



Switching on: the voice warm up

You have invested in your studio; been part of its design. It meets not only your own needs for each job of work that you undertake but also the expectations in any agreement with your range of client. It has to.

Everything needs protection and maintenance. You update it from time to time. Your focus is not only on what you need it to be but also on managing the expectations of your clients.

I have asked some of you about the essential routines and even rituals that you go through before recording begins. Answers include: 1) switching the electricity to 'on', 2) entering the booth, 3) opening up the software, 4) putting on the headphones, 5) running a test for the microphone. The studio is 'warmed up' and ready to deliver.

Maybe you have the same dedication when it comes to your voice, or maybe you would like to learn more and set aside time to keeping your 'key communication asset' primed for the best results. For too long the training and coaching of voice has been the professional expectation of and for actors and singers while voice artists have been overlooked. So it is a joy for me, as a professional voice coach, to support The VoiceOver Network with its growing range of workshops and other resources to care for you and to keep you producing your very best work.

What follows is a simple approach to

a good basic 'switch on and power up' routine for your vocal instrument. There are many more exercises that I could include but have chosen to cover the bare essentials here. Many more are available in a range of excellent voice books or can be experienced at one of the voice workshops I run for VON. It can be good practice to gradually build up a selection of exercises to draw upon.

Here then, is the basic package for you work in the booth. It will cover 4 key areas: body, breath, voice and speech.

Body

- Make sure that you are comfortable, warm, and as free from unhelpful tensions as possible.
- How are you sitting or standing? Is it your space? Can you improve your postural alignment to help your comfort levels? Is everything around you positioned to help you deliver your best work?
- Check in with four physical areas that are very close to your larynx and that can carry significant tension.

Exercise:

1. **Shoulders** – move them around then try lifting them up and then letting them drop back down again to work with the negative and positive feelings that tension and its release give you.
2. **Neck** – try simply letting your head hang down (aim to give yourself a sense of its weight) then slowly and very gently move between left and right shoulders (still trying to keep that sense of weight). NOTE: it isn't generally a good idea to circle round

completely – the top of the spine and neck don't like it.

3. **Jaw** – with your fingers in front of your ears and over the place you feel movement when you open and close the jaw, massage the muscles using a movement that goes forwards and down first, then back and up to where you started. Vary the pressure – it might feel sore if your jaw is holding tension.
4. **Tongue root** – use your thumbs or fingers to massage under the chin while you speak with your tongue out of your mouth and hanging easily over your lower lip (try counting to twenty, days of the week, months of the year or the alphabet) then, keeping the massage going, put your tongue back in your mouth and repeat the words one more time.

Breath

This is the hub of the wheel for your voice and also your ability to think creatively. Take time to take stock. Are you tensing your abdominal muscles? If you are, you will be rationing your breath – which rations your vocal range, expression, creative imagination and overall performance in turn. If you are not sure whether you are or not, then go through my 'Corset On/Corset Off' exercise (described below).

Research shows that, when you breathe in and allow yourself to feel the abdominal area slightly expand as you do so, to accommodate the displacement of all the abdominal contents (or the 'kitchen department' as I like to call it!) that are