Vocal Music Virtual Learning

8th Grade Choir

Vocal Technique:

Vowels and Tone (Part I)

April 29, 2020

8th Grade Choir
Lesson: April 29, 2020

Objective/Learning Target:

How does our singing mechanism create the words we sing and influence our singing tone?

Warm-Up Activity

Imagine you have been gifted a brand-new trumpet. Draw a quick sketch of what that trumpet might look like.

Now imagine that you already know how to play the trumpet, and you pick it up and play your favorite song on it. Imagine what that sounds like.

Warm-Up Activity

Now, imagine that you left your trumpet outside in your driveway (like you do). Oh no! Somebody just backed their car out of the driveway and ran over your new trumpet!!

Draw a sketch of what your trumpet might look like now...

Warm-Up Activity

Imagine you picked up your squashed trumpet and tried to play it. Would it sound the same? Why or why not?

Take a second to think about how your trumpet would probably sound different, and write about what that difference would be.

Second Warm-Up activity:

Let's experiment with our voices!

To start out today, we are going to try and change the sound of our voices. As we do this, you can either sing one long note, or sing a phrase of music, such as "Happy Birthday" or "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

First, pinch your nose and try to sing so that you sound like a goose honking (have some fun with this!)

Second Warm-Up activity:

Let's experiment with our voices!

Next, sing the same notes, but unpinch your nose and try and sound like a 4 year old kid singing (yes, it should sound obnoxious!)

Finally, sing the same notes, and try your best opera impression, very dramatic and mature!

We use the word “tone” to describe the quality and character of our singing voice

Tone - Definition

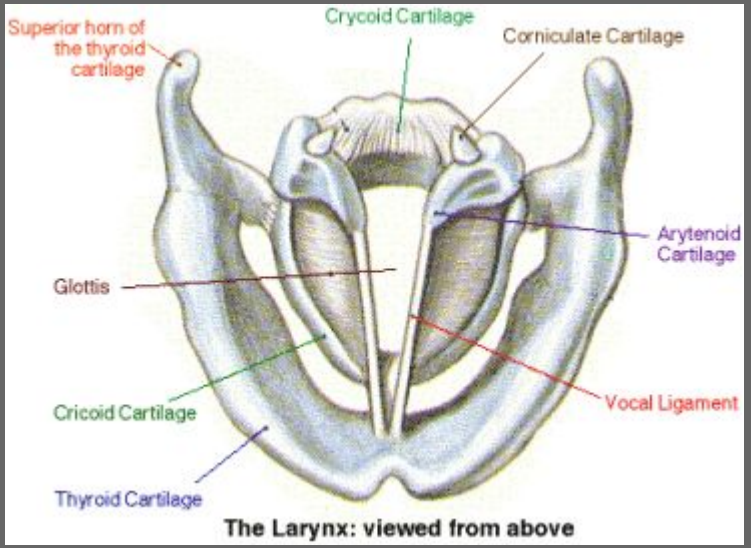
A musical or vocal sound with reference to its pitch, quality, and strength.

I want to a have a good tone in MY singing! So… how do I do that?

I’m so glad you asked! We do have a lot of control over the character of our singing voice and the tone that we produce. But in order to understand how we shape our tone, we need to understand a bit more about how singing works.

