

Vocal warm-up exercises

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Jeanette Nelson: You are now going to see some actors warming up their voices. We always begin vocal warm-up with breathing exercises to organise the breathing muscles and to extend the capacity of the breath, as well as getting a sense of the breath very deep inside the body. OK, shall we stretch out? Grab your arm, pull your back. Any way you like. So we're opening up the ribs, pulling out of the shoulders and the pelvis and just getting a sense of freedom in the shoulders. OK.

Actor: Both wrists?

Jeanette Nelson: Yes. Great. And when you're done, let's stand up. Nice, soft knees and ankles and just flop over from the waist, to relax the neck and shoulders. Have a little bounce there, if you like. And then hang still and focus the breath into your belly and back. Just feel the back of the rib cage opening out as it stretches there against the breath. And then, quite slowly, rolling up again. Don't come too soon or you'll get a blood rush to the head. But as you come up, see if you can keep that sense of connection with the belly and the back. Breathing as you go. And bring the feet in under the hips and connect to the breath. And to get the breath even deeper, let's go down to the squat, shall we? It doesn't matter if your heels are on or off the ground. Lovely. A nice, round back. And now you're breathing very deeply. Not letting the shoulders come up. Right into the bottom of your body.

Actor: It's like breathing into the buttocks.

Jeanette Nelson: Yes, it is. Right down into the bum. Yes, absolutely. And you get what I call a little barrel of breathing around the belly and the back. Can you feel that? It's quite powerful. Yes, yes, that's it. And stable. So, when you come up again in a minute, don't come too fast because you're squashing the big blood vessels

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in your thigh and you'll get a blood rush. But as you come up, see if you can keep that connection to that very deep breath. So, drop your heels and raise your bum, hang over from the waist. Relax the neck, that will come up last with the head. And up you come, keeping the tummy soft. And bring your feet back in under your hips. Actually, that's the million-dollar question in breathing, isn't it? Do you hold your tummy tight? Let it go. Yes, if you don't let the tummy go, your diaphragm can't move up and down properly. Relax your tummy. Lovely. OK, let's do our first breathing exercises. We're going to do three long breath releases on an 's' to really feel the organisation of the breathing muscles. Off you go.

Actors: Ss-ss.

Jeanette Nelson: Slow as you like.

Actors: Ss-ss-ss.

Jeanette Nelson: Lovely. Ribs go down and then the belly comes in at the end. And then you release and breathe again.

Actors: Ss-ss-ss.

Jeanette Nelson: Lovely and steady. We do this at least three times.

Actors: Ss-ss-ss.

Jeanette Nelson: Great.

Actors: Ss-ss-ss.

Jeanette Nelson: And then a third time.

Actors: Ss-ss-ss.