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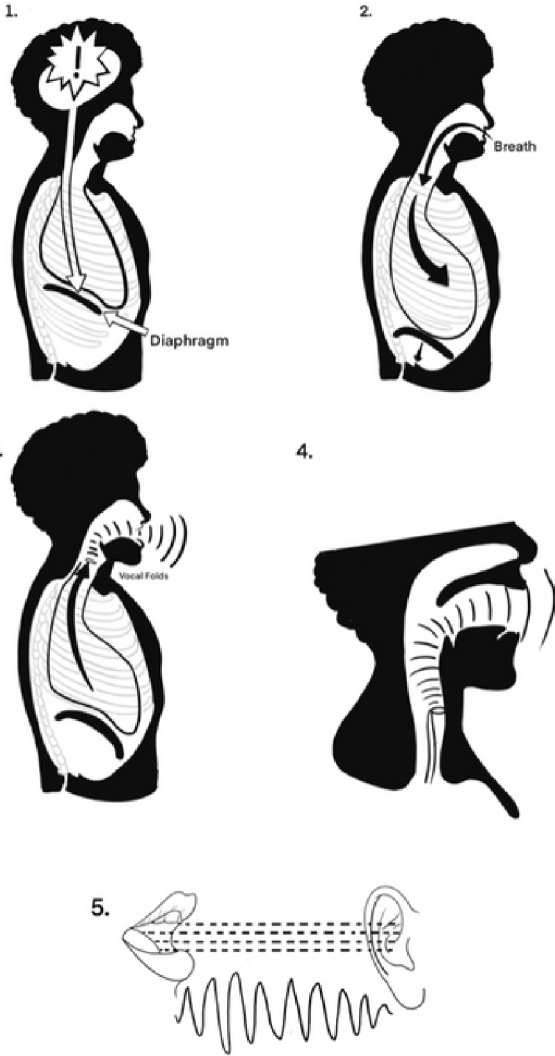
How the voice works

Muscle names and anatomy can be useful for some. For others, it can lead to overwhelm and disconnect from the sensation of speaking which is what I really want you to experience.

So this chapter isn't full of in-depth, anatomically detailed descriptions of how the voice is made. I don't think you, as an everyday occupational voice user, need to know that. That's my job.

What follows is my user-friendly description of how the voice is produced to help you get the most out of this book.

How our voices work



On The Mic!

1. When we have the impulse to speak, our brain sends an impulse to the diaphragm.¹
2. The diaphragm contracts down and draws air into the lungs.
3. When we start to speak the air then leaves the lung and passes through the vocal folds which start to vibrate.
4. These vibrations travel up through the throat, mouth and nose, getting shaped along the way into recognisable sounds.
5. Those sounds leave the mouth and nose, travel across the space you're in and become voice when they hit the listener's ears drums. Until then, they're just vibrating air molecules. That's the mad bit of science that will always astound me. It's the *If a tree falls in the wood...* conundrum.

There are essentially three systems² in play when voice is made:

1. Air source system; all the breathing bits like the lungs, diaphragm, ribs, chest muscles, and abdominal muscles.
2. Vibratory system; the two vocal folds themselves and your larynx.³

3. Resonating system; the spaces that the vibrations pass through on the way out to the ears, including the throat, mouth and nose.

When it comes to speaking, these technical systems exist inside two other systems relevant to communication:

1. Impulse system; the instinctive thought-having process and subsequent desire to share that thought.

2. Articulation system; shaping the thought into words your listener will recognise.

There's definitely an optional extra system. That's the *no, I probably should keep that thought to myself really* system. I jest, of course. But it is useful when working on your voice to understand that vocal censorship, whether conscious or unconscious, necessary or enforced, does affect the freedom of your voice and its condition. More on that later.

Let's go back to talking about vibrations because that's what it's all about. Vibrations. Buzz buzz. When we share a thought, idea, concept, opinion, or joke; our body makes vibrations. Lovely, buzzy, vibrations.

