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# Vocal exercises

The one instrument we all have is our voice, and this can be useful in developing musicality. Starting a music lesson using our voices can be highly effective as it allows the whole group to concentrate, participate, and develop musical skills. It's also a great way to get pupils focused on the lesson.

These are a few ideas that have worked for me in different contexts. As pupils get familiar with them, extend the exercises by asking pupils to lead them.



## Breathing exercises

- Stand the group in a circle with the teacher in the middle
- Ask the group to think about how they stand – relaxed shoulders, feet slightly apart, standing upright
- Ask pupils to focus on their diaphragm – their belly should move outwards when they take a breath, but the shoulders should stay relaxed
- Ask pupils to breathe in for 5 seconds, then out for 5 seconds, with the teacher counting out loud. Repeat to get everyone calm at the start of the session



## Physical exercises

- Ask the pupils to all yawn, allowing them to stretch their lower jaw and expand the mouth area
- Then try to do this without opening your mouth

## Humming and vowels

- Pick a note that is easy to sing (middle C often works)
- Try all humming the note with mouths closed – you should feel the vibrations in your mouth and this might tickle
- Then start to sing the vowels ‘ahh’ and ‘ooh’ – ask pupils to sing each for a number of beats with the teacher clicking/counting out loud. Changing the number of beats adds complexity

### This might look like this

Ahh	Ooh	Rest	Ahh	Ooh	Rest	Ahh	Ooh	Ahh	Ooh
1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	1,2	1,2	1,2	1	1	1	1

**Remember that as your pupils get familiar with these exercises, you can invite them to lead the exercise.**

## Music and Maths

This is my go-to vocal warmup and is used by choirs, schools and in musical theatre all over the world. It is a simple exercise which involves counting up and down the major scale. Start on

a pitch – let’s use Middle C to start with, starting slowly. Start at the top and then move to the next row:

Note to use	Number to sing
C	1
CDC	121
CDEDC	12321
CDEFEDC	1234321
CDEFGFEDC	123454321
CDEFGAGFEDC	12345654321
CDEFGABAGFEDC	1234567654321
CDEFGABCBAGFEDC	123456787654321

To make it a little more challenging, you can then use the same idea but starting on the top note (number eight):

Note to use	Number to sing
C	8
CBC	878
CBABC	87678
CBAGABC	8765678
CBAGFGABC	876545678
CBAGFEFGABC	87654345678
CBAGFEDEFGABC	8765432345678
CBAGFEDCDEFGABC	876543212345678

Try to then combine these ideas together, gradually getting faster to add to the challenge. Other ideas to make this vocal warm up more challenging:

- Make the starting note higher on each repetition (C#, then D, then D# etc.) getting faster each time

- Replace each number three (and number six for a challenge) with the word buzz
- Divide the group in two and have the second group start after the first group have sung the first two lines:

First Group	Second Group
1	<i>rest</i>
121	<i>rest</i>
12321	1
1234321	121

The video here might be useful to hear these ideas ►