

PVI Session – Suggested Outline

1. Introduction

- Welcome and introductions: put the singer at ease! Ask if there is anything she wants to work on or is concerned about.
- Listen to the singer's speaking voice for clues about possible vocal problems.
- You will probably need to make physical adjustments during the PVI – ask if the singer minds if you touch her. It is important to make sure she is comfortable with this.

2. Alignment (Posture)

- Check the singer's body alignment.
- Feet parallel, weight forward, knees flexed, pelvis tucked/flexible, ribs out of waistband, chest high, shoulders relaxed, neck relaxed, head level with chin parallel to floor.
- Look out for anything that might cause vocal tension.

3. Breathing

- There is always work that can be done on breathing!
- Check understanding of abdominal breathing – put one hand on lower back and one on abdomen – breathe for singing.
- Link hands (like for Auld Lang Syne) – each has hands pressed on other's abdomen – breathe together and feel what happens.
- Still struggling? Lie on floor, knees bent, chat about anything then think about where breathing is happening (should be abdomen) – put hand on abdomen, take a deep breath and sigh out.
- Alternatively, sit on a chair and put elbows on knees, head in hands. Lean forward and breathe deeply, letting everything “hang out” – feel expansion in the back.
- Try to replicate while standing – if still struggling, ask her to cough to find the right muscles.
- Check that breath is being managed effectively during the whole phrase to provide lift and support to phrase ends.
- Note noisy breathing – suggests tension and closed throat.
- Check posture still OK (unlocked knees, relaxed shoulders, neck alignment).

Breathing exercises

- Breathe in then hiss out in 3, 3, 7 rhythm; repeat. Do the same using ff and shh.
- Dead battery – breath in, “mmm” (changing tone by contracting abdominal muscles) in 3, 3, 7 rhythm, repeat four times (this should hurt!).
- Using chest voice, sing “doh-ray” (1-2) notes counting as long as you can at volume 3. When your voice disintegrates, note the number you got to then try to beat your own record over 2 or 3 attempts. Repeat using head voice.
- Rhythmic breathing. Sway while shifting weight from foot to foot in a comfortable rhythm. Count to 15 in rhythm with your sway – take a breath in rhythm on beat 16 and repeat – good stamina training for uptunes.

Doing these exercises away from chorus will pay dividends.

4. Singing

- Ask the singer to sing one or two lines of a song – they don't need to sing a whole song! Repeat a few times until nerves ease. Sing along with her if necessary.
- Tell her about some good things you have heard/seen – you should be able to find at least one!
- Observe the singer and listen for areas to work on. You can break this down into the 5 areas of vocal production:
 - **Posture.** Check posture remains relaxed.
 - **Breathing.** Check breathing is efficient. Listen for lifted phrase endings.
 - **Phonation** (creating sound). Look out for tension in the neck, jaw or tongue. Check sound is not being forced or constricted.

- **Resonance.** Too much? Not enough? More clarity needed (lips over teeth causing muffle)? Excessive vibrato? Appropriate head/chest voice mix?
- **Articulation.** Choppiness, vowels.
- Once you have identified areas for work, demonstrate what you want her to do. It can be effective to stand behind the singer and sing with her in the way you want it done – she can sing into your voice and match your style.
- Move on to specific exercises for no more than 2 or 3 areas (some people may need to work on only one area). Try one or two exercises – explain that each person sings uniquely, so they will need to find the exercise that works best for them.

Other Exercises

Relaxation

- Gently bring your teeth together. Tilt your head back and look at the sky/ceiling. Open your mouth. Maintaining this position, gently return your head to singing position – this is how a relaxed jaw position should feel.
- Once you are able to achieve a relaxed jaw position, practice singing the primary vowels (ee, eh, ah, oh, oo), focusing on maintaining the relaxed jaw. Once you are able to do this, advance to practising with a line and then a verse of a song. The aim is for this relaxed posture to become automatic.

Tuning/Break

- Use a pitch pipe, piano or keyboard to find a comfortable starting point, bearing in mind that you will sing up an octave. Practise singing up and down a major scale – use the keyboard to help if necessary. Play your start note, then practice 12131415161718 – 87868584838281 then check to see if you have stayed in pitch.
- If pitch drops, check you are maintaining the “inside smile” (below) and a lifted countenance. Ensure lips are not covering top teeth.
- If a line of a song goes through the break in your voice, practise singing a vowel in a ‘wave’ through the break (i.e. ‘glide’ in a sort of \cap shape). Ensure that you have sufficient breath support and maintain a relaxed open throat through the break.

Resonance

- The ‘hollow’ areas in the airway (throat, mouth, nose, chest and sinuses) are those areas of the body where sound will resonate. Develop an “inside smile” – gently lift the soft palate, relax the tongue into the bottom of the mouth and relax your lower jaw while lifting eyebrows and the “apples” of your cheeks. The “inside smile” allows the air to flow more freely to the resonators, giving a more resonant sound.
- Start to yawn – feel your soft palate lift and larynx drop. Try to maintain this feeling while singing a phrase or simple exercise. Be careful not to let the sound fall into your throat or become too dark.
- Exercises using “M”, such as “Mee Meh Mah Moh Moo”, help keep the sound forward in the mask. Try on 534231271.

5. Follow Up

- Complete a PVI record, noting the areas to target and suitable exercises.
- Agree a date for the next PVI.
- Thank her for her time!

Remember: not everything you do will work for this singer, nor will it work immediately. She should try the things that do work for her. It is also important that she does not beat herself up if things don’t go to plan – if she finds herself forgetting on chorus nights, just say: “How interesting!” and then try to get it right next time.

♪ “Tomorrow’s a PVI, I hope and pray I’ll make a difference...” ♪