

The Teacher Development Series

**The  
Language  
Teacher's  
Voice**

Alan Maley

  
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## About the author

I have been involved in English Language Teaching now for over 35 years, so I have been lucky to live through all the many changes which have taken place during that period. I worked for the British Council until 1988 in a variety of countries, including Yugoslavia, Ghana, Italy, France, China and India. I resigned from the British Council in 1988 to take up the post of Director-General of the Bell Educational Trust in Cambridge, where I stayed until 1993. After that I went to the National University of Singapore for five years as Senior Fellow. Now I divide my time between Assumption University, Bangkok, where I have set up a new MA in ELT, and freelance consultancy and writing. It has been a fascinating life! I have always been interested in the human side of language learning rather than the academic or technical aspects. What makes learners and teachers tick, how teachers create a supportive learning atmosphere, how both learners and teachers draw on their creative capacities – these are the kinds of things I have been most concerned with. Working with teachers' voices is, for me at least, a natural extension of these interests. I am in awe of the beauty and complexity of the human voice, the most subtle of all instruments. So I have been amazed at our failure to give teachers any help with developing and protecting their most valuable asset: their voice. Hence this book.

*Alan Maley*

*...what a strange thing the human voice is, this tiny instrument in the throat, with its hidden universe of notes, its delicate, inscrutable laws.*

Amit Chaudhuri

## The Teacher Development Series

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT is the process of becoming the best teacher you can be. It means becoming a student of learning, your own as well as that of others. It represents a widening of the focus of teaching to include not only the subject matter and the teaching methods, but also the people who are working with the subject and using the methods. It means taking a step back to see the larger picture of what goes on in learning, and how the relationship between students and teachers influences learning. It also means attending to small details which can in turn change the bigger picture. Teacher development is a continuous process of transforming human potential into human performance, a process that is never finished.

The Teacher Development Series offers perspectives on learning that embrace topic, method and person as parts of one larger interacting whole. We aim to help you, the teacher, trainer or academic manager to stretch your awareness not only of what you do and how you do it, but also of how you affect your learners and colleagues. This will enable you to extract more from your own experience, both as it happens and in retrospect, and to become more actively involved in your own continuous learning. The books themselves will focus on new treatments of familiar subjects as well as areas that are just emerging as subjects of the future.

The series represents work that is in progress rather than finished or closed. The authors are themselves exploring, and invite you to bring your own experience to the study of these books while at the same time learning from the experiences of others. We encourage you to observe, value and understand your own experience, and to evaluate and integrate relevant external practice and knowledge into your own internal evolving model of effective teaching and learning.

*Adrian Underhill*

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# Introduction to *The Language Teacher's Voice*

*Nothing remains but the human voice, this tiny instrument inside the throat endeavouring to carry a world inside it.*

Amit Chaudhuri

## Why a book on voice?

- Because, quite simply, we are our voices. Our individual voiceprints are every bit as distinctive as, and a great deal more public than, our fingerprints. (See the second activity on p viii.) Others judge us by them. It is through our voices that we tell others who – and how – we are. It is surely in our own interests to become aware of how we sound, and to change it if we wish to do so.
- Because, by developing a confident, natural speaking voice, which can sustain prolonged use, we have the capacity to change our relationships with our students. A tired voice conveys a lack of enthusiasm which students pick up on immediately. A richly textured voice, resonant with confidence and vitality, raises the energy levels of those who come into contact with it.
- Because, through better understanding and control of our own voices, we can share the benefits of voicework with our students. This has the double benefit of making them both more confident and more motivated to learn.

You might well object that we already know how to use our voices. After all, we have been doing so since childhood. So what is the problem? Yet like so much else in our lives, we tend to take our voices for granted. And what we take for granted, we neglect. In the case of teachers, we neglect our voices at our peril.

Just consider for a moment how much time you spend each day talking, and the kinds of talking you do. If you are working with a teacher development group, make a list and compare it with others in the group.

As teachers, we rely on our voices to a prodigious degree. For much of the time, we are 'on stage' in a public arena, with all that that entails in terms of stress and expenditure of nervous energy. Yet despite this heavy reliance on our voices, there is virtually no systematic training for teachers in the effective use of the voice.

Actors, who use their voices professionally for a good deal less time than teachers, are given rigorous training in voice use over three years or more, and continue to carry out voicework on a regular basis throughout their careers. Other professional voice users, such as politicians and business executives, regularly seek voice training (and pay a lot of money for it!). But teachers continue to take their most precious asset, their voice, for granted.

One of the effects of this neglect is sustained overuse and misuse of our voices, which impairs our efficiency and may even cause permanent damage. There is now a great deal of evidence to show that teachers suffer more than most professionals from a number of voice-related symptoms. These may range from reduced vocal range or volume to chronic hoarseness or even total voice loss.

*It is difficult to think of any other injury that individuals pay as little attention to as voice injury.*

Martin and Darnley

---

**Activity: Voice scan**

How many of these statements are true for you?

1. My voice gets tired quickly.
2. I sometimes run out of breath when I am speaking.
3. I often get a sore throat after speaking for a long time.
4. I need to clear my throat quite a lot.
5. I don't think my voice sounds as good as it used to.
6. My throat often feels dry after I have been speaking for some time.
7. I sometimes experience a kind of tightness in the throat muscles.
8. My voice often sounds tired and dead, lacking energy.
9. I have difficulty making myself heard when speaking to large groups.
10. I wish I had a more attractive voice.

Even if only a few of these are true for you, you can benefit from using this book!

---

Although we may not have developed serious voice malfunctions, we may still be operating below our potential best. You can probably recall teachers from your own past who brought life and colour to their classes through the quality of their voices – and others whose voices gave the kiss of death to what they were teaching.

This concern for voice quality should arguably be developed to an even greater degree among teachers of language. The current obsession with fluent communication in foreign language learning is in danger of obscuring the need to develop a feel for the physical substance of the language, its characteristic rhythm, its muscular energy, its visceral undercurrents and its aesthetic appeal. This is something we, as teachers, can convey through our voices.

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**Activity: Your voice profile**

- Think of someone you know well. It may be a public figure, or someone you know personally. Use the list below to characterize their voice. Mark the adjectives with a tick or a cross. If you are not sure, put a question mark. At the end, make a list of all the ticked items; this is the voice profile of your 'subject'. If you are working in a group, discuss your judgements with others.
- Now complete the list for yourself. If you are working with a group, check whether other members agree with your self-perceptions. If you are working on your own, try to find someone who knows you well to check with.

muffled	shrill	breathy	strangled	nasal	bubbly
strained	nervous	booming	squeaky	forced	tired
purring	gravelly	thin	whining	quavery	clear
husky	resonant	velvety	mature	vibrant	lilting
deep	dead	flat	friendly	throaty	slurred

---

The profile you get from the previous activity is where you are starting from. You may wish to do the activity again after working on your voice for a few months and compare the two profiles.

