out of the lungs. In singing, the diaphragm stays engaged throughout the time right before a sound is made to the end of the sound. Common problems with inexperienced singers and breathing include: 1. Shallow breath; 2. Breathing with tension in the throat; 3. Not enough diaphragm engagement, leading to “breathy” sound; and 4. Breathing too late before singing.

When breathing in to sing, posture is step one. If the singer is in proper posture, the chance for extra tension decreases. There should be no extra movement in the body other than the expansion from the diaphragm. For some people, the shoulders go up, creating a shallow breath. Only about half of one’s lung capacity is filled when the shoulders rise, because it counteracts the diaphragm’s ability to expand. Also, breathing in should be completely silent. Any sound is an indicator of tension, which transfers to the throat (cue F. M Alexander). If a quick breath is necessary, and it often is, then the image that could help is this: pretend you are quickly surprised at winning the lottery, but you don’t want anyone to know. Another technique to keep tension away from the throat is to imagine what it feels like when you yawn (cue the yawn). Your throat opens up, and your soft palate in your mouth rises. After breathing in, the diaphragm should remain engaged, so tension cannot come back to the throat. Here’s a technique to accomplish this: First, find the spot below your ribcage, place your hand there, and pant. You should feel a muscle tensing and relaxing. That is part of your diaphragm. Push against that spot continuously so it stays engaged (If you fall over, then it is not engaged). This spot is nicknamed the “pant muscle” because of its ease to notice engagement by panting. Finally, people usually wait to the last second to breathe before singing, greatly increasing the chance for tension. Take up to 4 seconds to breath in if there is time. This allows for a deep breath with little extra tension.

It cannot be stressed enough how important these two concepts are for proper singing. Think of proper breathing as having enough gas in your car to get to your destination. Without enough breath, something has to give in order to make it to the end of the musical phrase. Typically singers get tense as they run out of breath. If you haven't figured it out yet, any tension other than diaphragm engagement is the enemy of the singer. It causes the majority of vocal issues, and stems from bad habits. Usually it takes four times as long to unlearn a bad habit than the time it took to create it. Because singing is such a physical activity, good habits through repetition and muscle memory must be practiced. The payoff in the end is your true voice shining through, and greater control over what sound is produced.



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PART III
UNIT 2

6. Basics of Singing 5: Vocal Health

Anyone who has sung for a while has experienced that dreaded time when a performance is upon you, but you have come down with a sore throat, cold, strep, etc. There are professional singers who use methods to manage their voice in order to perform in any condition. I once saw a singer perform a difficult musical program, and afterwards learned from the person that she had laryngitis! Anytime a singer is sick, it will affect the voice; however, following certain steps will insure the best possible performance under these circumstances.

In my experience as a vocal coach, I have heard every reason why a singer does not sound their best in a performance. The typical reason given is “I have a cold.” There is a standard in the professional world, where if a singer is auditioning for a gig and cites any illness, they are usually disqualified instantly. However, I have also heard full performances of everyday singers, and afterwards they admitted to being sick, which went unnoticed in the performance. This is the preferred method of vocal judges of any kind: to be pleasantly surprised that the singer could even sound better than what was just sung. Here are some specific dos and don'ts for when you have to sing with a sore throat or cold.

First of all, let's look at what happens to the voice in the case of a sore throat. The cold virus typically begins to manifest itself in the throat, causing dryness and irritation in the back of the throat. The larynx and vocal cords swell a little, and become inflamed. This inflammation either increases over the next few days, or gives way to a congested nose and nasal cavity, sometimes lasting for weeks.

In the first stage of the sore throat, the average person typically drinks less liquid (“it hurts to swallow, so why go through that?”), and clears the throat often. This results in a throat that hurts more,

so the person finds the quickest relief in cough drops with menthol, which is a numbing agent. Of course, as soon as the cough drop wears off, the person's throat seems to hurt more, and so pops another cough drop. This vicious cycle continues for days, eventually giving way to the congestion phase: constant sniffing, sore nose, nonstop mucus, and misery. In the singer's case, these problems can compound quickly, as singing with a sore throat seems to increase the pain, and the voice sounds more raspy with each passing day. Cold medicine seems to help for a small period of time, but the problems don't go away for a while. And if there is a performance during this period of time, all the symptoms of the sore throat and cold get even worse, sometimes resulting in no voice at all.

