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THE CHOIR:

**SING**

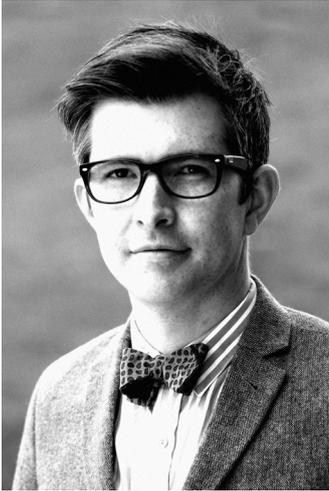
WHILE YOU

**WORK**

**THE BASICS OF SINGING**

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# THE BASICS OF SINGING



Gareth Malone

Welcome to The Choir: Sing While You Work guide to singing. If you're reading this, congratulations, as you have either already taken that first step and joined a choir at work or you are thinking about it.

Singing is not only a lot of fun but also gives you confidence and is great exercise for your heart and lungs which in turn gets the brain working. Performing with others in a choir is a great way to start singing and singing at work with your colleagues has benefits too. It can improve communication and teamwork plus it's a great stress-buster. Singing is good for you!

Your choir master will take you through all the basics of singing in your rehearsals but it's important to practise as often as you can – this guide will help you to do that on your own.

Visit [bbc.co.uk/thechoir](http://bbc.co.uk/thechoir) for video and audio clips to help you.

You can sing anywhere. Try in the bath, in the kitchen while you're cooking dinner or in the car driving to work.

Best of luck  
**Gareth**



# GETTING STARTED

## POSTURE

Good posture will help you make a good sound. As your voice comes from within your body the way you stand affects how you sing.

- Stand up straight - imagine a string pulling you up from the top of your head.
- Place your feet shoulder-width apart, keep your knees unlocked and stay balanced.
- Your head should be upright, looking straight ahead.
- Keep your shoulders down and your abdomen relaxed.
- Try to relax - tension will prevent you from making a good sound.

*As your voice comes from within your body the way you stand affects how you sing.*

## BREATHING

Breathing is one of the most important things to think about when you're singing. Breathing correctly will support your voice but breathing in the wrong way will make your voice thin and tired. Developing a good breathing technique takes practice and patience.

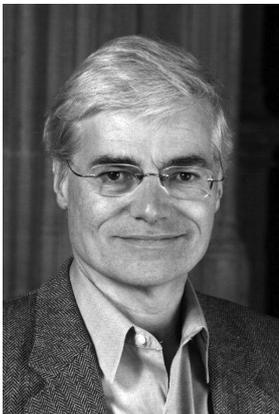
- Breathe deeply from your lower lungs. Imagine a rubber ring around your waist, breathe in and try to push the ring outwards.
- Avoid raising your shoulders as you breathe in, keep them relaxed and level.

### Try these breathing exercises

Lie on the floor on your back with your hands on your stomach. Breathe in and your hands will rise, now breathe out and they will lower. In this position it is almost impossible to breathe incorrectly. Try to breathe like this when you're singing.

Practise deep breathing, slowly fill up your lungs with air and release slowly, gradually increasing the time it takes to empty your lungs – this will prepare you for any longer phrases you may need to sing.

Visit [bbc.co.uk/thechoir](http://bbc.co.uk/thechoir) for more information.



*Right from learning the notes to performing as a highly sensitive team, sing with passion. Then all your faculties will be on high alert and you will be able to give your very best. If you love it, they will.*

Ralph Allwood  
Judge, *The Choir: Sing While you Work*  
Photo Credit © Tom Allwood



# WARMING UP

## YOUR BODY

Preparing your body before you start to sing is essential, you need to warm up before you perform.

- Shake out your body to loosen up.
- Slowly stretch your arms up to the ceiling and then lower them gently all the way down so that you are reaching towards the floor.
- Roll both your shoulders backwards and then forwards. Next roll only one shoulder backwards and then forwards, now swap and do the same with the other shoulder.
- Very gently roll your head from side to side, take care not to push too hard or you may strain your neck.