All of us have the potential to develop powerful, confident and sensitive voices. But this potential will only be realized if we take action to develop it. This book is intended to help you do just that.

*What we are is to a large extent what we make ourselves.*

Michael McCallion

## **Some important issues**

### **1 Everything is habit**

Infants do what comes naturally. They have a poise and balance which we lose as we 'mature' and acquire habits which change the natural use of our bodies. The kind of chairs we sit on, the beds we sleep in, the repetitive routines of work, the parental admonitions to 'sit up straight', the adaptations we bring about in our body use in response to stress and injury ...all serve to distort our natural body use into a habitual pattern. Voice is just one of the faculties which suffers as a result.

The problem is that habits, just because they are habitual, feel 'normal'. And what is natural will therefore feel abnormal, at least to begin with:

*...even when we do try to realign ourselves, the body 'prefers' the old pattern, in fact it rejects the new posture as wrong because it identifies and is comfortable with the old habitual position.*

Martin and Darnley

Therefore, you must not expect work on the voice to be easy. Neither are there any quick fixes. To change habits takes time and regular, sustained hard work. The profit in it is that, if you can re-establish natural use, you will be able to exercise choice in how you use your body (including your voice). Habit leaves you no choice but to continue the habitual pattern.

It is also a fact that, by changing your habitual patterns of use, you yourself will change. In some sense, you will become another person. But be reassured – all those I have worked with have preferred their new self to the habit-shackled self they have left behind.

### **2 Everything is connected**

In voicework everything is connected. The position of the skeleton determines what the muscles have to do. The muscles control the way we breathe. The way we breathe determines how much air we have available for making sound. A change in one part of the body has a domino effect on the rest. This is something we shall explore in detail in the next chapter. It is, however, important to grasp the concept of centredness or balance from the start.

*The voice is like a finely-woven tapestry, all threads of the work are interconnected.*

Patsy Rodenburg

Physical centredness, which frees the body parts to perform the tasks for which they have evolved, is connected to psychological centredness. If we are physically centred, we are more likely to be psychologically alert and calm. This state of relaxed readiness is the ideal for producing a natural, free voice. Clearly our mood state is closely connected to the way we sound. If our mood is off-centre so will our voice be. Think how often your voice has betrayed your mood of irritation, disappointment, boredom, joy, anticipation ...

*As a barometer of life's pressure, the voice is unfailingly accurate.*

Patsy Rodenburg

At a different level, our physical and psychological centredness is connected to our spiritual condition. Not everyone will wish to explore this, of course. But if we wish to enter a meditative state, we need to be both physically and psychologically centred.

Because everything is connected, work on your voice will inevitably entail changes elsewhere in your body. Through it you may come to understand better what makes you tick. You may also find the space to understand other unsuspected and unexpected aspects of your makeup.

### **3 Speaking 'proper' and speaking effectively**

This book is not about changing your accent, or offering elocution lessons. It is about helping you to use your voice more effectively.

If your first language is English, you will already have a distinctive accent of some kind. Accents, especially in Britain, are markers of social acceptability or stigma, and many people suffer various forms of discrimination based simply on the accent they use. Some may wish to change their accent to conform to what they perceive as a more acceptable norm. Others may feel a justifiable pride in the badge of identity their accent confers on them. But I shall not focus on these questions in this book. Your accent is your business.

*All tension comes from anxiety to please, and eventually you have to come round to the view that what you have to offer is good enough.*

Cicely Berry

Instead, I want you to be able to use your voice more effectively, with less wear and tear, whatever your accent is. If you use your voice more effectively, you will feel greater confidence in it. Confidence in fact tends to override questions of accent. People will listen to you because you sound convincing; they will not be bothered by your accent.

If English is not your first language, you will also have an accent. You may feel that this puts you at a disadvantage compared with 'native speakers'. I do not believe this is true. Your accent is one of the marks of your individuality. And it is not my intention in this book to change your accent into 'Received Pronunciation' (RP). However, I do hope to persuade you that, if you learn to use your voice more effectively, your confidence in your ability to communicate in English will improve dramatically.

## 4 'It ain't what you do ...

... it's the way that you do it,' in the words of the song. No one can do voicework for you. It is something you have to explore yourself. And this implies commitment. When you come to try the exercises later in the book, they will have no effect unless they are done with full physical and mental concentration and commitment. If you simply go through the motions, do not expect much benefit. However, a word of warning – do not approach them as you would an aerobics class. Athleticism is not the aim, rather a relaxed yet focused form of effort. Trying too hard will be counterproductive.

*I am my own worst enemy; I usually beat myself.*

Timothy Gallwey

## The aims of the book

### *1 To raise awareness of the importance of the voice in both professional and personal contexts*

Everything starts with awareness. Until we begin to observe ourselves, we have no chance of understanding how we function, nor of effecting any change. Ironically, it is those things closest to us which are the most difficult to become aware of. To hear yourself as others hear you is literally impossible, but it is possible to sharpen considerably your self-perception.

### *2 To impart practical skills for developing the voice as a strong and flexible instrument*

A range of exercises and activities will be suggested for improving posture, breathing, phonation, pitch range, articulation and modulation. These begin with relaxation work, which helps to put us into a state of relaxed awareness.

### *3 To provide self-help activities for maintaining teachers' voices in good condition*

The care of the voice can be assured by applying some quite simple rules and procedures.

### *4 To offer suggested activities for use in class as well as for self-development*

Students can benefit greatly from voicework too, both in terms of enhanced confidence in themselves and increased competence in the language – especially through an understanding of its aesthetic potential.

### *5 To offer information on the use of the voice for sustaining physical, psychological and spiritual well-being*

For those who are interested in taking their involvement with voicework further, the book will set out an introduction to the ways in which the voice can create changed mental states and can sustain health, through activities such as toning. This may not be for everybody, but no account of voice would be complete without it.

## **Who the book is for**

Primarily, the book is for any teacher of language. This includes the following categories:

- teachers of English as a foreign or second language, including those for whom English is their first language and those for whom it is a second or foreign language
- teachers of any other language as a foreign or second language, for example teachers of French in the UK, of Spanish in Germany, of Japanese in Singapore, of Mandarin in the USA, etc
- teachers of the first language, for example English teachers in the UK, French teachers in France, Spanish teachers in Argentina, etc

It will also be of interest to teachers of any subject, since all teachers use their voices, whatever they teach. Anyone who needs to use their voice professionally, in whatever capacity, should find this book of use.