Voice is vibrations that we shape in a certain way.

On The Mic!

Why our voices sometimes don't work like they should

Vocal vibrations are dampened by tension. As humans, we spend our entire lives accidentally and unconsciously accumulating tension; physical body tension or mental tension and psychological blocks. This tension can hinder that simple speaking process on and off the mic. Sometimes we know the reasons for the tension:

- Abdominal tension from holding your belly in all the time because magazines tell us bellies are unacceptable.
- Shoulder and neck tension because of your work environment.
- A phone scrolling habit that leads you to live life chin first and head down.
- Breath tension due to anxiety issues from having to exist in a world with corrupt politics, world wars and pandemics.

You get the point. Life is hard.

We typically evolve from babies with easy, free breath patterns led by instinctive processes our body was designed for and a voice free as, you guessed it, the day you were born, into adults worn down and

gnarled by professional stress, social anxiety and, well, life.

And that's why voice problems occur. I'm not telling you this to be dramatic. I'm telling you this because it's ok and as a way of, perhaps, helping you reflect on some of the reasons you may feel your voice doesn't work, or sound, as you'd like it.

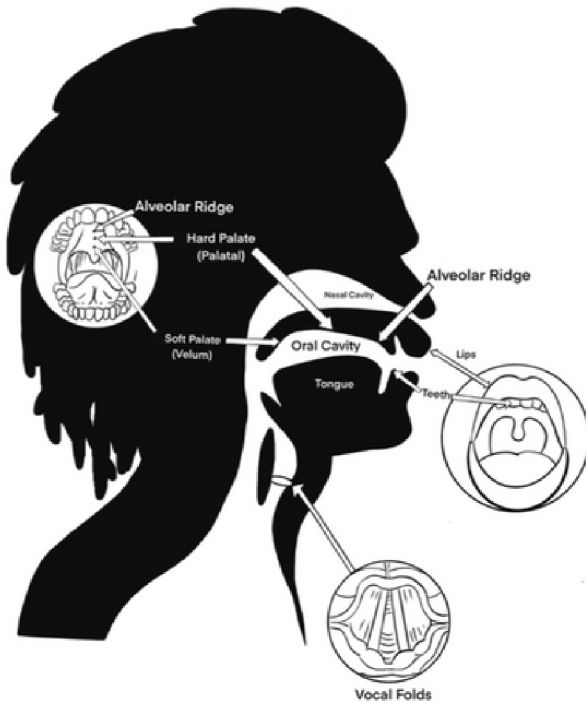
It's important to remind yourself that there's often a reason why certain vocal traits occur. Reflecting on why your voice is like it is will help you understand, explore and embody different options as you work through this book. You aren't born running out of breath at the end of sentences. You don't start life with a voice that lacks variety and expression. And you certainly don't arrive on this earth hating your voice. You are conditioned this way. And that's perfectly understandable when you consider all the things life throws at us.

Of course, the reasons for the buzz-killing tensions aren't always dramatic and intense. Sometimes, it might just be that the voiceover you've got to record is badly written and there's no way anyone, with even the lung capacity of Zephyrus⁴ himself, could get to the end of it in one go. Or it could be that you're super excited to be presenting to a large crowd, or nervous because you're finally interviewing that dream guest for your podcast.

On The Mic!

Either way, understanding the basics of how your voice should work, and why it sometimes doesn't, is a really important part of imprinting new habits on your speaking. If nothing else, it tells us why we might be finding speaking tiring, hard, or uninspiring, which is a reassuring place to learn from.

In the interest of knowing how things work, here's a quick pic of your head, larynx and vocal tract - the areas through which sound passes on the way out.



Nic Redman

All these bits and bobs work together to shape your vibrations into sounds that your listener will recognise. Isn't it marvellous? You'll meet these bits in great detail later.

Right, I'm getting distracted by pretty pictures. Let's get on with the learning, shall we?