



Vocal Music Virtual Learning

8th Grade Choir

Vocal Technique:

Vowels and Tone (Part II)

April 30, 2020



8th Grade Choir

Lesson: April 30, 2020

Objective/Learning Target:

How can we use our soft palate, tongue, throat, and lips to help produce a mature sound while singing?

Warm-Up Activity

Sing “Happy Birthday to You” out loud, paying attention to all the different vowel sounds you make. Put whatever name you want in, or you can say “dear someone”.

Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday dear Someone,
Happy birthday to you!



Warm-Up Activity

Now, sing it again, but this time, replace all of the vowel sounds with the “ee” vowel, like you would find in the word “sneeze”. It should sound something like this:

Heeppy beethdee tee yee,
Heeppy beethdee tee yee,
Heeppy beethdee deer Seemween,
Heeppy beethdee tee yee!



Warm-Up Activity

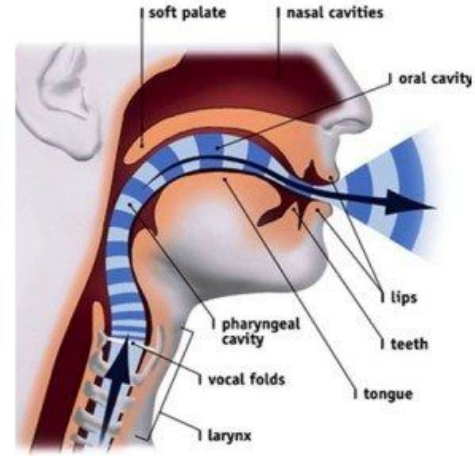
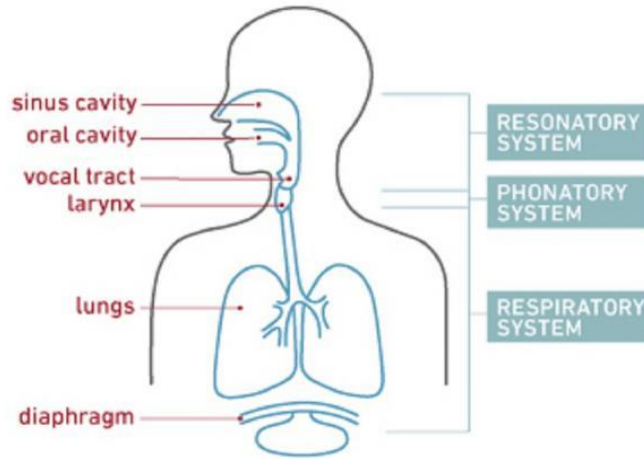
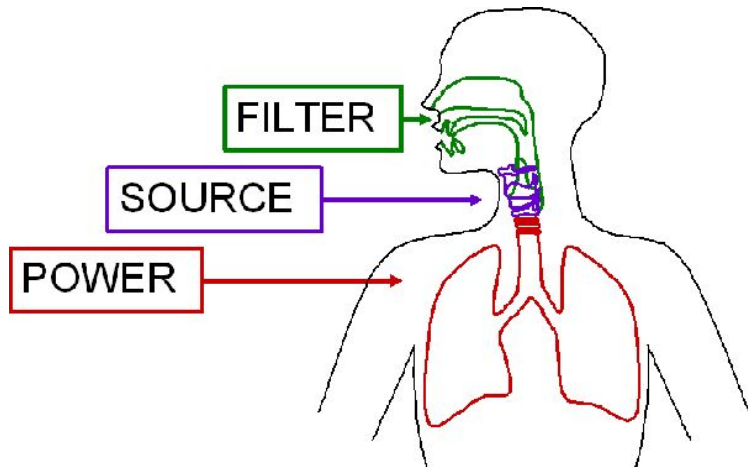
Now that you have the hang of it, sing it a few more times, but try all sorts of different vowel sounds, such as:

- “ah” (Hahppah bahthdah tah yah)
- “oh” (Hohppoh bohthdoh toh yoh)
- “oo” (Hooppoo boothdoo too yoo)
- “ih” (Hihppih bihthdih tih yih)

See if you can think of any more!

Second Warm-Up activity:

Let's review the last lesson on Vowels and Tone. Looking at the pictures below, write a brief description of how your body produces a singing sound.





Quick Review

Last lesson, we talked about how the sound of your voice is made when air from your lungs is pushed through your vocal cords (in your larynx), causing those vocal cords to vibrate together. These vibrations make sound.

This sound is then sent into your vocal tract, where it resonates in your pharynx (throat), oral cavity (mouth), and nasal cavity (sinuses and nasal passage).