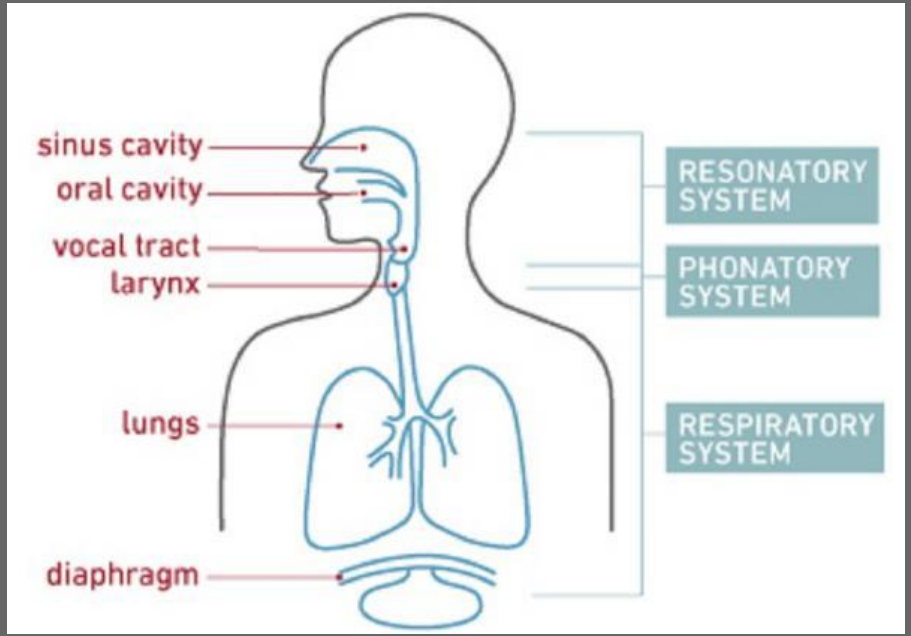
Stop #1:
Your Voice Box

The sound of your voice is generated in your larynx, which we also call your voice box. We call the act of your voice box making sound “phonating”.



Stop # 2: Where that sound echoes

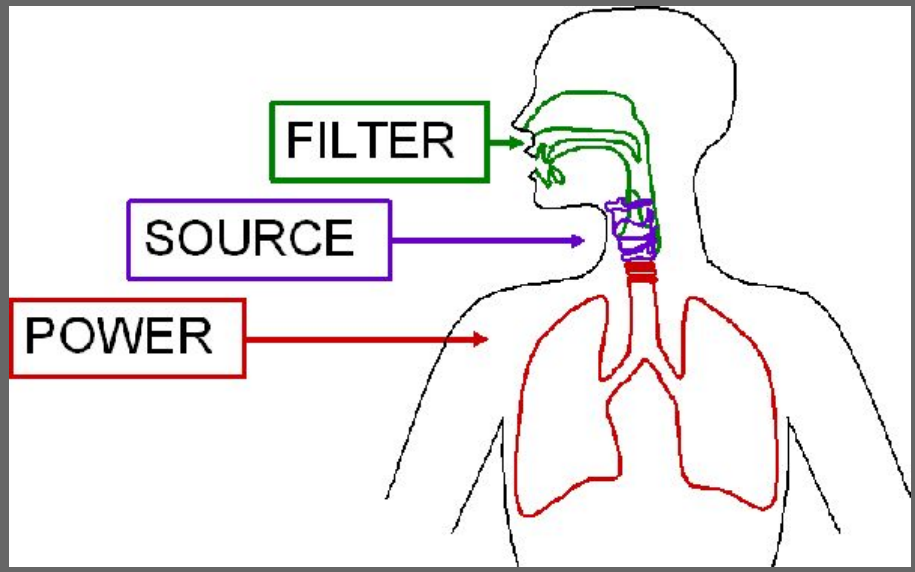
When the sound of your voice leaves your larynx, it echoes or “resonates” in your throat (vocal tract), mouth (oral cavity) and nasal passages (sinus or nasal cavity)



A system that works together

Your speaking and singing voice works because the different parts of your body work together:

- Your lungs and diaphragm provide the power by supplying air
- Your larynx makes the sound
- Your resonation chambers filter that sound into a nice, rich singing or speaking voice