There are several techniques to eliminate the cold with minimal pain and suffering. The first thing to realize is that trying to eliminate the symptoms with medications that numb the throat as a singer is dangerous. Remember, the throat is sore because the vocal cords are dry and inflamed, so the problem must be addressed with decreasing the dryness and irritation. Drinking lots of water is the easiest way to decrease the dryness, and using cough drops that increase lubrication of the vocal cords will assist in the inflammation. An example of these cough drops is Halls Vitamin C drops, which also give the body vitamins to fight the infection.

There is even a good and bad way to cough with inflamed vocal cords. Coughing "naturally" is the best way. The opposite is clearing the throat. When a person clears his or her throat, the process involves closing off the throat and causing an explosion of air across the vocal cords. This just gives temporary relief from the mucus on the vocal cords, but increases the irritation, which in turn causes more coughing.

Another technique to assist in the elimination of the sore throat is to change the environment in the throat to a more hostile one for the virus. This is accomplished in several different ways. One is to gargle with either salt water or mouthwash. Both solutions work to kill the germs. Drinking a tea with lemon and/or honey

also changes the acidity level in the throat to one less friendly to the virus. Another effective way is to change the acidity level of the entire body. Biologically, our bodies function the best when the PH level of the blood is not acidic (a PH slightly basic, or just above 7, is ideal). Sadly, most people's diets involve consuming foods that are acid in nature. The foods that are not acidic are...vegetables. Therefore, changing the diet during a cold to more vegetables and less processed foods will give the body more tools in the fight against the disease.

Breathing properly can also assist the body in the elimination of the disease. The body continuously gets rid of toxins in the cells through the lymphatic system, a fluid system that does not have a pump like the circulatory system (the heart). The lymphatic fluid moves using internal body movement. Generally, people become less physically active when sick, which compounds the problem. Deep breathing techniques give that movement within the body to move the toxins out. I will give one example here, but there are many (check out some in yoga breathing techniques). The ratio of breathing is 1:4:2. Breathe in to a count of 5, then hold your breath for 20, then exhale slowing with a hiss for 10. The base numbers can be higher or lower, depending on your personal breath control. Do this ten times, three times a day. It also increases blood flow and energy level as side benefits.

One other simple technique to relieve a sore throat is to rest the voice and body. In extreme cases, singers will go on what's known as "vocal rest," or the total elimination of talking for a period of time. The resting of the voice decreases stress on the vocal cords, allowing the inflammation to subside more quickly. Resting allows the body to fight the disease more efficiently.

With the case of congestion, drinking plenty of water will not add to the mucus, where dairy products increase mucus in the body. If you have heard from a vocal coach not to drink milk before a performance, the reason is the creation of mucus, which coats the vocal cords. Many of the medications to eliminate mucus have the side effect of drying out the throat, adding to the existing irritation.

One method of mucus elimination without the side effects is a Neti pot. These can be purchased at your local drug store or chain store such as Walmart or Target. The Neti pot can be used several times a day to flush the mucus out with a salt water solution. Using a Neti pot instead of constantly blowing your nose also decreases inflammation in the nasal passages. If you have ever had the experience of feeling congested, trying to blow your nose, and nothing comes out, that is because the nasal passages are inflamed, blocking the air flow. An added advantage to the Neti pot is eliminated the thick mucus in the back of the nasal passage that won't come out any other way.

