

# **HOW TO BREATHE**

## **A Practical Guide for Singers and Actors**

**Are you one of the many singing students—or even professional singers out there who still find the subject of breathing and support a mystery?**

**Are you tired of hearing “breathe from your diaphragm” but not knowing what to do in your own body?**

**Have you done all the so-called “breathing exercises” offered in books, on the web, or by your teacher only to see no improvement?**

**If so, this is the book for you!**

**After 10 years of studying voice both in the U.S. and Europe, I realized that although I had “a voice” and had been to some famous teachers and music conservatories, I still hadn’t mastered breathing for singing. “Mastered”---I didn’t even really understand it! Every teacher I had said “Breathe from your diaphragm”. But where was it? What did it feel like?**

**High School biology taught that you breathed through your lungs, not the diaphragm so reverently spoken of in the singing world...I knew that this breath thing was holding me back. I couldn’t hit the high notes with ease, sing long phrases, or resist the urge to “push” when I felt my stamina giving way during a concert.**

**I did a lot of reading (and even more hair pulling out). Finally I discovered the “secret” of breath control--- instead of saying “feel me” as all my other teachers had done, my new teacher taught me that I needed to separate the 2 parts of breath control: Coordination and Endurance.**

### **COORDINATION**

**Just as any other muscular coordination needs to be taught, so does the breathing and support needed by singers. One must learn a multitude of complex actions to a point of subconscious behavior. In other words, to learn a new method of respiratory muscle control that becomes a habit and occurs consistently and without conscious effort.**

**Remember when you first learned to ride a bike? You had to pay attention to your feet, hands, posture, etc. At the beginning everything felt uncomfortable and uncoordinated. Each individual action had to be thought of independently. (I.e. hands on handlebar, right foot down, etc.) But now you ride your bike with**

**ease, never needing to consciously think about where your hands and feet are. Why is this? Because you mastered a complicated series of muscle movements kinesthetically. Your muscles now respond automatically in a fluid and unconscious manner.**

## **ENDURANCE**

**Once your muscles have learned the proper coordination used for singing, you must then develop endurance. Endurance is the ability to sustain an activity for a long time. Endurance consists of three main components: coordination, strength (the ability to work for a sustained period without fatigue) and, in singing, “balanced tension”.**

**Back to the bicycle analogy. Once you’ve learned correct coordination (how to pedal, steer, etc.) you are then ready to take off your training wheels. As muscle strength increases, you are able to ride for longer periods of time. You then discover what “balanced tension” feels like. In singing, this translates to the appropriate amount of air pressure to make the vocal folds phonate (vibrate).**

**From this fundamental notion of separating coordination from endurance “How to Breathe” was conceived.**

**“How to Breathe” offers a brief overview of anatomy as it pertains to sound production. But here’s what really makes it different: practical application. As you already know, every time you feel your teacher’s breathing you know that he/she is doing something different from what you do. And even after a thorough lecture on anatomy, you still don’t know what to do to make your body behave like your teacher’s. Here’s the secret:**

## **MUSCLES DON’T COMMUNICATE VERBALLY!**

**When’s the last time you told your diaphragm to stay low and it obeyed? I teach singer’s breath (sterno-costal-diaphragmatic-epigastric) through a series of physical exercises that are designed to re-create correct coordination. Muscles learn through repetition. So all you have to do is to make the commitment to do the exercises daily and to increase the difficulty as your body permits. (Increasing the difficulty will lead to increased strength which in turn will lead to increased endurance) The rest will follow naturally. Consistent repetition over time will allow reflexive control of the muscles to become habit. And conversely, wrong muscle repetition will make wrong coordination become habit.**

**In addition to the book, I offer private “hands-on” lessons. These sessions will check that you are doing the exercises correctly, adjust for any specific limitations you may have, and will “tweak” to meet your personal goals and needs.**

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. “Do I have to change singing teachers”?

**No! This book teaches breath control only. It does not address vocal technique or genre.**

### 2. “I’m not an Opera singer. Do I still need to learn singer’s breath”?

**Yes! In order to endure the rigors of singing, regardless of your singing style, you need to develop your breathing apparatus. In fact, touring and singing in a non-classical manner is often more of a challenge for your instrument. Learning good breath support will keep your instrument strong and healthy. The demands of non-classical singing encourages poor vocal habits. Learning how to put the correct amount of air pressure on your vocal folds will prevent nodes and other problems from occurring.**

### 3. “Will it help with my high notes”?

**Emphatically yes! According to acoustical science, it takes more air to produce high notes. As your coordination improves and the muscles strengthen you will be able to not only sing longer phrases, increase range and power, but also hit notes you only dreamed about singing!**

### 4. “When can I expect to see results”?

**If you do the exercises daily, you should see improvement almost immediately.**

### 5. “How long do the exercises take”?

**About 15 minutes per day. They can be done all at once or spread out. Whatever fits best with your schedule. The key is to do them a minimum of once a day.**