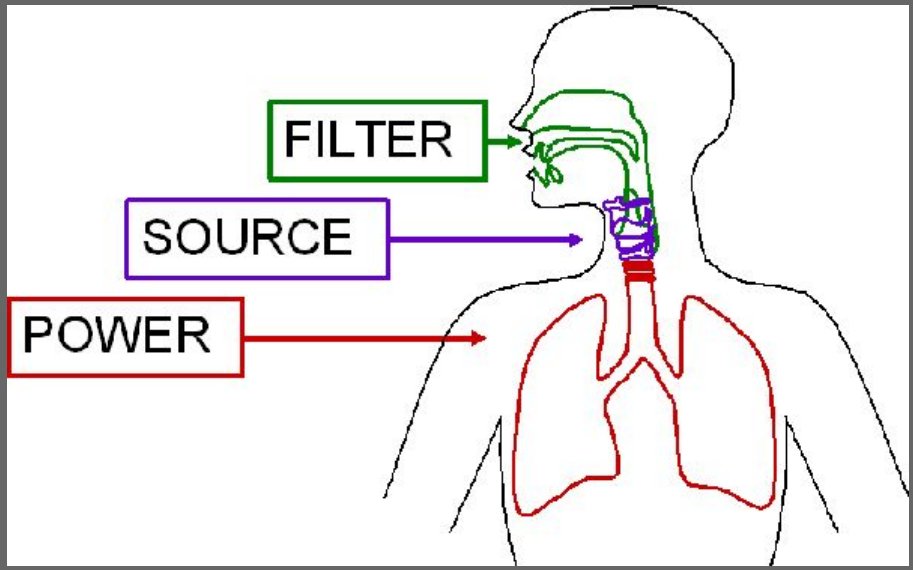


So what part of this process can we control?

We can't really change anything happening in our larynx. But we CAN focus on our breathing and on how we make our vowels.

Earlier this week, we focused on the system that powers our singing, our **breathing**. Today, we are focusing on the filter that takes the sound from our vocal cords and turns it into the voice as we know it.

This is called our **Resonatory System**.



The sound of our voice starts when air from our lungs is forced through our vocal folds in our larynx.

Those vocal folds vibrate together, and those vibrations make sound, just like how a trumpet player's lips buzz together to start the sound of a trumpet.

The Resonatory System:

Where the magic happens

Remember the trumpet from earlier?

When you were imagining playing the trumpet after it had been squashed flat, you probably were imaging that the trumpet would not sound good.

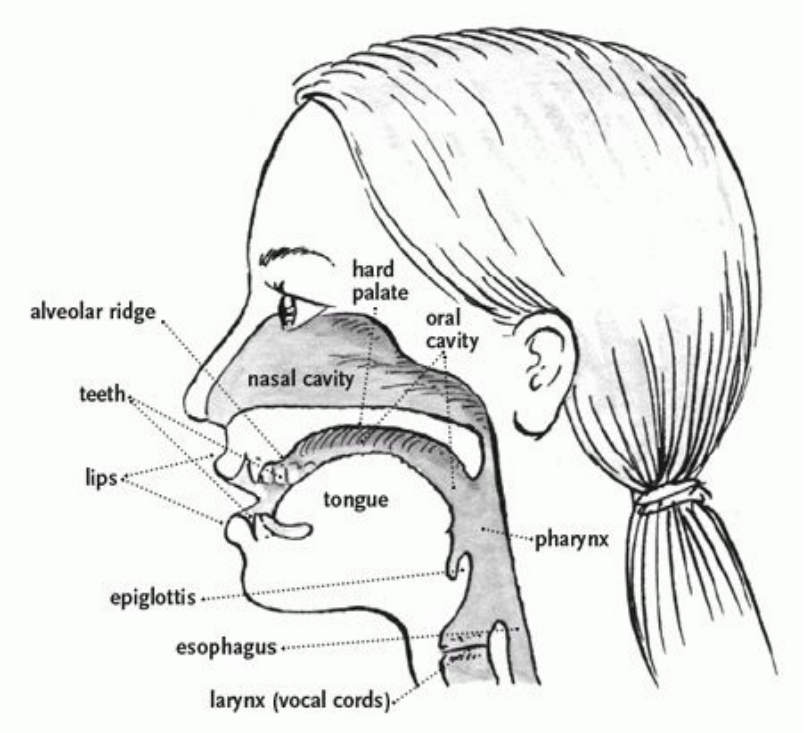
The Resonatory System:

On some level, you already understand that in order for a instrument to sound good, there has to be space inside the instrument for the sound to echo. We call that **resonating**.

For a trumpet, the player makes the sound at the mouth piece by buzzing their lips, then the sound **resonates** through the instrument, and when it comes out of the bell on the other side, it sounds like a trumpet!

