

I'm ready to perform." Start in the middle of the range, from about D to D, then gradually extending up and down. Weiss likes to incorporate lip trills—rolling your lips while blowing air through them, which makes the familiar "bblllbbb" sound. "I start with lip trills because they get the air going properly. They get the vocal folds working without tension, and they force you to let go of your jaw. They'll make your lips loose, and they get some of the muscles in the face worked, too."

Next, she uses scales. "I usually start with scales, up and down, on different vowels. I'll try to warm up on all my vowels."

Weiss also recommends portamentos, which are a slide up or down from a previous note. These are very good for control, and Weiss recommends doing them on different vowels.

"I also do some arpeggios, and I always try to end with some staccato," Weiss continues.

Arpeggios should be sung smoothly, and staccato requires notes to be sounded separately.

"Staccato is really good for getting the brain ready to sing because you have to hear the note before you sing it," Weiss says. "When you do staccato, you have just that split second to get it right. It's a great thing to end with."

Another tip Weiss offers is humming—it's good for your voice and body. "Very often, when people get nervous they'll start humming, and it helps to calm them down," she says.

"You want to get your whole body ready. The whole body is your voice in a way," Weiss says. "Be aware of tight muscles that are affecting your larynx." To get relaxed, Weiss recommends stretching, and she emphasizes maintaining good body alignment. She uses yoga stretches before a performance to help with relaxation and alignment.

Most important, says Weiss, are mental warm-ups. "Get yourself centered before you start singing," she says. "Some people get centered by doing breathing exercises; some people meditate. I like to do a thing where I sit down and put my elbows on my knees and just sit there folded up. From this position, I breathe perfectly and it helps me sing better."

Finally, think about what you're singing. "If you're not thinking about what the words mean, your voice really won't get its true beauty," Weiss says.

"Singing is 90 percent mental. We think the note, and the vocal folds get ready for that particular note," Weiss explains. Try practicing silently. "If you can't hear internally exactly what you want to come out, then it's impossible to make it come out," she continues. "Imagine yourself singing perfectly and then sing along with that." *AFM*

Easy Exercises: Actors

Ursula Meyer is an actress who also teaches voice and text in the University of California, San Diego's professional actor training program and spends many summers as voice and text director for professional companies such as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She is a designated Linklater teacher, but she also incorporates other well-known voice training methods into her teaching. Mastering proper voice techniques takes time—sometimes years—but Meyer offers some very basic warm-up exercises to practice that can help improve performance. These exercises are a very simplified version of what she teaches in her classes, but they can serve as a primer to someone who hasn't learned her full method. While these techniques are geared toward the speaking voice, singers can benefit, too:

1. Do some physical exercise to get the breath going: jogging in place, swings, jumping jacks, et cetera.
2. Stretch to make room for more breath: stretch sideways, forward and back (hands above head or behind back). Make sure to exhale with all stretches. Feel free to yawn during all this; it relaxes the throat and jaw and massages the voice.
3. To get the breath going, do some simple body shakes with an unvoiced "ff," "sh" or "s." Shake your arms, legs or shoulders if you are standing up. Use your hands to shake your stomach muscles, chest, or ribcage if you are lying down. Then add voiced sirens, "heeeee," "hooo" or "haaaaa," sliding from high pitch to low and still shaking to loosen and free the sound.
4. Loosen the lips with a stretch or a lip flutter and then add a humming siren. Move from high to low on a hum, then open your hum up to an "ah" as you slide down. Take your hums onto actual (singing) pitches, starting at middle C. Go down a few notes first and back up several notes ("mmah, mmah").
5. Massage your jaw with your hands. Continue shaking with sirens, and yawn more if you can.
6. Send your voice out by throwing your arm or pointing and simultaneously making sounds like "hey," "no," "yess." Make sure to change your pitches. Add more stretches if you need them—neck side to side or shoulder circles.
7. Move your tongue around in a circle then up down, right and left. Say "blabbel blabbel blah."
8. Warm up the articulators with simple exercises: "be bay by bo bu." Changing consonants, say "Topeka-bodega" several times. Say the name "Peggy Babcock" faster and faster. Make sure to stay physical.
9. Move to more difficult tongue twisters (there are plenty to choose from in books and online), then try a piece of tricky text or a little song. Stand in alignment and go back to a simple exhalation. You are ready to go!

