



THE MIDDLE SCHOOL SINGER'S HANDBOOK

How to Use Your Voice, Sound Great & Keep It Healthy

Poynter and Evergreen Middle School Choir

1. YOUR VOICE IS AN INSTRUMENT

Here is the coolest—and strangest—thing about singing:

You ARE your instrument.

A trumpet player can put the trumpet in its case.

A drummer can put the sticks away.

You carry your instrument around **ALL DAY LONG.**

That means the way you:

- stand
- breathe
- talk
- move
- listen
- and take care of yourself

can affect your singing.

Our goal isn't to make everybody's voice sound the same.

Our goal is to help **YOUR** voice work easily, safely, and confidently.

2. BUILD YOUR SINGER STANCE

Forget:

✗ "Stand up straight!"

✗ "Shoulders back!"

✗ "Chest out!"

Those instructions can actually make your body **more tense.**

Instead, think:

FEET

About hip-width apart.

Imagine three balance points under each foot:

big-toe side • little-toe side • heel

Your weight should feel balanced between all three.

KNEES

Keep them **soft and unlocked**.

Never lock your knees while singing.

HIPS

Keep your pelvis in a comfortable middle position.

Don't stick your backside way out.

Don't tuck it way underneath you.

Just find **neutral**.

CHEST

Comfortable and natural.

Don't puff it up.

Don't collapse.

HEAD

Imagine your head balancing gently on top of your spine.

Your ears should be approximately over your shoulders.

★ THE 5-SECOND CHECK

Before we sing:

Feet → Knees → Hips → Chest → Head

Ready?

Sing!

3. SITTING LIKE A SINGER

Yes—you can sing well while sitting!

Try this:

 Sit comfortably toward the front of your chair when possible.

 Keep your feet supported.

 Keep your spine long but relaxed.

 Bring your music UP instead of bringing your head DOWN.

The Golden Folder Rule

Bring the music to your eyes.

Don't bring your eyes down to your music.

Your neck will thank you.

4. BREATHING FOR SINGING

Singing requires air—but **MORE AIR isn't always BETTER AIR.**

You don't need to suck in the biggest breath in human history.

Instead:

Breathe quietly.

Let your body expand naturally.

Stay relaxed.

Then use the air efficiently.

Try these:

 **DOG PANTS**

Gently pant like a dog.

Slow...

then faster.

Notice your abdominal muscles moving.

 **SNAKE HISS**

Take an easy breath.

Release it on:

SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS

Can you keep the sound steady?

4-IN / 8-OUT

Breathe in for **4 counts**.

Hiss out for **8 counts**.

The goal isn't to win.

The goal is **CONTROL**.

5. THE WEIRDEST WARM-UPS ARE SOMETIMES THE BEST

Some of our warm-ups may look ridiculous.

That's okay.

They have a job.

One of our favorite types is called:

SOVT

That stands for:

Semi-Occluded Vocal Tract Exercise

You absolutely do **not** need to memorize that.

You just need to know:

SOVTs help your vocal folds work together efficiently without forcing.

Try:

 Lip trill BRRRRRRRR	 Z buzz ZZZZZZZZZ	 V buzz VVVVVVVVV
 Pretend straw Pretend you're singing through a tiny straw.	 Blowfish Let your cheeks puff gently while phonating.	 Tongue-out hum Yes. You will look ridiculous. No. We do not care.

WHY DO WE DO THESE?

They can help us:

- warm up gently
- reduce unnecessary effort
- find an easier sound
- prepare for difficult passages
- reset our voices when something feels forced

Choir Rule: Weird is fine if it helps us sing better.

6. MEET YOUR TONGUE

Your tongue is MUCH bigger than the little part you can see.

It extends backward and connects with structures involved in singing.

So...

A tight tongue can create a tight voice.

Most of the time, the tip of your tongue should rest gently:

behind your bottom front teeth.

Try it.

That little spot is your tongue's **HOME BASE**.

If your tongue starts pulling backward while you're singing, your sound may become harder to produce.

TONGUE RESET

Put your tongue gently behind your bottom teeth.

Relax your jaw.

Hum.

Then sing.

Sometimes one tiny adjustment can make a huge difference.

7. THE FIVE SUPER VOWELS

Choir singers spend LOTS of time working on vowels.

Why?

Because vowels carry the singing sound.

Our five basic singing vowels are:

AH — EH — EE — OH — OO

The tongue and lips do most of the work.

Your jaw shouldn't bounce all over the place.

AH Relaxed jaw and lips.	EH Tongue moves forward.	EE Tongue is high and forward.	OH Lips become rounded.	OO Lips become even more rounded.
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CHOIR CHALLENGE

Sing:

AH — EH — EE — OH — OO

Try to change the vowels mostly with your:

TONGUE + LIPS

instead of chewing each vowel with your jaw.

8. THE SECRET TO CHOIR BLEND

People sometimes think “blend” means:

“Don't stick out.”

That's not very helpful.

Great choir blend comes from singers coordinating things like:

VOWEL SHAPE

Are we singing the same vowel?

