

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The power of Your voice

For group fitness instructors, the voice should be like an instrument which, when properly played, will allow you to charm and engage your audience. **Greg Sellar** outlines the essential skills and techniques to using your voice effectively.

The first step in training your voice is to improve your voice power. Your voice should be energetic and offer a pleasant sound. It should not be tense, nervous or weak. Here are a few exercises to improve your voice power and control.

Inhalation exercise one

1. Lie on your back on the ground. Take a deep breath and feel your chest and abs expand upwards. Do not contract your abdominal muscles in any way and notice that your shoulders do not move.
2. Take another deep breath and feel your entire chest and abdominal area expand. Your chest should expand outwards, not upwards (as you tend to do when you're standing) and you should feel your back extensors and lateral flexors lengthen as well. This is the kind of breathing you want to achieve while instructing.

Inhalation exercise two

1. Pretend that the air is really heavy as you inhale. Visualise it weighing 20kg and let it fall low into your body.
2. Let it fall lower than your belly button. Explore this sensation.
3. Then let the breath fall in faster. Still visualise it being heavy but let it fall quickly into your body.
4. You can also fill your lungs as if you are going to blow up a balloon. You will

feel your abdomen and lower back expand. This sensation of quickly filling your lungs with air is how you properly inhale for instructing.

Exhalation exercise one

1. Light a candle and hold it 20cm away from your face.
2. Take a deep breath, keeping your shoulders and chest steady.
3. As you exhale, blow gently on the flame to make it bend but not flicker.
4. Continue the steady stream of air to keep the flame bent, counting silently to see how long you can bend the flame. This breathing exercise for instructors helps you to develop the control needed when you deliver cues while out of breath. If you can bend the flame for the count of five the first time, try to make it to six the next time, and so on.

Exhalation exercise two

1. Look at a clock with a seconds' hand.
2. Take a reasonably sized breath and say "ah". Try to use up all your breath in a five-second span. That's exactly five seconds – no more, no less.
3. Repeat as many times as you like, using larger or smaller breaths. Again, the goal is to use up all the air in five seconds.





The above breathing exercise teaches instructors to focus their breath and avoid wasting air. Try it again, using a longer time period than five seconds. It may help to visualise filling the room with all of your sound, while using up your breath completely. With sufficient practice, you'll achieve a clearer, focused sound and better breath management.

Your voice should be energetic and offer a pleasant sound

10 slow exhalations

Start by taking a deep breath. Now let it out slowly in a constant stream. It helps to imagine that you are breathing out through a very thin straw and the air is escaping so slowly that it doesn't appear as if you're breathing at all. Even if a candle were placed close to your mouth it should hardly flicker as you exhale. Do this 10 times.

Five exhalations changing pitch

On the next five breaths, choose a comfortable sound and hold it during the entire breath. Try not to let it change in pitch or volume. Choose a sound in a comfortable pitch somewhere in your normal speaking register. Low notes are recommended for this breathing technique because they help the throat relax. Change the pitch for each outward breath.

Five exhalations changing pitch and volume

Now do another five of these but this time gradually change the volume of each sound from zero up to a medium volume and then take it back down to zero before the end of the breath. Select a different pitch for each breath. In this breathing technique,

all that is changing is the volume and that should be changing so slowly that the rate of change is almost undetectable.

Five exhalations changing pitch, volume and tone

For the last set of five breaths (making a total of 25), do everything you did in the previous five but change the timbre (tone) of your voice at a faster rate than the volume is changing. To do this, sweep through the vowels: a, e, i, o, u. The change should be gradual and in any order you wish. You're probably asking yourself how these breathing exercises help and want to know why the benefits are immediate. By concentrating on keeping your voice constant, you focus on what your body needs to do to deliver cues with clarity while moving. Let's face it, vocal tone is probably the most common and important concern of instructors and their participants when it comes to vocal delivery. A side benefit of doing this breathing exercise is that it pumps extra oxygen into your brain. This is great, because the more oxygen in your brain, the better you think and are able to focus on the task at hand: delivering a great class.

Not talking is a useful teaching technique. Believe it or not, talking is more of a strain on your voice than instructing in class (if you're doing it right of course). Many West End theatre stars are under contract to not utter a word on the day of the show until after the singing performance ends. This means that, if you want to be a successful instructor, you have to learn to breathe, to focus and shut up! Your voice is unique to you and you alone. Remember this, and the fact that you only have one. Once it's gone, it's gone. We see many instructors develop nodules on their vocal chords which eventually go on to affect their speech in later life. Look after your voice and it will make your career. Ignore it and it will almost certainly break it. **fp**

Look after your voice

Think of your voice as one of the most important tools you have as a trainer, says leading voice coach Priscilla Morris. A class requires the message being delivered to be loud, clear and interesting. Let's look at each one individually.

Be loud

- Consider the size of the space and group
- Mentally focus on throwing the voice
- **DO NOT FORCE** (i.e., SHOUT) as this will result in a harsh tone which is not clear and weakens the vocal cords
- **PROJECT** by expanding the chest using the intercostal muscles (between the ribs). While swinging the ribs upwards and outwards, the domed diaphragm will be lowered and extra breath drawn into the lungs. This is then expelled by using the abdomen to control the outflow and push the vocal note forward on a strong column of air
- Feel the power of the note resonate in the upper chest and head



Be clear

- **OPEN YOUR MOUTH**
- Make sure the muscles in your mouth, lips and tongue are strong and flexible.
- Improve clarity by taking your time and making all consonants firmly
- **DON'T RUSH – BE ACCURATE**

Be interesting

- This involves moving your voice about on your full range of notes
- Think **MUSICAL**
- Practise scales – singing and speaking
- Remember to emphasise key words to point the message
- Don't be monotonous or repeat patterns of notes
- Vary the pace but never speak too fast for your group to follow.

For more information about Priscilla Morris, visit www.loudandclearuk.com