

Module 1

Achieving Composure

Stance: Relaxation stretches and posture alignment exercises

1. Standing with your feet parallel directly beneath your hips, stretch up, reaching your arms up into the air. Stretch all the way up to your fingertips and down to your toes. Stand on your tiptoes as you stretch and imagine that your fingers are touching the stars above and your feet are growing roots that are stretching all the way down into the core of the earth. You are that big! Your presence is enormous!
2. Release your stretch and drop your arms to your sides. Allow yourself the sensation of your feet spreading across the floor and your head floating above your neck. Imagine your arms and your head becoming very heavy. Release your neck and allow your head to gently drop forward. Allow the heaviness in the head and the arms to draw you down towards the floor, rolling down through your spine, one vertebra at a time. Allow your knees to soften and bend slightly as you roll forwards. Keep your neck and arms free at all times. Let yourself hang from your coccyx, with only your legs supporting you. Take a deep breath in and feel your ribs spreading across your back and release your breath on a sigh. Repeat the breathing. Then, slowly, to a mental count of 8, roll up through your spine, one vertebra at a time. Think of your neck as an extension of your spine, uncurling last and allowing your head to come up last of all. You will find that if you are completely relaxed as you roll up your jaw will drop open as you straighten the head into an upright position.
3. Standing with your feet parallel directly beneath your hips, imagine a fine string attached to the crown of your head, holding you up, lengthening your neck. Allow your head to float freely above your neck. Let your shoulders hang. Let your head rotate slightly first to the right and then to the left while still being held up by this imaginary string. Now imagine someone cutting that string and allow your head to drop forward, starting the repeat of Exercise 2.
4. Raise your shoulders slightly (about 2 cm) and release them, letting them hang. Repeat 3-4 times, using your breathing to help you release them more on every exhalation.
5. Roll the shoulders, taking care not to tense your neck nor push the head forward.
6. Gently stretch the neck (without using any force or causing any strain). Keep your jaw slightly dropped open and as relaxed as possible. Slowly drop the head forward and hold. Feel the muscles in the back of the neck releasing more and more on every exhalation. Lift your head to the centre. Repeat, this time to the side, allowing your right ear to move towards your right shoulder. Keep both shoulders relaxed and dropped. Raise your head back to the centre and repeat this on the left side and, finally, once more in the centre. Watch out for the shoulders that might want to shift in their positioning. When your ear drops down to them your shoulders should stay horizontal and relaxed.
7. Feel for the jaw hinge, just in front of your ear lobes. Massage the jaw at its hinges, then move your massaging down to the back of your neck and, finally, up to the temples.

Intercostal Diaphragmatic Breathing (IDB) Exercises

Locating the breathing – placement & action

1. Place your hand over your belly button
2. Take a deep breath in – breathe into the area underneath your hand as if breathing the air in to the bottom of your stomach. Feel the expansion. Imagine that your abdomen is a balloon and fill it with air (take slow, deep breaths). Repeat at your own pace.
3. Place your hands gently on the sides of your ribcage and feel for expansion as you breathe in slowly and deeply. Repeat at your own pace.
4. Stand in front of a mirror or a partner. Place one hand on the belly button and the other on your chest. When you breathe in through your nose allow the air to push your hand that is over your belly button out and not move the hand that is placed on the chest. When breathing out, let any air that might be held in the chest cavities out first and then only the air in the abdominal area (watch the hands for movements). Remember, air going into the upper chest does not aid voice production or draw in enough oxygen to calm your system, so the idea is to feel as if you are bypassing the upper chest and drawing the air directly into the abdominal area.

Increasing breath capacity and controlling the breath

5. With one hand at the side of your ribcage and the other above your belly button, take in a deep breath. Hold your breath for a mental count of 3. Slowly exhale to a mental count of 3 (controlling your exhalation). Repeat, but this time exhale to a mental count of 5. Repeat again to a mental count of 7. Continue practising, each time attempting to increase your mental count. Ensure that your upper body remains relaxed (particularly your chest, shoulders and neck)
6. Breathe in deeply. Pant the air out in short sharp breaths, controlling the exhalations with the diaphragm. Repeat. If you get light-headed, simply slow down your breathing.

Translating breath into voice

7. Repeat exercise 6, this time as if gently exhaling ‘her’ on each pant. Think of your diaphragm as a trampoline and imagine the sound bouncing off the trampoline and out of your mouth.
8. Take a deep breath in, using your diaphragm. Gently ‘hum’ your breath out on a comfortable note. Make sure that all air is ‘translated’ into sound. Try to stay as relaxed as possible, so that you don’t force the sound. Repeat several times, gently warming up your voice.
9. Repeat exercise 8, this time, after humming for a short while, slowly let your jaw drop open until you continue the sound on an ‘aw’ (mmmm-aw)

10. Breathe in deeply again. Now start counting aloud, slowly, one number at a time. Be sure to use the breath only when you speak and hold it in the pauses in between, using the diaphragm.
11. Repeat exercises 1-10, lying on your back on the floor with your knees lifted so that your back is aligned and your spine is lengthened along the floor (in the Berry position). Lifting the knees allows less of an arch in the lower back and better alignment for breathing. Place a large dictionary, law book or some other similarly heavy book on your belly button (or between your belly button and the V of your ribcage, just below your sternum). When you inhale, breathe into the area below the book (imagine your balloon is here) and feel the book rise as you inhale. As you exhale, feel how the book lowers and returns to its original position.
12. Introduce yourself ('Hello, my name is...') using breath support, both while standing and sitting.

Please Note: Practising regularly and frequently is essential. Find the time to practise for 15-30 minutes daily and apply your techniques whenever possible. These two commitments will make all the difference!