VOWEL TIMING

Are we arriving at the vowel together?

RELEASE

Are we leaving the vowel together?

CONSONANTS

Are we placing consonants together?

You do **not** need to erase your individual voice.

You need to coordinate your singing with the people around you.

Great blend = GREAT TEAMWORK.

9. THE 90/10 RULE

Some words have vowels that move.

Try saying:

MY

It starts with one vowel and ends with another.

In singing, we usually don't want to move between them too early.

Think:

90% MAIN VOWEL

10% ENDING VOWEL

For example:

Instead of:

M-AHH-EEEEEEEE

we hold the main vowel and move quickly to the ending vowel near the end.

Stay on the main vowel.

Flip together.

That's one of the secrets to a choir sounding unified.

10. HIGH NOTES ARE WEIRD

As notes get higher, your mouth sometimes needs to adjust.

That's normal.

You might sing a vowel slightly differently on a very high note than on a comfortable middle note.

This is called:

VOWEL MODIFICATION.

Don't worry—we're not changing the word.

We're making a small adjustment so your voice can stay:

FREE • RESONANT • IN TUNE

So when Mr. J asks you to adjust a vowel on a high note...

he isn't trying to make you pronounce the word strangely.

He's helping your voice.

11. IF WE'RE FLAT...

Sometimes a choir sings a note too low.

Our first reaction might be:

"SING HIGHER!"

But that isn't always the solution.

Pitch problems can come from:

- body tension
- vowels that aren't matching
- tongue tension
- inefficient breathing
- vocal coordination
- not hearing the other sections well

So instead of immediately trying to **push the pitch upward**, we'll investigate.

Maybe we:

1. Reset our bodies.
2. Do a lip trill or another SOVT.
3. Fix the vowel.
4. Relax the tongue.
5. Check our breathing.
6. Listen differently.

Choir is musical detective work. 🕵️🎵

12. DICTION DOES NOT MEAN YELLING CONSONANTS

If Mr. J says:

“I CAN’T UNDERSTAND THE WORDS!”

the solution is NOT necessarily:

HARDER CONSONANTS!!!

Good diction comes from coordinating:

Vowels + Consonants + Timing

Your jaw shouldn’t slam shut every time you sing a consonant.

Try saying:

LA — YA — GA

Keep your jaw fairly still.

Notice how much work your **tongue** can do.

That’s independence!

Your tongue, lips, and jaw have different jobs.

13. YOUR VOICE HAS A DAILY BATTERY

Imagine that every morning your voice starts with a battery.

Every time you:

 talk

 sing

 yell

 cheer

 rehearse

your battery gets used.

That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t use your voice.

It means:

Use it wisely.

If you have a concert tonight, screaming during lunch might not be the greatest plan.

14. VOCAL HEALTH

VOICE-FRIENDLY HABITS

 Drink water regularly.

 Get enough rest.

 Warm up gently.

 Release unnecessary body tension.

 Give your voice breaks.

 Avoid competing with extremely loud environments when possible.

If you're sick, your voice may need more rest than usual.

15. DON'T TRY TO "POWER THROUGH" VOICE PROBLEMS

Your voice should not hurt when you sing.

Tell an adult if:

- singing hurts
- your voice suddenly feels very different
- you've suddenly lost part of your range
- your voice keeps cracking in an unusual way
- you're unusually hoarse
- something simply doesn't feel right

IMPORTANT:

Your choir teacher's job isn't to diagnose your voice.

Our job is to **notice problems and help you get the right help when necessary.**

16. CONCERT DAY

Concert day is NOT the day to sing everything 47 times.

Your voice needs energy for the actual performance.

A good concert-day routine includes:

 Gentle warm-up

 Hydration

 Spot-checking difficult places

 Vocal rest

 PERFORMANCE!

And remember:

TALKING COUNTS AS USING YOUR VOICE.

Save some of that voice battery for the stage.

17. THE MIDDLE SCHOOL SINGER'S CODE

A great singer doesn't just have a "great voice."

A great singer learns how to **USE** their voice.

I WILL...

- ☐ Warm up before demanding singing.
 - ☐ Keep my body balanced instead of stiff.
 - ☐ Keep my knees unlocked.
 - ☐ Bring my music toward my eyes.
 - ☐ Breathe without unnecessary tension.
 - ☐ Learn our choir vowels.
 - ☐ Listen to the singers around me.
 - ☐ Match vowel timing and releases.
 - ☐ Use my voice responsibly.
 - ☐ Tell my teacher when singing hurts or feels wrong.
 - ☐ Remember that mistakes are part of learning.
 - ☐ Keep experimenting until something clicks.
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MR. J'S BIG IDEA

You don't become a better singer by simply:

TRYING HARDER.

You become a better singer by learning:

WHAT TO CHANGE.

Sometimes the answer is your breath.

Sometimes it's your tongue.

Sometimes it's your vowel.

Sometimes it's your posture.

Sometimes it's your listening.

And sometimes we have to explain something **five different ways** before suddenly...



AHA!

That's learning.

That's choir.

And that's how we build great singers.