



A GUIDEBOOK TO
**WARMING UP THE
CLASSICAL VOICE**

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Introduction

Warming up is often one of the most misunderstood aspects of managing the singing voice. Many singers confuse the act of warming up the voice with the process of technically training their instrument.

It's easy to understand why that might be. Both a singer's warm-up and workout are often based on the use of vocalizes or vocal exercises. The distinction between the two activities should be tied to duration and intention. As 20th Century English Vocal Pedagogue, William Shakespeare notes, "It is irksome to sing with care what are apparently simple exercises, yet in acquiring any art, *thoughts* must come first, then *acts*, then *habits*." ¹

It is precisely these thoughts, acts and habits that differentiate the warm-up from the workout. The technical workout for a singer is a time set aside for methodical and deliberate physical training designed to develop the voice. A warm-up is the work that prepares the body for the physical act of singing. Once the voice is warmed up, you can begin a vocal workout session or you can turn your attention to your repertoire.

It's not a good idea to train your voice technically every day, but in the words of Richard Miller, "Warming up should be a daily event for every healthy singer of any age." ²

Knowing what you should do and knowing how to do it are two very different things. It's why the question of "how do I warm up?" is always a topic of conversation for singers.

1. (Plain Words on Singing, G.P. Putnam, p. 95)

2. (Solutions for Singers, Oxford University Press, p. 234).

What elements go into a good vocal warm-up?

A good warm-up will connect you to your proper singers' breath and help you say "hello" to your entire range. It should set you up for a productive performance or rehearsal and should never leave you fatigued.

A good warm-up will include breath and body work and have a handful of range appropriate gentle but thorough exercises to ease you into a beautiful vocal alignment.

The warm-up should not be a time to push your range and work to expand it but should be an opportunity to gently work within parameters that are comfortably available to you.

Another question many singers ask is "how long should I warm up for?" Depending on your range, age, and level of technical mastery warming up can take anywhere from 10–20 minutes.

The following warm-ups are designed to do just that.

With these exercises as a guide, you can build the habit of warming up every day. If you do, you will be rewarded with a consistent, clear tone that is always ready for a rehearsal or performance.



Step 1: Start with the body structure.

The perfect place to start your warm-up is a gentle stretching series that opens up the rib cage and invites the breath to settle into the body. It not only eases the voice into the warm-up, but can settle and focus the mind as well.

Feel free to use any stretching series that works well in your body. These can include side bends and shoulder rolls – even cat/cow yoga postures. The key here is not the specific stretches but that you are taking a moment to prepare your body physically for your warm-up.

After stretching, take a moment to find a neutral supported standing posture.

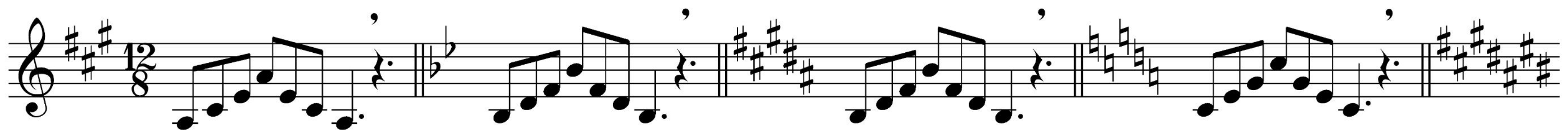
In your neutral posture, begin inhaling into the lower abdomen. Inviting the breath to drop deeper with each inhalation. Create a hissing sound on the exhale. Repeat this three times.



Step 2: Incorporate a lip or tongue trill to connect the breath work with your posture.

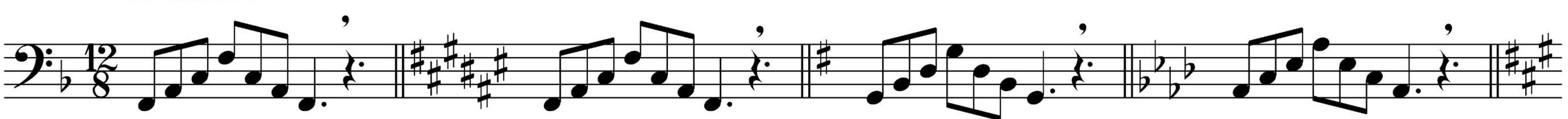
High Voice

Andante



Low Voice

Andante



High Voice Range: A4–C6

Low Voice Range: F3–G5

Note: Range of exercises in this guide can be expanded to accommodate individual vocal requirements. The high and low ranges are for general reference only.

