



Funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



Shaping the Interpreters  
of the Future and of Today  
[www.shiftinorality.eu](http://www.shiftinorality.eu)



**SHIFT in Orality preparatory materials – Intellectual Output 5**  
Juana Muñoz López (UGR) and Emilia Iglesias Fernández (UGR)

---

## VOCAL HYGIENE

---

Remote Interpreters are voice users who must perform under extremely taxing emotional and physical conditions in highly demanding technical media. The physical pressure impacts the body and vocal delivery in particular. The pressure to deliver correctly and perform effectively under these conditions is extremely taxing both mentally and physically. Additionally, a pleasant voice is expected of interpreters in order to connect with their audience.

Vocal hygiene or voice coaching/training addresses these challenges by developing a set of habits and techniques to prevent voice disorders and vocal fatigue. Unfortunately, many professionals suffer from voice disorders due to ignorance of good vocal practice and voice abuse.

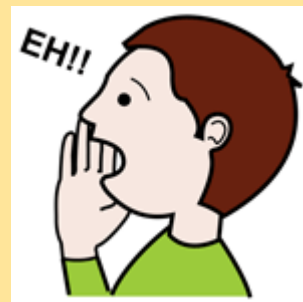
Remote interpreting places some unique demands on the voice that are not present in other forms of interpreting. Besides the additional noise of the technical channel, interpreters are engaged in an activity with a high cognitive load, increased and sustained intensity for long periods of time in demanding technical media which leads to increased tension and vocal stress. Consequently, there are negative implications for the voice such as higher rates of fatigue and vocal abuse.

This session will present a set of exercises and long-term habits which must be adjusted to the individual needs of the users, as each interpreter develops specific bad voice habits depending on the daily time they devote to interpreting and their life-style. The following principles may help interpreters improve their vocal health.

## VOCAL ABUSE BEHAVIORS

In order to take care of your voice, a set of vocal behaviours are exemplified which should be avoided because they negatively impact vocal health:

- Avoid speaking loudly, screaming and shouting. Do not deliver onomatopoeic sounds or emulate other people's speaking style;
- Avoid whispering, as it puts tensions on the larynx and can lead to vocal cord swelling;
- Avoid speaking too fast;
- Avoid coughing, throat clearing, strong sneezing, loud blowing of one's nose and loud bursts of laughter;
- Try to use the microphone when speaking in public, and use new technologies;
- Avoid using a monotonous tone;
- Avoid speaking without clear vocalisation as this puts pressure on the larynx.
- Avoid speaking during strenuous physical exercise (cycling, running, weight lifting, etc.);
- Avoid producing vocal bursts;
- Monitor and use an adequate pitch, neither too high nor too low. An adequate tone is one which requires minimum effort while achieving maximum effect;
- When singing, do not force your pitch and intensity. Try and find a tone that is comfortable for you;
- The voice should come from the abdomen. Do not speak from your throat as this puts a lot of pressure on the shoulders and the cervical spine;
- Practice warm-ups before making use of your voice by gently humming on a comfortable tone and producing buzzing sounds or sighing lightly on a soft "ahhhhh" feeling completely relaxed;
- Take resting pauses after speaking for an hour. Pauses should be 10 to 15 minutes long.



Illustrated by Sergio Palao. Images of the collection ARASAAC (government of Aragón-Spain). License Creative Commons (BY-NC-SA).

## VOCAL CORD LUBRIFICATION

Local lubrication and hydration can be topical (water in the vocal fold mucosa) and systematic (intracellular water). Hydration is crucial for voice endurance and reduced phonation pressure.

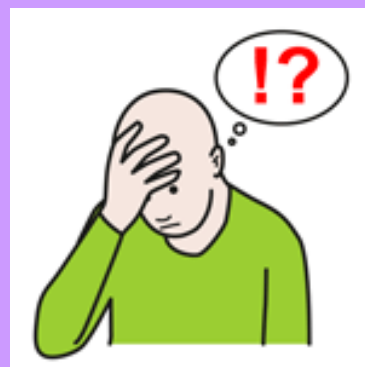
- Drink 2 litres of water (still water) daily (8 to 10 glasses of water);
- Keep the water in your mouth for a while before swallowing. This will keep the pharynx, nose and throat hydrated;
- Before extensive vocal use and after intensive vocal production, gargle with ginger juice or camomile tea and honey;
- Before extensive vocal use and after intensive vocal production, breath over a steaming pot // direct steam inhalation.



