

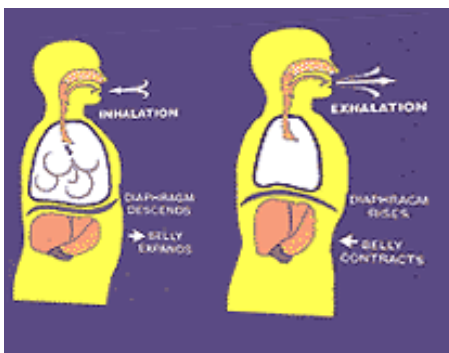
3 Simple Techniques to Improve Your Vocal Control

Whether you are speaking at a packed lecture hall or presenting to a small team meeting, effective voice projection is essential if you want people to hear you clearly and take you seriously as a speaker.

Effective voice projection depends on a combination of three key areas:

- **Breathing technique**
- **Resonance**
- **Pitch**

There are plenty of exercises to develop all of these areas, but here are a few which, if practiced regularly, will really make a difference to the way your voice sounds and travels: You'll be heard at the back of a busy room without resorting to shouting.



Breathing technique

Good voice projection requires efficient working of the lungs, intercostal muscles and diaphragm. The diaphragm is an umbrella shaped muscle which helps push air out of the lungs. The diaphragm should move down and push the belly out when breathing in, and move up, pushing air out of the lungs and pulling the belly in when you breathe out.

Place one hand on your belly (below the ribcage, over your belly button) and one hand on your back. Breathe in slowly, and feel the gap between your hands get wider as your belly moves outward. Take a few deep breaths in and out and feel the hand on your belly moving out and in as you do so. Now place your hands, with fingertips touching, across your belly, just below the ribcage. Breathe in and feel your belly move out, then breathe out making a hard, quick “Huh” sound – you should feel your belly contract as the sound comes out. Repeat several times. Practice this abdominal breathing regularly so that it becomes normal and natural (in the car, watching TV – anywhere). Then try making different sounds. Hear how much stronger and clearer the voice is, and how much more it projects when you breathe abdominally.

Abdominal breathing also improves our physical and mental health by detoxifying inner organs, promoting blood flow and digestion, increasing oxygen supply to the brain and muscles, as well as improving concentration and reducing stress.

Resonance

Resonators are the 'speakers' in your head. Your voice originates at your vocal cords and then resonates through your chest, throat, and head as it comes out of your mouth. When people have a cold and their sinuses are blocked, their voice doesn't resonate well and they sound odd. To improve vocal tone, one must "open up" the chest, throat, and head cavities to allow the voice to resonate.

Hold your nose and say **"Many mighty men making much money in the moonshine"** with as much force as possible. Then immediately let go of your nose and say the same phrase. You will immediately hear the difference in the force of your vocal sound.

Humming is another way of improving resonance: Hum at a comfortable pitch, then move the pitch slightly lower and pay attention to how your chest feels. Continue humming until you can feel the vibration in your chest – try to increase the vibration in your chest. Then move the pitch slightly higher and pay attention to how your head feels. Let your mouth open gently. Hum until you feel the vibration in your tongue and lips, behind and above your mouth. Then continue humming, attempting to increase the vibrations in your mouth, tongue and lips. Finally, return to your chest again. Repeat the whole exercise, but always ensure you end with your chest in order to develop a full, luscious sound.

Note: Remember to breathe frequently, and stop if you get light headed.

Pitch

Everyone has an optimum pitch (which is usually lower than their normal speaking voice). To find your optimum pitch, place your hand on your chest, at heart level. Breathe with your diaphragm (see above) and say a long "Ooooooh" starting with a high pitch and swooping down to the lowest pitch you have and then up again. Pay attention to the vibration on your chest - there will be a specific pitch level in which you feel more vibration than the others. This is your optimum pitch - the more vibration you can achieve the better. Practice speaking at or around this pitch (but NOT on a monotone!)

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