See the end of this guide (pg. 10–15) for full notation of vocalizes.

Tips!

- Be sure to increase your lower-abdominal support as you go up in pitch and remember your goal is NOT to push the range to extremes.
- Make sure you are breathing in rhythm!
- Once you have reached the comfortable top of your range, come back down. You want to be as methodical with your mechanics coming down in pitch as you were going up.

Step 3: Begin to add Resonance through the middle voice.

High Voice

Moderato



Low Voice

Moderato



High Voice Range: A4–F5

Low Voice Range: G3–E5

See the end of this guide (pg. 10–15) for full notation of vocalizes.

Tips!

- Remember to sing the pattern BOTH ascending and descending by half steps through the entire range.
- Start with an [i] “ee” vowel in the middle voice and open up to [a] “ah” as you reach the high notes.

However, if these vowels are not the best focussing vowels for you, feel free to customize with vowel sounds that work best in your instrument.

Step 4: Open up the lower register.

Vowels on this will be quite personal. Much like the last exercise, most voices will prefer a closed vowel [i] “ee” in the middle of the range and open up to an [a] “ah” as it reaches the bottom end of the range.

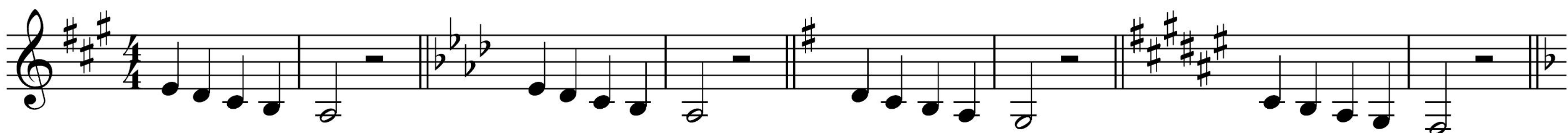
High Voice

Largo



Low Voice

Largo



High Voice Range: G4–F3

Low Voice Range: E4–D3

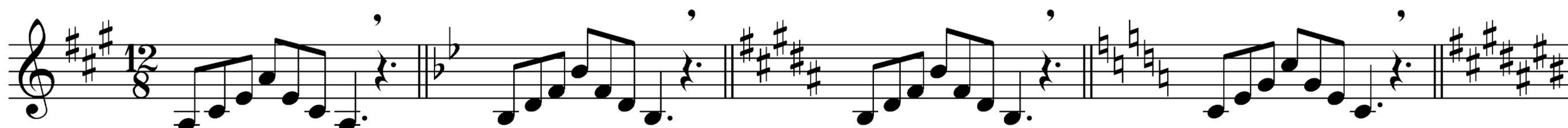
See the end of this guide (pg. 10–15) for full notation of vocalizes.

Step 5: Connect the range through the top.

Return to the initial vocalize (the one that you used for the lip trill). Replace the trill with vowels. Begin with the [i] “ee” vowel, transition to the [a] “ah”* on top (when you reach the comfortable upper end of your range). Remember to sing this exercise in both directions – ascending by half steps then descending by half steps.

High Voice

Andante



Low Voice

Andante



High Voice Range: A4–C6

Low Voice Range: F3–G5

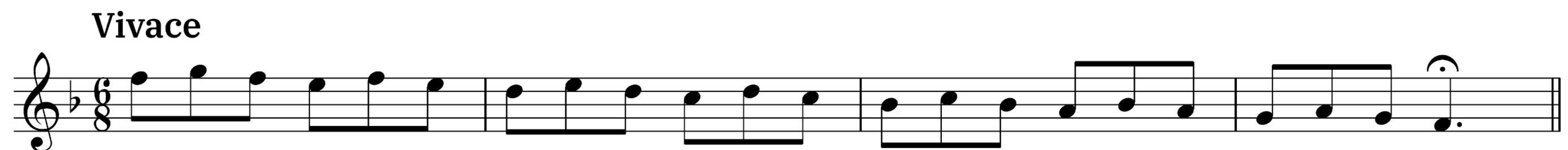
See the end of this guide (pg. 10–15) for full notation of vocalizes.

Step 6: Final siren

Finally, finish your warm up with a siren that stretches from the bottom of your range through the top of your range.

Step 7: Coloratura add-on.

If you still feel like you need a little more movement in the voice to be fully warmed up, add this exercise beginning at the top end of your middle voice. Experiment with open and closed vowels to see which one suits you best. You can move through this vocalize by half steps EITHER ascending or descending from your starting point (depending on where you want to find movement).

