

# VOCAL EASE

ROBERT RUSSELL—[rrussell@maine.edu](mailto:rrussell@maine.edu)

Many singers in volunteer choirs can improve their sound with attention to six characteristics of vocal production.

- I. **MOVE THE AIR**—The voice is a wind instrument; air vitalizes the sound. The beginning of a good quality sound is air that moves freely across the vocal folds and through the resonating spaces of throat, mouth and nose.  
Suggested exercises:
  - sss-sss-sssssss (two shorts and one long, sustained)
  - blow out five candles, one on each finger
  
- II. **CONNECT SOUND TO THE AIR**—Once you have established a freely flowing column of air—much like the flow of water through a garden hose—then initiate a sound in mid-voice, connecting the sibilant (ss) to vowel (ah).  
Suggested exercises:
  - sah (descending legato five-note scale: 5-4-3-2-1)
  - sah-sah-saaaaah (5-5-54321)
  
- III. **SING “IN THE MASK”**—One of the easiest sounds to make, which will help to center the pitch “in the mask,” is the hum. Initiate the hum with lips lightly touching (mm) and tip of the tongue behind the front teeth at the junction of teeth and hard palate (nn). The combination of mm/nn directs the sound into the nasal resonators and helps balance “just the right amount of nose” into the singing sounds. Suggested exercise: mm/nn (5-4-3-2-1)
  
- IV. **UNIFY THE VOICE BY CONNECTING LIGHT MECHANISM (“HEAD” VOICE) TO HEAVY MECHANISM (“CHEST” VOICE)**—Singing from above (“head” voice) will facilitate a sound that is easier to control and easier to tune. All of these exercises are in a five-note descending scale (5-4-3-2-1):
  - mah-mah-mah-mah-mah
  - (ay-oh) - (ay-oh) - (ay-oh) - (ay-oh) - (ay---)
  - (ee-oo) - (ee-oo) - (ee-oo) - (ee-oo) - (ee---)
  
- V. **SING TO THE CENTER OF THE PITCH**—Most often choirs sing under pitch, usually caused by insufficient air flow (“move the air”) or dominance of heavy mechanism (overactive “chest” voice; underbalanced “head” voice). Sometimes choirs sing sharp, usually related to tension in the muscles attached to the larynx or over-support, i.e., too much breath pressure.
  
- VI. **SING UNIFIED VOWEL SOUNDS**—ah [a] – ay [e] – ee [i] – oh [o] – oo [u]