Many of the things to avoid are opposites of the above-mentioned solutions. First, do not drink anything that dries out the throat. Examples include beverages with caffeine or alcohol. Second, do not sing forcefully (with any tension), which will increase the inflammation. If necessary, sing lightly (also known as “marking”) until the performance. Any singing without tension will have minimal effect on the inflammation of the throat. Finally, any substance that would increase mucus or inflammation should be avoided. Smoking cigarettes can also increase mucus and inflammation, so if you smoke, try to limit your smoking while sick. On a quick side note, smoking also affects the voice when a person is not sick in a variety of ways (breath control, mucus, a coating on the vocal cords which changes the sound of the voice, and decrease in vocal range, to name a few), so eliminating it altogether would have a positive affect on the voice.

For some people, battling constant sore throats becomes the norm. If you find you are fighting a sore throat on a regular basis, it may be time to see an ear, nose, and throat doctor. You may have a different problem other than a cold virus, such as vocal nodes, or bumps on the vocal cords. There are many levels of vocal nodes, and the earlier a person treats them, the better.

The majority of this lesson on vocal health focused on sore throats and colds, and there are many types of vocal issues for singers. This

course is meant as an overview, and not intended to provide medical advise for all types of vocal issues.



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4. Name 3 positive things you do while singing that relate to this concept.
5. What 2 things can you improve on relating to this concept?

7. Basics of Singing 6: Singing in Different Styles

The world is filled with different styles and genres of music. Music is found in every culture, and although there are commonalities, each style of singing is different. Because of this, the music of one's own culture growing up has a profound impact on the singer. Think about it: you can most likely make your voice sound like someone else, and even your accent is enculturated from the people you talk with day by day. In some cases, a person will not even realize he or she has an accent until moving to another place, even for a few months. I remember going to camp as a kid, and people would arrive from other parts of the country, they would leave worried they would sound different "back home." I went overseas to teach, and the students thought I had a "funny accent." Singing is no different than speaking in this case. The difference is singing "accent," or style.

Most people have a favorite singer who they emulate, and wish to sound just like them. Here's the problem with the idea of copying someone else's voice: we were all made with different voices. The only way to sound like someone else requires the singer to modify his or her voice in an unnatural way, causing tension in the throat. So how can one sing different styles of music without tension? The key is keeping to the basics of singing (correct breathing, open throat, and free of tension), and modify the vowels/consonants naturally. This will not create perfect copying of an artist's sound, but it can create the proper style of singing.

The basic principle of all vocal music is the telling of a story through music and lyrics. Whether the genre is Hip Hop, Broadway, Classical, or any other, the singer's job is to tell the story, both verbally and nonverbally. The verbal aspect of singing is the creation of stylistically appropriate sound with the voice, and the use of the

articulators (tongue, teeth, and lips) to communicate the words. I'm sure you have heard a song on the radio you enjoyed, and could not understand part or all of the lyrics (until you looked them up online of course). If the singer does not communicate the lyrics effectively, the story of the song is incomplete and will not have the full effect on the audience. Even covers of someone else's song can be told with a twist in the story through text emphasis. You may have heard a song done as a cover and thought differently of the lyrics. This is due to the singer either articulating the text (better or worse) differently, or a change in musical emphasis.

The singing is not the end of the storytelling, but rather the beginning. Studies have shown people communicate more nonverbally than verbally. In other words, you judge what a person means more by their body language than what is said. There have even been studies where people were shown video of different singers, using the same vocal recording for all the singers. People thought they heard differences in the music because they saw a different person "singing" the song. The singer is not just about communicating with the voice. The whole body must be involved. Too many singers forget this concept, and believe they are perceived a certain way ("I sound really good") when the audience could not get past the singer's body language ("He looked like he was not interested in the song at all"). There are several acting techniques that can begin to assist the singer's awareness of body language. Look up pantomime skits online, and pay attention to the body language.

How does a singer know what the audience sees and hears? The simplest way is to either visually record yourself, or have someone watching you perform and critique it. The video recording may reveal more to the singer about posture and facial expression, but the singer is still biased (you either think you look great or horrible, in my experience with singer's self examinations). The outside observer should not be too close to the singer, otherwise their bias will also show through, connecting their knowledge of the person outside of the performance to the singer.

