

## **STRETCH AND RELEASE**

These are adapted from a hand out from Dane Chalfin that he put together with Ed Blake. I have added in exercises from voice classes I did at University and Drama school, stretches shown to me by Charles Ward (VocDoc) and James Barton (Royal Scottish Ballet)

## **ACTIVE ALIGNMENT**

This means imagining a “line” running through your skeleton. It goes from your toes, up to your hips, then your shoulders and and lastly your ears. Stand as tall as you can be, as though a puppet master is lifting up you by a string in the crown of your head and a string at the top/front of your chest, as well as a little weight that is pulling you down at the base of your spine.

This should lead to a feeling of lengthening without holding tension.

You should feel energised and, as though you could break into a run, but also that you are grounded and wound’t fall over if someone bumped into you.

## **PRE-STRETCH CHECK-IN**

In this check-in we are working with a scale of 1 to 10. 1 is as easy as it could be and 10 is as difficult as it could be. Work within your scale of effort, we are all different. When “grading these exercises it can be useful to note down the numbers you give to each exercise.

1. Turn your head as far as you can to the left then the right. Observe the effort required and how far you can turn your head Give it a mark from 1-10.
2. Put the tip of your tongue behind your bottom teeth. Push the rest of your tongue out of your mouth, stretching your tongue from the back. Observe how tense your tongue is, particularly at the back and underneath your chin. Again grade it from 1-10.
3. Slide from the bottom of your voice up to the top on a gentle “ng” sound. Grade this exercise from 1-10 based on how easy/difficult it feels, paying particular attention to the extremes of your range. Also consider if your voice feels bumpy or has gaps.

## **STRETCHING EXERCISES**

**For all of these exercises make sure that you have active alignment**

### Exercise 1: torso drop down

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your knees loose.
2. Let your head drop onto your chest.
3. Continue this stretch until it is as though you are trying to touch your toes. Don't worry if you can't touch your toes.
4. Feel the weight of your head and gently shake out your body, letting gravity take hold of your head and shoulders.
5. Very slowly straighten up your spine again, imagining that you are building your spine from the bottom, one vertebra at a time until you are standing tall.
6. Make sure that your neck is the last part of your spine to straighten by keeping your chin tucked in till the last moment.

### Exercise 2: Shoulder Clocks

1. Imagine you have a giant clock face on both sides of your shoulders.
2. Take your shoulders up to 12 o'clock.
3. Take your shoulders all the way forward to 9 o'clock.
4. Take your shoulders all the way down to 6 o'clock.
5. Then take your shoulders all the way back to 3 o'clock.
6. Now start at 12 and move one hour at a time (12, 1, 2, 3, etc.)
7. Now go anti-clockwise the same way.
8. Repeat this three times in each direction making sure to move all the way through whole clock face.
9. Notice how you can feel your breath expand different parts of your torso as you move your shoulders.

### Exercise 3: Head/Neck Rolls

1. Drop your head so your chin is touching your chest or as close as you can get to that. (See how many extra chins you can create.)
2. Tilt your chin as though tipping your left ear towards your left shoulder. Only take it as far as you can, keeping your chin touching your chest.
3. Return your chin to the centre and then repeat on the other side.
4. Repeat this at least three times.

### Exercise 4: Head Tilt

1. Keeping your head facing forwards tip your left ear towards your left shoulder.
2. Tilt your head as though you are looking upwards.
3. Relax the jaw and let it hang “loosely”. It may feel as though you are drooling when you do this.
4. Stay in this position for 30 seconds and breathe into the stretch.
5. Repeat on the other side.
6. Repeat this at least three times.

### Exercise 5: Neck Stretch

1. Put your hand on the skin of your upper chest, at the base of the front of your neck and gently pull downwards.
2. Raise and tip your head backwards. You should feel a stretch on the muscles on the front of your neck. Do not tip your head too far back, if you don't feel the stretch pull harder with the hand on your chest.
3. Tip your head gently to your left side.
4. To increase this stretch even more jut your chin forwards.
5. To further increase the stretch press your tongue towards the front of the roof of your mouth.
6. THE AIM OF THIS exercise is to stretch your neck muscles without curving your head backwards too much.
7. Repeat on the other side.

### Exercise 6: Pec Stretch - doorway stretch

1. Stand with active alignment in a doorway with the door open.
2. Bend your arm at a 90 degree angle at the elbow with your hand pointing towards the ceiling.
3. Keeping in active alignment move your body forwards so that you can feel a stretch across the front of your torso and into your shoulder muscles.
4. Check that your neck is still long.
5. Repeat on the other side.

### Exercise 7: Jaw Massage

1. Place your fingers just under the cheekbones back towards the ears.
2. Press into the muscle and drag your fingers down and back towards the back of your jaw. Be careful not to be massaging your neck but keep to the sides of your face, where you would have sideburns if you were Elvis.
3. Repeat for 30 seconds.
4. Be careful not to drop the head forward. Keep your Active Alignment throughout.

### Exercise 8: Cheeky Jaw Massage

1. I call this the cheeky jaw massage as it is most effective if you use what my kids would call their “rude finger”, the one next to your ring finger. However it most important to use the fingers with the shortest nails.
2. Slightly open your jaw by creating a small space between your back molars.
3. Using the fingers from both hands gently push backwards on the space between your molars.
4. If you are unsure if you’re in the correct place slightly open and close your jaw. If you are in the correct place you will feel the chewing muscles move.

### Exercise 9: Tongue Massage

1. Take hold of the skin under your chin, squeezing any flesh underneath your jaw.
2. Massage this area with your thumbs for 30 seconds.
3. Keep tall!

### Exercise 10: Teeth Washing

1. Give your teeth a good clean by using your tongue as a scrubbing brush.
2. Start with the upper teeth and go around clockwise five times.
3. Now repeat anticlockwise five times.
4. Move to the bottom teeth and repeat the previous steps.
5. This may make the back of your tongue ache. If it is too much for you then do less!

### Exercise 11: Chew and Yawn

1. Chew an imaginary piece of cake keeping your lips closed.
2. Imagine the cake is growing in your mouth. Make space in your mouth and throat whilst keeping your lips closed.
3. This might bring on a yawn. If it does enough the yawn. Yawning is great for your voice. Let it stretch through your whole body be nosing with it and really enjoy it.

### **CHECK-IN #2**

Now go back and check in the way you did before you started the Stretch and Release work. You should notice that your resting tension levels have dropped. If they have not dropped below a 3 repeat the Stretch and Release exercises until they do.

**With thanks to Dane Chalfin, Ed Blake, Charles Ward and James Barton.**