

WARMING UP: PHYSICALLY & VOCALLY

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Choose to Relax -- Breath & Body

Develop a modest pre-speech regimen (5-10 minutes) wherein you do some simple stretching and breathing exercises prior to going into the venue. Someone who regularly contends with pre-speech jitters should not casually disregard the following advice! No self-respecting actor would enter the stage without giving some attention to the breath and relaxing the body.

Start with the breath. Standing with your arms at your sides and your feet in a comfortable parallel position, close your eyes and simply check in with your breathing. Is it shallow? A tad frantic? Then, simply take a nice warm deep breath in through your nose, and then release the breath through your teeth like a snake, hissing it out slowly. Push most of the air out before you take another breath in. Then again, in through the nose, out on a hiss. Do this five times. Then, do the same thing again, only this time, instead of hissing on the exhale, try sighing. Five times.

What is quite good to do is to slowly allow the head to drop forward, as though you were dropping your chin to your sternum. Consider this the start of a gradual collapse of the upper body. . . first head, then neck, then shoulders and upper, mid, and lower back. Everything folds over to the waist. You should remain standing while doing this, knees bent slightly. You get a lovely rush of blood to the brain, and you are releasing tension in a very simple way all along the spine. Breathe as you do this! Then, slowly stack the body back up beginning at the base of the spine, coming up vertebra by vertebra. Three times.

Then, stand on your tiptoes and reach up for the ceiling. Stretch your arms way up. Then return to a neutral position. Sometimes I reach up and collapse over at the waist as above and then stack my spine back to a neutral standing position.

Wherever you feel tension . . . stretch. Legs? Do a few pre-jogging stretches. Rear end tension? Few care to admit to this, but it exists in epidemic proportion! Put your hands on the small of your back and do some warm hoola-hoop butt rotations. Around to the right, around to the left. Shoulder tension? Rotate them slowly forward and back. Attending to these matters prepares the instrument (your body) for full availability to the message you intend to deliver.

Work on the Voice and Speaking Clearly (A Quick Vocal Tune Up)

Just as we warm up the body, the same holds true of the voice. Begin with a healthy yawn -- really drop that jaw and yawn. It's good for you. Make sound; a big expansive yawn driven sigh! Three times.

Chew an imaginary gigantic piece of chewing gum. Do this with your mouth open (the North American Jaw is notoriously clenched and tight) and be fearless about making warm vocal groans as you chew! Thirty seconds.

Vibrate your lips like a horse. Then add sound to this like a child pretending that she's riding a motor bike. Thirty seconds.

Stick your tongue out. Try to touch your nose with your tongue. Then your chin. Rotate it clockwise and counter clockwise. Repeat the series three times. You have invigorated the tongue now. This is a good thing, as the tongue is useful when speaking and deserves your attention!

Really exaggerating the consonants, say: "LA NA TA DA" Ten Times. Really hit the L's, N's, T's and D's. Fire up the articulators.

Repeat the following words (speed is not the key here; articulation is!) until you speak them clearly and well. "RED LEATHER, YELLOW LEATHER"

Finally, speak the poem below clearly one or two times, and you should be good to go:

GIVE ME THE GIFT OF A GRIP TOP SOCK
A CLIP DRAPE SHIP SHAPE TIP TOP SOCK
NOT YOUR SPIV SLICK, SLAP STICK, SLIP SHOD STOCK
BUT A PLASTIC, ELASTIC, GRIP TOP SOCK

NONE OF YOUR FANTASTIC SLACK SWOP SLOB
FROM A SLAP DASH, FLASH CASH, HABERDASHER SHOP
NOT A KNICK KNACK, KNIT-LOCK, KNOCK KNEED KNICKERBOCKER SOCK
WITH A MOCK SHOT, BLOB-MOTTLED, TRICK TICKER TOCK CLOCK

NOT A RUCKED UP, PUCKERED UP, FLOP TOP SOCK
NOR A SUPER, SHEER, SEERSUCKER, PUCKA SACK SMOCK SOCK
OFF A HOTCH POTCH MOSS BLOTCHED BOTCHED SCOTCH BLOCK
NOTHING SLIP SHOD, FLIP FLOP, DRIP DROP OR GLIP GLOP
TIP ME TO A TIP TOP GRIP TOP SOCK

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