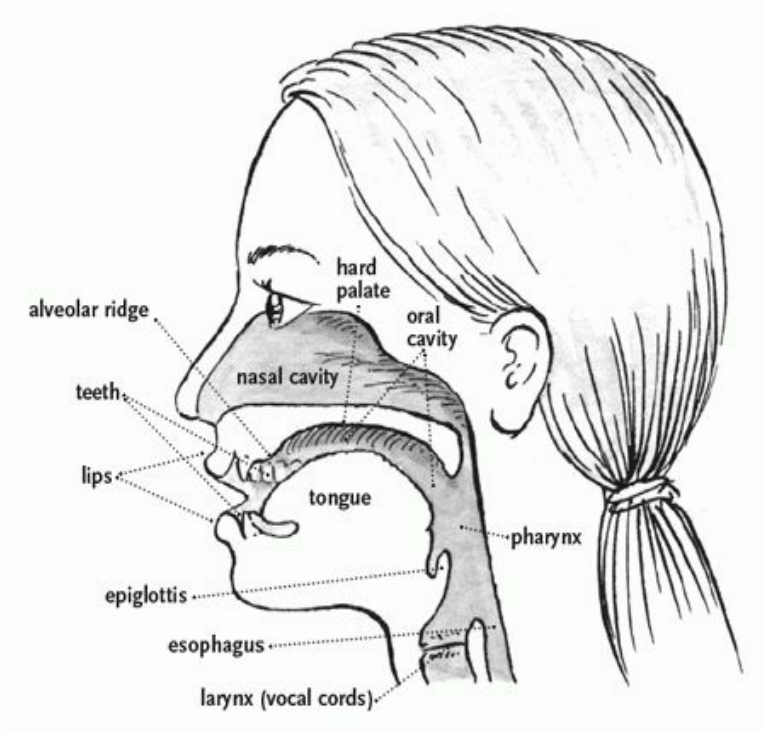
The Resonatory System:

For your singing voice, the resonating happens in three main sections of your body, all of which are located in your head and neck.



The Resonatory System:

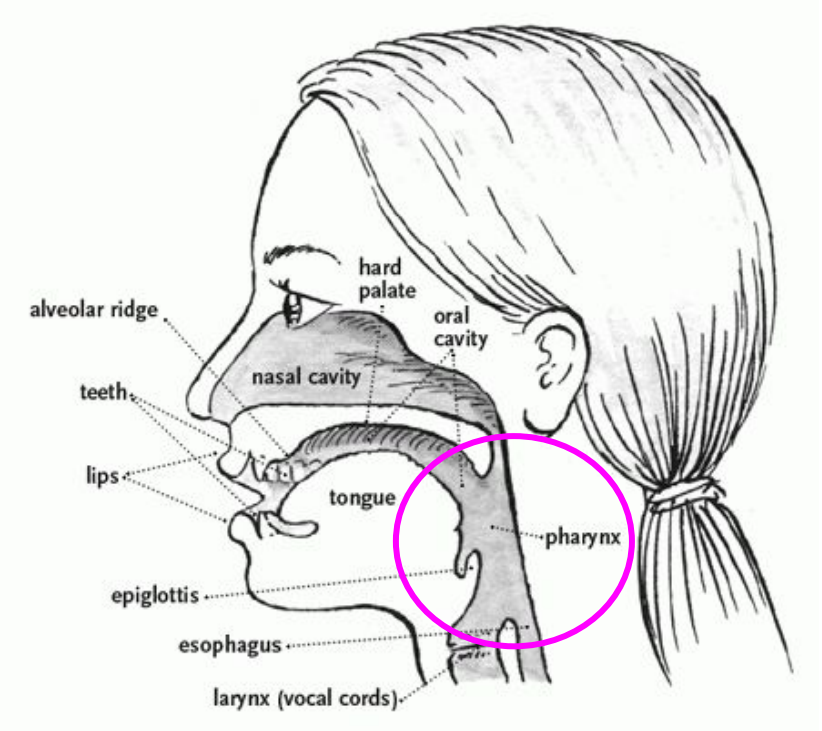
1. The **pharynx** is the space in your throat between your vocal cords and your mouth.
2. The **oral cavity** is the space in your mouth, from the back all the way to your teeth
3. The **nasal cavity** is space in your nasal passages and sinuses that you use when you breathe through your nose.