## **The structure of the book**

### **Chapter 1 Developing the voice**

Following a section on relaxation techniques, this chapter describes how voice is produced, with activities for developing better posture, breathing, phonation, resonance, articulation and modulation. There are exercises and routines for you to do alone. Some can also be used with the class.

### **Chapter 2 Voicework in class**

This chapter focuses on the integration of voicework in the overall communication process. It offers a range of suggested activities for students in four sections: sensitizing activities; physical warm-ups; work on sounds, words and sentences; working with texts.

### **Chapter 3 Voice for personal growth**

This focuses on how voice can be used to reduce levels of stress, promote better health and open the way for spiritual awareness and growth. A sample of practices will be described.

### **Chapter 4 Care and maintenance of the voice**

This contains a discussion of the factors militating against a well-maintained voice and offers a number of routines and suggestions for voice care. The chapter ends with some suggested workout routines.

### **Annotated bibliography**

This includes brief descriptions/evaluations of the many books relevant to voicework.

### **List of useful addresses**

For those readers who wish to continue to develop their interest in voice.

*Alan Maley*  
December 1999

## Chapter 1 **Developing the voice**

<b>1 Relaxation</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2 Posture</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3 Breathing</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4 Onset of the voice/resonance</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5 Articulation</b>	<b>12</b>
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<b>7 Volume</b>	<b>14</b>

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I shall suggest some ways of training and developing your voice so that it becomes a more effective instrument of communication. Most of the activities are for your personal use and development, although a few of them could be adapted for use in your class.

In order to effect any lasting improvement in the way you use your voice, you have to want to do it! And you have to realize that it is your own responsibility and that there are no quick or easy fixes. Working on your voice is enjoyable, but it is hard work too. But if there is pain, you will find there is also plenty of gain, as you begin to notice the improvements in your voice quality and control.

Remember too that in voicework, everything is connected. If you are not physically and mentally relaxed, your posture will suffer. If posture is off-centre, your breathing will suffer. If your breathing is shallow or irregular, there will be insufficient air to generate a strong sound. And downstream from a weak sound, features such as resonance, articulation, volume and modulation will also suffer. So although this chapter is divided into separate sections, they are all mutually reinforcing. Work on posture has an effect on breathing. Work on relaxation has an effect on posture, and so on. Nothing is really separate.

*Sound mind, sound body, sound voice.*

Stephen Chun Tao Cheng

As you work on your voice, you will gradually become more aware of yourself and your body and how everything works together. Even such apparently mundane activities as eating, sitting down, standing up, walking, lifting things ...all involve complex interactions between muscles. Being mindful of the way you carry out these activities – the way you use yourself – should help you to do it more economically and less damagingly. And this will have an impact on your voice, too. Here again, everything is connected. If you want to find out more about this, the Alexander Technique and the work of Feldenkrais and Rolf are good places to start: see *Books with a focus on physical well-being* in the annotated bibliography.

*...it is worthwhile to think about what you do with your body before you begin to work on your voice, because for good or ill, that is the foundation upon which your voice use rests.*

Michael McCallion

The exercises suggested below are clearly only a selection from the wide variety available. You may wish to look at some of the books listed in the annotated bibliography for further ideas.

## 1 Relaxation

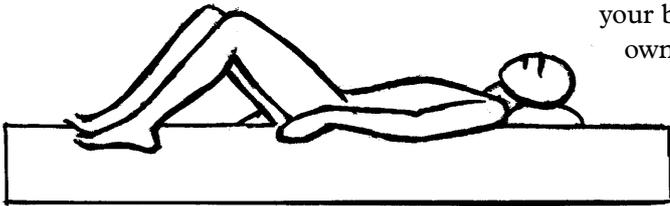
The key to all voicework is to start from a position of minimum tension. In this way, you allow your body to act in the least effortful way. All too often we try to force our bodies to do things rather than allowing them to happen naturally. In this way we get in our own way, rather than trusting that things will happen better if we do not intrude too much in our own process. It's a bit like the centipede, who could walk very well until one day he tried to concentrate on which leg to move first – and couldn't move at all as a result!

### a) Semi-supine position

The best position for relaxation, and for many of the other exercises, is the semi-supine. The reason is that when you are lying down, gravity exerts less force on you, so everything you do requires less energy.

You need to find a place to lie down. The floor surface should be carpeted or you should use a thin exercise mat to lie on. A hard surface will damage your back. Put a thin pillow or a book under the back of your head. (You can calculate how thick this should be by standing against a wall with your heels, buttocks and shoulders touching it. Stand normally, not stiffly erect. Then measure the distance between your head and the wall. This is the thickness you will need.)

You lie down with knees raised (see diagram), and arms loosely by your side. If you wish, play some soft background music: baroque or New Age is best. Let your body go, do not force it down. Let it find its own contact with the floor. Feel your back spreading on the floor. Don't worry that there is a part of your back which does not touch the floor. This is a natural curvature – and as you do more floor work you will find that more of your

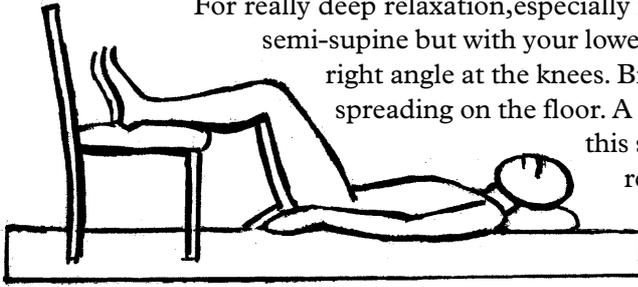


back comes into contact with the floor: the muscular tension which causes the curve to be accentuated will gradually relax and let your body lie flat. Breathe slowly and evenly. Close your eyes and visualize your body, part by part, starting at your toes and working your way upwards. Don't try to do anything with your muscles. Just think your way around your body. Be aware of where you are in contact with the floor. Then slide your legs down so that they too are in loose contact with the floor.

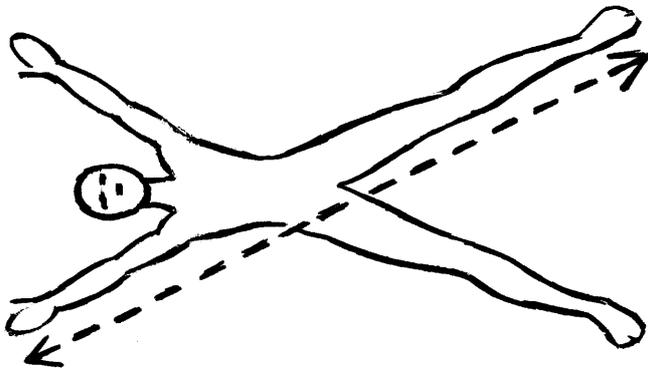
This exercise will leave you feeling incredibly relaxed. But apart from that, it helps to lengthen the spine and widen the back – both positive effects for your general health and for breathing.

