

VOCAL FREEDOM THROUGH (Effective) MODIFICATION

2018 MSVMA Summer Workshop
Karen S Nevins, Presenter

Basic Goals

- ▶ Teach clean and healthy resonance through forward focus and free tone.
- ▶ Secure efficient connection between the breath and tone, releasing tension in the pharynx and the base of the tongue.
- ▶ Secure smooth transitions through the entire vocal range.
- ▶ Create independent singers who can nurture their voices for a lifetime of healthy singing.
- ▶ Strive for: “Never Louder than Beautiful!”

Good Singers are Great Copiers!

- ▶ The teacher's vocal example in warm-up and in the rehearsal is critical.
 - ▶ Warm-ups
 - ▶ Rehearsal
 - ▶ Phonate rhythmic studies
- ▶ Students match the style and timbre of whomever they idolize!
- ▶ Away from the rehearsal, what style of music are students listening to?
 - ▶ Pop/Rock
 - ▶ Gospel
 - ▶ Theater

Teacher/Student Collaboration

- ▶ Remain positive and encouraging! Your energy output will be returned three-fold!
- ▶ Empathize with students as they learn and grow into resonance.
- ▶ Listening Fridays can invite healthy discussion while educating the young ear!
 - ▶ Let students take ownership of your ultimate choral goals.
 - ▶ Suggest pop/rock and theater artists that provide healthy example
 - ▶ Play early recordings of Adele and Sam Smith revealing resonance changes before and after vocal node surgery/therapy.
 - ▶ Less scooping.
 - ▶ Less soft onset.
 - ▶ Cleaner forward resonance.
 - ▶ Play early recordings of Julie Andrews and discuss her roll in “Victor Victoria”—resulting voice loss).
 - ▶ Include students in choosing which choral recordings provide best listening examples.
 - ▶ Provide final examples where students can acquire easy access. (Box.com)

Feeling is Believing!

- ▶ Soft onset is often the norm. It's when singers begin to feel the "pop" of clean focus that the connection occurs! The eyes brighten with excitement!
- ▶ Abandoning the "pressed" or "pushed" tone.
 - ▶ A soft whimper tone allows them to feel the focus.
 - ▶ "Julia Childs" or "Mrs Doubtfire" allows the girls to feel the breath connected to an "imploded" tone through phonated chant.
 - ▶ "Count Dracula" allows the men to feel their breath connected to an "imploded" tone through phonated chant.
- ▶ You know they're catching on when singers begin raising a hand in the rehearsal to say, "can you help us with this note?"

The Beauty of the International Phonetic Alphabet

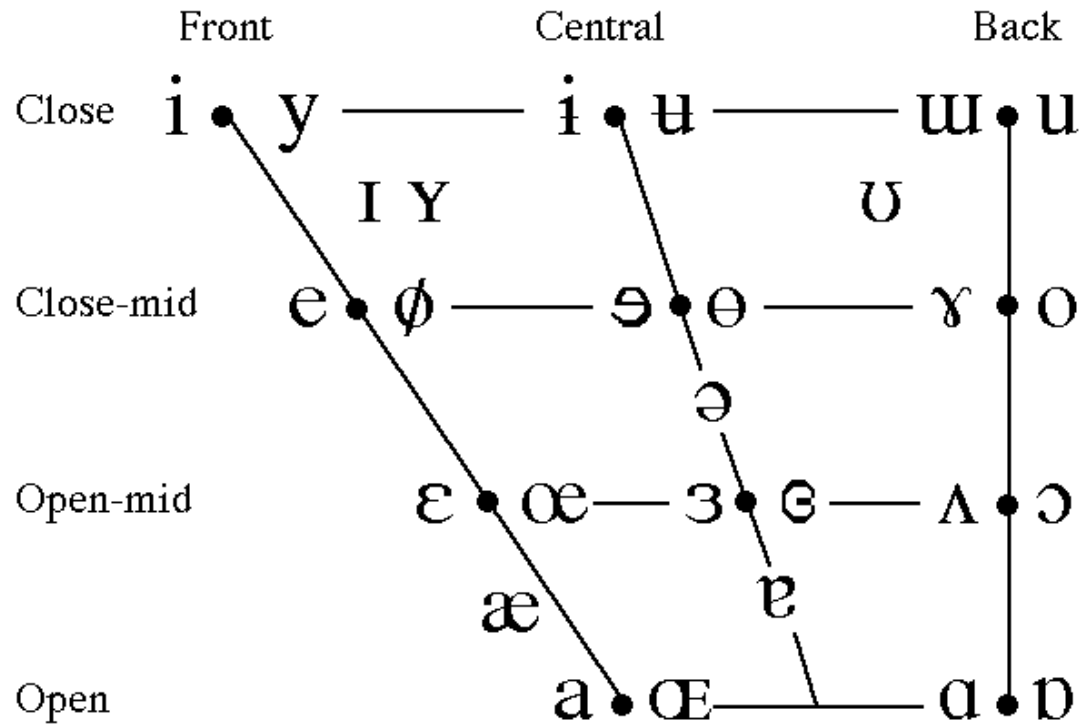
- ▶ IPA--an instant tool for communicating specific sounds and modifications to singers.
- ▶ Symbols and Sounds are universal with slight variables in languages.
- ▶ Easy to learn
 - ▶ Classroom posters
 - ▶ Flip Chart for private voice instruction referral
 - ▶ Classroom and home study through hearing precise sounds via interactive website: www.ipachart.com.
 - ▶ 8.5 x 11 enlarged IPA Chart distributed to choir folders for reference.