The Resonatory System:

The pharynx

We do not naturally have a lot of control over our pharynx. The main way way we can encourage opening the pharynx up to give our voice more space to resonate is by thinking about singing with an open throat.

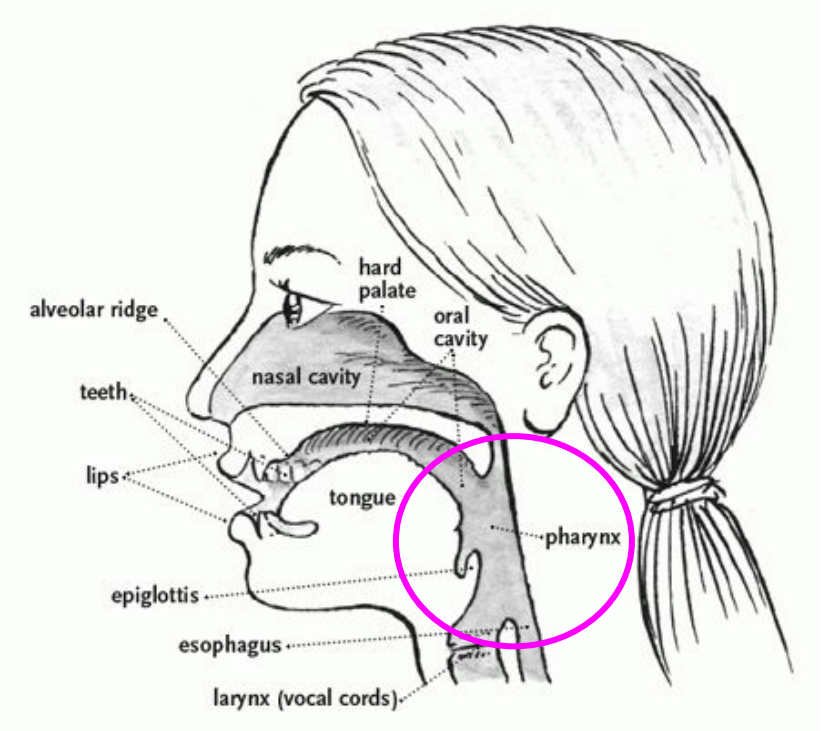


The Resonatory System:

The pharynx ACTIVITY

Open your mouth like you are yawning, and feel the stretching that happens in the back of your throat as your mouth and throat open up.

This the area your doctor checks when you have a sore throat.



The Resonatory System:

The pharynx ACTIVITY

Breath in like you are yawning again, but this time, say the vowel “Oh” as you breathe out.

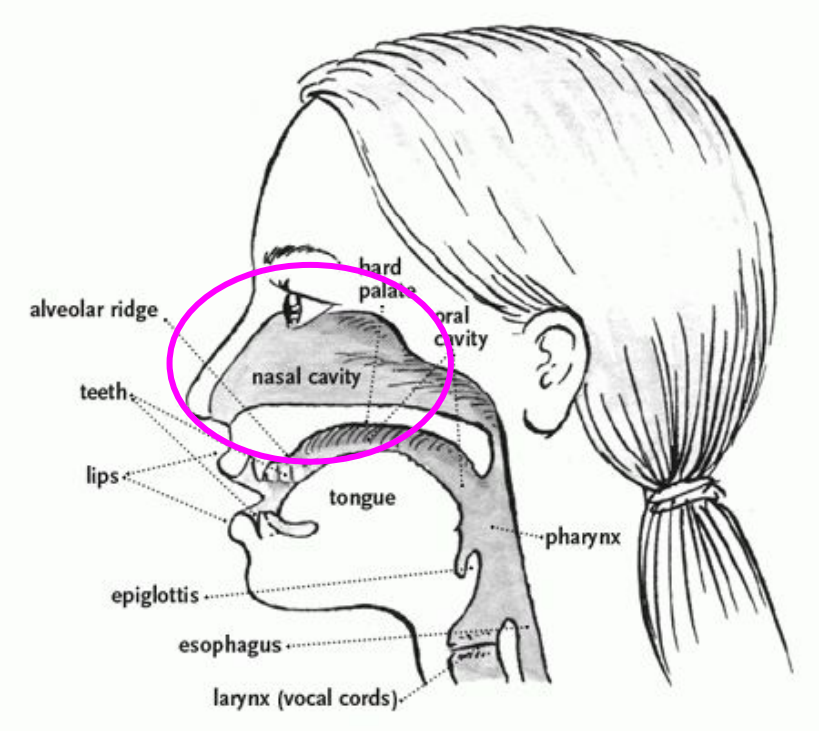
Your jaw should be low, and you should sound like a dramatic opera singer who just realized something!