### b) Semi-supine plus

For really deep relaxation, especially if you have come in from a hard day, lie in semi-supine but with your lower legs resting on a chair, so that they form a right angle at the knees. Breathe slowly and deeply, feeling your back spreading on the floor. A lot of my students have told me that they find this so relaxing that they drift off to sleep! Try it, it really works.



Lie in semi-supine (see diagram on p 2) and press different parts of your body towards the floor, one at a time: your heels, your calves, your thighs, your buttocks, the small of your back, the middle back, your shoulders, your neck, your head, your elbows, your wrists, your hands. For each body part, press down for a count of five, then release. Count five before you press down the next part. When you have finished, let yourself melt back into the floor.



Start in semi-supine. Then stretch out your four limbs in a star-shape. Extend the right arm and left leg as far out as you can. Then relax them. Then do the same with the left arm and the right leg. Do this five times, then go back into relaxed semi-supine.

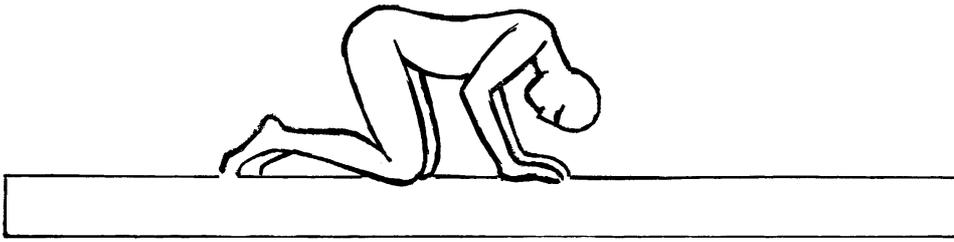
Start in semi-supine. Tense each part of your body in turn, starting with your toes and moving upwards. Hold each part, tensing for a count of five,

then let go completely. Count to five before tensing the next part. Finally, tense the whole of your body, clenching all your muscles at once. Let go on a big sigh, and go back to relaxed semi-supine.

The last three exercises above all involve tensing muscles, then releasing them. It may sound paradoxical but you can't completely relax a muscle until it has been tensed. Try it for yourself: rest your arm on a table normally and try to 'relax' it. It's incredibly difficult because the muscle 'thinks' it is already relaxed. Then try tensing it, and releasing it, and notice the difference.

### c) Down on your knees!

Still using a mat or carpet, take up the kneeling position (see diagram on the next page). Your arms should be slightly bent, and so should your legs, so that you are evenly supported, with your back in a straight line. Your head should hang down loosely so that there is no neck tension. Let your belly hang loose!

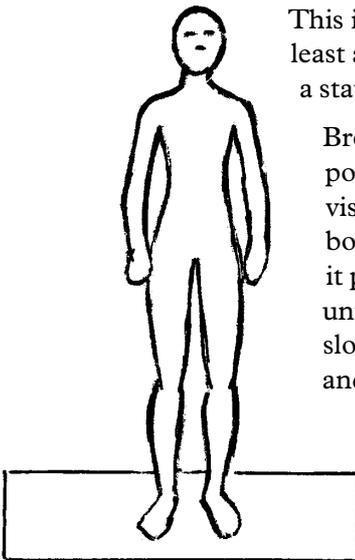


In this position, take long, even breaths. On each in-breath, raise your head slowly and without strain. Lower it on the out-breath. Take ten breaths like this. Then take another ten breaths. This time rock your body forwards, raising your head on the in-breath, and rock backwards letting your head go down on the out-breath. Feel the breath filling you completely each time.

Because your arms and legs are supporting you, your chest and abdomen are free of tension. This makes it easier simply to breathe relaxation into you.

#### **d) On your feet!**

Stand in the balanced position: comfortably erect, eyes straight ahead in a tension-free gaze, shoulders loose, hands hanging loosely by your side, knees slightly flexed, feet shoulder-width apart.



This is the perfectly centred position, where your body is least affected by gravity, and where all your muscles are in a state of relaxed readiness to do whatever is needed.

Breathe deeply and regularly, keeping a steady gaze at a point on the wall in front of you. Close your eyes and visualize all the tension or fatigue draining down your body and into the ground beneath your feet. Really feel it percolating through each part of your body in turn until it has all drained away. Still breathing deeply and slowly, draw energy from the earth back into your feet and feel it rising through you till it reaches the crown of your head. By this time you will be fully energized, alert, yet relaxed.

Some people find it difficult to visualize to begin with but usually it gets easier as they go on. So don't give up if you have this problem. You may find it helps to visualize something more concrete, like a plug hole under each heel. Think of your weariness and tension draining away like bath water. In drawing energy inwards, think of bright orange light which streams up through you and out of your head like stars from a firework. Or as one of my students reported, 'I think of myself as a volcano – all the energy goes shooting up like molten lava.'

### e) Shoulders and neck

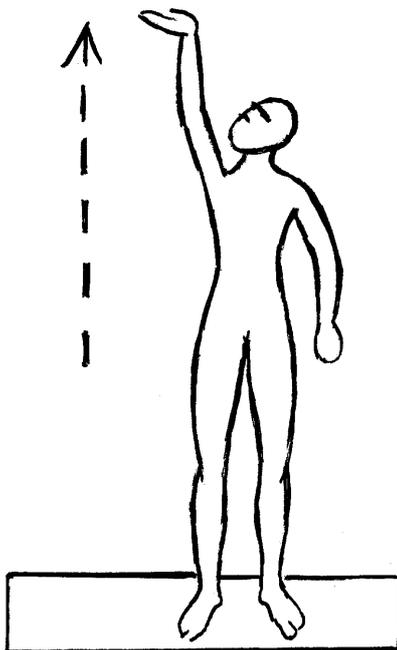
These are the parts of your body which (along with the jaw) concentrate most tension,so they need regular checking.If your shoulders are raised by tension, your neck is constricted and the muscles you need for breathing have their attention diverted.

Stand in the balanced position and lift your shoulders as high as you can.Hold them tense for a count of five,then drop them back into place.Do this five times. (If you work with a partner,ask your partner to stand behind you. Leave your shoulders loose and your partner will lift them up and let them drop. Don't try to 'help' your partner by lifting your own shoulders – let her do it.) After this,do five shoulder rolls from back to front and from front to back.

For the neck, let your head drop gently forward onto your chest. Very slowly and gently turn your head so that you are looking sideways over your left shoulder. Then repeat this for the right side.Do the movement five times. Raise your left shoulder and nudge your head loosely to the right,then raise the right shoulder to meet your head,sending it back to the left. Keep up this rippling motion until you have shaken out the tension from your neck.

