

Voice Characteristics

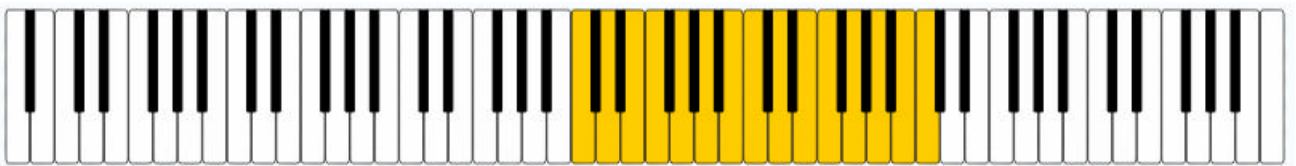
Voice (or **vocalization**) is the **sound** uttered through the mouth of living creatures, especially of human beings in speaking, shouting, singing, etc. It is typically described in terms of:

- **Pitch**—the relative **tone** of a person's voice: how high or low it is; how monotonous
- **Intensity**—the force or **volume** of tone; how loud or soft it is
- **Quality**—the character or distinctive attributes of a sound; it's **resonance**

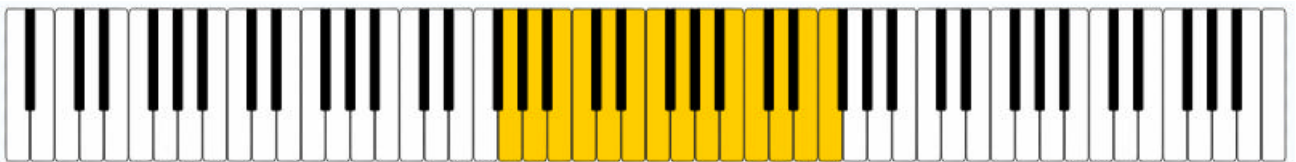
Vocal Range

Vocal range is the **span** from the highest to the lowest note (pitch) a particular voice can produce. The basic choral ranges are:

❖ **Soprano**—C4 to C6



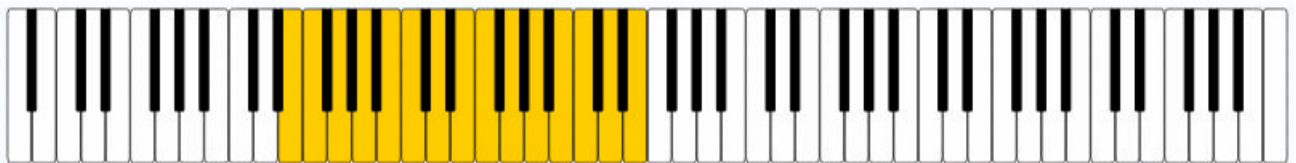
❖ **Alto**—G3 to F5



❖ **Tenor**—D3 to A4



❖ **Bass**—E2 to E4



Speaking Rate

Rate of speaking is a person's talking **speed**; how fast or slow it is.

- If you talk too fast, your partner may feel that you are in a hurry. If you talk too slowly, you may lose your partner's attention.
- A person can talk at 140–160 **words per minute** (wpm) and be clearly understood. It is the range that people comfortably hear words.
- Women speak faster on average than men.
- The speed of **rapping** is usually measured in syllables per second/minute.

Prosody

Prosody is the **rhythm—stress** and **intonation** patterns of speech. It may reflect the emotional state of a speaker; whether an utterance is a statement, a question or a command; whether the speaker is being ironic, sarcastic or angry.

- ❑ **Rhythm**—the variation of the length and **accentuation** of a series of sounds

Intonation

Intonation is the **variation** of pitch when speaking—the rise and fall of the voice as it slides from one pitch to another in the formation of a syllable, word, or group of words. There are five **tones** in English:

- ❖ **The fall** ↘ (**falling** intonation)—the pitch decreases with time.
- ❖ **The rise** ↗ (**rising** intonation)—the pitch increases over time.
- ❖ **The fall-rise** ↘ ↗ (**dipping** intonation)—the pitch falls and then rises.
- ❖ **The rise-fall** ↗ ↘ (**peaking** intonation)—the pitch rises and then falls.
- ❖ **Level** →—the pitch is flat.

Falling intonation—certainty, finality

- Statements and replies
- Exclamation
- Orders, commands and warnings
- *Wh*-questions

Rising intonation—uncertainty, pausing

- Before pauses or commas
- Hesitation
- Requests
- Ordinary questions

Dipping intonation

- Afterthoughts
- Tag questions

Peaking intonation

- Two sense groups

Stress

Stress is the relative **emphasis** that may be given to certain syllables in a word or certain words in a sentence. **Accent** is sometimes also used with this sense. Emphasis is achieved by the use of **inflection**, volume, and **pause**.

