

Teaching Your First PVI

Learners: Music Staff Personnel

Time Frame: 90 minutes

Objectives:

- I. Give guidelines for achievement in correct singing posture and correct breathing technique for the singer.
- II. Give meaningful instruction to the PVI teacher to improve the performance of the student.
- III. Give beneficial exercises to the PVI teacher to assist in the instruction to the student.

Handouts:

PVI Instructor Follow-Up Form

PVI Feedback Form

Begin:

- I. Welcome
- II. You have the talent and ability to help others become better singers.
- III. Prepare your student for the PVI experience. Ask them to come early, bring a tape recorder, fresh batteries, new tape, music and a "warm" voice. If you have the opportunity, give them a couple of easy vocal warmup exercises to use before arriving for their PVI. Use a descending pattern such as 5-4-3-2-1, using lah, lah, lah, lah, lah.
- IV. Your preparation as the teacher should include having a checklist of items to cover, a pre-recorded tape of breathing exercises to give the student, a focused mind and plan to stay on track. The student may have her own agenda of what she wants to accomplish in her PVI. Since the objective is to cover posture and breath management, stay focused on these areas for the first lesson with the student. These two areas are the most critical and not easily accomplished on a consistent basis even with a very experienced singer.
- V. Begin by singing an easy exercise (the one in III. above is a good choice). To begin, if the singer is timid sing with her to boost her confidence. Then stop singing so you can concentrate on her posture and breathing technique as she continues to sing.
- VI. Compliment the singer. Find something positive to say about her posture, breathing and/or her voice.

Posture:

- I. Work on the posture first. Give correction and praise when she comes close to standing correctly. Review how critical posture is to the singer since it IS her instrument. Compare with a brass or wind instrument and commiserate on the complexity of the singer's instrument. The vocal instrument is flexible, can get tired, feel pain, etc. unlike any other musical instrument.

- II. Give exercises to improve:
 - A. Visualize and mimic placing a 2-liter coke bottle carefully on top of her own head so it will stay in place (lifts rib cage and levels head). (Jim Casey)
 - B. With palms down and arms at her sides, slowly have her lift arms out to her side until they are straight out from her shoulders. Have her think about the lift on the rib cage as she does this. Then have her turn palms up and have her experience the additional lift to the rib cage by doing so. Then have her lower her arms and leave the rib cage elevated. Then have her roll her shoulders to release any tension that may have developed in that area. (Bev Sellers)
 - C. Have student visualize having a rope hooked to her chest and hanging from the ceiling. (Mary Dick)
 - D. Visualize a Marionette with the "head" string keeping the rest of the body in alignment.
 - E. Go through the checklist, toes to head: Feet slightly apart, one foot slightly ahead of the other, stand on the balls of the feet, knees flexed, turn thighs out slightly to release tension and tendency towards swayback in lower back, abdomen relaxed for breath intake, lift rib cage high and wide, relax shoulders, stretch tall to top of head, cheek bones high, inside smile, twinkle in the eyes.
- III. Things to watch for and to correct
 - A. Sway back
 - B. Chin jutting out or pulled down and in
 - C. Collapsed ribs
 - D. Lifted (tense) shoulders
- IV. Remind student to restate perfect posture with every breath!
- V. Ask for questions/comments.

Breathing:

- I. Strengthening intercostal muscles for managed air to sing:
 - A. Take in air through the nose (snuff breath) and expand rib cage simultaneously, then blow out the air.
 - 1. Have student collapse as they blow out the air and explain that this is normal (non-singing) breath technique.
 - 2. Have student resist the collapsed ribs and explain that this is the singer's breathing technique.
 - B. Repeat Item A. above and hiss out the air to the count of 8, then 12, then 16, then 20 (if they can manage it) while the student resists the collapse of the rib cage. Be sure to emphasize that the ribs will give in **slightly** and this is to be expected.
 - C. Repeat Item A. above and count slowly "1---,2---,3---,4---, 5---,6----" with a full bodied, resonant voice. Again ask the student to resist the collapse of the rib cage.
 - D. Give the above exercises as homework assignment to strengthen intercostal muscles. Ask the student to practice these exercises while going about their daily routine, i.e. stopping at a stop light, doing dishes, working at the computer, etc.