## 2 Posture

Most of us lose the naturally good postural habits we are born with. Everyday body use creates new habits which feel normal but which in fact work against good natural posture.The exercises here help to correct poor body use habits and to restore a well-balanced,centred posture.

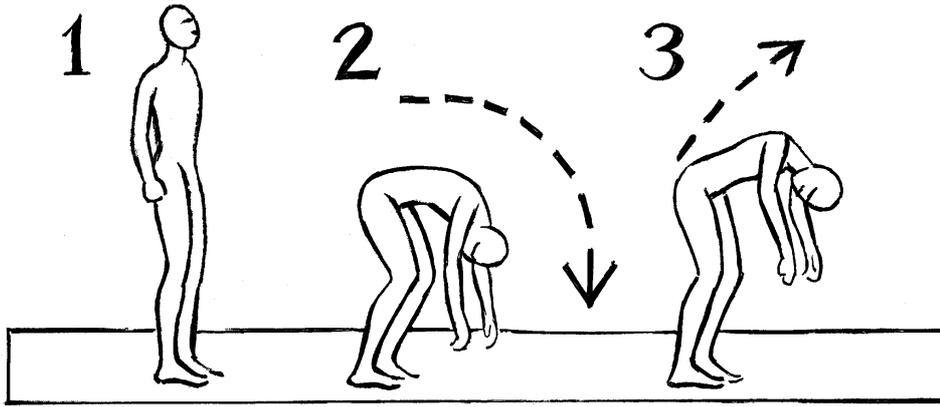


*Sleep like a bow.*  
*Stand like a pine.*  
*Sit like a bell.*  
*Walk like the wind.*  
Tao saying

### a) Pushing up the sky

Stand in the balanced position.Extend your right hand and arm above your head with the palm facing upwards. Take a deep breath and release it in one long, smooth out-breath as you push upward in a number of small movements of your arm and hand.Visualize pushing up the sky with your hand. Do this five times then repeat it with the other hand.

**b) Unwinding the spine**



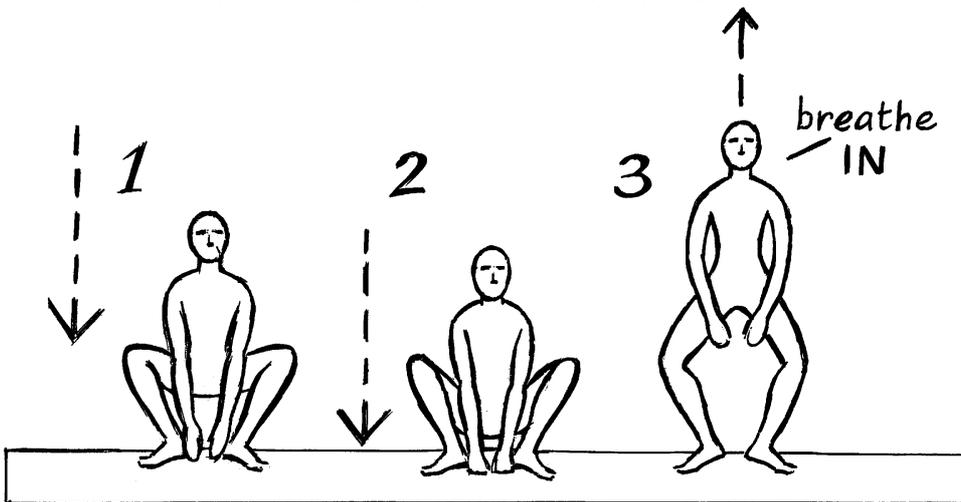
Stand in the balanced position, feet shoulder-width apart. Take a normal breath, then on the out-breath let your body flop forward from the waist, hands hanging loosely down (they should fall just above each foot) and head hanging loose. Take two or three breaths in this position, feeling the air reaching deep inside you, then come up slowly. Try to unwind one vertebra at a time, leaving the seven neck vertebrae till last. Bring your head up slowly and let it settle gently till it is balanced on top of your spinal column.

This is literally ‘unwinding’, and it’s so easy to do. It’s not a bad idea to do this between lessons, if you can find a private place! You’ll really feel the benefit of it.

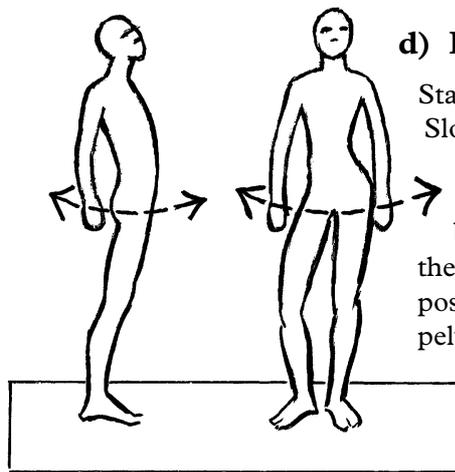
**c) The monkey**

In the monkey position you are crouched down, feet shoulder-width apart, head and spine erect and in alignment, heels flat on the floor, hands touching the ground between your feet.

First go down halfway to the point where your hands can just reach the ground. Then slowly lower your buttocks till they almost touch the ground. Then come up



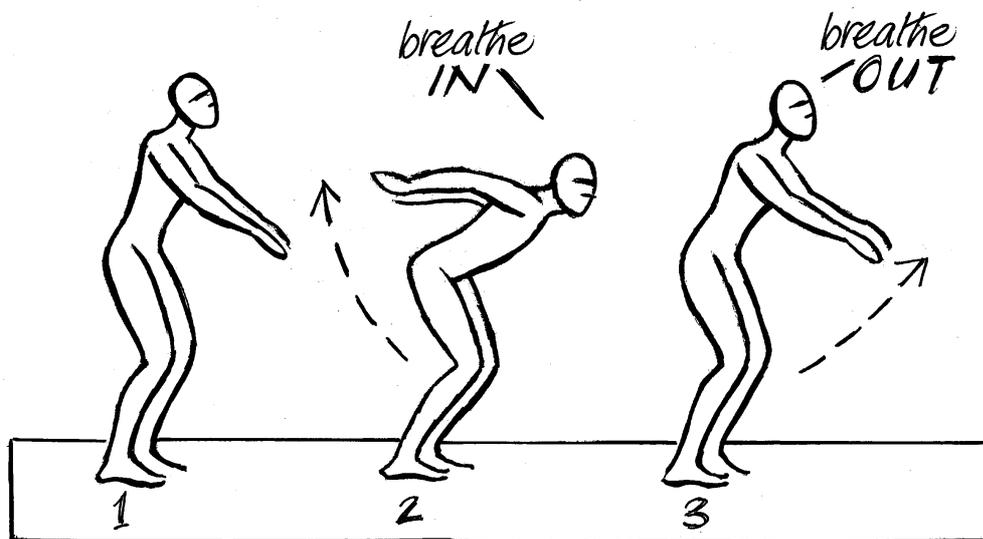
Try to find it  
It is hard to keep your  
feet flat on the floor  
and spine with, but  
eventually it will  
become easier.