- ❑ **Inflection**—the modulation of the voice; the change/alteration in pitch or tone
- ❑ **Pause**—the brief suspension of the voice, or hesitation, while speaking

Content Vs. Function Words

In a sentence, **content words** are stressed such as:

- Nouns
- Principal verbs
- Adjectives
- Adverbs
- Demonstrative pronouns
- Interrogative pronouns

Non-stressed words are considered **function words** such as:

- Articles
- Prepositions
- Conjunctions
- Helping verbs
- Possessive adjectives
- Relative pronouns
- Personal pronouns

Timing

Timing is the rhythmic quality of speech, in particular how syllables are distributed across time. There are two types of language timing:

- ❖ **Syllable-timed** language—every syllable takes up roughly the same amount of time when pronounced; “machine-gun rhythm.”
- ❖ **Stress-timed** language—syllables may last different amounts of time when spoken; “Morse-code rhythm.”

Exercises: Intonation

Exercise 1: Rubber band practice with nonsense syllables—Take a rubber band and hold it with your two thumbs. Every time you want to stress a word by changing pitch, pull on the rubber band. Stretch it out gently, don’t jerk it sharply. Make a looping figure with it and do the same with your voice. Use the rubber band and stretch it out every time you change pitch. Read first across, then down.

	A	B	C	D
1	duh duh duh	la la la	mee mee mee	ho ho ho
2	duh duh duh	la la la	mee mee mee	ho ho ho
3	duh duh duh	la la la	mee mee mee	ho ho ho
4	duh duh duh	la la la	mee mee mee	ho ho ho

Read each column down, keeping the same intonation pattern.

	A	B	C	D
1	duh duh duh	duh duh duh	duh duh duh	duh duh duh
2	ABC	imprecise	condition	alphabet
3	123	a hot dog	a hot dog	hot dog stand
4	Dogs eat bones.	They eat bones.	They eat them.	Give me one.

Statement intonation with nouns—Intonation or pitch change is primarily used to introduce *new information*. This means that when you are making a statement for the first time, you will stress the *nouns*.

Exercise 2: Noun intonation—Practice the noun stress pattern using pitch change. Add your own examples at the end.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Dogs eat bones . | 11. Jerry makes music . |
| 2. Mike likes bikes . | 12. Jean sells some apples . |
| 3. Elsa wants a book . | 13. Carol paints the car . |
| 4. Adam plays pool . | 14. Bill and I fix the bikes . |
| 5. Bobby needs some money . | 15. Ann and Ed call the kids . |
| 6. Susie combs her hair . | 16. The kids like the candy . |
| 7. John lives in France . | 17. The girls have a choice . |
| 8. Nelly teaches French . | 18. The boys need some help . |
| 9. Ben writes articles . | 19. _____ |
| 10. Keys open locks . | 20. _____ |

Statement intonation with pronouns—When you replace the nouns with *pronouns* (*old information*), stress the *verb*. As we have seen, nouns are new information; pronouns are old information. In a nutshell, these are the two basic intonation patterns.

Exercise 3: Noun and pronoun intonation—In the first column, stress the nouns. In the second column, stress the verb. Fill in your own examples at the bottom.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Bob sees Betty . | 1. He sees her. |
| 2. Betty knows Bob . | 2. She knows him. |
| 3. Ann and Ed call the kids . | 3. They call them. |
| 4. Jan sells some apples . | 4. She sells some. |
| 5. Jean sells cars . | 5. She sells them. |
| 6. Bill and I fix the bikes . | 6. We fix them. |
| 7. Carl hears Bob and me. | 7. He hears us. |
| 8. Dogs eat bones . | 8. They eat them. |
| 9. The girls have a choice . | 9. They have one. |
| 10. The kids like the candy . | 10. They like it. |
| 11. The boys need some help . | 11. They need something. |
| 12. Ellen should call her sister . | 12. She should call someone. |
| 13. The murderer killed the plumber . | 13. He killed a man. |
| 14. The tourists went shopping . | 14. They bought stuff. |
| 15. _____ | 15. _____ |
| 16. _____ | 16. _____ |

Statement vs. question intonation—You may have learned at some point that questions have a *rising* intonation. They do, but usually a question will step upward until the very end, where it takes one quick little downward step. A question rises a little higher than a statement with the same intonation pattern.

“Here is my **car**.”

“Where is my **car**?”

Emotional or rhetorical question intonation—If you know that your car is parked outside, however, and someone doesn’t see it and asks you where it is, you might think that it has been stolen and your emotion will show in your intonation as you repeat the question. As your feelings rise in an emotional situation, your intonation rises up along with them.

“Where is my **car**?”

“**Why?** Is it **gone**?”

Four main reasons for intonation—Depending on the situation, a word may be stressed for any of the following reasons: (1) new information, (2) opinion, (3) contrast, and (4) the word “can’t.”

- 1. New information**—*Rain* is the new information. It’s the most important word in that sentence and you could replace everything else with *duh-duh-duh*. *Duh-duh-duh rain* will still let you get your point across. Repeat: *Duh-duh-duh rain*. Make “rain” very musical and put it on two notes: *ray-ayn*. *Duh-duh-duh ray-ayn*.

