

TAKE THAT!

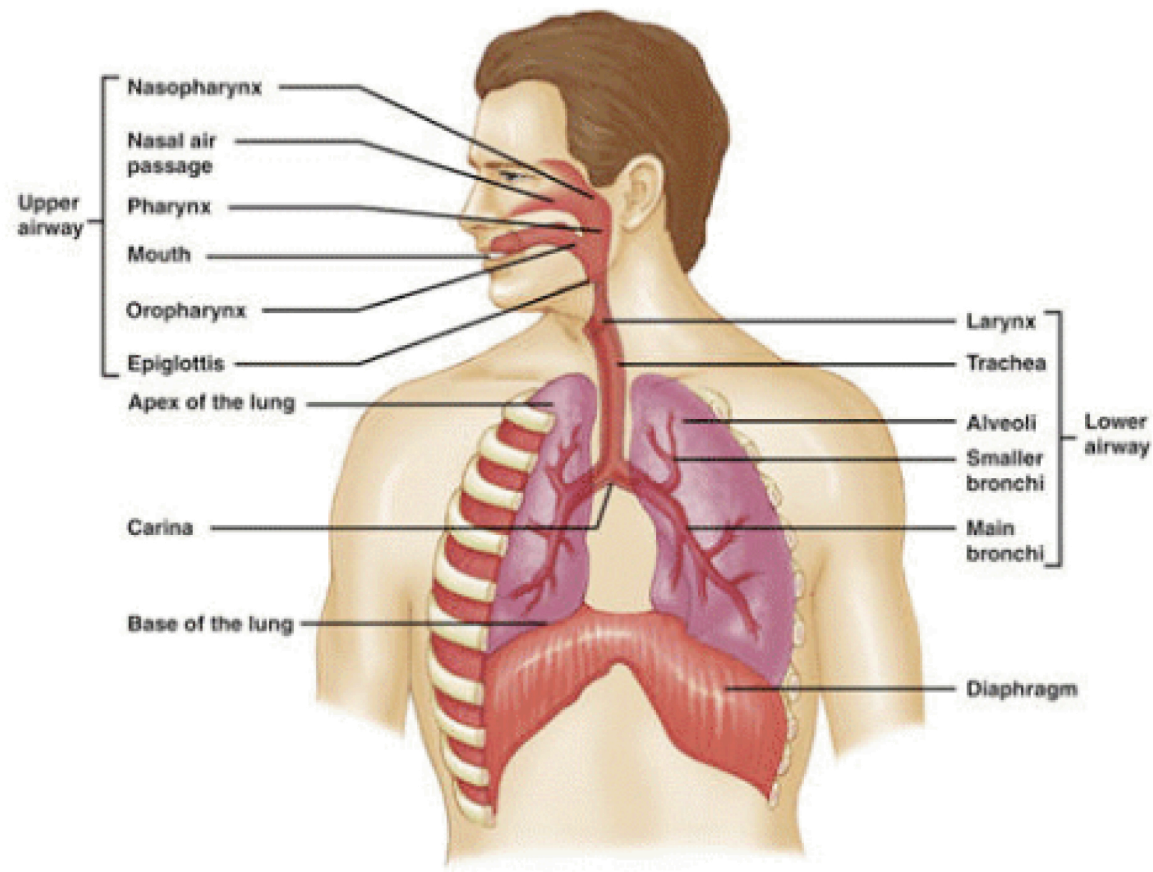


finding, trapping
and taming exertion sounds

Introduction!

- I'm DB Cooper, a voice actor. Late last year, I polled dialog and audio directors about what they need from voice actors and one consistent item on the directors' wish lists was a way to overcome the challenge of getting great exertion sounds. What I want to do today is to show you the voice actors' process. Once YOU know how sounds are made it's a lot easier to help someone else make those sounds—and sometimes sounds at the end of a 4-hour VO session your actor needs a bit of help with the punch and hit and kill and die when they may be in a state of creative exhaustion.

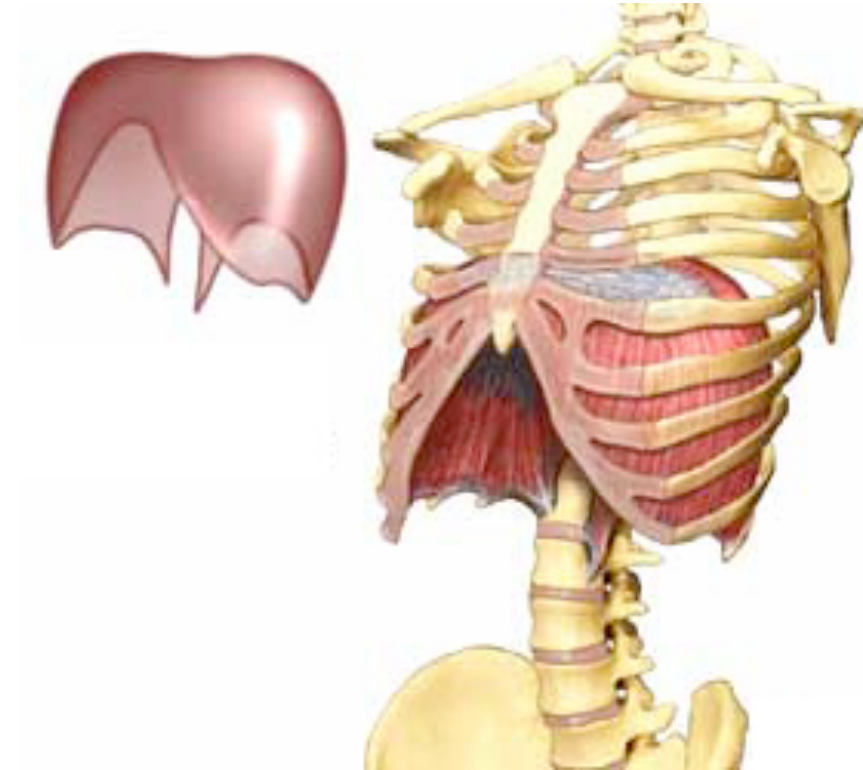
The human airway



This is the voice actor's instrument.

Whether you breathe thru your mouth or breathe thru your nose, the chief element of this apparatus is the diaphragm.

Make friends with your diaphragm



The diaphragm is the saddle of muscle that sits in the bottom of the rib cage. Its job is to draw air into your lungs. The lungs don't have any musculature— it's all these muscles on your sides, the obliques, the serratus, the intercostals. Your lungs full with air passively--involuntarily. The diaphragm pulls down, and air fills your lungs. Everybody stand!

Place your fingers at the bottom of your rib cage and say HA HA HA. THAT's your diaphragm. It's the seat of strength for any vocal activity— and the control of diaphragmatic support and breath determine the difference between INTENSITY and VOLUME.

Violent Vowels



The spectrum of sounds we make when hitting or being hit does not begin and end with “aughh!”
These are the Violent vowels.

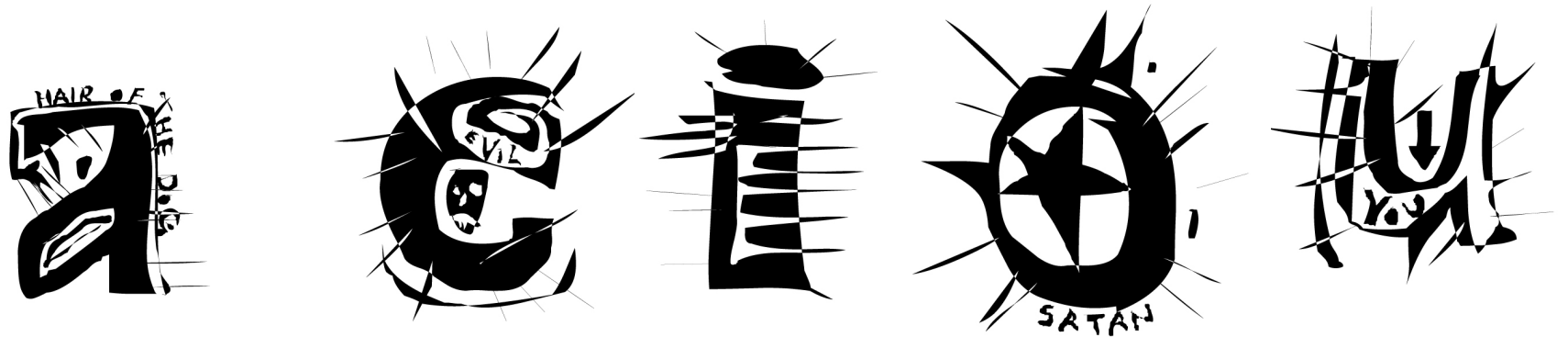
Think of Roger Rabbit, falling thru that skyscraper. He made a different kind of sound as he smashed thru each floor. **With a glurch on the end**

The Long vowel sounds are sharp— AYEE!! EEEAuggh! Iiyeee! Owah!