#### d) Pelvic rocking

Start from the balanced standing position. Slowly rock your pelvic girdle from front to back and back again. Do this a few times rhythmically. Then rock it from side to side by shifting the weight from one hip joint to the other and back. Come back to the balanced position, releasing any tension in your legs. The pelvis will fall back into place.

#### e) Diving in



Stand as if you were about to launch into a dive: knees slightly bent, arms bent slightly out in front, body slightly inclined to the front. Then, on the in-breath, throw your hands behind you and bend forward, as if you were just about to launch yourself forward. Then on the out-breath return to the starting position. Do this several times. The last time you do it, return slowly to the erect balanced position again.

In both d) and e), you are going out of alignment in order to come back to a better alignment. It's a bit like having to tense muscles before you can release them. By moving away from the point your body 'thinks' is centred, you make it easier to find your natural point of perfect alignment.

### 3 Breathing

*Breathing is the first and last thing we do.*

Patsy Rodenburg

*Soun is noght but eyr ybroken,  
And every speche that ys spoken,  
Lowd or pryvee, foul or fair,  
In his substaunce ys but air.*

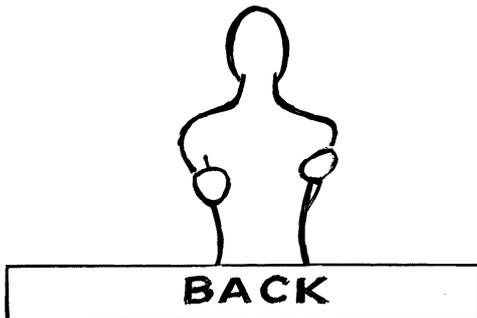
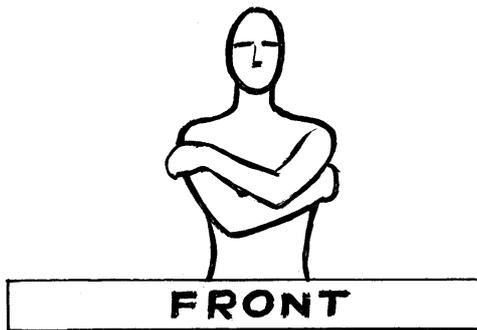
Geoffrey Chaucer

#### a) Semi-supine

- Lie in semi-supine, with legs drawn up to form a triangle with the floor. Take a breath and as you release it, slowly slide your left leg down till it is flat on the floor. On the in-breath draw it back up again. Do this five times with alternate legs, focusing on where the air is going inside your body. Do not force yourself to breathe deeply, just let it happen, nice and slowly.
- Lying in semi-supine, take a breath, then release it as slowly as you can, making a -ffffff sound as you do so. Make the out-breath last longer each time you do it. Then do the same releasing your breath on a long -aaaaah sound.

*I love making that 'aaaaah' sound. It really makes me feel as if I've emptied out.  
(Charlene, voice student)*

#### b) Hug yourself tight

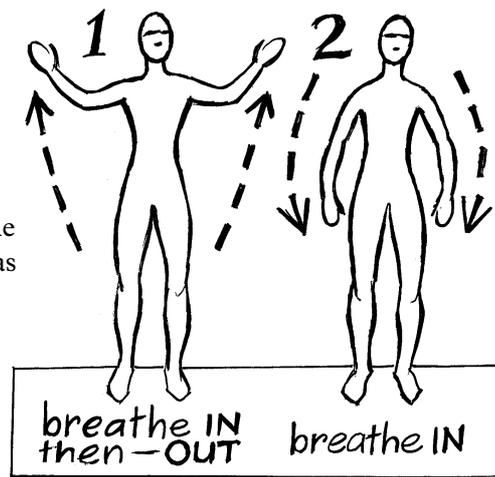


Stand in the balanced, centred position (see p 4). Put your right hand under your left armpit and your left arm around your right upper arm. Hug yourself tight in this position and take several slow, regular breaths, drawing the air in as deep as you can. Then take an in-breath and on the out-breath, let your body fall forward from the waist. Take several breaths while you are down. Feel the air opening up your lower back. Then come up slowly on an in-breath. Repeat the process with your left hand under your right armpit and your right hand round your left upper arm.

*It really feels as if the air is pushing right down to the bottom of my back – as if I had lungs right down there. (Jason, student)*

**c) Conducting the orchestra**

Visualize yourself as a famous orchestral conductor. Stand in the balanced position. Breathe in as you raise your arms to shoulder height, slightly towards the front, hands loose. Look to the right and the left, as if at the musicians. Breathe out and relax. Just as you are about to start, someone in the audience drops a bottle. Disgusted, you drop your hands to your sides. At the same time you take in a deep breath of annoyance. Repeat the process three times.



This is based on an idea in Michael McCallion's *The Voice Book* (Faber & Faber 1988).

**d) Blowing out candles**

Stand in the balanced position. Imagine there are twelve candles in a row in front of you. Take a breath, then blow out the candles one by one. Make sure you have enough breath left for the last one!

*Great for breath control. You really have to keep enough air back for the last one. The kids in my class loved it too. (Cheryl, teacher trainee)*

**e) Flat tyre**

Take a full breath from the balanced standing position. Imagine you are a fully inflated car tyre. Suddenly you get a puncture. Let the air out in a slow –sssss until the tyre is completely flat. Do this for all four tyres!

*Such a lot of fun, this one. I used it with my students too. They loved it. (Daren, teacher trainee)*

**f) Reverse breathing**

The object of this exercise is to develop your awareness of the normal breathing process by experiencing its opposite! Normally you would breathe by pulling air in and pushing down the diaphragm, causing your abdomen to swell. As you breathe out, your abdomen flattens. Take four breaths like this to feel the sensation it gives you. Then try pushing out your chest and pulling in your abdomen on the in-breath; collapse your chest while throwing out your abdomen on the out-breath. Try alternating between the two ways of breathing.

*I felt that this gave me a lot more control over all my breathing muscles, though it felt a bit strange at first. (Huang, teacher trainee)*

### g) Vacuuming the lungs

From the balanced standing position, take a deep breath. Then breathe out completely, emptying your lungs. When you are completely empty, close your mouth and pinch your nostrils so that you cannot take in any air. Now expand your ribcage and abdomen as if you were breathing – but do not take in any air, just move the muscles. When you are at maximum expansion, let go of your nostrils. There will be a sudden rush of air into your lungs. A great clean-out! Also a way of getting your breathing muscles to work without actually breathing, so that you can feel what actually happens when you really do breathe.

