

# THE ACTOR'S TOOLKIT – VOICE

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## Basic Voice Concepts for the Stage

1. Rate – how fast or slow an actor speaks.
  - Tempo - is the speed or pace of the performance.
  - Rhythm - is the timing of sounds and silences that occur over time. Pacing, pauses, breath, the emphasis of key words, diction, and intonation comprise the rhythm of each voice acting performance.
  - Difference between Tempo & Rhythm - whereas tempo is the overall speed of the performance, rhythm is the variations in speed.
  - Phrasing - In language a phrase is a group of words that convey some meaning. In music a phrase a unit that has a complete musical sense of its own. Phrasing in voice acting refers to how the speaker chooses to group words. Phrasing is a particular grouping of words marked by pauses, breaths, emphasis, speed changes, or tone that convey some coherent thought and emotion. Use pauses to establish phrasing and indicate importance. Whatever follows a pause is perceived as being more important.
    - Various phrasing choices can substantially alter the meaning of a passage.
    - Compare “The panda eats shoots and leaves.” to “The panda eats, shoots, and leaves.”
    - Compare “Let’s eat, Grandma” to “Let’s eat Grandma”
2. Projection – how loud or soft an actor speaks.
  - Volume, also known as dynamic range describes the variations in loudness in your delivery. An actor can be soft, loud, or moderate and vary the volume throughout the delivery.
3. Clarity – How clearly an actor speaks. It is important that the words are garbled, mumbled or lazy.
  - Articulation - is the movement of the tongue, lips, jaw, and other speech organs—known as the articulators—in ways that make speech sounds. In speech acting, articulation refers to the clarity with which words are spoken.
  - Enunciation - is a close synonym and refers to the art of speaking so that each word is clearly heard and understood to its fullest complexity and extremity. This clarity is accomplished through accurate pronunciation and tone choice.
  - Practice these enunciation exercise paying particular attention to:
    - Speaking the ends of every word. Say “going to do this” rather than “gotta do this”

- Distinctly articulating both letters when the same letters appear back-to-back in adjacent words as in “success seeds success”
- Pronounce “ing” rather than “ng” in words like lightning, clothing, and everything.
- Differentiate the (unvoiced) “s” and the (voiced) “z” sounds so that “bells” sounds differently than “buzzer” and “zoologists” sounds different at the start than the end.
- Accentuate the pronunciation during these practice exercises but be sure to speak naturally when using a conversational style.
- Diction - is the accent, inflection, intonation, and speaking style dependent on the speaker’s distinctive vocabulary choices. Slow down as required to ensure you are speaking clearly.

4. Inflection/Expression – This refers to the emotion that an actor adds to their lines.

- Emotions Chart

	Negative	Positive
High energy	Angry Jealous Envious Hateful Contemptuous Afraid Gloating Disgust	Surprised Joyful Passionate Proud Loving Compassionate Grateful Hopeful
Low Energy	Sad Depressed Ashamed Embarrassed Guilty Exhausted Lonely	Contentment Serenity

5. Pitch – The vocal range that the actor employs while saying their dialogue.

- Vocal range describes the highest and lowest pitch, tone, or frequency of the voice. Pitch can also be varied throughout the performance.

6. Tone – also known as timbre, emerges from a combination of pacing, volume, range, articulation, diction, tempo, rhythm, phrasing, attitude, and subtext.
  - Varying the tone of your performance can create a wide variety of distinctive voice qualities, including: rich, ringing, booming, deep, breathy, cracked, gravelly, thin, flat, nasal, shrill, sing-songy, velvety, and glib.

## Marking your Script for the Voice

As you read and re-read the copy out loud, begin to mark the copy to indicate:

- Where to pause or breathe,
- The tone, inflection, and pacing,
- The volume of your voice,
- Pronunciation of difficult words, and
- Other dynamic elements contributing to the tone of your delivery.

Use any marking system that works for you. Some commonly used marks are listed in this table. Add to this list, or modify it to suit your needs.

Mark	Meaning
/	Breath
//	Pause
///	Long pause
Circled words	Check and mark pronunciation before performing
↗ or ↑ or <	Raise voice or pitch
↘ or ↓ or >	Lower voice or pitch
UPPER CASE, or bold	Raise Voice
Underline	Emphasize by raising or lowering your voice or pitch.
H or 😊	Happy mood
E or 😄	Excited mood
C or 😌	Calm mood

## The Voice MEETS The Body

### 1. Breathing

Because the [diaphragm](#) is the primary muscle of respiration, it is important to practice [diaphragmatic breathing](#). “For a performer, correct breathing is from the diaphragm, not from the chest.”

