

Vocal Technique for the Actor
de Veer

Alexander-based Exercises to do on your own:

1. Lie-down in semi-supine with 1 – 3 paperback books under your head at the occipital lobe (This is to give you the same head-neck-back relationship you have while standing. Make sure you are not compressing your larynx.) 20 minutes is ideal, but whatever you can do will help.



2. Lie-down, as above, with lower legs on chair at a 90 degree angle to thighs. This is particularly useful if you have tension in your hips and thighs.



3. Yoga child's pose with feet together, knees apart, forehead on floor, elbows bent, and hands beside your face. This will help a number of things:

- Free and stretch the low back
- Open the lower ribs
- Free the hip flexors to allow for full diaphragmatic breathing
- Being a form of fetal position, it is calming to the nervous system



4. Whispered “ahs”

Alexander created this exercise as a means of helping himself unwind his own faulty vocal habits. I find the Whispered Ah highly effective in assisting actors to release the excess tension that accompanies the startle reflex and to get out of the way of their breathing. It is usually done in the position of mechanical advantage he called Monkey, that balances the two heaviest parts of the skeleton—the head and the pelvis.

The Whispered Ah calms the actor and encourages an uninterrupted free flow of breath upon exhalation. It is also a good antidote to a common habit many actors exhibit: that of meting out the breath in a miserly way by compressing the muscles in the torso and neck with the mistaken belief that they need to control the breath. The steps are as follows:

- Stand in Monkey – Give yourself the directions *I want my neck to be free, my head to go forward and up, and my back to lengthen and widen* while bending the knees and allowing the torso to tip forward at approximately a 45 degree angle. It is important to maintain your length and not allow the back to round or collapse. You may balance your knuckles on the back of a chair or table if you desire more support.

- Exhale through the mouth making sure not to tighten the neck or abdominal muscles. Allow the breath in through the nose.
- Think of something pleasant or funny to elicit a gentle lift of the soft palate.
- Place the tip of the tongue on the back of the lower teeth. This will encourage the tongue to lengthen forward freeing the vocal tract.
- Allow the mouth to open and the jaw to drop to its normal open position, back and down. This is the point when many people tighten the back of the neck, thus making more work for the jaw and restricting the throat.
- Freely release a steady whispered Ah until you reach the end of your breath. At that point, close the lips and allow the breath to drop in (do not take a breath).
- Repeat the Whispered Ahs 3-4 times, reminding yourself to free the abdominal, pelvic, and neck muscles.



I usually encourage actors to continually think of generously giving the breath away to help them avoid controlling the exhalation (which really means holding the breath to some extent), and creates more tension and pulling down in the core.



5. Hands on back of chair – Encourages one's whole self to balance the weight of one's body. It also gives the arms a nice stretch as they spiral out of the lumbar area of the back. And the rib cage can freely hang off the spine, encouraging free breath.
 - Move into Monkey
 - Give yourself the directions to allow just the thought of a gentle pull from your wrist to your elbow and your upper arm to your elbow. This will encourage the back to lengthen and widen.
 - Extend chair onto its 2 front legs, keeping your elbows extended, but soft and not "locked"
 - Return to upright by looking forward and up and gently pulling to the elbows.



6. Deep monkey

- Move into Monkey
- With a flat back, going “forward and up,” move into a position with your torso parallel to the floor, knuckles helping support



- Extend wrists away from self, lengthening arms out of back.



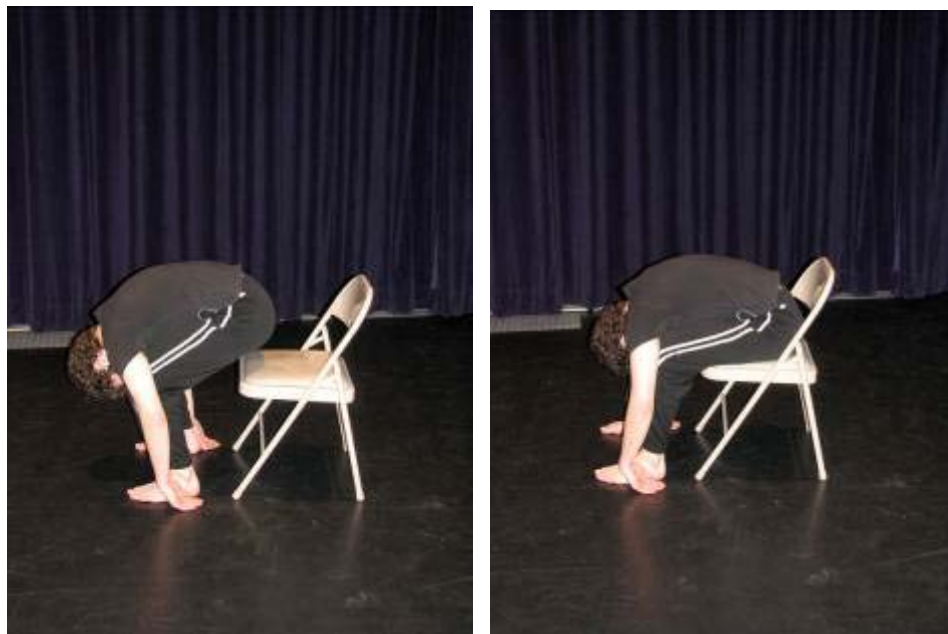
- Head down, butt up, come to standing by leading with your he
7. Sit in chair, go “up” to look down, roll down spine in primary curve – head forward, hips back. Raise butt and scoot back in chair. Roll up.

Step one



Step two

Step three



8. Squat – Helps free the hip flexors and lengthen the spine
- Move into deep monkey
 - Round the spine into primary curve as you fold into the full squat position.



9. Buddy squat
- Stand opposite your partner, arms linked
 - Partner A slowly moves into flat back position, while partner B helps to balance them by standing in monkey



- Partner B continues to balance Partner A while s/he moves into a full squat.



- Both partners look at each other, direct “up” to return to standing upright.

10. LARGE EXERCISE BALL

- Lie on belly on ball, release head forward – find position that is comfortable and allows your back to lengthen and widen. This also helps give a sense of diaphragmatic breath support



- Lie on back on ball, have something/one support your head – open up pecs and front flexors



