Finding Practice Partners & Opportunities

From the Vocal Congruence Project - vocalcongruence.org/#practice-partners

Finding the time, places, and people needed to practice can be one of the most difficult parts of developing a congruent voice. However, devoting significant time to practice is necessary to make changes to your voice, even when you have the support of a provider.

The following advice may or may not apply to you depending on your transition timeline, access to supportive people, and other factors. Pick and choose what strategies feel most useful to you.

Practicing in Private

Practicing in private can be a great way to explore your voice before sharing it with the world. However, finding privacy can be difficult and many individuals need to create private practice spaces for themselves. Here are some common places and methods that may offer some privacy:

- In your car, especially while parked in a comfortable, safe location
- On a walk or hike where the setting affords some privacy
- When home alone or in the most private space in your home
- A rentable meeting room, sometimes available at libraries and co-working spaces
- A rentable music practice room, sometimes available at music stores or universities
- Using a portable voice dampener, such as the Belt Box or the Metadox VEKTA

Soundproofing

Soundproofing areas of your home or a room can help maintain privacy when practicing. Placing furniture against walls can make a space more soundproof. Tapestries and wall hangings, fabric furniture like couches, and rugs can also help reduce the transfer of sound. Stepping into a closet filled with clothes or speaking under a duvet can both provide quick sound reduction.

While DIY approaches may help, you are unlikely to achieve true soundproofing without products designed for this purpose. Sound dampening material such as acoustic paneling can be effective but expensive. Cheap foam panels are rarely adequate to soundproof a space.

Masking

In addition to these approaches, music, noise of a TV, a fan, a white noise maker, or other audio can be used to cover the sound of your voice. You can also practice while doing a loud activity or chore, like vacuuming or cutting the grass, but note that any of these strategies will make it harder to hear and evaluate your own voice.
All of this said, limiting yourself in this way can be difficult and is not strictly necessary. At any point, we encourage you to aim for openness and confidence with your voice practice. This can make the next steps — using your voice with others and in public — easier.

Practicing with Partners

Speaking with another person can help build confidence in using your voice and give you opportunities to shape and troubleshoot your communication. A practice partner can also provide feedback and insight that is not apparent to you. However, practice partners can also give unwelcome feedback or misunderstand your goals. Communication is key to making this experience a productive one.

Check out our "Letter to Your Practice Partner" worksheet as you think through what you do and don't want from a practice partner: ko-fi.com/s/8d89026557

Practicing with a Provider

A gender affirming voice and communication training provider is a valuable practice partner as they can offer the most specific advice and feedback to help you meet your voice goals. You can also set expectations and discuss what sorts of feedback you are looking for. Learn more about how a provider can support you in our resource, “Independent Practice & When to Seek Support.” It is important to note that one session per week will almost certainly not be all it takes to change your voice. Rather, home practice both alone and with others is typically necessary to apply and develop the skills you develop in sessions.

Practicing with Friends

Supportive friends make great practice partners as they provide a low pressure environment where conversation is easy. This allows you to focus less on what to say and more on how you’ll say it.

Playing games with friends is one great way to practice your voice. Tabletop Role Playing Games such as Dungeons & Dragons normalize the use of character voices, which can be helpful to explore and experiment. However, it is important that your target voice feels like you and not a character. Think about what elements of your chosen character voice are appealing, and how you can adapt them into a speaking voice for daily use.

Practicing with Strangers

If your goals include developing a cis-assumed voice, practicing with strangers will provide the most useful feedback. While engaging in practice with strangers, remember to be kind to yourself. If the risk of being misgendered is too great of a barrier, think about this type of practice approach as just for skill development and try not to put too much emphasis on how others respond.

Feedback from strangers is most useful when your voice is perceived in isolation. For example, you might try calling a restaurant to inquire about their menu or hours. The use of gendered language like “sir” or “ma’am” is common, especially among high-end establishments, and can provide valuable information about how your voice is perceived.

Another opportunity for using your voice with strangers is online gaming with a voice chat feature. Note that many gaming communities are toxic. Specifically, for those with feminine voice goals, misogyny prevalent in some gaming communities may mean that regardless of your success in achieving your goals, your treatment by others can still be negative.