- II. Strengthen the abdominal muscles for managed air to sing.
 - A. Using spread hands as a guide in front of the abdominal bulk, demonstrate the expansion of the abdomen on breath inhalation and the inward and upward motion of the abdomen on the spoken (then sung) syllable "lah."
 - B. Repeat Item A. above on the spoken (then sung) phrase: "5,4,3,2,1."
 - C. Take air in through nose and mouth by relaxing jaw, expanding ribs and abdominal bulk and sing:
1-2-3-4-5-5-5-5-4-3-2-1, in staccato fashion, on the syllables "hip, hip, hip, hip, hah, hah, hah, hah, hah, hah, hah, hah, hah, hah." Have the student note the tiny inward and upward lift of the abdominal bulk on each note of this exercise.
 - D. If the student has a good understanding of the basic breathing technique move on to chorus/quartet music to work on air management through the phrase line.
 - E. Discuss and demonstrate proper "chorus" breathing to insure expanded sound at all phrase endings. The two appropriate methods for chorus breathing are:
 - 1. Breath on an open vowel sound that is being held; keep the vocal instrument consistent (including the mouth posture) and keep the pitch steady through "exit and entrance" of phonation.
 - 2. Leave out a syllable, word, or words (depending on the speed of delivery).Stress the importance of not taking a sneak breath by finishing the old syllable or word and starting the next syllable or word. Be certain the student understands that this would cause synchronization problems for the chorus. Also stress the importance of being consistent with the "chorus" breathing technique so the student's special "chorus" breathing spots are always in the same place(s). This will indicate to their neighbor singers on the risers that they need to do their "chorus" breathing elsewhere which will promote a continuous wall of sound from the ensemble.
 - F. Most singers need more work on expanding ribs through the back for maximum air usage. If you have good back expansion when you take in air have the student observe the expansion you achieve and ask them to duplicate. To assist the student, have her lean on the back of a chair or to the edge of a countertop (demonstrate).
- III. Things to watch for and to correct
 - A. Shoulder/neck tension when working with the expanded rib cage and resisting the collapse of ribs.
 - B. Reverse breathing when working the abdominal muscles for singer's breath hookup.
 - C. Tense abdominal muscles that student has difficulty releasing for maximum air.
 - D. Little or no expansion through the back at the rib cage.
- IV. Again, remind student to restate "perfect" posture with every breath!
- V. Ask for questions/comments.

Summary:

- I. As you complete your PVI session give the student praise for being there, for following instruction and for the progress made in their session.
- II. Give the student written homework assignment(s).
- III. Ask for questions and ask if any clarification is needed on the exercises or homework.
- IV. Give the student her PVI Evaluation Form.
- V. Before "graduating" the student to the next level of PVI's, be certain the student is secure and consistent in posture and breathing skills in vocal exercises and in singing their voice part on a song they are currently singing in chorus or quartet.
- VI. After student leaves fill out the PVI Follow-Up Form and turn it in to the PVI Coordinator.
- VII. Enjoy your adventure! It will become easier and you will soon enjoy observing the student, teaching the student and learning from the student!

SAMPLE PVI SCHEDULE

Segment I

Before Chorus Rehearsal Schedule				
Week 1	Time Slots	Instructor 1	Instructor 2	Instructor 3
Week 2	Time Slots	Instructor 1	Instructor 2	

These sessions will be held at the Rehearsal Hall

Thursday Evenings				
Week 1	Time Slots	Instructor 4	Instructor 6	
Week 2	Time Slots	Instructor 2	Instructor 5	Instructor 6
Week 4	Time Slots	Instructor 5		

These sessions will be held at the Instructor's Home

Saturday Morning				
Week 3	Time Slots	Instructor 1	Instructor 3	Instructor 6

These sessions will be held at the Instructor's Home