### 6. “What happens if I miss a day”?

**If you miss a day (with illness for example) you won’t “lose”it. However, just like weight training, for every day you miss it will take two to get you back to where you were in terms of strength. Once you have mastered the proper coordination, you will have it for life! (You haven’t forgotten how to ride a bike have you?)**

### 7. “Singing is just a hobby for me. Do I still need ‘How to Breathe’”?

**Whether you sing in the shower, along with the radio, or with your church choir, YOU are your instrument. Learning correct breath support will keep your voice healthy and free. The easier it is to “play” your instrument, the more fun you will have.**

**8. “Do I need a private lesson or will the book alone be enough”?**

**The book is often enough. It depends on your goal and level of commitment. There is no substitute for “hands on” work. As I mentioned earlier, we learn through repetition. Having me check that you are following the directions accurately can make all the difference.**

**9. “I get really nervous before a performance or audition. Will learning good breath control help”?**

**Absolutely! Nervousness is a vicious cycle: You think about performing in front of others and your heart begins to race. This causes your breathing to become shallow. The more shallow your breath, the less air you get, and the more nervous you become! Learning how to breathe correctly can control this physical chain of events. You will not only have something to focus your mind on, but your breaths will become deeper which in turn will slow down your heart rate. It is a simple method of controlling the “fight or flight” reflex.**

**10. “I’m a lawyer, public speaker, actor, etc., is this book right for me”?**

**Yes. Any activity that requires good diction as well as voice projection will benefit from learning proper breath support.**

**11. “ How is this book different from other books about breath control”?**

**All breathing exercises attempt to make singer’s breath “second nature”. They have failed because they neglect to connect the physical movements with the expulsion of sound, which is essentially what singing is. “How to Breathe” DOES make that connection.**

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**I have been teaching singing and singer’s breath, as well as performing since 1984 in the U.S. and Europe. I have worked with singers from all genres--- classical, pop, musical theatre, country, etc. No matter what their style, all singers have the same goal: mastery over their instrument. Keeping the voice healthy is paramount to longevity in the performing world. I teach privately and in groups and master classes. My own background is in traditional Bel Canto technique. I am fourth in a direct line from Lamperti, father of Bel**

**Canto singing.**

## **VOCAL PEDAGOGY**

**My methodology is rooted in traditional Bel Canto as taught by Lamperti. The ideals of Bel Canto are evenness of tone, flexibility, “chiascuro” (light & dark resonance), and above all, vocal health. Scientific research has proven that pure Bel Canto technique produces minimal stress on the vocal organs and thus is the “natural” way to sing. I teach Bel Canto as the foundation. From this, the singer can then occasionally make an artistic choice and use his/her instrument in a non-Bel Canto fashion, which meets the realities of today’s world. But as anyone can tell you, before you build a house, you need a strong foundation!**

**If you are presently taking singing lessons, then my approach will probably be different from what you are used to. In accordance with Bel Canto tradition, my lessons are NOT repertoire based. (That’s the band-aid approach to singing!) Rather, you will learn HOW to sing---and once you know how, you will be able to sing anything! The majority of the lesson is spent on a routine of vocalizes written by Lamperti. They begin with warm-ups and then proceed in difficulty to cover all the vowels and consonants in a variety of combinations. These exercises DEVELOP the voice. After even-ing out the middle we continue by extending the range on both sides. In short, if you can sing an “EE” vowel correctly 20 times in a row regardless of pitch or dynamics, then you will be able to sing one in a song! Your muscles need to learn how to make an “EE” correctly and consistently. The only way to accomplish this is through repetition. Singing lessons strengthen the surrounding muscles that are your resonating chamber. Your vocal folds (or cords) you were born with, they do not change. However, as your breath and resonating chamber develop, your voice will become richer and fuller with increased range and power.**

### **THE “HOW TO BREATHE” PRICE LIST**

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| <b>“How to Breathe” .....</b>                             | <b>\$29.95</b>  |
| <b>Shipping and Handling (USA &amp; Canada).....</b>      | <b>\$4.50</b>   |
| <b>Introductory Breathing Lesson (book included).....</b> | <b>\$125.00</b> |
| <b>Follow-up breathing lessons.....</b>                   | <b>\$90.00</b>  |
| <b>“How to Breathe” Master Classes (per person).....</b>  | <b>\$65.00</b>  |
| <b>(Groups of 4 or more, books included)</b>              |                 |

### **SUPPLEMENTAL PRICE LIST**

|                             |                |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Singing Lessons.....</b> | <b>\$75.00</b> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|

**For singers who are already touring, I offer a weekly rate that includes one singing lesson and one breathing lesson per day, as well as preparatory “warm-up before each performance.**

**“On the Road” (by the week).....Price available on request**

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