To check your breathing, stand in front of a mirror and place your right hand on your stomach below the rib cage. Place your left hand on your chest, over the sternum. Exhale fully and feel your stomach contract as your right hand moves toward your spine. Relax and allow your lungs to fill with air. You will feel your stomach expand. Your left hand should not feel expansion or contraction of the chest during correct diaphragmatic breathing. Your shoulders should not rise. As you continue to breath, your stomach should expand as you inhale and contract as you exhale, and your chest should remain still.

- As an exercise, inhale while silently counting slowly 1-2-3-4, notice the stomach expand, hold the breath counting slowly 1-2-3-4, exhale counting slowly 1-2-3-4-5-6, notice the stomach contract, and then hold counting slowly 1-2. Repeat several times.
- As another exercise, place the fingers of both hands on the belly and open your mouth wide in a [yawn](#). Inhale a deep breath and then exhale with a long yawn-sigh making a “haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa” sound, pushing your diaphragm with your fingers toward the spine as you continue to exhale. When there is no more air, relax, allow the diaphragm to lower and draw in your next breath.

These exercises are helpful in developing strong diaphragmatic breathing, however to breath conversationally, it is important to only take in enough air for what you need to say. Breath after expressing a complete thought, as you typically do in ordinary conversation.

Because the diaphragm is our primary breathing muscle, we naturally breath diaphragmatically. A problem arises, however, when we unknowingly hold our breath while trying to speak. The goal of these exercises is to practice diaphragmatic breathing, so it becomes natural during speech performances.

Practice sounding conversational as you read your script. Record yourself, listen to the recording, and continue to practice until you sound relaxed and natural. Copy can be obtained from many sources, including various books, advertisements, instruction manuals, and even cereal boxes.

Work to improve the *clarity* of your speech as you practice reading copy. American speakers should begin by using [General American](#) (also known as Standard American English) as your

pronunciation reference standard. Recorded samples are available from the [General American collection](#) of the [International Dialects of English Archive](#).

- Avoid over-emphasizing the “s” sound, known as [sibilance](#), by clearly differentiating between the “s”, “sh”, and “z” sounds.
- Take care to pronounce the ends of words, especially those ending in “b”, “d”, “g”, “p”, and “ing”. Use proper breath control to provide adequate breath support throughout the passage.
- Avoid lowering your voice and trailing off toward the end of sentences.
- To convey emotion, emphasize [vowel](#) sounds.

## 2. Activating your Resonators

In a process called [vocal resonance](#), our voices employ a variety of [acoustic resonators](#) to amplify the sound.

The voice, like all acoustic instruments, has its own special chambers for resonating the tone. Once the tone is produced by the vibrating vocal cords, it vibrates in and through the open resonating ducts and chambers. Since the vocal tract is often associated with different regions of the body, different resonance chambers might be referred to as: chest, mouth, nose ("mask"), or head.

Because we have several [vocal resonators](#) we can learn to place sound primarily within a particular resonator. Our vocal resonators include our chest, the larynx, the pharynx, the oral cavity, the nasal cavity, and the sinuses. Each resonator creates a distinctive sound quality.

- **Head resonance** should not be confused with head register or falsetto. It is used primarily for softer singing in either register throughout the range.
- **Nasal (mask resonance)** is well-moderated at all times in a well-produced tone. Nasal resonance is bright and edgy and is used in combination with mouth resonance to create forward placement (mask resonance). Nasal resonance adds overtones that give clarity and projection to the voice.
- **Mouth resonance** is used for a conversational vocal color in singing and, in combination with nasal resonance, it creates forward placement or mask resonance.
- **Chest resonance** adds richer, darker, and deeper tone coloring for a sense of power, warmth, and sensuality. It creates a feeling of depth and drama in the voice.

To explore these resonators, begin by humming. While humming feel your throat with your hands. You should notice the hum vibrating the throat area as the sound resonates in the throat. Now try moving the hum so it resonates in the head. This [head voice](#) will shift to a much higher pitch. Now speak the line “‘The time has come,’ the Walrus said, ‘to talk of many things’” placing the sound in your head resonators.

Now hum using your nasal and sinus cavities as the resonators. This area is called your “mask.” Try speaking while resonating in your mask. Finally try humming then speaking using chest

resonance. This **chest voice** has a lower pitch. Confirm the chest resonance by using your hands to feel your chest. You should feel the hum and speech vibrating in the chest