Quick Review

We have learned about how proper breathing helps power our singing voice, and we have we have given a brief overview of how that sound is then molded by our resonating spaces in our neck and head.

Today, we are going to zero in on the resonation chamber that we have the most control over, and that has the biggest impact on our singing sound: the **oral cavity**



The Oral Cavity

Let's get to know the different parts of your mouth

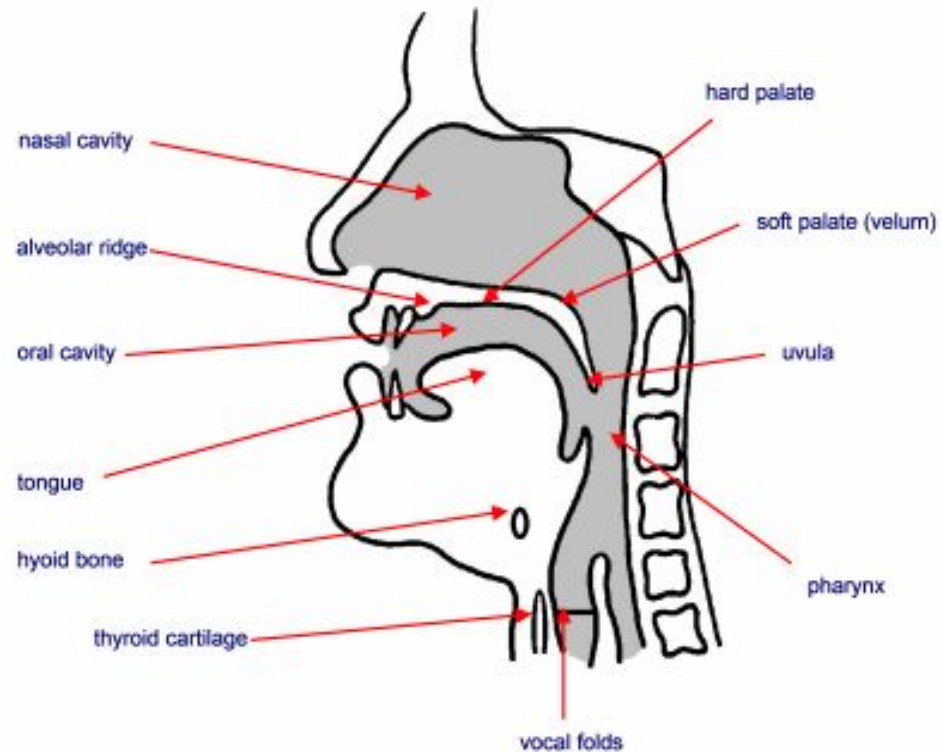
Before we can learn how to improve, mold, or strengthen our singing tone, we need to understand all the different moving parts in your mouth. Your mouth is a complicated place that is asked to do a great many different things.

Think about it: you use your mouth to speak, sing, hum, eat and breath. Those are all really different activities!

The Oral Cavity

Here is a diagram of the oral cavity.
The following is a list of the parts we are going to focus on:

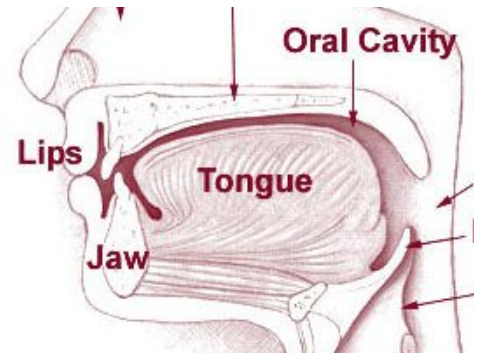
- The tongue
- The teeth and hard palate
- The soft palate
- The lips



The tongue

The tongue is actually a pretty awesome muscle in our body. It is by far the body's most flexible muscle, and is one of the strongest. It is also one of the most important body parts when it comes to speaking and singing.

