

Principle 1: Find The HuNNN

THE PRINCIPLE:

Closing the mouth in the “n” position keeps the air from the phonation from exiting through the mouth and forces it out through the nasopharynx, sinuses, and nose.

I have found that this “n” position gives the singer the most physical feedback such that they can have a interoceptive experience of the sound they are making. This, then, allows them to focus their attention on the feeling they are creating by phonating.

Understanding this principle gives you the opportunity to find new ways to explore it.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS PRINCIPLE:

The objectives of this exercise are any or all of the following:

- MOVE THE BIG ROCK: Shift the singer’s attention from what they hear to what they feel.
- Help them realize that what they feel is providing the information about how their voice is functioning.

TEACHER NOTES:

Please think of this exercise as brain training. Remember that this is PROCEDURAL MEMORY, and just because someone understands it doesn't mean they can do it. "Mistakes" are just as valuable as "wins." Please choose a "yes, and" approach rather than "correcting mistakes."

Also remember that this is strange and not what they expected when they signed up for voice lessons. Explain what you need to without over-explaining.

SCRIPT

YOU: We're going to start by making a very plain sound. Normally when we hum we hum on an M like Mary. I'd like you to hum on an N like Nancy.

THEM: Hums on N

If they are unable to, suggest they say "hun" like the first half of the word "honey." If that doesn't work, ask them to say the word "tin" and hold out the "n."

YOU: Do you notice that buzzy sound that happens when you hum on the "n?"

THEM: Yes.

If no, ask them to listen for it and do it again.

YOU: Great. I'd like you to do that again, please, and this time bring your attention to the front of your face. See if you can *feel* that buzzy sound you just heard.

THEM: Yes. I can feel it.

OR, if they say they can't, go back to the beginning and ask them to listen for the buzz again. Then ask them to bring their attention to the front of their face and tell them to look for a very small feeling.

If they still can't feel it, you can turn back to the sound. Ask the to attach a concept to the sound (a mosquito, a blender, etc.) and just go with that for now.

YOU: Is the feeling more general, or are you experiencing it in a more local way? Like, can you point to it or tell me where you're feeling it?

THEM: I feel it here.

Whatever they say is fine. Make clear, by being relaxed and accepting, that they're exploring a feeling.

YOU: Great. Do it again please.

THEM: *They do it again.*

YOU: Great. I'm going to ask you to do it again, and this time, before you make the sound, anticipate how it's going to feel. Look for the feeling before you make the sound.

THEM: *They try.*

YOU: Great. Do it again.

THEM: *They do it again.*

YOU: Do you feel like you're getting what you intend?

*Listen for the Neuro-Vocal Trifecta: buzzy sound, relaxed larynx, slight abdominal engagement. If that's happening, move on. When they're first learning, **close is good enough**. You want to encourage them. You can tidy it up next time.*

If there is laryngeal tension, it is because:

- 1. They think they're singing, or*
- 2. They're trying to be too loud, or*
- 3. Both*

The sound of "I think I'm singing" and the sound of working to be too loud are different, and you'll learn to discern between the two.

*Start with checking their volume. **Remember you're looking for that sweet spot of enough volume/breath energy to create the buzz, but not so much as to create any pushing, straining, or tension.***

If they think they're singing, tell them so. Remind them that we're just making sounds, and that we're trying to trick the brain into not singing. Give them the "make the sound with a sneer" or "make the sound of a..." or whatever tricks you have.

THEM: Yes.

YOU: OK! We're going to move that around a little bit.

Now you move them within a small range, up and down in half-steps, helping them along the way.

Please remember that this is odd, and people sometimes feel uncomfortable about it. They are with you to learn to sing, and this is not singing. Praise and reassurance go a long way.

YOU: (picking a major third in which they felt comfortable) We're going to do these few pitches again.

Do this again and point out to them what bit they're doing well and/or the bit you think is important:

1. Notice how you feel that buzz in your face, and nothing in your larynx?
2. Notice how your abdominal wall is ever-so-slightly engaged when you do that?
3. Notice how you're allowing for changes in the way those pitches feel as you go higher? (Nasty Triangle)

This is what happens when you make sound efficiently. I know it's hard to believe, but that really does turn into singing. When you get more accustomed to this feeling, you'll hear it in *every single singer* you listen to!