

Vocal Exercises for Storytellers

Vocal and Facial Exercises

The main tool for a storyteller is the voice. Think of it as an instrument, and learn how to care for it. The voice is a part of the whole body. It is important to loosen up all of the body and give special attention to the vocal chords.

The voice is projected through the vocal chords. Yet, other parts of the body impact the voice before it comes out as sound. Your voice can be deep and booming, nasally, or squeaky, depending on how you use your body. The body does more than just channel the voice when you tell stories. We use gestures, assume postures, and create characters with our bodies. When you tell a tale, plan to use the entire body.

Before performing, take the time to relax your body and exercise your vocal chords. This gives you time to center yourself and release any stress prior to the performance. Take thirty minutes, or so, just to take care of yourself.

Start with some stretches. Stretching releases muscle tension. As a storyteller you need to be loose and relaxed to allow full control over your voice and body. Possibly start on the ground stretching your legs, back and hips, then move to the upper body. Be sure to stretch your neck and shoulders well. If you don't have a stretching routine, consider getting some help planning a routine.

Plant your feet shoulder width apart and with a slight bounce with bent knees and arms hanging loose, twist at your waist. This helps get you grounded. Then plant your feet firmly on the ground. Be aware of your full weight. Take deep breaths. When inhaling, imagine your chest expanding to the place where the ceiling and wall come together in front of you. At the same time feel your tail bone moving towards the floor and wall behind you. Make sure your spine is straight and head and shoulders are not tipped forward. This will bring you into your body and create a sense of expansiveness. When you take the stage you will fill your space more fully. When doing this we fill our lungs to full capacity and get in touch with the volume of air we have at our disposal.

Doing vocal warm-ups is very important. Make sure to use your full tonal range when warming up your voice. Play with the sounds you make. Move your mouth muscles to exaggerate each sound and syllable. Try not articulating well. Puff your cheeks out and say things. This is a time to really explore your voice, where can it go, what can it do. Try to speak from your stomach or from your head, notice the difference in sound, volume and tone. Experiment with volume carefully. You do not want to strain your voice. Go for volume in the tonal ranges that are neither too high or too low but in the middle of your range. We strain our voices most at the extreme ends of our vocal range. Like stretching, if you have never experimented with vocal exercises seek someone out to help you.

Finally, make certain sure to take time to be still and quiet. Give yourself some positive affirmations. Think how much you like the audience you will perform for. This is not a time for being critical of yourself. If critical voices come up, notice them and let them go. The main thing you want to feel at the end of this time is peaceful self-acceptance and readiness to perform. Then, tell your stories. You will be at your best!