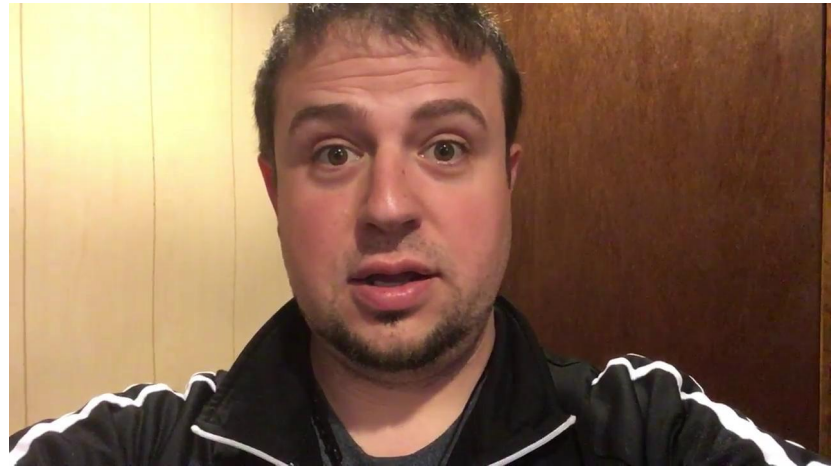
The tongue helps makes many of the consonants we articulate, and helps form our vowels. It does this by going to different positions inside your mouth.



The tongue - ACTIVITY

Sing a 5-note scale (Sol-Fa-Mi-Re-Do) going down, and as you sing every note, sing between an “ah” vowel and an “ee” vowel.

As you sing, feel what your tongue is doing with each of those vowels.



The tongue - ACTIVITY

As you switched between those two vowels, you may have noticed that the position of your tongue changed.

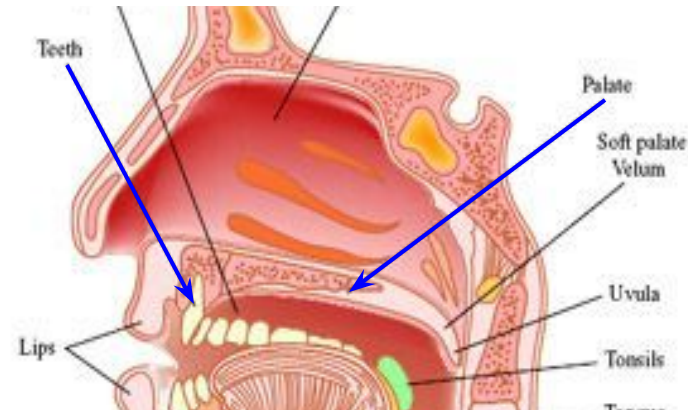
While you were singing the “ah” vowel, your tongue was low and back in your mouth, lying flat.

While you were singing the “ee” vowel, the tongue moved forward towards your front teeth.

The teeth and hard palate

Take the tip of your tongue and press it against the back of your front upper teeth. Now, slide your tongue back until you reach your gums, and then you should feel a bump at the front of the roof of your mouth. That bump is called the “alveolar ridge”.

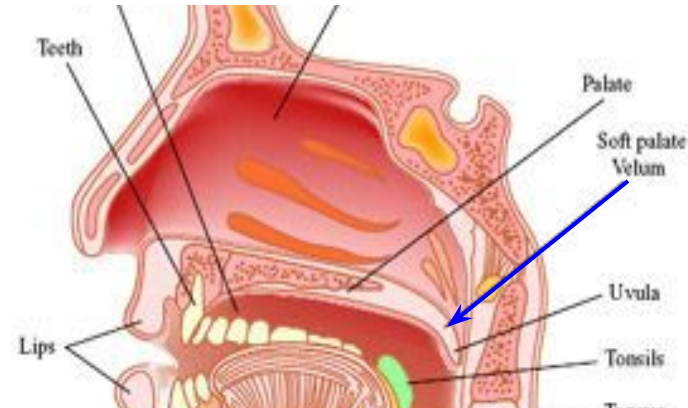
Keep sliding your tongue back, and you will feel a rise in the roof of your mouth. This hard part of the roof of your mouth is called the **hard palate**, or just the **palate**. It's where the peanut butter gets stuck when you bite into a peanut butter and jelly sandwich!



The soft palate

The teeth and hard palate do not play a big role in changing our tone. They are much more involved in our we make our consonances. But the NEXT part of the roof of your mouth is very important!

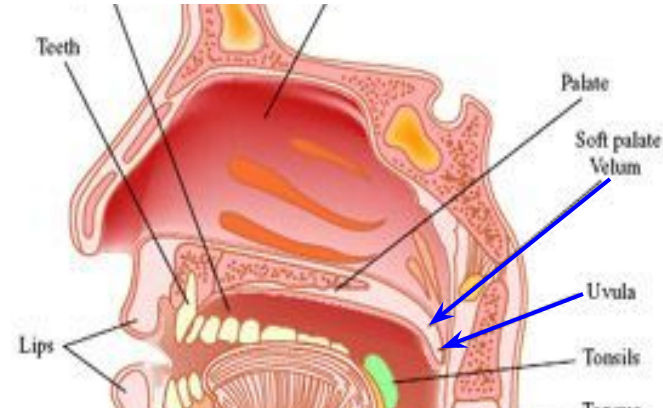
Put the tip of your tongue back on the hard palate, then slide it back even further. Just as your tongue reaches as far back as it can go, you can feel the roof of your mouth go from hard like bone to soft and spongy. You just found your **soft palate!**



