

Vocal Variety - Your Speaking Voice

The Medium of Your Message

Your greatest tool as a speaker is your voice. Every time you address an audience your mind, your body and your voice act as partners in the task of getting your message across to your listeners. When you speak, your voice is the primary link between you and your listeners - it's the medium of your message.

The importance of having an effective voice isn't restricted to public speaking. A good, controlled voice is an asset in every contact with others. Your voice mirrors your personality with a language all its own - a language that people recognise and respond to immediately. A natural voice that projects an image of cordiality, cultivation and authority is a significant tool for personal success. It can help in gaining promotions, making sales, winning the respect of others and improving your social opportunities, as well as in speaking effectively to audiences.

When you speak, your voice reflects your psychological and emotional state of mind. You can't hope to persuade or influence others - or even get them to listen in a positive way - if your tones are harsh, scolding and unfriendly. Such a voice can repel even when the speaker wishes to attract. The quality of friendliness is a prime requisite for a good speaking voice.

Remember - always speak with a **Smile**.

Characteristics of A Good Speaking Voice

One of your goals as a speaker should be to develop a voice that has the following qualities:

- It is **pleasant**, conveying a sense of warmth.
- It is **natural**, reflecting your true personality and sincerity.
- It is **dynamic**, giving the impression of force and strength - even when it isn't especially loud.
- It is **expressive**, portraying various shades of meaning and never sounding monotonous or without emotion.
- It is **easily heard**, thanks to proper volume and clear articulation.

How Your Voice Is Created

Before you undertake the development or improvement of your speaking voice, it's important that you undertake how speech sounds are produced. It is this process that you can change in order to improve your speech. As you read the explanation of the process, you may wish to refer to the diagram in figure 1 below.