Try and practice standing in front of a mirror and singing different types of songs. It is important to show visually what each line in the song is depicting. If the line is about death, a smile and raised eyebrows may not be the correct nonverbal. Likewise, an upbeat positive song should not look like a dirge. Another technique to focus energy on the nonverbal is to audiate, or sing the song in your head, while lip syncing along with the correct nonverbal. This eliminates one of the variables, the voice, and allows the singer to focus on the physical portrayal of the song. This technique may seem silly at first, but remember practice makes permanent.

Another technique to achieve the appropriate level of communication for any song is to visualize in your head the perfect performance of the song repeatedly. People captured in war use this technique to survive. By imagining they are somewhere else, they do not give in to despair. One military officer visualized the perfect round of golf on his favorite golf course, every day several times a day for the years he was incarcerated. After his release, he played the best golf game in his life, even though he was locked in a small cell for years. The key was envisioning every aspect of it: what the weather was like, how the club felt in his hand, the direction of the wind, where the ball went after each stroke, etc. If the singer envisions the performance in its ideal state, the mind can recreate that state in the actual performance.

Since every genre and style of music is different, I will not give specifics about each genre of music and how to sing it. Instead, I would encourage you to listen to different singers from different genres. Try singing that style, keeping the head free of tension while staying true to the music. In the demonstration video, there will be some examples.



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8. Basics of Singing 7: Singing in Different Environments

Learning to sing in different styles is only part of the equation. A singer who sounds and looks a certain way in one place will sound and look quite different in another place. Here's a quick example: sing a song in your room and record it. Now try singing the same song the same way in the bathroom and record it. You will notice the sound changes, in some cases dramatically. Now go outside and repeat the process. There are three major factors involved in singing in different environments: 1. Acoustics, 2. Amplification, and 3. Size of the environment.

Acoustics is the science of sound. There is a process your body undertakes for every sound you hear. Sound begins as vibrations. The faster sound vibrates (frequency), the higher the pitch of the sound. This is typically measured in Hertz (not the car rental place), or Hz for short. When a person is born, he or she typically can hear between 20 and 20,000 Hz. To give some perspective, a piano's lowest note is 27.5 Hz, and the highest note is 4186 Hz. As one gets older, the ranges narrows, and in many cases people lose ranges within the full range. Older people sometimes comment on hearing male voices better than female voices, and that is due to loss of the frequency range of the typical female voice. If you are curious about your hearing, there are apps available to test your current hearing range.

Hearing sound is not isolated to your outer ear. The vibrations pass through your outer ear, into your ear canal, and passes through to the inner ear. Little hair like structures called cilia transfer the vibrations into a chemical response, which is passed on to the brain, and finally interpreted as sound. The vocal cords are also only part of the singing mechanism. The vocal cords cause the vibrations; however, the passing of those vibrations through the rest of the

body affects the sound. This is one reason why your voice sounds different to other people and on a recording than inside your head. When you hear your voice while singing, the vibrations travel to the inner ear both internally and externally. Hearing your voice from a recording only gives the external information.

The intensity of the sound is called amplitude, and is measured in decibels; the greater the decibel, the louder the sound. When any sound passes a certain threshold of amplitude, it can cause damage to the inner ear. If you ever attended a live concert and stood close to the large speakers, and then afterward notice all sound was dull for a bit, that is an example of crossing the threshold. Although there are fail safes built into the human body to shield it from certain levels of sound, it cannot cope with sound above the threshold for extended periods of time. This is why listening to music that is “too loud” for long periods causes hearing loss. The cilia can be damaged beyond repair if exposed to strong vibrations. If cilia are damaged at certain frequencies, the hearing loss is centered on those frequencies. Hearing aides by definition amplify sound, or make everything louder. This only assists if the cilia can still interpret those frequencies.