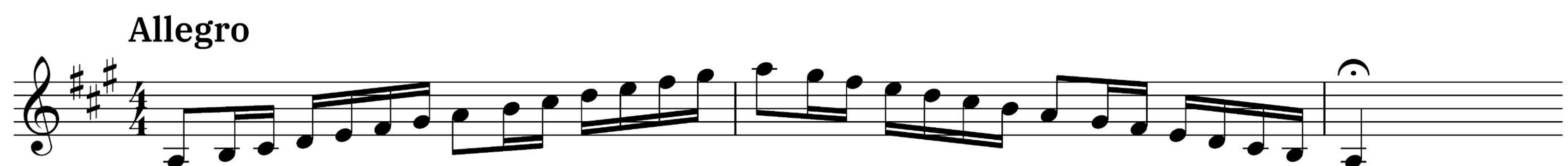


High Voice Range: starting pitch F5

Low Voice Range: starting pitch D5

Bonus!

If you are an advanced singer and are looking for a fast warm-up that catches your whole range consider this. After your lip/tongue trill, try singing the following exercise beginning just below your standard mid-low end starting spot. Run all the way through your high notes and return to the starting spot. As with the above exercise, always remember to sing both ascending and descending. Experiment with the vowels on this and see which one helps you navigate those shifting registers.



Tip!

- You may need to adjust the vowel mid-exercise to keep your voice lined up efficiently.

Conclusion

With the above warm-up routine, you will notice a variety of vocal skills being called into play.

- Scaffolding through technical skills (posture, breathe, resonance and vowel work) in a systematic and deliberate manner functions as a means to get each technical pillar turned on and working in conjunction with the others.
- Introducing a variety of tempi within your warm-up mirrors the reactions that will be called for in repertoire.
- Introducing a variety of ranges while juxtaposing step-wise motion with skipping motion in the exercises helps the voice become nimble.

This methodical strategy is the key to a well constructed warm-up routine.

Though the provided vocalizes are excellent examples that work well in a warm-up series, they are by no means exhaustive. As with so much in vocal training, it's not the series of pitches that matter. It is the underlying PROCESS.

Remember that warming up is not the main event. It sets the stage for a day of healthy voice use. When practiced regularly, warming up can be the foundational habit that supports a unified singing voice capable of remaining reliable and flexible for years to come.

Heidi Vass, B.M., M.M., NATS

tonebase Voice Lead

Full Notation – Exercises for High Voice

High Voice

Andante

The image displays eight staves of musical notation for high voice exercises. The tempo is marked 'Andante' and the time signature is 12/8. Each staff contains a sequence of notes and rests, with key signatures changing between measures. The exercises are designed to be performed in a single breath, as indicated by the phrasing marks. The key signatures for the eight staves are: 1. D major (two sharps), 2. E major (three sharps), 3. F major (one sharp), 4. G major (one sharp), 5. A major (three sharps), 6. B major (four sharps), 7. C major (no sharps or flats), and 8. D major (two sharps).

High Voice

Moderato

The musical score is written for a High Voice part at a Moderato tempo. It consists of ten staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 2/4 time signature. The music is composed of eighth and quarter notes, with some measures containing a half note followed by a quarter rest. The key signature changes throughout the piece, including F major, D major, and B major. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and rests.

High Voice

Largo

The musical score is written for a High Voice part in a Largo tempo, 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The music is written in a series of measures, with various key signatures and rests. The second staff continues the melody, featuring a key signature change to three sharps. The third staff shows further key signature changes, including a key with two flats. The fourth staff concludes the piece with a final key signature of two flats and a double bar line.

Full Notation – Exercises for Low Voice

Low Voice

Andante

The image displays seven staves of musical notation for low voice exercises, marked 'Andante'. Each staff begins with a bass clef and a 12/8 time signature. The notation consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and includes various key signatures (one flat, two sharps, three sharps, and four sharps) indicated by the key signature symbol at the start of each staff. The exercises are designed to explore different vocal ranges and intervals within the low voice register.

Low Voice

Moderato

The musical score is written for a low voice part at a moderate tempo. It consists of ten staves of music. The first staff begins with a 2/4 time signature and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The subsequent staves feature various key signatures, including one flat (Bb), two sharps (D# and F#), three sharps (F#, C#, and G#), and four sharps (F#, C#, G#, and D#). The music is primarily composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, with occasional quarter notes and rests. The notation includes a variety of musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and note heads. The overall structure of the piece is a continuous melodic line with some changes in key signature and tempo markings.

Low Voice

Largo