## YOUR VOICE

Once you've prepared your body you now need to prepare your voice, this will avoid straining and damaging your vocal cords. Try these exercises:

### Exercise 1

- Breathe out through your mouth releasing all the air from your lungs.
- Once your lungs feel completely empty, relax your stomach muscles, open your mouth and let the air flood back in.

- Do this several times.
- Now breathe in again and when you release the air add an 'sss' sound. See how long you can hold it.
- Try this again using 'shh' and 'fff' sounds. This will help to build different vocal muscles.

### Exercise 2

- Close your eyes and spend a little time breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- When breathing in, imagine the breath going down into the lowest part of the lungs, keeping the shoulders down and relaxed.
- When breathing out, try to maintain your inflated shape, breathing out slowly until you feel as empty as possible.

### Exercise 3

- Counting four, breathe out whilst you bring your left ear down to your shoulder.
- Counting four, breathe in and bring your head up to the starting position.
- Repeat on the other side.

*Breathing correctly will support your voice but breathing in the wrong way will make your voice thin and tired.*



# FINDING YOUR VOICE

## RANGE

Your range is the highest and lowest notes that you can sing. There are six main adult voice types which are classified by their range (shown highest to lowest)

- Soprano (high female)
- Mezzo Soprano (mid female)
- Alto (low female)
- Tenor (high male)
- Baritone (mid male)
- Bass (low male)

The ranges overlap and as everyone's voice is different your voice may not fit exactly into one of these.

### To find your range:

- Sing the note that comes most naturally to you.
- Gradually take the pitch up to the highest note you can sing comfortably without straining.
- Now take it all the way down to the very lowest note, again without straining.
- You can also try the above with a line from a song, raising or lowering the pitch each time you repeat it.

## VOLUME

- Choose a comfortable note and sing 'Ahhh'.
- Start as quietly as you can, slowly building in volume, don't forget to breathe.
- You can also try this with a line from a song, raising the volume as loud as you can without straining your voice.

## ARTICULATION

It's also important to focus on how you pronounce the words - your articulation. Singing the words clearly so that your audience can hear the words is as important as singing in tune. Speech and accents vary but there should be uniformity when singing so that any trace of an accent disappears. During singing all the tone is on the vowels as they carry the melody.



*Sing your heart out and you may be surprised by what you find out about yourself. If ever you imagined that you couldn't sing, put yourself in the hands of a competent musical director and discover what you are capable of.*

**Manvinder Rattan**  
Judge, *The Choir: Sing While you Work*



# PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE

Even the smallest amount of practice can make a big difference, so there's no excuse for not doing a little every day. A gentle warm up each day will increase your lung strength and capacity and build up your stamina. There are lots of ways to practise, below are just a few suggestions:

- Put on one of your favourite songs and sing along. Choose songs that have a familiar melody and limited range.
- Take passages of songs apart and really think about the words and sounds you are singing.
- Listen to yourself. Are you making a good sound? Are you in tune? Train your ears as well as your vocal muscles.
- Try improvising, use a line from a familiar song as a starting point and play with the notes and rhythm.
- Try a challenging song or a difficult note, it might feel demanding but this is a great way to develop your technique and range.
- Sing in front of a friend and ask for their feedback.

## CHOIR BASICS

Choirs have existed for thousands of years. For much of that time choirs would only sing a single line. However these days most choirs sing in harmony, this means that each section sings different notes at the same time creating a beautiful musical effect.

Most mixed choirs have four sections – Female: *Soprano, Alto* Male: *Tenor, Bass*

It's helpful to have a reasonable balance between the four main voices. Tenors can often be in short supply; Basses sometimes have to help out with the tenor lines.

*TogetherNESS is your choir's wall of defence.  
You will be strong as one, voices ringing out  
bringing joy to the listener.*

**Ruby Turner**

*Judge, The Choir: Sing While you Work*



# BE INSPIRED

*Most choirs sing in harmony, this means that each section sings different notes at the same time creating a beautiful musical effect.*

Think about what you might like to sing as a choir, your choir master will always be open to suggestions to expand your repertoire. You will already have your own favourite songs that you might like to suggest but there are plenty of other places to go for inspiration.

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