A singer should be familiar with the acoustics of the performance space. If the space has more hard structures than soft, the acoustics will be more “live,” increasing the amplitude of the voice. An extreme example is either a stairwell or cathedral. All surfaces are solid, with nothing to dampen the sound, such as carpet or fabric. Examples of acoustically “dead” rooms are a conference room, carpeted bedrooms, or a recording studio. A simple acoustical test is clapping, and subsequently listening to the sound as it dissipates. If the sound disappears quickly, the space is more “dead” than if there is an echo of the sound over a period of time. If a singer performs in an acoustically “live” room, it is important to clearly sing the text. The echo effect of the acoustics creates difficulty in hearing consonants, and therefore words are lost. If a singer performs in an acoustically “dead” space, it is important to not over sing with tension to be heard. The singer who is not accustomed

to singing in dead spaces cannot hear himself or herself as easily, and therefore compensates with more volume. This leads into the subject of amplification.

There are two ways to amplify the voice: naturally or mechanically through electronic sound systems. The natural way to amplify the voice has been used for centuries, and essentially utilizes the natural acoustics of the space and the singer's own body to create a clear sound. Concert halls are created with these acoustical scenarios in mind, and the best halls are both live and built to project sound from the stage to the audience clearly. Curved hard surfaces are utilized to focus the sound from the stage to all parts of the audience. Singers utilize breath control, articulators, and open space to create a loud sound free of tension. Most modern singers rely on electronic amplification, and for good reason. Concert halls were not built to be flexible spaces. Performances occur in coffee shops, bars, street corners, and stadiums. All of these spaces are typically acoustically dead, and sometimes too large for most singers to fill naturally. The use of microphones and amplifiers assist in bringing the singer's voice to the audience in the best way possible. There are drawbacks. First, the amplification system's basic function is to make the sound louder. The singer must first sing well, and articulate the text well, for the audience to hear and understand every detail. Modern technology has allowed singers to sound better amplified than their natural voices by altering the natural sound. This is one of the reasons famous singers sound different live than on an album recording.

Correct microphone technique is also imperative for the singer to sound his or her best. Many singers use microphones regularly in performances, but may not follow certain techniques to maximize sound quality. First, the singer should hold the microphone about 4-6 inches from the mouth, with the microphone head facing the mouth. Although it looks cool to "eat" the microphone (aka putting the mouth directly on the microphone), the sound becomes muffled. It is not uncommon for the singer to move the microphone around while singing, which causes the sound to vary. If the singer is

holding the microphone and standing still, at times the microphone head turns away from the mouth because of tired arms. Holding the microphone steady also allows any sound technician to adjust the quality and amplitude to best fit the song and singer.

A sound check prior to the performance is critical to resolve technology issues, such as bad audio cords, sound levels, new people unfamiliar with the system, or the singer unaware of the location of the “on” button on the microphone. It is in the singer’s best interest to be familiar with any audio technology he or she utilizes on a regular basis. Every soundboard, although similar in function, can appear quite different. Technology, when working properly, can be great; however, frustration ensues when either the system won’t work or that annoying feedback screech appears in the performance. The more the singer knows about the system, the easier he or she can trouble shoot in case no one else knows the answer. The primary issue for audio system failure is one button/slider/knob is turned the wrong direction, causing silence. The secondary issue is manipulating the wrong channel (ex. Microphone is plugged into channel 2, but the audio person thinks it is in channel 3 and can’t understand why nothing is working). A third less likely problem involves any wireless microphone. There are many factors that can inhibit the signal from the microphone to the sound system. Depending on the frequency programmed into the wireless microphone and receiver, cell phones in the room can disrupt the signal. Most wireless systems can modulate the frequency if one does not suit a venue. Unfortunately, in sound check the problem may not surface, because the audience is not typically there, using their cell phones. Another disruption of wireless systems is other wireless systems. If the performance is in a venue where other wireless systems are on, the systems may have competing frequencies. It is wise to always have a backup microphone that is wired and ready at a moment’s notice in case of these issues in performance.