Key Vowel Modification References

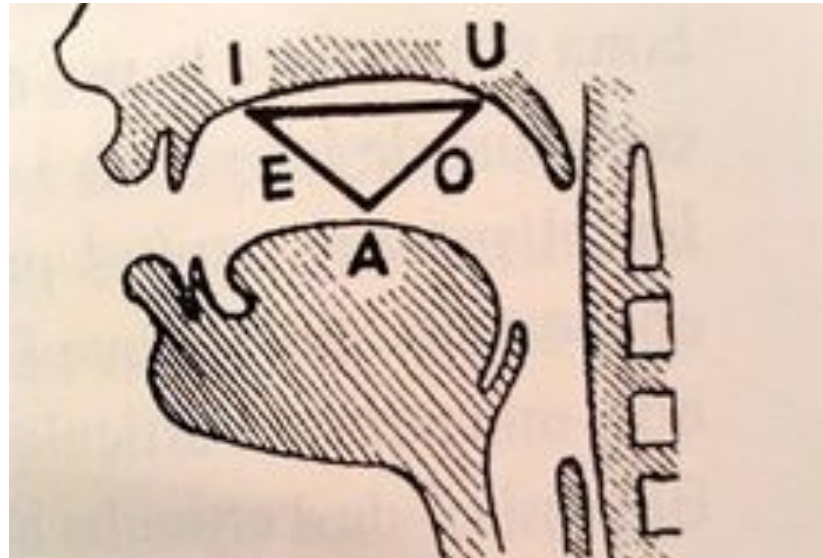
- Kenneth W. Bozeman provides us with “Kinesthetic Voice Pedagogy” (Motivating Acoustic Efficiency). Bozeman details the process of vowel modification, which occurs through the slight narrowing in the width of a vowel for smooth transitions through the passaggio. When asked by a teacher, “When to begin teaching vowel modification,” Bozeman’s response was, “How soon do you want your student(s) to stop yelling their top notes?” He goes on to say that “detailed work on vocal acoustics can only be begin after a healthy breath to voice connection has begun” ... “it must evolve from emotional expression and the motivation to communicate.”
- ▶ Berton Coffen’s “Overtones of Bel Canto” (with modification chart) assures that a single vowel sung on an ascending or descending line of several pitches must be modified every three pitches to maintain consistent resonance.
 - ▶ “Oh Thou That Tellest” from G.F. Handel’s “Messiah” with melisma’s hovering over the alto passaggio are a testament to the need for modification every third pitch.
- ▶ Shirlee Emmons & Constance Chase’s “Prescriptions for Choral Excellence” confirms that when all sections of the choir are singing the same vowel on varied pitches, each section must often modify differently based on the pitch and how that particular vowel sits in the range.
 - ▶ In the event of a soprano singing alto, the soprano may nasalize a low note whereas the rest of the section may modify simply by narrowing.

