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Singing Exercises

for
dummies[®]
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Expand your
vocal technique

Make sense of technical
singing concepts

Improve your
performance abilities

Pamelia S. Phillips

Professional singer and voice teacher



Singing Exercises

by Pamela S. Phillips, DMA

**for
dummies**
A Wiley Brand

Singing Exercises For Dummies®

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Introduction

Singing is an amazing sport that can provide you with hours of entertainment. But developing your singing skills takes time and practice. This book is here to help you expand your singing technique with exercises specifically designed to address the most common aspects of singing. These exercises provide a great practice routine for you to use every day or when you need to brush up on a skill. Whether you want to sing just for fun or you have dreams of breaking out as a singing sensation, *Singing Exercises For Dummies* is for you.

About This Book

Whether you sing pop music or you're auditioning for the local chorus, *Singing Exercises For Dummies* has what you need to refine your singing technique. The exercises in these pages, which range from easy to pretty hard, cover the most common topics in singing and are designed for any type of singer singing any style of music. They're also the same type of exercises that you may expect to sing during a voice lesson or in a singing class. If you can't afford to pay for lessons on a regular basis, this book can help you continue to refine your technique on your own at home.

In addition to exercises, [Chapters 5](#) through [14](#) also feature practice pieces — short songs I've written to help you practice applying a specific singing technique. They all have accompanying audio tracks and a singer who demonstrates the correct sounds for you so you know the sound that goes with the text that you read in the chapter. You will find these tracks on the book's website

at www.dummies.com/go/singingexercisesfd. The combination of exercises and practice pieces provides a variety of ways to practice your technique.

The audio tracks are demonstrations of the music figures you see in the chapters. Some of the tracks have only the piano playing the figure for you so that you can make the sounds on your own; the text in the chapter lets you know which tracks you won't hear a singer on.

I've organized the material so that you don't have to read the book from cover to cover. Instead, you can review the table of contents to find the technique you want or need to work on most and head straight to that section. For example, if you have trouble transitioning between different vocal registers, you can proceed directly to [Chapter 11](#) for help. Or you can work through all the practice exercises for a complete vocal workout that builds on itself.

Conventions Used in This Book

I use common singing terms throughout this book, but I define them for you in case you haven't seen them before. You can also expect to see the following conventions:

- » **Key signatures:** Each figure includes a key signature so you know exactly where to sing that particular pattern. Don't worry if you don't know key signatures; for those patterns with audio tracks, you can still follow along with the piano and/or singer.
- » **Pattern repetitions:** Most figures in the book show all the repetitions of the patterns, but some larger

figures show only the ascending or descending versions of the patterns. Rest assured that you can hear all the repetitions on the audio tracks.

- » **Phonetic spellings for vowels:** The English alphabet has five vowels — *A*, *E*, *I*, *O*, and *U*— but each of those vowels may make more than one sound based on how they're combined with other vowels or consonants in a word. I use the phonetic spellings of the various vowel sounds to help you understand exactly which vowel sound you're supposed to make. (**Note:** The sound the letter *a* makes in the word *cat* is different from the *a* in the word *father*. When you see this *a*, know that the vowel sound you're going for is like the *a* in *cat*.)
- » **Practice exercises and other figures:** Some of the figures in this book help you practice a particular exercise, and some of them provide basic singing information or practice for you. A black box with a track number tells you which exercises have an accompanying audio track. If you don't see a black track box, you know that example is a figure that's explained in the chapter but doesn't have audio.
Note: A lot of the time, music is written in treble clef for guys even though they sing the notes an octave lower. Guys, when you see the music written in treble clef, just know that you sing it down an octave unless instructed otherwise. In some exercises in the book, I ask you to sing the music as written — not down an octave.
- » **Singers on the tracks:** Many of the exercises have accompanying audio tracks where a singer demonstrates the sounds of the patterns for you. I include both male and female singers, as well as different voice types. The text accompanying each exercise tells you whether you hear a singer or you get to practice the figure on your own.

- » **Song lists:** At the end of most of the chapters in this book, I include a list of songs that you can use to help you practice the different techniques covered in the rest of the chapter. If a song's text is gender specific or if it's for a role that's gender specific, I mention that gender. Otherwise, I list *either*. You can work on any song you like, but you may want to note the gender-specific information if you want to perform the song. To help you learn a song, I recommend you get the sheet music first so you can practice singing along with the notation without hearing a recording. You can find sheet music at your local music store or online.

What You're Not to Read

Throughout the text, I include helpful tips for performing each exercise, but if you're in a hurry and you just want to get to singing, feel free to perform the exercises along with the audio tracks. You can always go back to the tips later.

Foolish Assumptions

I made the following assumptions about you when writing this book:

- » You really like singing and want some help with developing your technique.
- » You have some prior knowledge about singing — whether from singing in a choir, taking lessons, or reading my book *Singing For Dummies* (Wiley) — and you want to take your skills to the next level.
- » You sing all kinds of music and don't limit yourself to just one style (such as classical, country, pop, or gospel).

- » You'll use the audio tracks for a long time, which is why the exercises range from really easy to pretty hard. That way, they can keep you challenged now and later.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized into five parts, each of which contains specific topics about singing. Each chapter in the part contains details about how to develop that part of your singing technique with exercises that correspond to the explanation.

Part 1: Preparing Your Body for Practicing

Practicing singing is like practicing any other sport because you need to warm up your body and voice. After all, your singing voice will last longer during your practice session and won't tire out as easily if you take the time to warm up beforehand. [Chapter 1](#) is all about knowing what to do when you warm up.

[Chapter 2](#) helps you explore breathing so you can develop the physical coordination you need to manage any phrase in your song. It lists all the places that move when you breathe and explains how to control all those shifting muscles. The rest of the part is about vowels and consonants. [Chapter 3](#) guides you on shaping vowels, and [Chapter 4](#) helps you practice the proper articulation for consonants.

Part 2: Making Your Music Magical with Variety

Musical variety is what makes a song memorable. This part helps you discover several musical elements that can make your song sound great every time you sing it. [Chapter 5](#) tells you all about the most common intervals you find in songs. Knowing how to recognize intervals

and sing them allows you to get your new song ready fast.

[Chapter 6](#) helps you explore the most common rhythms seen in songs. The notation on the pages of classical music is exactly what you're supposed to sing. The rhythms in contemporary radio songs are often just suggestions because contemporary singers don't always sing what's on the page. However, if you don't know what's written on the page, you won't know how to change the rhythm to make it sound the way you want it to sound.

[Chapter 7](#) describes the elements you can use to make your songs unique. In it, you explore dynamics and discover what you need to do physically to sing softly or loudly. You also find out about the symbols that you see above the notes that tell you how to sing the notes — short or long, detached or connected — or even when to stop singing. This chapter also helps you work on improvisational techniques.

Part 3: Working Out Your Range

The chapters in this part work out the various areas of your singing voice from top to bottom. [Chapter 8](#) explores your chest voice — the lowest part of your singing voice. [Chapter 9](#) moves way up the scale and explores your head voice — the high part of your singing voice. [Chapter 10](#) moves to the middle area of your voice to help you work on your mix. (*Mix* is a word that you hear a lot in singing, and it can be used in a lot of different ways; [Chapter 10](#) tells you what it means to mix and how to do it.)

Last but not least, [Chapter 11](#) helps you figure out how to move between registers. When singers say they cracked when they tried to sing the high note, they're

really saying they didn't know how to handle the register transition. This chapter helps you practice moving between registers so you can smooth out the transitions.

Part 4: Advancing Your Singing Technique

Advancing your singing technique requires that you know not only the basics of singing but also how to finesse your tone. You make a unique sound when you sing, but you can always decide to change your tone, and [Chapter 12](#) tells you how. [Chapter 13](#) gets you moving fast with patterns for agility. *Agility* in singing is the ability to sing a phrase that has a lot of notes that move quickly. You need a combination of skill and courage to sing the notes quickly, and this chapter is full of exercises that get you on your way. [Chapter 14](#) is all about *belting* — singing with really forward resonance and a mixture of some head voice and chest voice. You want to know how to belt well so your voice stays healthy.

Part 5: The Part of Tens

One of the hallmarks of a *For Dummies* book is the Part of Tens, and this book is no exception. [Chapter 15](#) has you covered if you want to develop your practice routine from the first session when you try out the song to the performance. [Chapter 16](#) is full of answers to those questions you just don't know whom to ask (like "What shouldn't I eat before a performance?").

This part also houses a helpful appendix that tells you all about the various audio tracks found on this book's website. If you can't remember which track had the exercise for making a smooth crescendo, for example, turn to the appendix to find out quickly. When you flip to the chapter you need (in this case, [Chapter 7](#)), just look

for the black box that tells you which track goes with which exercise.

Icons Used in This Book

The three icons you see in the left-hand margin throughout the book are as follows:



REMEMBER This icon is to remind you of the fundamental concepts of singing.



TIP This icon highlights particularly helpful advice about singing the exercises.



WARNING This icon reminds you about what not to do and warns you about potential problems.

Where to Go from Here

If you're wondering where to head first, you can always start with [Chapter 1](#) and explore the chapters in order. Or you can move around and explore sections that interest you now. If you go that route, feel free to group exercises together to create your own practice routine to suit your interests.

The exercises on the audio tracks are played at the tempo that's best for practicing. After you know the exercise, you can sing it without the audio tracks at any tempo that you find interesting or challenging. Save any

exercises that you find too challenging for later, or break them into parts and work on only the easiest parts now. You can always sing along with the first portion of the track and then rewind and start over. As your skill develops, you may find that those harder exercises get more comfortable. If an exercise isn't in the right key for you, feel free to explore the exercise to get all the notes and then sing in the key that suits you best.

This book contains a lot of information and a lot of options for structuring your practice sessions. Don't be afraid to dive right in, and enjoy exploring your technique!

Part 1

Preparing Your Body for Practicing

IN THIS PART ...

This part has information to help you develop your warm-up and get your body ready for practicing. You may be tempted to just rush through your warm-up, but I'm telling you now, "Don't!" After all, the warm-up can make a big difference in your practice session when you know how to use it. Start by physically preparing your body with stretching and positioning. Then focus on mastering the physical coordination necessary for proper breathing while singing. Take your time working through the chapter on breathing to make sure you know exactly what to do for any phrase.

Shaping your tongue and lips for vowels and consonants is something you do every day whether you're singing or not. However, you have to be more precise with your lip and tongue movements in singing if you want your audience to understand you. So be sure to review the chapters on vowels and consonants because they contain lots of exercises to help you practice making just the right shapes and sounds.

Chapter 1

Warming Up for Singing

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » **Defining a warm-up routine**
 - » **Stretching and balancing the lower and upper body for singing**
 - » **Warming up the body and voice with a sample warm-up**
-

The sequence of every practice session you do as a singer includes a warm-up (both physical and vocal), your vocal exercises, and then the application of the skills you work on during your vocal exercises to your songs. Warming up the body before you warm up the voice helps get the muscles flexible so your warm-up takes less time. If you warm up your body first, that early morning practice session becomes much more productive because you can get to your vocal exercises more quickly.

In this chapter, you explore the steps of a warm-up for singers. You find out how to warm up your body, stretch your muscles, and maintain good balance by releasing tension. Each section has you warm up a different part of the body with one or more stretches and balance exercises. Then at the end of the chapter, I give you a vocal warm-up that both prepares your voice and lets you take stock of your body.

After your vocal warm-up, you're ready to start working on the practice exercises in this book that help you develop technique. You can look through the table of

contents to find a topic that interests you and dive right in, or you can move on to [Chapter 2](#) to work on breath control and then explore the rest of the chapters in order. You may want to take a quick look at [Chapter 15](#), which can help you set up productive practices, before you start exploring other chapters.

Preparing Your Instrument: Stretching Out from Head to Toe

Warming up and stretching your body before a vocal warm-up helps you feel like your body is flexible and open from head to toe. Feeling *open* means that you feel as if you have a lot of space inside your body that you can open for sound to resonate. Although your body is full of muscles, organs, and tissues, the stretching and releasing of tension that you do during your physical warm-up can make you feel like you're creating an open area between the organs.



TIP

Remember whatever physical sensation you feel after you stretch so that you can create that same opening every time you start your warm-up. After you get your body warm, you want to maintain the feeling of flexible movement throughout your practice session.

Don't feel like you have to follow every part of this chapter word for word during your warm-up. You know your body better than anyone, so use the information I present here as a guide for structuring the warm-up that

best suits you. For example, you can use your yoga routine or your cardio workout at the gym to get your body warm and your blood pumping. Even your power walk around the neighborhood can get your body quickly warmed up and ready to stretch. Then you can use the stretching sequence in this chapter to help you stretch just the right muscles to get flexible for singing.



TIP Make notes of any stretches in the chapter that may be more than your body can handle. Here are some ways to modify the stretches to work for your body:

- » If standing for long periods of time isn't comfortable for you, feel free to modify the stretches and do them seated in a chair. Practicing your singing in a chair can help you really focus on the movement and not worry about holding up your whole body.
- » Lower-back problems or balance problems may prevent you from comfortably leaning over or stretching. When an exercise calls for stretching, feel free to alter the movement to get the stretch that feels good for your body. Start with a limited amount of movement and gradually add more as you explore what's comfortable and safe for your body.