The Resonatory System:

The nasal cavity

While your nasal cavity plays a big part in your singing voice resonating, we do not really control that part of our body either.

The way we encourage resonance in our nasal cavity is by focusing our sound through that space.

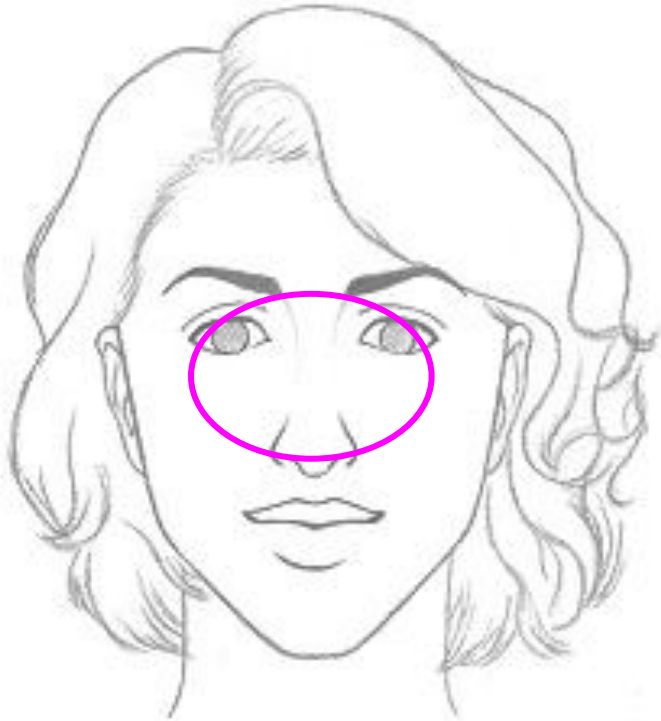


The Resonatory System:

The nasal cavity

In singing, we refer to the space behind our nose and eyes as the mask.

Focusing our singing sound through here can have a big impact on our singing sound!



The Resonatory System:

The nasal cavity ACTIVITY

Breath in as we have been, and then start singing a note in the upper part of your range while making an “ng” sound. Hold that note for a few seconds, then open up to an “ah” sound and feel where that echos.

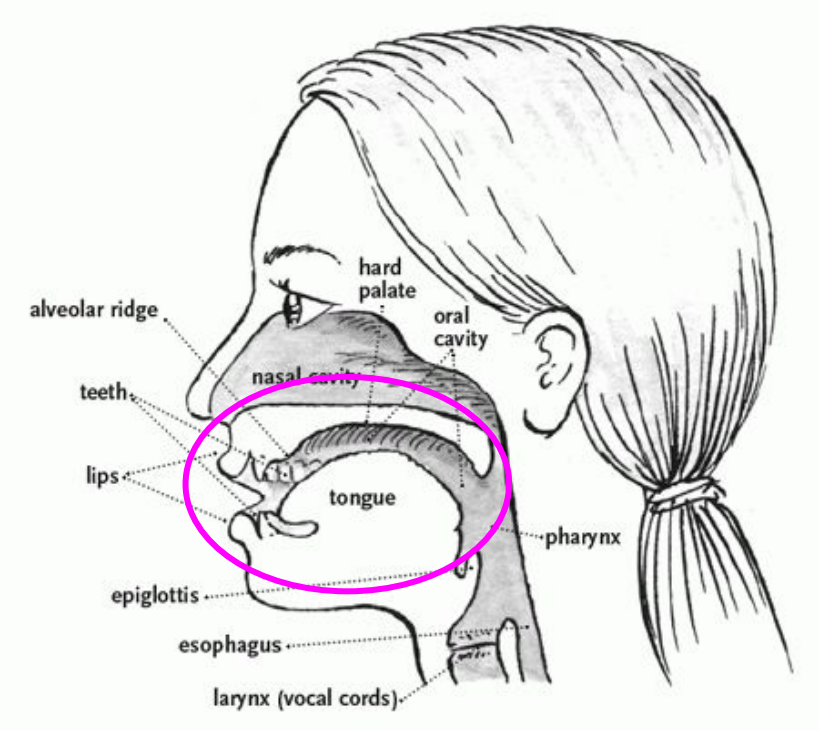
The “ng” sound naturally echos in the mask!