IPA Charts/Tongue Position

As vowels resonate on the tongue:

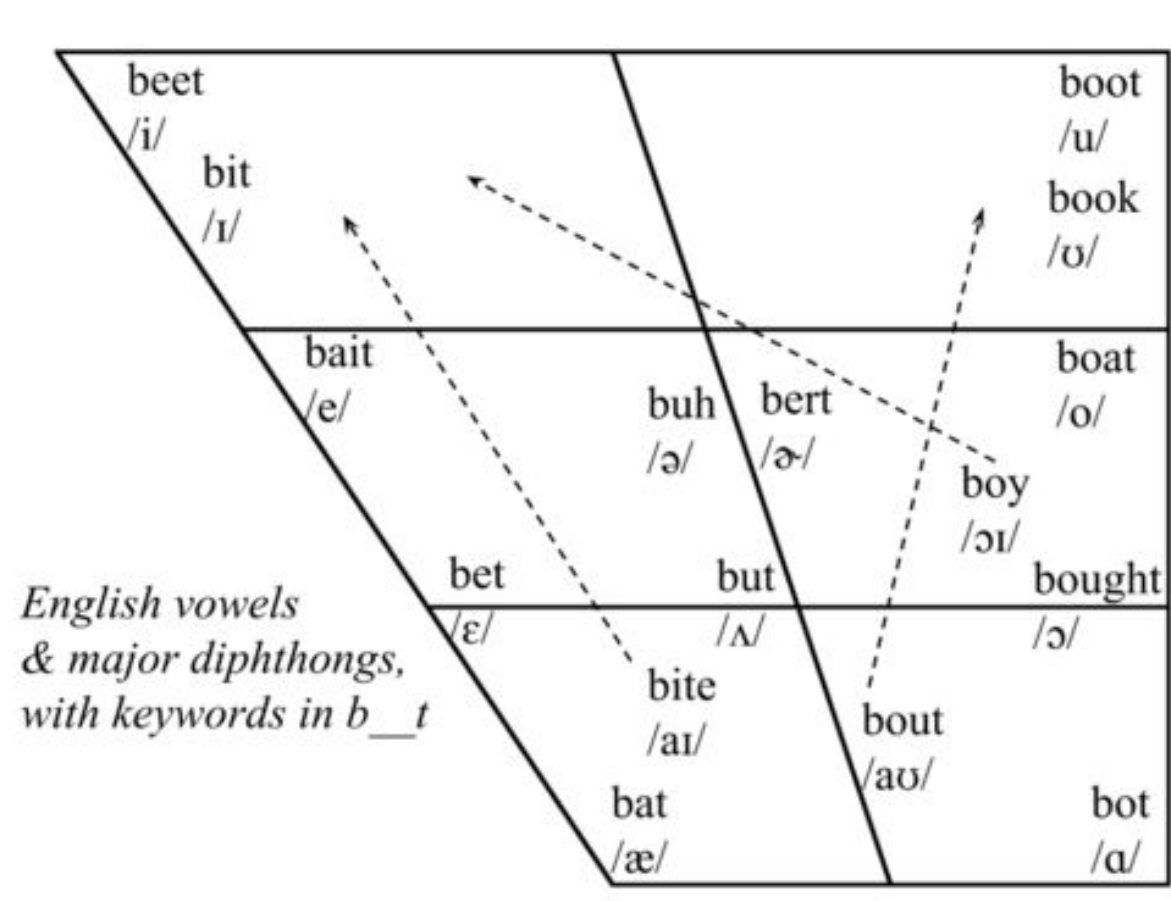


Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.



