

Daily Technical Check-In

It's a good idea to frequently check the basic functions of your voice to make sure you give it the exercise it needs to stay in shape. This is especially true if you are in a period of growth or exploration. For example, greater "cut" with less dynamic range and agility is not a good trade-off. Advancement in one of the main technical areas should not handicap the others.

How to check in? Use vocalises containing the following functions:

1. Quick pitch change (scales, arpeggios, and trills). If you can't do a trill yet, keep trying, as it can teach you things. Also try many scale and arpeggio patterns, perhaps rotating through different ones throughout the week.
2. Dynamic change (the *messa di voce*). You may have never had much dynamic wiggle room on your highest notes but you want to make sure that most of your range can be sung at varying volumes. I know it sounds crazy, but working on dynamic range tends to give you more dynamic range.
3. Ease of pitch range (high, middle, and low notes intact and connected to each other).
4. Staccato and legato note transitions. Staccato is very underutilized by many singers, but it's gold for checking the efficiency of the start of the sound – what used to be commonly called "attack" of the sound. I'm fine with the word "attack". It implies action and life. "Onset" reminds me of the start of a disease. With students, I usually just say "how it starts".
5. The five cardinal vowels of /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, and /u/. Other vowels can also be used, but these are the basics.

You can use the SAPS as described earlier, or there are many other options for a consistent, structured check-in. One of my favorite thorough yet compact sets of exercises is the Rossini *Gorgheggi e Solfeggi*, available for free in the public domain. You can construct your own exercises that are similar to those, using the five principles above. An ascending and descending 9 note scale can be a good structure with which to work, if done in two or three different keys. See below for an example of such a C scale with four different rhythms.



If you are a singer of coloratura or riffs, practicing a difficult run with all of the rhythms above will help you to become very technically secure. Transpose the scale up or down as needed to work out the different pitch areas of your voice.

Generally, do most of the exercises with the /a/ ("ah") vowel and its near relatives, and occasionally check in with other vowels. Each vowel has something to teach your voice. Many people, in their quest to sound more impressive, will develop warped vowels, or merge them into one all-purpose non-vowel. A warped vowel wrecks your diction, lessening the impact of your lyrics, and it can also be harder to project, falling out of the mouth and dying a few feet from the stage. As pitch rises, the vowels can change, but they should always sound human. That may seem sarcastic, but listening to auditions all day can make you wonder about that.

Checking in daily with the five basic functions above, regardless of the specific form of the exercise, will help to keep you on track. All of these checks can be done in less than 15 minutes, if necessary.

If you ever find yourself in a situation where you have to warm up very quickly, experiment to find what works best for you. Some people need to move the voice, some just do a few quick sirens, lip trills, vocalizing through straws, or other exercises that do not use an open mouth. If I'm in a five-minutes-or-less situation, I will wake up my throat with a couple of sirens from high to low and low to high, and some form of the *messa di voce* (soft-loud-soft on one note).

Usually, I do the *messa di voce* over about an octave and a fifth. As a

Excerpt from *Sane Singing: A Guide to Vocal Progress*
by D. Brian Lee

tenor, I often warm up on the pitches from C3 to G4. This helps me to get to the core of my voice quickly. It exercises the thin-to-thick-to-thin fold function, which relates to high-low function, which relates to flexibility, which relates to everything else. A *messa di voce* on just a few notes in the middle of the voice can be an effective, fast warm-up when necessary. If I have a little more time, I will do some light staccato arpeggios as well.

Time and experimentation is required to figure out what works best for you. There are two main things to consider when you check in:

- What kinds of warm-ups get my voice flexible and ready for anything?
- What kind of music am I going to be singing today?

The warm-ups you need to wake up your voice and get it moving are often very different from the music you are going to sing.