*I think this was the first time I realized how many muscles were involved in the simple act of breathing. It sort of cleans you out too ... (Clarinda, voice student)*

This idea comes from Kristin Linklater's *Freeing the Natural Voice* (Drama Book Publishers 1976).

## 4 Onset of the voice/resonance

The voice is produced when air vibrates the vocal cords (actually a couple of flaps of flesh across the larynx). But the sound we produce would be very small if it were not amplified by our resonators. Resonators are simply cavities in our bodies whose shape helps to give sounds their typical colour. Just as a violin is a hollow box which resonates to produce a sound typical of the violin, so do our chests, throats, mouths, noses, sinuses and cranial bones resonate to produce the particular combination of pitches which make each of our voices so distinctive. The aim of the following activities is to get the sound moving smoothly and to experiment with different resonators.

### a) Semi-supine

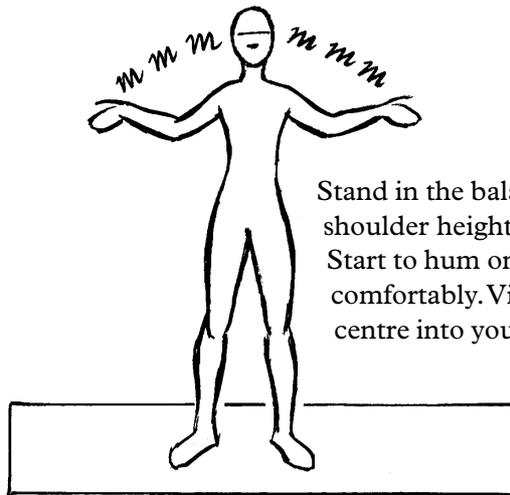
Lying relaxed in semi-supine, let your breath out as a long sigh. Do this several times. Sound the note –*aaaaah* on the out-breath. Make it last as long as your breath lasts. Try making it last longer. Feel the vibrations in your body as you do it. Where do you feel them most? Spend some time tuning in to the vibrations. Make the sound –*oooooh* as low in your voice as you can. Put your hand on your chest and feel it rumbling. Then make the same sound come from your mouth and face area. Put your hands lightly on your cheeks and jaw and feel the vibrations. Then make the sound come from the top of your head. Put your fingers lightly on your forehead and scalp and feel the vibrations.

*I was amazed that even my forehead was vibrating – and the top of my head too. (Kevin, voice student)*

Do the same series of notes using different sounds: –*eeeeee*, –*aaaaah*, –*ooooor*, –*errrrr*, –*iiiiii*, –*uuuuu*.

*What I enjoyed most was just playing around with the sounds and working out which bits of me were vibrating as I shifted up and down. (Sunil, voice student)*

**b) Hum into your palms**



Stand in the balanced position and raise your arms to shoulder height, hands held loosely with the palms up. Start to hum on a low note – as low as you can manage comfortably. Visualize yourself as humming from your centre into your hands. After a time you will feel your palms vibrating gently.

*I would never have thought you could feel it in your palms. But I could!  
(Ee Hong, voice student)*

**c) The touch of sound**

From a standing position, flop over at the waist. As you come up, unwinding the vertebrae, take a breath so that you are full by the time you are erect. Then release a touch of sound: *-huh*. Then again: *-huh*. Go on doing this till you have no more air left. Then start again. Visualize the note bouncing off your diaphragm, as if it were a trampoline. Put your hand lightly on your middle as you do this and feel the bouncing movement of the muscles. Then repeat the process in semi-supine.

**d) Mouth and nose**

Keeping your lips lightly closed, hum vigorously until you feel your lips vibrating – it may even tickle a bit. Then experiment with adding a vowel sound to the *-mmmmmm*: *-mmmmmah*, *-mmmmmmoo*, *-mmmmmmii*, *-mmmmmmey*.

Then repeat the process making a *-nnnnnn* sound. Feel the vibrations in your nose. Add vowel sounds as before. Notice the way the vibrations in your nose on the *-nnnnnn* combine with those that come through your mouth on the vowels. Then repeat the process with *-nnnggg* and with the vowels. Feel the release of your soft palate when the vowel pops out.

*I tried to imagine I was an African pronouncing the place name 'Ngorongoro'.*  
(Steven, voice student)

*Don't be afraid to play with the voice. Step outside the narrow tracks of your ordinary voice use as a regular part of your training.*

Michael McCallion

**e) Sliding and gliding**

Try these exercises for exploring and extending your vocal range.

- Do a 'miaow' like a cat, starting as high in your voice as you can and sweeping down to your lowest note. Do it as slowly as you can, using up all the breath. Keep doing it until you have a smooth curve of sound, without any blips.

- Imitate a police siren: –eeeeee/–oooooo (repeated). The –eeeeee should be at the top of your voice and the –oooooo right at the bottom.
- Imagine you are on one side of a valley and your friend is on the other. Greet her with *Hi!* starting really high and swooping down through your vocal range.
- Standing in the balanced position, let go on the sound –aaaaah, starting at your highest note and moving smoothly down to your lowest growl. You may find that at one point there is a sudden pitch break. Work to eliminate this so that your voice moves seamlessly down through the curve. Then reverse the process, moving up from the bottom to the top note. You may find it useful to visualize your voice as a lift moving from the basement to the top storey. This is a useful exercise to do just before you have to give a public presentation. If you do it quickly a couple of times, then speak a sentence with your normal voice, you will find that your voice has a more comfortable pitch. This is your real voice, not the one you often strain to produce.

### f) A smooth getaway

Some people have difficulty with words beginning with vowels. They produce a hard glottal attack rather than a smooth sound at the front of the mouth. If you have this problem, try putting a silent *h* in front of the vowel. Breathe the sound out. *h ... attack, h ... infantry, h ... exercise*, etc. After a time, a smooth onset will become habitual.

## 5 Articulation

Articulation refers to the way we chop up the sound after it comes through the vocal cords, using the teeth, the tongue, the soft palate and the jaw. There are two basic kinds of exercise for articulation: for warming up the articulators, and for practising particular sounds.

### a) Warming up the articulators

#### *Face muscles*

Play with your facial muscles: raise one eyebrow, then the other; flare one nostril, then the other; wrinkle your nose up as high as possible; clench your whole face as tightly as you can; pull your cheeks sideways in an exaggerated grimace; tense the tendons that connect your chin to your throat; stretch your face laterally – from the right eye to the left side of your mouth, then from top right to bottom left.