## EFFECTS OF STRESS AND EMOTION ON THE VOICE

Dysphonia can be associated with stress and anxiety. There are times in our lives when pressure builds up and this unrecognised stress takes its toll on our voice. Under periods of stress, the muscles that control the voice box (larynx) become tense. Prolonged muscle tension in the voice box can lead to a lack of coordination of vocal fold vibration.

- Avoid talking in situations that lead to increased muscular tension, stress, fits of anger, anxiety and alarm;
- Avoid exerting excessive tension in the vocal tract, (voice box, throat, mouth), facial muscles and neck when talking as this can lead to stiffness of the throat resulting in voice strain;
- Avoid clenching your teeth, tensing your jaw or tongue during speech. Keep a space between your teeth;
- Engage in leisure activities that help you release emotional tensions;
- Loosen the vocal chords first by releasing tension around the vocal muscles. Practice diction exercises to activate the resonators in the lip, tongue, palate and oral cavity. This will keep your resonators flexible.



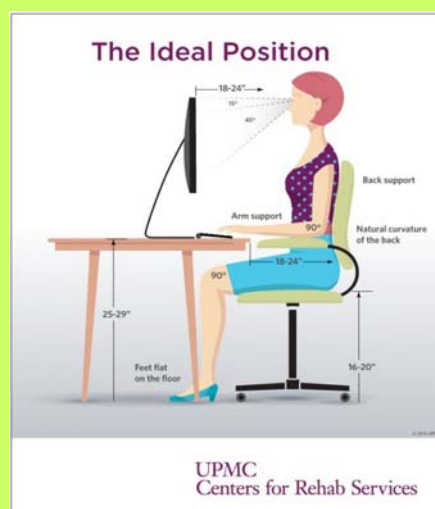
Illustrated by Sergio Palao. Images of the collection ARASAAC (government of Aragón-Spain). License Creative Commons (BY-NC-SA).

## BODY POSITION AND BREATHING

Adequate posture plays a very important role in bringing out the correct tonal quality. Always have a straight posture, i.e. sit firmly on the chair, shoulder-width apart with a straight spine. Never have a hunchback, do not raise the chin up and down.

Practice proper breathing through the nose. Fill the chest with air from the bottom of the lungs. Reverse this process by releasing the air from the lungs and emptying them top down to exhale. This is called deep breathing.

- Breathe deeply through the nose and cleanse the nose with physiological saline solution;
- Avoid holding your breath while thinking about what to say next;
- If breathing is too short you may end up breathless in mid speech, which exerts tension;
- Keep an upright position while talking;
- Use adequate chair;
- Talk looking at the audience, do not speak when turned away from your listeners;
- Do not cross your legs while talking, keep your feet apart at shoulder width. Do not put strain on your neck;
- Use loose clothes when talking for long periods of time.





## UNHEALTHY HABITS

- Get plenty of rest to allow your body to heal itself. Regularly sleeping eight hours at night is a healthy option;
- Avoid drinking coffee, but if you do drink coffee or hot tea with caffeine, make sure you drink one glass of water per cup of coffee or tea to help counteract the dehydration your body experiences from the effects of caffeine;
- Do not smoke and avoid exposure to second-hand smoke.



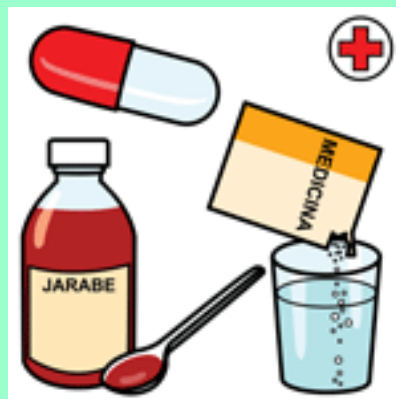
## AVOID CERTAIN DRUGS

Some medications can have dehydrating effects, particularly when making extensive use of the voice.

- Many common medications decrease secretions, including saliva production, and may result in an excessively dry throat.

Some examples include antihistamines, tricyclic antidepressants, and antispasmodics. Many drugs used to treat Parkinson's disease, overactive bladder, and chronic bronchitis can also cause a problem.

- Avoid taking aspirin, or antihistamines, or consult your doctor. Aspirin may cause haemorrhaging;
- If you're uncertain about the effects of any medications, it's best to consult your doctor.



Illustrated by Sergio Palao. Images of the collection ARASAAC (government of Aragón-Spain). License Creative Commons (BY-NC-SA).