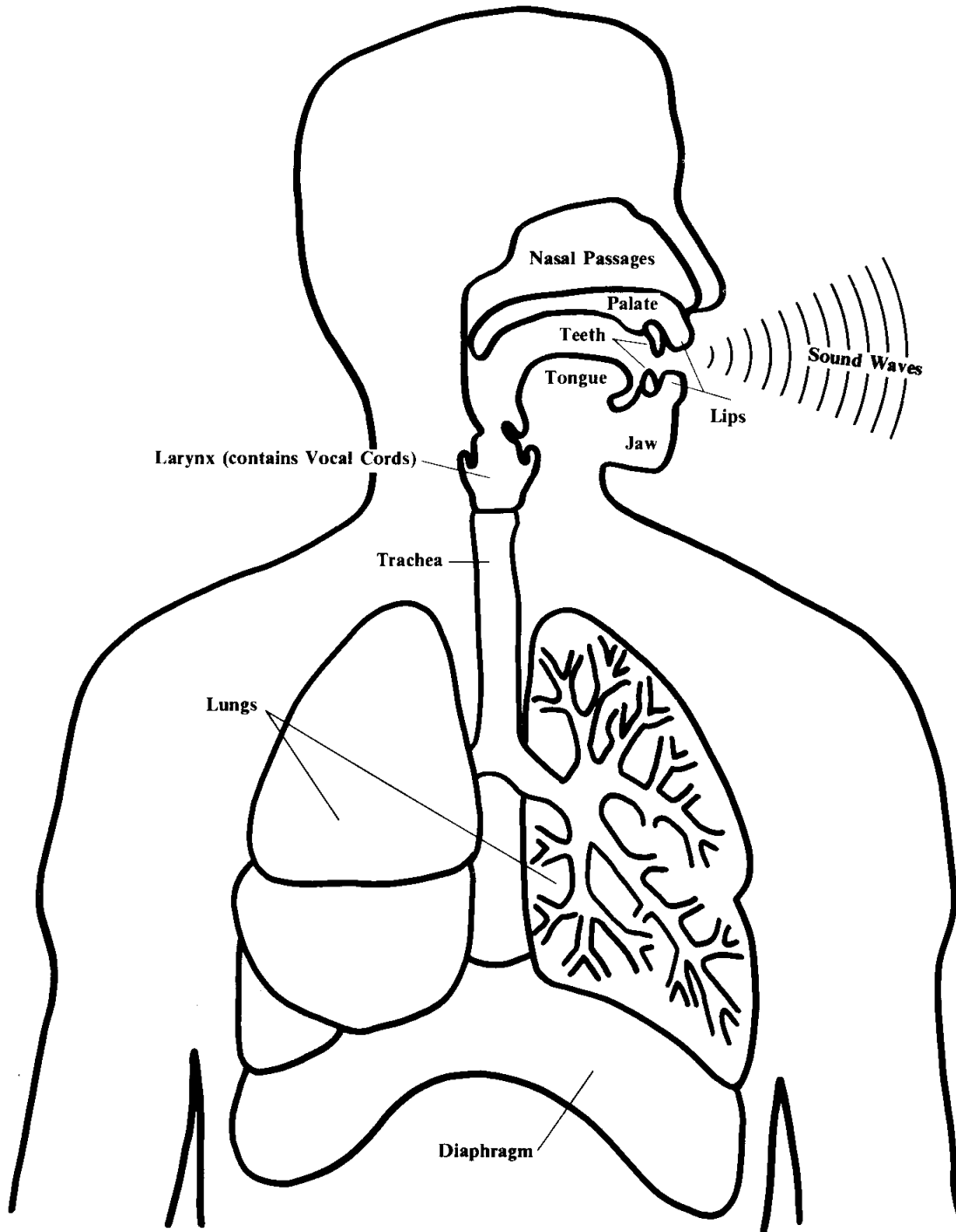


Figure 1 - Structures for Speech Production

Breathe Produces Voice

Deep, controlled breathing is necessary for good vocal production. Your voice is supported by a column of air, the depth and steadiness of which determines your vocal quality. Think of the diaphragm as the foundation on which this air column rests and by which it is controlled as it comes upward to meet the vocal organs.

When you breathe in, your abdominal wall expands, and the dome-shaped diaphragm flattens. When you exhale, the diaphragm relaxes and the abdominal wall contracts. The relaxed diaphragm rises, pushing air out of the lungs. The exhaled air provides the controlled production of speech sounds.

As the air pushes upward against the vocal cords, it causes them to momentarily separate, allowing the air to pass between them. The rush of air and the elasticity of the vocal cords then pulls them back together. The production of these vibrations is called phonation.

Consider how sound is produced at the mouth of an inflated balloon. Vocal sound is produced in a similar manner. Air pressure comes up through the throat, mouth and nose, causing a continuous pressure change in the air surrounding the speaker. These pressure changes are called sound waves; they are transmitted to the ear of the listener, and the voice is heard.

Production of Voice Quality

Think for a moment about musical woodwind and brass instruments. Their sound comes from the musician's breath and lip vibrations or the vibration of a reed in the mouthpiece. Because the chambers of these instruments differ in size and shape, their tone qualities are distinctive. Different parts of the original tone are increased, or resonated, and other parts are reduced.

Human resonance is the increasing or modifying of sounds by the throat, nose and mouth. The sound waves created by the vibration of the vocal cords travel into the upper part of the throat, then to the mouth and, at times, into the nose. As these waves bounce around within these structures, they are reinforced and amplified.

The differences in people's voices arise from the size of the vocal cords and the effects that the resonators (throat, mouth, nasal passages) have on the vocal tone. To a certain extent a speaker can change the size, shape and surface tensions of the pharynx and the oral cavity; he or she may also use, partly use or close off the nasal cavities.

Spice Up Your Speaking with Vocal Variety

There are four ways in which you can spice up your speaking voice. These are:

- Pitch
- Duration
- Pause
- Volume

Pitch Variety

There are five types of pitch changes you can make within words. The arrows below indicate whether the voice goes up, down or remains level in the examples:

No change in inflection

Johnny →

Inflection up or rising pitch

Johnny ↗

Inflection down or lowering pitch

Johnny ↘

Inflection up and down or raising and lowering pitch

Johnny ↗↘

Inflection down and up or lowering and raising pitch

Johnny ↘↗

Practice the following words and sentences and change the pitch as indicated

hello →

goodbye →

hello ↗

goodbye ↗

hello ↘

goodbye ↘

Duration Variety

Duration refers to the amount of time you take to say a word. You can change the meaning and importance of words by saying them quickly or drawing them out. Try this while you read the following poem.

War Is Kind

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
Do not weep.
War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,
Little souls who thirst for right,
These men were born to drill and die.
The unexplained glory flies above them,
Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom
A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.
Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,
Do not weep.
War is kind.

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,
Eagle with crest of red and gold,
These men were born to drill and die.
Point for them the virtue of slaughter,
Make plain to them the excellence of killing
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,
Do not weep.
War is kind.

Stephen Crane

Pause Variety

Pauses are periods of silence between words and phrases. Their function is to separate ideas and hold attention. Read the following selection, and pause at each dash. Then take a selection from a book, magazine or newspaper and do the same.

The whole fury and might - or the enemy - must very soon be turned on us.
Hitler knows - that he will have to break us in this island - or lose the war.
If we - can stand up to him - all Europe - may be free and the life of the world may move forward - into broad sunlit uplands. -
But if we fail - then the whole world - including the United States - including all that we have known and cared for - will sink into the abyss - of a new dark age - made more sinister - and perhaps more protracted by the lights of perverted science.
Let us therefore - brace ourselves to our duties - and so bear ourselves that - if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years - men will say
“This - was their finest hour.”

Winston S. Churchill

Loudness or Volume Variety

Remember to use diaphragmatic respiration to project volume. As you read the following speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., interpret what words should be spoken loudly and which ones softly.

I Have A Dream

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations.
Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells.
Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality....

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our Northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self evident; that all men are created equal. . .

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today....

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

Martin Luther King Jr