“It sounds like **rain**.”

- 2. Opinion**—In this case, intonation makes the meaning the opposite of what the words say: “*It looks like* a diamond, but I think it’s a zircon.” “*It smells like* Chanel, but at that price, it’s a knock-off.” “*It feels like...*” “*It tastes like...*” These examples all give the impression that you mean the opposite of what your senses tell you. Practice the intonation difference between new information and opinion: *It sounds like rain* (It’s rain). *It sounds like rain* (but it’s not).

“It **sounds** like rain (but I don’t think it is).”

- 3. Contrast**—*Like* and *hate* are contrasted and are the stronger words in the sentence.

“He **likes** rain, but he **hates** snow.”

- 4. “Can’t”**—Contractions (*shouldn’t*, *wouldn’t*, etc.) and negatives (*no*, *not*, *ever*) are important words since they totally negate the meaning of a sentence, but they are not usually stressed. *Can’t* is the exception.

“It **can’t** rain when there are no **clouds**.”

Exercise 4: Pitch and meaning change—Practice saying the four sentences. Pay close attention to the changes in pitch that you must make to convey the different meanings intended. The words to be stressed are indicated in bold face.

1. It sounds like **rain**.
2. It **sounds** like rain.
3. He **likes** rain, but he **hates** snow.
4. It **can’t** rain on my **parade**! He **can’t** do it.

Practice saying the sentences after the suggestion and the beep tone. You will be given only a short time in which to reply so that you won't have the leisure to overthink. Start speaking as soon as you hear the tone because the sentence will be said only a few seconds later.

1. Convey the information that it really does sound as if rain is falling.

2. Convey the opinion that although it has the sound of rain, it may be something else.

3. Convey the different feelings that someone has about rain and snow.

4. Convey the fact that rain is an impossibility right now.

Exercise 5: Inflection—Notice how the meaning changes, while the actual words stay the same.

1. I didn't say he stole the money. *Someone else* said it.
(It's true that somebody said it, but I wasn't that person.)
2. I **didn't** say he stole the money. That's *not true* at all.
(Someone has accused me and I'm protesting my innocence.)
3. I didn't **say** he stole the money. I only *suggested the possibility*.
(Maybe I hinted it. Maybe I wrote it. In some way, I indicated that he stole the money, but I didn't say it.)
4. I didn't say **he** stole the money. I think *someone else* took it.
(I think someone stole the money, only not the person you suspect did it.)
5. I didn't say he **stole** the money. Maybe he just *borrowed* it.
(I agree that he took it, but I think his motive was different.)
6. I didn't say he stole **the** money, but rather some *other* money.
(We agree that he stole some money, but I don't think it's this money.)
7. I didn't say he stole the **money**. He may have taken some *jewelry*.
(We agree that he's a thief, but we think he stole different things.)

Now, let's see what you can do with the same sentence, just by changing the stress around to different words. You will be told which meaning to express. When you hear the tone, say the sentence as quickly as you can, then the sentence will be said for you. To test your ear, the sentences will be repeated in random order. Try to determine which word is being stressed.

1. Indicate that he borrowed the money and didn't steal it.

2. Indicate that you are denying having said that he stole it.

3. Indicate that you think he stole something besides money.

4. Indicate that you were not the person to say it.

5. Indicate that you don't think that he was the person who stole it.

6. Indicate that you didn't say it outright, but did suggest it in some way.

7. Indicate that he many have stolen a different amount of money.

Overdo it—Practice these sentences on your own, really exaggerating the word that you think should be stressed. In the beginning, you're going to feel that this is ridiculous. (Nobody stresses this hard! Nobody talks like this! People are going to laugh at me!) Yet as much as you may stress, you're probably only going to be stressing about half as much as you should. Practice the sentences in random order ten times. Another reason you must *overexaggerate* is because when you get tired, emotional or relaxed, you will stop paying attention. When this happens, like a rubber band, you're going to snap back to the way you originally were sounding (10 percent). So, if you just stretch yourself to the exact position where you ideally want to be, you'll go back almost completely to the old way when you relax. For practice, then, stretch yourself far beyond the normal range of intonation (150 percent or so), so when you relax, you relax back to a standard sound (100 percent).

Intonation contrast—Below are two sentences—the first is stressed on the most common, everyday word, “book.” Nine times out of ten, people will stress the sentence in this way. The second sentence has a less common, but perfectly acceptable intonation, since we are making a distinction between two possible locations.

Normal intonation: “Where’s the **book**? **It’s** on the **table**.”

Changed intonation: “Is the book **on** the table or **under** it? It’s **on** the table.”

Exercise 6: Create your own intonation contrast—Write a short sentence and indicate where you think the most normal intonation would be placed. Then, change the meaning of the sentence slightly and change the intonation accordingly. Now you decide which words should be emphasized. Write a normal, everyday sentence with at least seven words and put it through as many changes as possible. Try to make a pitch change for each word in the sentence and think about how it changes the meaning of the entire sentence.

Normal intonation:

Changed intonation:
