

Presentation Skills: Delivery Skills: Voice: Breathing

## **The Voice that Captivates**

Breathing: The First Step toward a Powerful and Captivating Voice

**You can speak only as well as you breathe.** Control your breath, and you begin to control your speaking voice. Also, better breathing reduces tension in the neck and shoulders that can inhibit your best natural voice. The voice is a wind instrument. Try the following exercises to get yours in tune!

**Get ready.** Stand with your feet not quite shoulder width apart, your weight forward, more on the balls of the feet than the heels. Relax your hands by your sides. Start to pay attention to your breathing. As you exhale, release your shoulders, relax your neck, unclench your teeth, and see if you can't manage a yawn and maybe even a smile.

**Diaphragmatic breathing.** This is breathing from your belly. It fuels your voice and releases tension from your upper body. It's also called belly breathing because as you inhale, your belly expands (and your chest and shoulders don't move). This is the opposite of what you might do on the beach where many people suck in their bellies and puff out their chests.

Place one hand over your belly button. Slowly inhale one long breath through your mouth while silently counting "one... two... three... four." Your stomach should expand, pushing your hand forward (your shoulders and chest should not move.) Feel your hand move out as you pull the breath deep into your lungs. Now, hold that breath and count silently, "one... two... three... four." Next, exhale the breath through your mouth while counting silently, "one... two... three... four."

Do this until you are comfortable and breathing easily. Now, you are ready to make sound.

**Ha...** You are going to make a gentle "Ha" sound, using up an entire breath on just that one sound. Take in a full belly breath, and as you exhale say a very gentle and quiet sustained Haaaaaa... until you run out of air. Do it again, being certain to really open your mouth as you softly sustain the Ha.

**Shoulder bounce.** Once you've mastered the Ha, start to release tension

from your neck and shoulders. First, lift your shoulders up toward your ears, hold them for a count of four, and then let them drop, completely releasing them. Now, do this rapidly. This is the shoulder bounce.

Next, combine the shoulder bounce with the Ha. With your hands relaxed by your sides, take a full belly breath, and then exhale a gentle sustained Haaaa, running out of air as you did before. Only this time, while you are doing the Ha, simultaneously do the shoulder bounce for the entire time you are making sound. This will help release tension from your vocal chords and help you prepare your voice to speak.

**Keep it up.** Doing these exercises regularly will help prepare your breath to support your voice. Each time you do them you improve your breathing and release some of the tension that can easily accumulate throughout the day. They will help you prepare to speak, not just physically but also mentally, by reducing any anxiety you may be feeling.

[This Issue](#)



[http://totalcommunicator.com/voice\\_article.html](http://totalcommunicator.com/voice_article.html)