*I felt like a real idiot at first! Then I realized just how many muscles there are in the face, and how hard it is to isolate them. I still have trouble raising my right eyebrow without pulling up the left one with it! But I'm working on it! (Wendy, voice student)*

#### *Jaws*

Make a circular chewing movement to the right, then to the left. Take your lower jaw lightly between the fingers and thumb of each hand. Let the jaw drop and stop your muscles from holding it up. Slowly and gently raise and drop the jaw with your hands.

*It makes you realize just how habitual it is for us to pull up the bottom jaw. Really difficult to let it go completely. (Sandra, voice student)*

Gently massage the jaw joint (on a level with your ears) with a circular movement.

### ***Lips***

Alternately pout your lips forward, then spread them wide. Draw your lips into your mouth so that they cover your teeth. Then pop them out as you release the air in your mouth. Make a –brrrrr sound by expelling air through your lips to make them vibrate. Try doing it on a –prrrrr without voicing.

### ***Tongue***

Stick your tongue as far out as you can. Then curl the tip backwards as far as you can till it touches your soft palate. Do this five times. Place the tip of your tongue against your bottom teeth. Keep it rooted there as you alternately make the sounds –aaaaah and –eeeeee. Notice the way your tongue changes shape as you do this. With the tongue rooted against your bottom teeth again, push the middle of your tongue as far forward out of your mouth as possible. Then pull it back in as far as you can. Repeat the complete movement five times.

*It's disgusting! But I'd never realized just what a big muscle my tongue was! (Anjali, voice student)*

### ***Soft palate and throat aperture***

Do a big yawn. Notice how big your throat opening becomes. Use a mirror to observe yourself. Release the air in your throat by flapping open your soft palate in a –khaaaa sound. Do this several times and visualize the small explosion at the back of your mouth. Then reverse the direction of the air and suck it in, again feeling the explosion as it breaks through in a –khaaaa. Do the movement in both directions alternately ten times. Then try to do it without actually yawning, keeping your mouth closed. Think of it as a suppressed yawn.

*I never realized how enormous my throat hole was! You could pour a bucket of coal down it! (Peter, voice student)*

## **b) Practising particular sounds**

There may well be sounds you have problems with in English. This is certainly the case for non-native speakers of English but native speakers often experience difficulties too. There is no space here to give full examples of the sorts of practice sentences or texts you can try. However, there are many good practice paragraphs in Michael McCallion's *The Voice Book* pp 146–72, and in Malcolm Morrison's *Clear Speech* (see annotated bibliography).

The kinds of sounds you may have problems with are the w/v distinction and the r/l distinction. These can be tackled by practising sentences like these:

*Winsome Vera lived a long life in Windsor with Vincent and went to work in Vernon's in the West End.*

*Red lemons are rarely left ripening on the red lemon trees because when they ripen a lot, they rot.*

## 6 Modulation

Here we are concerned with giving an affective tone to the voice. There is really no substitute here for reading a text aloud and experimenting with different moods and intentions. Begin with sentences (see Chapter 2 for some examples). Notice how the same string of words can be given completely different meanings depending on how they are spoken. Try saying *I had a great day today* as if you really meant it, and then as if it were a bitter statement about your wholly unsuccessful day.

### a) Chunking and mood swings

Take a fairly short text (the Polish textbook writer Leszek Szkutnik has some wonderful short texts in his *Lyrics in English*). Decide how you are going to read it – where you will need to pause for the sense to come through, where to pause for effect, what mood you want to convey – joy, anger, disappointment, uncertainty, etc; who you are talking to, and so on. Then try it. But then try it again with a different mood and intention. It is best if you work with a partner but you can also do it by recording yourself on an audio or video tape. Here is an example from Szkutnik's *Lyrics in English*:

*They are good people. Almost all of them. They may not see you. They may not help you. They may not understand you. But they are good. They mean well.*

### b) Semi-supine speaking

Try speaking a short text aloud while lying in semi-supine. You will need to commit it to memory, not read it from a script. For example:

*Everyone knows about it. But no one says anything. How can we go on like this when no one even admits there is a problem? Yes, a problem. You mean you haven't noticed anything either? Not even you? Then I think the world really has gone crazy. Who else can I turn to, if not you?*

Remember to relax completely and to take advantage of the fact that you don't have to fight gravity. Your voice should come out effortlessly. Then try speaking it with different moods, intentions, emphases. Record yourself if you can and listen critically afterwards. Listen to yourself as if you were someone else.

## 7 Volume

Whenever I talk to people about voicework, they almost always say, 'Ah, yes, voice projection ...' and of course, it is true that we need to make sure that our voices match the size of the space they are working in. But there is no magic formula for projecting your voice. Most of the work you need to do is inside your head. You certainly don't need to think about shouting and booming your way across classrooms and lecture halls. You need to sense the need of your audience and 'think' your voice out, not push it out. Nevertheless, volume is important; it is no good speaking to a group if you cannot be heard. Here are a few of the things you could try.

### **a) Sweet and low**

When you next have a class, begin by speaking very softly. You may even begin by moving your lips but not vocalizing. When you speak softly, the audience tends to listen harder, in case they miss something. You will be surprised at how far your voice carries when people are listening to what you say!

*When I tried this, I was amazed at the effect it had. Gradually they noticed I was moving my lips but they couldn't hear anything. One by one, they fell silent. As they did, I gradually increased my volume to normal. (Prakash, teacher trainee)*

### **b) Off the wall**

Decide on a sentence to speak. Stand about a yard from a wall and speak it. Then move back another yard and speak it again. Keep doing this until you are a long way from the wall. You have to match your voice to the distance from the wall. The farther away you are, the more effort you have to make to reach it with your voice.

### **c) The fishing line**

Stand at the front of the space you will have to speak in. Then, as you begin to speak, make the motion with your right arm of someone casting a fishing line towards the back of the space. Visualize your voice snaking out with the fishing line, in a great curve which reaches the back of the space. Alternatively, think of your voice as an arrow which you shoot in a long, smooth arc towards the back of the space. See its trajectory in your mind's eye.

### **d) Crescendo**

Start to speak your lines or text very softly. Gradually increase the volume to the point just before a shout. Then go back down again.

### **e) Radio tuning**

Imagine that you are tuning a radio set. Decide on a text to read (it might be a newscast), then read it through the changes of intensity on the different wave bands. Your voice should go louder and softer as you pass through the wave bands.

*I had a lot of fun with this one. I tried it with my class too. They were better than me at the sound effects. (Cheryl, teacher trainee)*

## **Concluding remarks**

If you do at least some of the above exercises on a regular basis, your voice quality, range and expressivity will almost certainly improve.

*It's not that I don't know what to do, it's that I don't do what I know.*

Timothy Gallwey