Feedback is the other major issue in a performance. Feedback, that horrible, loud, high pitched sound, is caused when a

microphone is pointed in some fashion at a speaker. In essence, microphones send signals to the sound system, which project the signal through the speakers. If a microphone is pointed at the speaker, the signal continuously increases (microphone-speaker-microphone-speaker, etc), causing an accelerated feedback loop of sound. The same sound is created when the soundboard volume/power is increased beyond its threshold. Depending on the sensitivity of the audio system, this problem is easily remedied by moving the microphone away from the speakers and/or turning the sound down at the board. Although feedback cannot always be avoided, testing the power levels in sound check (bringing the microphone levels up to just below feedback levels) will eliminate one of the two factors.

The size of the performance space is another factor for the singer to consider when preparing to perform. Typically amplification is needed in large outdoor spaces, or in smaller spaces where either the acoustic is dead, or there is competing sound (picture a coffee house or banquet performance). In the large outdoor performances, amplification causes a new problem for the singer: sound delay. In large arenas, the audience may or may not notice a time delay between when the singer/announcer opens his or her mouth, and sound is heard. The speakers are such a distance from the audience that it takes time for the vibrations to reach their ears. The singer, also usually a fair distance from the speakers, hears the sound seconds after it was just produced, causing a delay. The same would be true if someone sang at the end of a large room and someone at the other end was listening. In a large room with live acoustics, the sound is heard as an echo. An echo essentially is the sound traveling around the room and returning. An echo in a large room can take seconds to dissipate. Some of the largest cathedrals in the world have 6-7 seconds of echo before the sound disappears. Sound delay can disorient the singer who relies on hearing him or herself to sing correctly. In situations with sound delay, the singer must “turn off” what he or she hears. To practice for this scenario, cup your hands over your ears, facing your hand backwards away

from your mouth. When you sing, it takes a little time for the sound to travel to your ears, bouncing off of the walls of the room first. Also, practice singing in different spaces to acclimate your mind to hearing your voice in different ways. Without awareness of the change in sound in different environments, the singer tends to fall back on bad habits, such as tension in the throat or anything previously used to inhibit the sound, to compensate for the sound difference. If you have ever performed and felt like you had no voice after the performance, tension dominated. Always return to the basics of singing when disrupted by new environments.



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PART IV
UNIT 3

9. Basics of Singing 9: The International Phonetic Alphabet

For couples getting married in a church, there is some desire for a traditional wedding song. One of those songs is *Ave Maria*. There are many melodies that set this text, but we will explore one of those in this lesson.

The text of *Ave Maria* is from the Catholic prayer “Hail Mary.” The full Latin lyrics, along with the prayer, are:

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.
Benedicta tu in mulieribus,
et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus.
Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,
ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and in the hour of our death. Amen.

The topic of translation brings up interesting problems. If the singer is not familiar with the foreign language, how does he or she know the meaning of each word, and how to pronounce the text? To answer the first question, common songs have word for word translations. This is usually different from the English translation given in sheet music. The reason is when an English translation is

set to music, it has to make logistical sense, so some words are rearranged or changed to fit the music and language. Consider the word for word translation for *Ave Maria*:

Ave Maria	Hail Mary
gratia plena	[with] grace filled
Dominus tecum	the Lord [is] with you
Benedicta tu	Blessed [are] you
Et benedictus	And blessed
Fructus ventris tui.	[Is] the fruit of the womb of you.
Sancta Maria	Holy Mary
Mater Dei	Mother of God
Ora pro nobis	Pray for us
Peccatoribus	Sinners
Nunc et in	Now and in
Hora mortis nostrae.	The hour of the death of us.

Although some of the text corresponds with the first translation, some are “out of order” in the English. The importance of this is for the rule of text emphasis. How can a singer know which word is most important if he or she does not know what the words mean? Some singers will sing songs in a foreign language without knowing any of the meaning. How can the singer tell the story without knowing the meaning of the text? Even a general knowledge of meaning is better than none in order to tell the story. This relates to the second question of pronunciation. If a singer knows meaning, but does not know the correct pronunciation, the story is incomplete. An audience member may know the language, and will be confused if words are mispronounced. In some languages, inflection of words changes entire meanings. How can an inexperienced singer be expected to know pronunciation of multiple languages, some of which do not use the same alphabet? The answer lies in another language, the International Phonetic Alphabet.