Opening and Positioning the Lower Body

To create the most efficient movement in your body for singing, you need to line up all the parts of your body and evenly distribute your weight, starting at your feet

and moving all the way up to your head. When you do so, no one muscle has to work harder than necessary for singing. As you work through the lower-body stretches and balance exercises in the following sections, notice how the stretch affects the weight distribution throughout your body. It's easy to forget all about your legs and feet when you sing since they're so far away from your mouth. However, taking the time to balance your weight on your legs and feet gets you better prepared for singing by increasing flexibility in your torso.



TIP

If you're getting ready to sing in a performance, do your practice sessions in the shoes you plan to wear at the performance. Guys, even the slight heel on your dress shoes may change your alignment. Ladies, wearing high heels changes your balance quite a bit. Hence, I don't recommend wearing stilettos for any performance because they offer such little support on the tiny heels. Choose heels that are more solid for better support and remember that you need to keep your feet flexible inside your shoes. If your feet lock, you may lock muscles all the way up your back.

Connecting your feet to the floor

Three points on the bottom of each foot help you balance your weight to keep the muscles throughout your body flexible. You need to know where these three points are so you can balance when you practice singing and stay balanced when you perform on the stage.

Stretch

While standing or sitting, lift your toes up and then curl your toes down to stretch the muscles in your feet and toes.

Balance

To balance the right way on your feet, you need to distribute your weight evenly on three points of the feet: the heel, the point under the little toe, and the point under the big toe. To help you find the right points, take a few minutes to work through the following steps, which can help you identify the right (and wrong) sensations to feel when balancing on your feet for singing. I recommend that you do this sequence without shoes so you can really feel the connection between your feet and the floor.

- 1. Rock slightly forward so that you're balancing your weight on the balls of your feet.**

As you lean forward, you should feel a tightening sensation along the back of your body. You don't want to feel this sensation when singing.

- 2. Lean back so that you're balancing more on the heels of your feet.**

Leaning back creates tension in the front of the body. You don't want to feel this tension when singing.

- 3. Lean on the outsides of your feet (from the heels to the little toes).**

As you lean on the outside of each foot, notice that you feel most of the weight in your heel at the back of the foot and at a point underneath your little toe. Leaning on the outsides of your feet tightens the muscles along the outsides of your legs.

- 4. Lean on the insides of your feet (from the heels to the big toes).**

As you lean on the inside of each foot, you should feel most of the weight in your heel at the back of the foot and at a large point under your big toe. Leaning on the insides of your feet tightens the muscles on the insides of your legs.

The points you identified in Steps 3 and 4 (the heel and the points under the big and little toes) are the points you want to balance on when singing. You can roll your feet around on the floor to feel these three points even more distinctly. Just follow these steps:

- 1. With both feet flat on the floor, gently press each heel to the floor.**
- 2. Roll to the point under your little toe and press that point to the floor.**
- 3. Roll to the point under your big toe and press that point to the floor.**

Rolling through these three points helps you figure out where the middle of your foot is and how you need to situate your feet to make sure you're spreading out the balance equally. Work through these three steps several times until you can feel the sense of balance. After you know what that balance feels like, you can roll through the three points at the beginning of each warm-up just to remind yourself to balance on the three points.



TIP

Balancing equally on the three points of the foot is a lot like using a tripod for a camera. Forming a tripod helps you feel grounded or connected to the floor. To make sure you're making a solid tripod, lift your toes while you're standing with the rest of your feet flat on the floor. You're more aware of the three points of your feet when your toes are lifted. Keep in mind that the toes are there to help you balance, but they shouldn't be tight. After you feel the points, find the same sensation of balance with your toes released.

To release any tension in the feet and reconnect with the floor, take a breath and release into your feet. Imagine that you have a mouth on the bottom of each foot that opens when you inhale; that's what the release into your feet should feel like. It also feels as if the feet were spreading out and then reconnecting with the floor.

Balancing on the ankles and knees

The ankles and knees are pretty far away from the mouth, but how you balance at both of these places helps you keep muscles flexible in your torso. Use the visuals I mention in the following sections to help you explore and remember the sensations you should feel when positioning your ankles and knees.

Stretch

To stretch the ankles, sit in a chair with one foot lifted off the floor. Draw an imaginary circle with your toes and gradually allow the circle to grow larger and then smaller. Reverse the direction of the circle. Repeat with the other foot.