

Relaxed Posture

Your posture affects everything you do as a singer, from your ability to breathe well and support sound to the amount of tension you hold in your back, shoulders, and neck. It also affects your audience's perception of you. Careless slouching or frightened rigidity does not convey confidence. You need to stand up straight and give your lungs plenty of room to expand, while keeping your muscles free and relaxed. Step one is to shed whatever tension you brought with you to your warm-up.

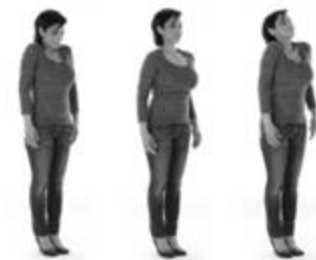


To begin, stand comfortably, with your feet about shoulder-width apart and your knees unlocked. Take a deep, relaxed breath. Exhale gently, bending forward at the waist as far as you can without any strain or effort. Let your hands dangle as though you are pointing at your toes, but don't strain or stretch to reach your toes. Close your eyes and let your neck muscles go limp. Think of your body as a soft rag doll.



Notice and enjoy the relaxing sensation of gentle stretching in the muscles of your back and in the backs of your legs. Inhaling slowly, stand back up gradually and smoothly. Think of the incoming breath filling you up, letting that inflation push you back into an upright position one vertebra at a time.

Once you are upright, exhale, sighing gently. Feel free to repeat this process right away and at any time during your warm-up, to ease any tension you may be feeling.



Next, close your eyes, taking a deep relaxed breath and letting out in a long, soft sigh that drops in pitch. Starting at 50, count backward, slowly, to zero, breathing deeply as needed. As you count, relax and roll your shoulders slowly and gently. Then drop your chin toward your chest and let it rest there for a moment. Next, move your head up, as though you're moving your eyes from the foundation to the top of an extremely tall building. Reverse the move, stopping with your chin on your chest.

Without looking up or raising your shoulders, raise your arms above your head and point your fingers at the ceiling. Keeping your arms relaxed, begin shaking them gently. Keep that gentle shaking motion going as you gradually lower your arms to your sides.

Relaxing Your Face

The small muscles of your face need a little attention as well. With your front teeth just far enough apart to insert your fingertip, close your lips and inhale through your nose. Exhale through your mouth, letting your lips part just enough to let out a gentle stream of air while still inflating your cheeks.



Shape your mouth as though you are about to say "oo," as in moon. Exaggerate the "oo" shape as much as you can.



Now take a deep yawning breath, move your mouth slowly from the exaggerated "oo" to a wide-open, dropped-jaw "ah" shape.

Feel the relaxed stretch of your facial muscles. Take a moment and then repeat. You may repeat this exercise at any point in your warm-up or practice session to ease facial tension.

If you decide to use this facial warm-up as a mid-rehearsal or mid-gig relaxation tool, be sure to turn away from your colleagues or hold a sheet of music in front of your face. Aside from creating a rather odd appearance, the yawning face you make could give the unfortunate impression that you are bored to distraction with what's going on around you.



Your last facial exercise is a simple smile. Start by bringing your lips into a smile. Let the smile broaden to spread across your face, until your teeth are showing and you can feel the smile in the skin around your eyes. Let your grin fade to a closed-lipped, subtle smile. That slightly lifted face of your subtle smile will help brighten the sound of your voice.

VOCAL WARM-UPS

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Warm-Up 6

Limbering Up Your Sound

The same gentle sigh you used earlier is going to be used for this vocal wake-up. Take a deep, relaxed breath and let out an audible sigh. Although you weren't thinking about singing, you began the sigh on a spoken pitch and essentially slid downward in pitch from there. Breathe and sigh again, this time using that same pitch and singing the sigh. Notice the difference in feel and air support as you sing the downward slide instead of speaking it.



Track 1

Listen to the singer in Track 1 perform this sung-sigh warm-up. Notice that the first and last notes of the sigh are sustained slightly.

Perform the sung-sigh warm-up, choosing whatever starting note feels natural to you. Make the downward slide as smooth as possible and stay as relaxed as you were on the first sigh. Do at least three sighs.

This is also a good relaxation exercise to insert as needed into your practice sessions.