Text/IPA Connections

Text examples for each common IPA vowel



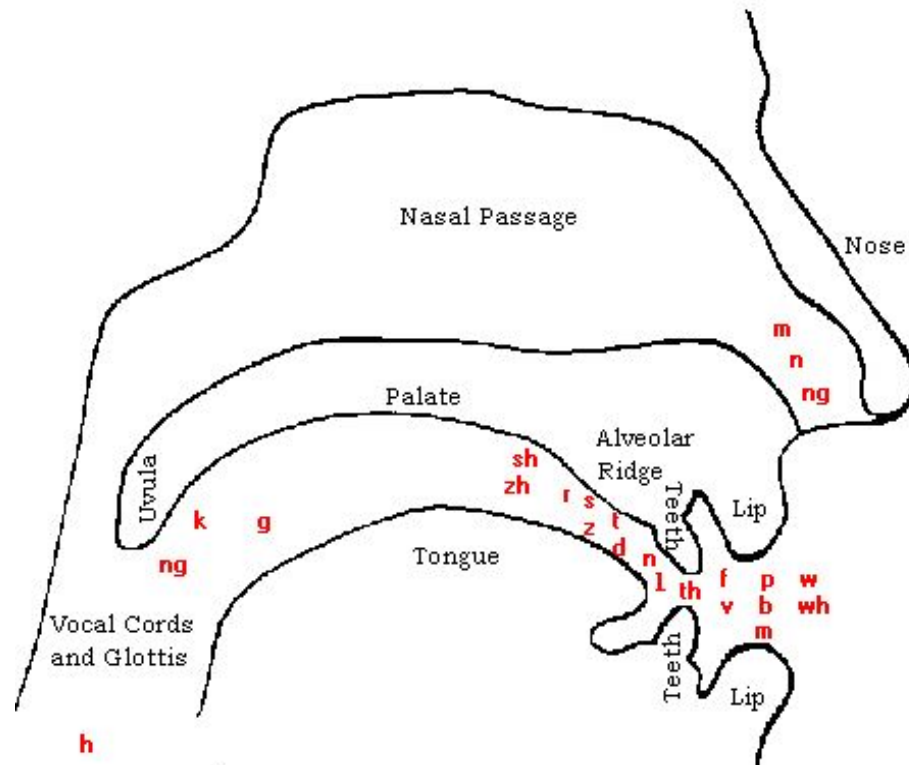
Vowel Modifications to Consider

- “Church” Embouchure “lengthens the tube” for better focus.
- Wide vowels change widen embouchure and encourage “the push” or “exploded” tone.
 - [ay] to [ɪ]; [o] to [ɪ]
- The embouchure heightens and jaw opens as the line ascends.
- When singing above a “g5” the open all vowels to “ah” for release of tension and tuning.
- The embouchure narrows through the passaggio.
- The embouchure narrows as the pitches descend below the passaggio.
- Singing below the passaggio (chest voice), avoid “pressed” tones and tension by assuring a lifted palate.
- The lowest pitches often must be nasalized too produce clean tone and focus.
 - A singer can gain added low pitches by nasalizing.

Consonant Modification

Occurs when a voiced or nasalized consonant creates tension in the pharynx/tongue and is replaced with an unvoiced or plosive consonant which releases tension and provides more efficient breath connection, supporting the vowel into the mask.

Occurs when consonants naturally articulated near the Uvula or in the pharynx are pointedly articulated in the dome.



Permission to copy for workshop use is granted by Laubach Literacy International, and copies may not be sold or distributed for any other purpose. All other rights reserved. Copyright 1989 New Readers Press

Consonant Modifications to Consider

- Replace voiced/nasal consonants causing pharyngeal tension with plosive or aspirated consonants that release tension and/or assure better breath connection and free focus.
 - modify “G” to “K” “Gloria” to “klawdia” (in the dome); “M” “Merrily” to “B” “berrily” “Row Your Boat”; aspirated “B” “Boy” to “P” “pelieve”; “D” “drop” to aspirated “T” “trop”; etc)
- “H”, “G”, “K” and “ng” naturally occur back in the pharynx.
 - Deliberately move them into the dome with a plan to place vowels in front of the consonant. (Amazing Grace or Kyrrie)
- Emphasize the opening consonants on the stressed syllable and secure beat/syllabic stress.
 - An aspirated consonant assures better emphasis and assures better breath connection.
- Minimize opening consonants of the unstressed beat/syllable or unstressed but stress the closing or double consonant with a shadow syllable.
 - “how sweet(a) the sound.”
- Provide cleaner diction by adding a shadow syllable at the end of an unstressed syllable or between double consonants.
 - “an-də thə” or “roun-də thə”.