The soft palate

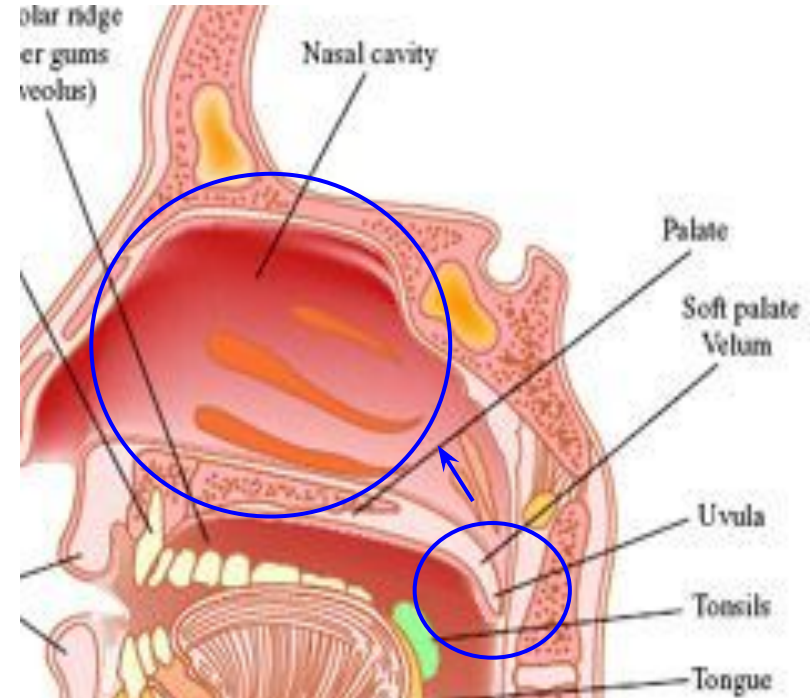
Your **soft palate** (or **velum**) is a very flexible section in the top, back half of your mouth that can lift into a dome or drop flat. It extends from the hard palate all the way to your **uvula**, the dangly bit in the back of your mouth.

The soft palate may be the single most important part of your body when it comes to helping shape your singing voice into a rich, mature-sounding tone. When it comes to helping create resonance, this is where it is at!



The soft palate

Another thing worth pointing out about the soft palate is that it also acts as a gate to the upper resonating space, the nasal cavity. Depending on how you approach your singing, you can actually open or close the path your singing sound takes to the nasal passages.



The soft palate - ACTIVITY

Breathe in like you are going to yawn, and feel the back of the roof of your mouth stretch up like a dome.

After you have done this a few times, try making a big, dramatic opera-sigh on an “oh” vowel, and feel the space inside your mouth you have created.



The lips

Your lips are the last gateway of your vocal tract as your sound exits your body. In some ways, your lips can act like the bell of a trumpet. The shape your lips make change the character of your tone.

We naturally change the shape of our lips all the time while we talk and sing without even realizing it. Sometimes, paying closer attention to what shape your lips are making as you sing can help change the color of your singing voice.





The lips - ACTIVITY

Drop your jaw down low, open your mouth tall and think about making space in the back of your throat and roof of your mouth. Now, sing a nice, tall “ah” vowel on one note and hold it.

Then, moving only your lips and without changing anything inside your mouth, bring your lips to an “oo” vowel shape (where your lips are pursed together).

Now, sing that note again, and switch your lips between those two shapes. Remember: try not to move anything else in your mouth!

The lips - ACTIVITY

It should wind up looking and sounding something like this:





Follow-Up activity

Now that we have broken down all the different parts of the vocal tract that help us mold and shape our singing tone, let's see all of that in action!

On the following video, you will watch a professional singer and voice teacher sing in a few different styles while being filmed in an MRI machine. It's really interesting to watch (and just a little bit creepy...)

As you watch, take some notes. What parts do you see moving the most? How do the different styles he sings sound different AND look different?

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2nd Follow-Up activity

Watch this video of professional singer and actress Audra McDonald singing a famous song written by Ira and George Gershwin, “Summertime”. As you watch, pay attention to what you see her singing mechanism doing, and how that affects her tone. Write down what you notice!

