

Elementary Vocal Technique

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Warm-ups:

- Elementary students benefit from a physical and interactive warm-up.
- The warm-up should have the following goals:
 - Student engagement.
 - Pre-singing vocalizations.
 - Activation of head voice.
 - Stretching muscles needed for proper singing technique.
 - Inclusion of musical concept(s) that are to be taught.
- Utilizing popular music is a terrific way to instantly engage students and can be used as part of the warm-up process.
- Warm-ups should be consistent throughout the year so students know what to expect. Changes in the warm-up should reflect musical objectives that are to be taught *that day*.
- This warm-up process should take place every day and can be tailored to fit individual classroom objectives.

Vocal Warm-ups:

- Before singing takes place, proper posture and breath support must be established.
- Proper facial expressions, i.e. raised eyebrows and relaxed jaw, should be modeled.
- Vocal warm-ups should begin with humming step-wise descending and ascending patterns.
 - These patterns should start in the middle of student's vocal range and never fall below a Bb or rise above a C.
- Vowel and sound placement should be modeled using physical gestures.
- Engagement of the diaphragm should be established in your warm-up using arpeggiated chords in both major and minor on a "hah."
 - Tip: Have your students place their hands above their bellybutton and below their sternum and pant like a dog. This will automatically engage the diaphragm.
- Warm-ups in the extremes of student vocal ranges can now take place utilizing the previous methods.
 - Tip: Use physical gestures in contrary motion to assist in singing in tune. For example, when the voice is descending, have students point towards the ceiling to remind them (without explaining) to sing on top of the pitch!
- Vocal harmonization exercises can now take place using Solfege or numbers.

Typical Vocal Abilities in Elementary Students: (adapted from Anderson, W. M., & Lawrence, J. E. (2014). *Integrating Music into the Elementary Classroom* (9th Ed.). Boston: Schirmer Cengage Learning.)

| Grade: | Range: | Target Abilities: |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---|
| PreK/K | D-A/D-D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sing play chants and easy tonal patterns. ○ Sing short melodies in major, minor, and pentatonic scales. ○ Sing melodies with one note per syllable. ○ Sing with awareness of steady beat. ○ Repeated rhythmic patterns should be utilized. ○ Dynamic discrimination needs to be stressed. |
| 1 st /2 nd | D-B/D-D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understand difference between voice types, i.e. whisper, singing, shout. ○ Sing call-and-response songs, as well as songs in binary or ternary form. ○ Sing songs with dynamic and tempo changes. ○ Sing songs utilizing accents and syncopation. ○ Sing from simple music notation. |
| 3 rd /4 th | Bb-D/Bb-E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Simple rounds, descants, and partner songs can be taught. ○ Sing from music notation ○ Harmonization can occur by ear. ○ Sing songs with complex rhythms and meter. |
| 5 th /6 th | A-F | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sing songs in two or three parts. ○ Sing/read simple notation. |

Selecting Music:

- Musical selections should be made in accordance with the previous chart of student’s vocal abilities.
- Selections should reflect a sequential music curriculum and enhance student knowledge.
- Musical selections should be made based upon the quality of the music and text.
- The ability to provide accompaniment for your students should be considered when selecting music. Orff accompaniments are terrific tools to use and can be written to complement most pieces.
- Check the key signatures of the pieces you want to use and transpose as necessary. Keys in D, F, Eb, and C are great as well as their parallel minors.
- Multicultural music should be used; however, authentic music experiences are important. Please be sure you know your own limitations before teaching a piece to your students.
 - Tip: When teaching a song from another culture, contact an expert to be sure you are teaching your students correctly. This is one of the only ways to ensure authentic music experiences in your classroom.

Teaching a Song:

- Before rote teaching begins, activation of student's prior knowledge is important. Try beginning with dramatic play to act out a part of the song. This movement activity can be used later on to introduce your piece.
- Systematic introduction of body percussion that outlines the rhythm of the words (or isolates difficult rhythms) can be used as a nice segue to connect rhythm and text.
 - Tip: Teaching accompanying ostinato or rhythmic/melodic sections at this point through body percussion is ideal. You can fit these figures with the rhythm of the melody so students have a point of reference without trying to sing at the same time.
- Through echo imitation, simultaneously teach students the rhythm and words of the piece.
 - Tip: Keeping the macro or micro beat during this process will aid in student retention.
- Once text is learned, have students provide movement to various phrase groups. This facilitates the learning process and allows you to focus on singing technique without reviewing the words.
- Introduce the melody in the same systematic way as rhythm and body percussion—phrase by phrase.
 - Tip: Use a melodic contour map or visual aid so students recognize the overall form of the melody. Slowly discontinue use of this aid during the learning process.
- Be sure to introduce the song sequentially. Never try to fit an entire song into one period. Always build upon previous knowledge from class to class. This will ensure continuity of learning.
- Highlight specific areas of the piece that coincide with your music objective through the use of body percussion, dramatic play, or student-generated ideas.

In General:

- Have high expectations!
- At all times, model the behavior and expectations you desire from your students.
- **Over-exaggerate** everything! You can pull your students back for performance purposes, but it does them no good (and will drive you crazy) if you have to push them to perform.
- Allow students room to be creative. If they produce something that does not go along with what you had in mind, but complements the piece, throw it in there!
- I caution against the use of themes for performances. It limits the amount of quality music that you can select. If a theme is of utmost important to you (or, more likely, your administration), select music first, THEN develop a theme. It is not easy, but you are doing your students a disservice by having them sing "fluff" material.
- Men: **ALWAYS** sing in falsetto unless demonstrating expressive techniques. You will have to acclimate yourself to this technique, but it is **NECESSARY** for student achievement.