Establishing a Solid Foundation

➤ Posture

- Roll Shoulders back with chest high
- Drop arms away from the hips

➤ Breath Preparation

- Raised eyebrows
 - Raises soft palate
 - Energizes upper face (communicating positive facial energy)
- “Church” embouchure (lips softly forward with no tension)
 - Inhaling a yawn creates audible breath
 - Yawning concept pulls breath and vowel back to the pharynx
- Inhale breath to cool upper front teeth (establish point of resonance)
 - Produces quiet breath while raising soft palate

Vocalizing the warm-ups

- Teacher provides focused example for each warm-up.
- Warm-up the voice, establish focus through modification.
 - Lip trills
 - Bright (rounded) to dark vowels with both in the mask
 - (ee-oh: 1-3-5-3-1)
 - (nee-e-e-e-e-e-aw-aw-aw: 1-123-345-3-1)
 - (oo-ee-oo-ee-oo: 5-4-3-2-1)
 - Add “k” to above exercise
 - Zee-hee-hee-hee-haw (connecting breath to tone)
- “Building Beautiful Voices” by Charlotte Adams/Charlene Archibeque
 - Use the hard copy booklet available for approximately \$5.00
 - Provides an array of effective & easily modified warm up variations.

Modify for Ease and Endurance

- Vowel Modification assures better endurance and a voice that can sing for a lifetime!
- Modifications usually narrow through the passaggio via an “inverted funnel” concept for smaller space in front, lifted soft palate and larger space in pharynx.
- Singers want to walk out of rehearsals, voice lessons and performances feeling gratified, accomplished and top of the world!
 - For theater vocal rehearsals, prepare students with full voice
 - For stage/blocking rehearsals, consider students utilizing marked voice until tech week.
 - Consider a “vocal rest” night between final dress rehearsal and opening.

Voicing the Choir

Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat, Gently down the street

Merrily, Merrily, Merrily, Merrily. Life is but a dream.

➤ Modifications:

- Modify “row,” “down” and “but” to feel more like [ʊ] (as in rook).
When the singer feels tension on the top, modify the “m” of the first Merrily to “b” or “p”.

Solfeggio

- Italian Syllables should be articulated as such.
 - Modify long “a’s” to rounded [ɪ] to eliminate diphthongs.
 - Modify long “o’s” to rounded [ʊ] to eliminate diphthongs.
 - Flip “r’s” to eliminate American “r’s”.
 - Focus “Fa” to [ʊ] (as in foot).

Vibrato

- Vibrato is more or less a “vocal-ometer” indicating when tension is minimized and all soft tissue is in the correct position.
 - Anton Armstrong once as said, “Free tone always produces some spin.”
- Vibrato occurs naturally and without manipulation when tone is focused “into the mask” with excellent breath connection and with no pharyngeal tension.
- Wide vibrato is indicative of excessive tension in the base of the tongue.
- Hormonal and muscular changes in the mature voice often affect placement and the width of vibrato.

Amazing Grace

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a soul like me.

I ononce was lost but now am found was blind but now I see.

'Twas Grace that brought me here thus far and grace my fears relieved;

How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed!

➤ Modifications:

- Release a silent “h” to connect breath to the opening phrase.
- The long “a” throughout is modified to the rounded [ɪ] (or short i).
- The “G” of Grace is placed in the dome with vowel in front of the “G.”
- The “e” of “the” is modified to the schwa [ə] rather than the [a] vowel, which is too open.
- The “ah” vowels get rounded to feel like the more closed [ʊ] (look) or in the upper range, to the more open [ɔ] (aw).
- Often in the mid or upper passaggio, a vowel is modified and widened to the [ae] vowel. Tenors focus with lots of [ae] for projection. (Feels like “biting the apple.”)

Nat'l Anthem

(h)Oh say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming!

Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thru' the perilous fight,
(h)O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming!

(h)And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof thru' the night that our flag as still there.

Chorus:

O, say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
Or the land of the free, and the home of the brave!

Modifications:

Provide a silent "h" to initiate each opening vowel.

"What" - Blow through "wh" to connect the breath then, "a" to [ɔ]

All long "a's" get rounded to [ɪ]

yet - may need to be widened to [ae]

'Til There Was You

There were bells on the hill, but I never heard them ringing,
No, I never heard them at all 'til there was you.

There were birds in the sky, but I never heard them singing,
No, I never heard them at all 'til there was you.

Modifications:

bells - "e" to [ε] or [ae] on a higher pitch.

never - "e" to [ae]

heard - "ear" to [ə]

all - "a" to [ɔ]