The International Phonetic Alphabet, or IPA for short, was created

to serve as a pronunciation key to any language. You may have seen it before in a dictionary (the schwa, or “ə,” is most prominent). If a singer is familiar with the IPA, and researches the corresponding IPA to whatever text is sung, no other pronunciation aide is needed. Essentially, the IPA is a collection of symbols denoted by brackets (ex. [a]) in which each symbol is a distinct sound. Although many of the symbols look like alphabet characters, it should not be assumed the symbol sounds exactly like the letter. An example would be the English words “cat” and “cent.” The “c” in each word sounds different, the first like a “k” sound and the second an “s” sound. The IPA for “cat” would be [kat] and “cent” would be [sent]. Another example involves the vowels in the English language. Although there are 5 vowels (“y” not included), there are 23 vowel sounds. American English in particular is a difficult language for IPA due to the variety of pronunciations (people from Rochester pronounce words differently than those in the south). There are a great many details on each sound, and the verbiage on websites about IPA can be confusing (see <http://www.internationalphoneticalphabet.org/ipa-sounds/ipa-chart-with-sounds/>). The simple explanation returns to the articulators (tongue, teeth, and lips) and what are known as *voiced* and *unvoiced* sounds.

A voiced sound occurs when the vocal cords vibrate during the creation of the sound, or phonating. Place your hand on your neck by your vocal cords, and slowly say the letter “z.” You will notice the vocal cords vibrating. Now say the letter “s” (just like the beginning of the word “snake.” This is a unvoiced sound because the vocal cords do not vibrate. Notice that when you created both sounds, your tongue moved to the roof of your mouth in the same location. One other example are the letters “b” and “p.” Closing the lips and exploding air create both, but the first is voiced and the second unvoiced. Every sound is the combination of articulators and voiced or unvoiced sounds. All vowels essentially are voiced sounds with little movement of the articulators.

When we sing, the majority of the sound occurs on the vowel. The time spent on the consonants is important to understand the words,

but the vowels allow for musical expression. One important aspect of vowel creation that is problematic in singing English is singing two vowels together, also known as a diphthong. Diphthongs are prominent in many words, and go unnoticed to the untrained ear. An example of a diphthong is the word “wide.” The vowel sound is both “ah” and “ih.” Generally, the rule is to elongate the first vowel, and sing the second vowel short. In some dialects, such as Irish, the same word would be sung in the reverse, singing “ah” short and “ih” long.

Latin pronunciation of vowels is the purest form (unlike many English vowels which have some level of a diphthong sound). This chart will assist in visualizing Latin IPA and the corresponding sounds: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_Latin . The classical Latin is widely accepted for singing. I would recommend using the text of *Ave Maria*, and writing out the IPA on a separate sheet of paper to visualize the symbols and their corresponding sounds.

If a singer familiarizes him or herself with the IPA, he or she can sing in any language without fear of mispronunciation of the text. The telling of the story preserves its authenticity, and can also serve as a doorway into many music cultures throughout the world.



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Assignment on IPA

Write out the IPA for *Ave Maria*. You can copy/paste characters from this or another website: [:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_Latin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_Latin)

ex. ave= [avɛ]

10. Basics of Singing 8: Standard Venue Songs

One issue beginning singers experience is the need to find a performing venue. Other than performing for family and friends, at karaoke, or open mic, there is two standard places singers can perform with little trouble: singing the National Anthem at a sporting event, and singing at weddings. In this lesson, we will explore the first in depth, while touching on the second venue briefly (more to come in next lesson).