The Resonatory System:

The oral cavity

The **oral cavity** is the part of our vocal tract we have the most control over.

This is the area with the most moving parts, since the tongue, soft palate, jaw and lips all play really important roles in shaping this resonating chamber.

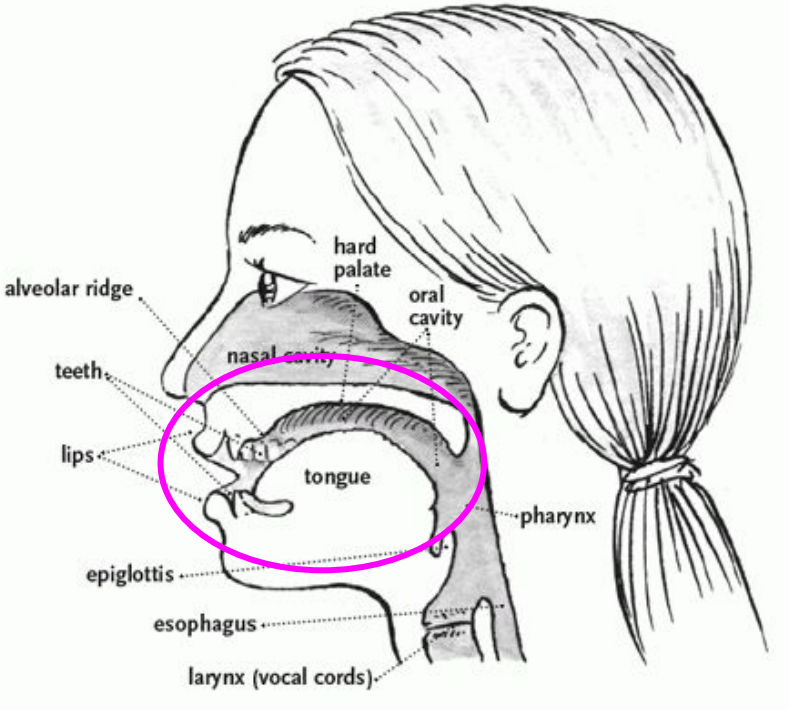


The Resonatory System:

The oral cavity

We are going to spend a lot of time in our next lesson exploring how we can change our singing sound by focusing on the oral cavity. For today, simply remember this guideline:

More space to resonate = bigger singing sound!



The Resonatory System:

The oral cavity ACTIVITY

For this activity, once again you start by breathing in with a relaxed, open mouth and throat. Then, sing a five note scale going down while make a “yah” vowel.

Your goal as you sing is to make the vowel sound tall and open by making space in your mouth!

Follow-Up activity #1:

Find a recording of your favorite song on YouTube, and sing along to the song. As you sing, practice maximizing your resonating chambers:

1. Your throat is open and relaxed
2. Your jaw is dropped low and you are making space in your mouth
3. You are focusing your sound through the “mask” in your face

Follow-Up activity #2:

Listen and watch Voces8 sing a song by Stephen Paulus called “The Road Home”. As you watch, look for moments where you notice them singing with open throats, tall vowels, and sound focused through their masks.

Write down any particular sections or words that stick out to you as being the most impressive!