## VOICE PERFORMANCE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- Do not put your voice under stress when you are in noisy environments such as bars, night clubs, while on the mobile phone, or using public transport. Do not talk or sing over background noise. Voice loudness tends to increase in these situations leading to a sore throat;
- Avoid using chemical products around the house or at work (e.g. air fresheners, insecticide sprays, etc.);
- Avoid rooms where the heating or air conditioning is very high. Exposure to these dry environments dehydrates your vocal folds;
- Make sure that there is enough humidity in your environment both at home and at work. Having plants around and a bowl of water on top of the radiator or near a heat source are good options;
- Avoid dusty environments. Dust irritates the mucosa of the larynx;
- Avoid drastic changes of temperature.



Illustrated by Sergio Palao. Images of the collection ARASAAC (government of Aragón-Spain). License Creative Commons (BY-NC-SA).

## A HEALTHY DIET FOR A HEALTHY VOICE

A regular intake of fruits, vegetables and whole cereals keeps the voice box and phonatory organs moist and flexible. Foods rich in vitamins A, C and E help keep the mucous membranes healthy.

- Avoid food and drinks that are too cold or too hot as they contract and stiffen the throat and voice;
- Avoid eating spicy or fried food and limit sparkling drinks;
- Drink plenty of water.
- Increase your intake of foods rich in vitamins A, B, E, D and C;
- Eat smaller amounts and more frequently;
- Aim for a healthy weight;
- Manage acid reflux (gastroesophageal reflux) by not laying down immediately after meals and consulting with your doctor.
- Stimulate the salivary glands by sucking on lemon, honey, marshmallow or liquorice-flavoured hard candies;
- Avoid mints and mint-flavoured candies;
- Sipping lukewarm tea with lemon and sugar is a good option before vocal performance.



Illustrated by Sergio Palao. Images of the collection ARASAAC (government of Aragón-Spain). License Creative Commons (BY-NC-SA).

## THE VOICE AND HORMONAL CHANGES

Hormonal changes throughout life may have major effects on the sound quality of the voice. And the same has been observed when thyroid problems occur. If you are suffering from any of these problems you should bear in mind that:

- Hormonal changes, particularly those related to the menstrual cycle, may lead to dysphonia (speech disorder that impairs the production of voice sounds): hoarse, breathy or harsh voice;
- Very drastic changes to voice quality may occur during menopause, including dryness of the mucous lining of the larynx;
- If you are taking birth control pills, you may suffer from some problems with your voice.

## VOCAL HEALTH

It's important to learn to identify the first symptoms of vocal fatigue. Pay a visit to the doctor if the symptoms of throat hoarseness or flu persist. If you are already feeling these symptoms you should take these tips into consideration:

- Do not stress your voice nor raise it if you are suffering from a dry, sore throat or when your throat is swollen;
- Avoid talking or singing when you are suffering from a cold, flu, hoarseness;
- Rest and spare your voice for three days if you are suffering from acute laryngitis;
- If you lose your voice or your throat is extremely sore for more than 15 days, visit an ear, nose and throat specialist.



Illustrated by (figure 1 y 2) Sergio Palao. Images of the collection ARASAAC (government of Aragón-Spain). License Creative Commons (BY-NC-SA).

## Bibliography

Barbara Weinrich, B, Gottliebson, R.O. & Wendy, W.D. (2012). *Vocal Hygiene: Maintaining a Sound Voice*, 2nd Edition. USA. Plural Publishing.

Behlau, M., Oliveira, G. (2009). Vocal hygiene for the voice professional. *Current opinion in otolaryngology & neck surgery*, 17(3), pp. 149-154.

Borragán Torre, A., Barrio del Campo, J.A. del y Gutiérrez Fernández, J.N. (1998). *El juego Vocal para prevenir problemas de voz en contextos escolares*. Santander: Gobierno de Cantabria – Consejería de Educación y Juventud.

Rodero, E., Diaz-Rodriguez, C. & Larrea, O. (2018). "Prologues to a Bad Voice": Effect of Vocal Hygiene Knowledge and Training on Voice Quality Following Stage Performance. *Journal of Voice*, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 300–306.

Sapienza, C.M. & Hoffman, B. (2017). *Voice Disorders*, Third ed. USA. Plural Pub Inc

van Wyk, L., Cloete, M., Hattingh, D., van der Linde, J & Geertsema, S. (2017). The Effect of Hydration on the Voice Quality of Future Professional Vocal Performers. *Journal of Voice*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 111.e29–111.e36.