Not all online communities are toxic, however. Many LGBTQ+ gaming or hobby communities provide a supportive practice space, and several online gender affirming voice-focused communities welcome submissions for feedback from other members. Learn more about these in our other resource, “Independent Practice & When to Seek Support.”

Across all of these situations it is important to acknowledge that being misgendered or receiving negative feedback can be difficult and discouraging. Make sure you are in a suitable headspace before intentionally seeking out this kind of interaction.

Additional ideas include:

- Visiting affirming businesses, such as coffee shops
- Getting a haircut (wax, lazer, brows, etc) and the associated small talk
- Participating in trans community groups, including support groups and hobby groups
- Working in customer-facing jobs
- Calling your state representatives! Check out 5calls.org to get started.

Finding Time & Building Habits

It can be difficult to find the time and space for regular practice, especially in the early stages of voice work. Here, we’ll cover various considerations for adding practice to your day. There’s no perfect strategy and you should feel no obligation to follow this structure strictly (or even loosely!). Rather, we want to provide some options for those who are seeking structure. A combination of these will work best for you, your lifestyle, and your brain. Lean into your natural patterns and habits.

Criterion

Criterion refers to the way we track completion in a practice session.

- **Time** - “for 30 minutes”
- **Trial** - “on 100 sentences”
- **Metric** - “until I am hitting 180hz consistently”

Occasion

Occasion refers to when we intend to practice.

- **Scheduled** - “every day at 8pm”
- **Routine Oriented** - “every day after dinner, no matter what time that is”
- **Task Oriented** - “I will check this off my to-do list whenever I have the time to complete it”

Recovery Mechanism

Recovery Mechanism refers to what we do when we do not meet a short-term practice goal.

- **No Recovery** - “If I miss a day, I will not make up the time”
- **Future Recovery** - “If I miss a day, I will add more time to the next day’s practice”

Reinforcement

Reinforcement refers to ways we reward ourselves, or benefit from the practice.

- **Positive Reinforcement -** Introduction of a reward, ie: “if I do my voice exercises for a week, I treat myself to bubble tea.”
- **Negative Reinforcement** - Removal of consequence, ie: “I practice consistently and now I feel less vocal dysphoria”

Reminders

Reminders refer to ways we cue ourselves to practice. This varies based on your choices above.

- **Phone Alarms & Calendar Events** - supporting “scheduled” approach
- **To Do Lists** - supporting “task oriented” approach
- **Visual / Environmental Reminders** - such as a note to self, or wearing an uncharacteristic accessory.
- **Accountability Partner** - recruit a friend to provide check ins

Check out our "Letter to Your Practice Partner" worksheet as you think through what you do and don't want from a practice partner: ko-fi.com/s/8d89026557

Additional Strategies

Habit Stacking

Build small moments of practice into your existing routines. For example:

- Practice while in the shower, while brewing coffee, or other moments of "downtime" in your morning routine
- If you drive, talk to yourself on your commute. Or, thank the bus driver using your target voice.
- If you go to the gym regularly, trade time on the treadmill for an outdoor walk for an added practice opportunity.
- Practice while doing the dishes, folding laundry, or for added privacy, during a loud chore like vacuuming or cutting the grass.

Active Listening

While engaged in conversation, use filler sounds (“mmm-hmm”) and short exclamatory responses (“oh wow”, “okay”) to stay engaged in and maintain your own vocal space. This strategy can be helpful for individuals who feel they can never predict what their voice will sound like when they take their next conversational turn.

We can turn these sounds and words into tools by practicing them to a point of high confidence. Then, they can help us calibrate and monitor our voices in a way that is not detectable by our conversation partner.

This approach also works for any phrase that we say often, especially at the start of sentences. Phrases like "Hi, how are you?" or "Hi, my name is..." can make it easier to start talking in the target voice in new situations, and can set us up for success in the sentences that follow it.

Inner Voice

Not everyone has an inner voice – a voice they “hear in their head” – but if you do, you can recruit it to help achieve your goals! Shift your inner voice so it is aligned with the voice you are working toward.

In Conclusion

Once you start to settle on a voice you are happy with and begin using it publicly, every time you talk becomes an opportunity to practice and hone it further. Random practice yields random results, so regardless of the practice process you choose we generally recommend that you commit to it and engage in it regularly. We are rooting for you!