

Regulation, Breath and Foundational Vocal Exercises

Breath as the Foundation of Voice

All vocal production is breath-dependent.

Before working with tone, pitch or resonance, practitioners must understand:

- Inhalation influences nervous system arousal.
- Exhalation influences parasympathetic regulation.
- Lengthened exhale supports vagal tone.
- Irregular breath patterns often reflect dysregulation.

Voice training in therapeutic contexts begins with breath awareness and regulation.

The aim is not performance enhancement, but nervous system stability.

The Physiological Sigh

The physiological sigh consists of:

1. A full inhalation
2. A second, shorter top-up inhalation
3. A prolonged exhalation

Research in respiratory neuroscience (e.g., work associated with Andrew Huberman) indicates that this pattern helps reinflate alveoli and regulate carbon dioxide levels, contributing to rapid down-regulation.

In therapeutic settings, the sigh:

- Releases muscular holding
- Lengthens exhalation
- Signals safety
- Provides an accessible entry into vocal work

It is often effective as a transition from silence into sound.

Fricative Exhalation (“Shhh”)

The “shhh” sound:

- Creates gentle resistance at the lips and teeth
- Regulates airflow
- Encourages controlled exhalation
- Reduces strain in the throat

Fricative sounds can support:

- Breath pacing
- Emotional containment
- Grounded vocal initiation

This stage provides structure without vulnerability.

Lip Trills (“Brrr”)

Lip trills:

- Stimulate the facial branch of the vagus nerve
- Reduce jaw tension
- Prevent vocal over-efforting
- Encourage play and ease

They are particularly useful for reducing performance anxiety and reintroducing flexibility into the vocal mechanism.

Humming and Internal Resonance

Humming:

- Extends the exhale
- Produces vibration in the sinuses and skull
- Stimulates vagal pathways
- Increases nitric oxide in the nasal passages

In therapeutic voice work, humming serves as:

- A low-risk entry into sustained sound
- A bridge between private and shared vocalisation
- A method for building somatic awareness

Humming also reduces exposure, as the mouth remains closed and tone remains internalised.