Every professional and amateur sporting event (including sports clubs with children) in America begins the game with the National Anthem. In many cases, the sporting event must resort to recorded versions of the National Anthem because a live performer is not available. In most cases, the organizers would love to have a live performance over a recorded one, as long as it is “good.” Simply contacting a team or club organizer and asking if they would like a live performance is a good starting point. For top amateur and professional teams, a recorded audition of singing the National Anthem is typically required, as demand for those events are higher. Although the National Anthem singer is rarely paid in money, usually there is some perk, such as seeing the game for free. It is great experience to sing in front of a large audience (and practice microphone technique in a sound delay environment).

Before discussing technique specific to the National Anthem, look here to learn the history of our National Anthem, the Star Spangled Banner: <http://amhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/the-lyrics.aspx>

Many people do not know the history of both the lyrics and the melody of the Star Spangled Banner, nor do they know there is more than one verse. After reading about the history of the lyrics and melody, take a new look at both the flag and lyrics of the first verse:

O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

First, notice the description of the flag is in the lyrics, but the events at Fort McHenry are the main theme of the verse. Second, notice the punctuation. We will discuss later on about breaths, but the use of question marks exhibit doubt. If you thought there was only one verse, that question mark at the end would add confusion. The whole picture is necessary to know the full meaning. Here are verses 2-4:

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream,
'Tis the star-spangled banner – O long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a Country should leave us no more?
Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand

Between their lov'd home and the war's desolation!
Blest with vict'ry and peace may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the power that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto – “In God is our trust,”
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Notice the punctuation in these verses, particularly the last line (which is the only repeated text in each verse).

It is intriguing that an English drinking song is chosen as the melody to these lyrics, considering the circumstances of their writing during a second war with the British. It is equally intriguing that although the song was highly regarded as a patriotic hymn, it was not adopted as the National Anthem until 1931.

In terms of singing technique, the Star Spangled Banner is not an easy song to sing. The melody does not follow standard folk song practice, and moves by leap in different directions. The melody also moves through different ranges of the voice (low, break, and high) relatively quickly, which is not easy to negotiate by the inexperienced singer. The lyrics to the Star Spangled Banner are consistently misconstrued. Singers over the years thought the first line was “Jose can you sing.” The third and fourth lines are forgotten the most, even though the melody is the same as the first two lines. The last word of the seventh line is often interpreted as “way” instead of “wave.” If a singer were to follow the Rule of Punctuation, the song would sound quite different than the standard rendition. Most singers breathe after every two measures, or half a line. The main breathing issue, in my opinion, is in the seventh line. The majority of singers breathe after “Star Spangled” and before “Banner.” Since this is the title of the song, it would not make logistical sense to breathe there (it's not the Star Spangled....Banner).

Many singers forget the environment in which this performance occurs. The people who came to the sporting event did not come

to hear the National Anthem singer. They came to see the game. It is not surprising that a cheering crowd drowns most singers out of the last line of the song. This means a long, drawn out version of the Star Spangled Banner is not appropriate for this venue. At major sporting events, professional singers are ridiculed for the extra length of their performance (and in some cases their lack of singing the correct lyrics). This is not to say singing the Star Spangled Banner is a race to complete as fast as possible. It simply means to fit the style to the environment. Most people love a dramatic high note on “free,” but other elongations (or added riffs for that matter) are not typically welcomed. Remember to always tell the story.

Another venue for singers is weddings, particularly of friends and family. On many occasions, a bride or groom will ask a friend of family member to sing at their wedding, and depending on the couple, will request a traditional song. We will explore one of those songs in the last lesson.



An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccvoiceclass/?p=35>

Supplemental Videos



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccvoiceclass/?p=35>

Assignment on Videos

After watching the demonstration video, enter the secret number at the top of your assignment.

Write in complete sentences answers to the following questions.

1. In your own words, what was the content of the video?
2. What are two things you found most interesting about the content of the video?

3. Think of a singer you have seen and heard. Who are they, and what do they demonstrate in terms of this concept?

4. Name 3 positive things you do while singing that relate to this concept.

5. What 2 things can you improve on relating to this concept?