The sound is focused by the shape of your mouth.

The palette really spreads out with [next]

Violent Vowels

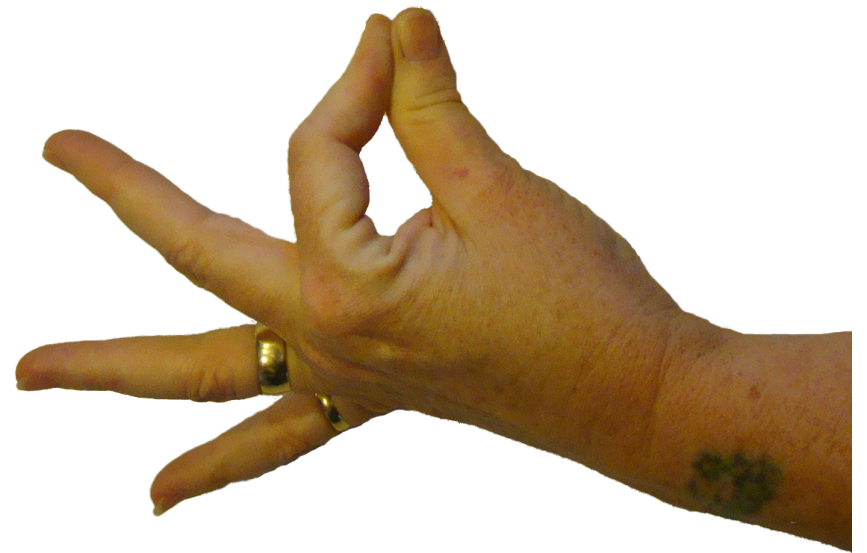
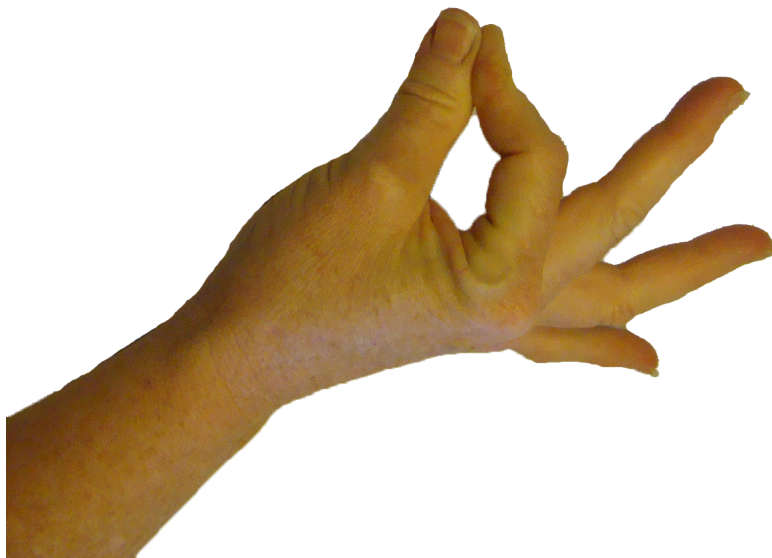


The SHORT vowel sounds. Augh, eh. ih. ah. uh.

These vowel sounds all require you to have your mouth open.

Feel the sound in your mouth as you make these sounds.

Pinch-ended Punches



Pinch-Ended Punches

This is where the difference between hitting and being hit comes in.

Stops can be glottal or diphthong. These sounds are the yyaaahhhh! And nguh! And iihfff!

How many people here have studied martial arts?

You know about breath control and shouting, ki-hap or ki-ai for effect and power.

When you gear up to hit something, you tend to store your breath to use on the attack.

The pinches temper the sound.

When you are hit, you're a lot less likely to be in control of your breath and the sounds you make. You're surprised, it hurts. Your jaw falls open and your breath falls or flies out.

These are the oofs and ughs of a punch to the body,

but we also need arrow and bullet strikes. Those require a sharp blast of sound and quite a twist-off.

Don't forget –cch as a closure.

These attacking and being attacked sounds don't have to always be loud, either. Use gritted teeth.

Think of Solid Snake.

[group interaction]

Some consonant closure suggestions next.

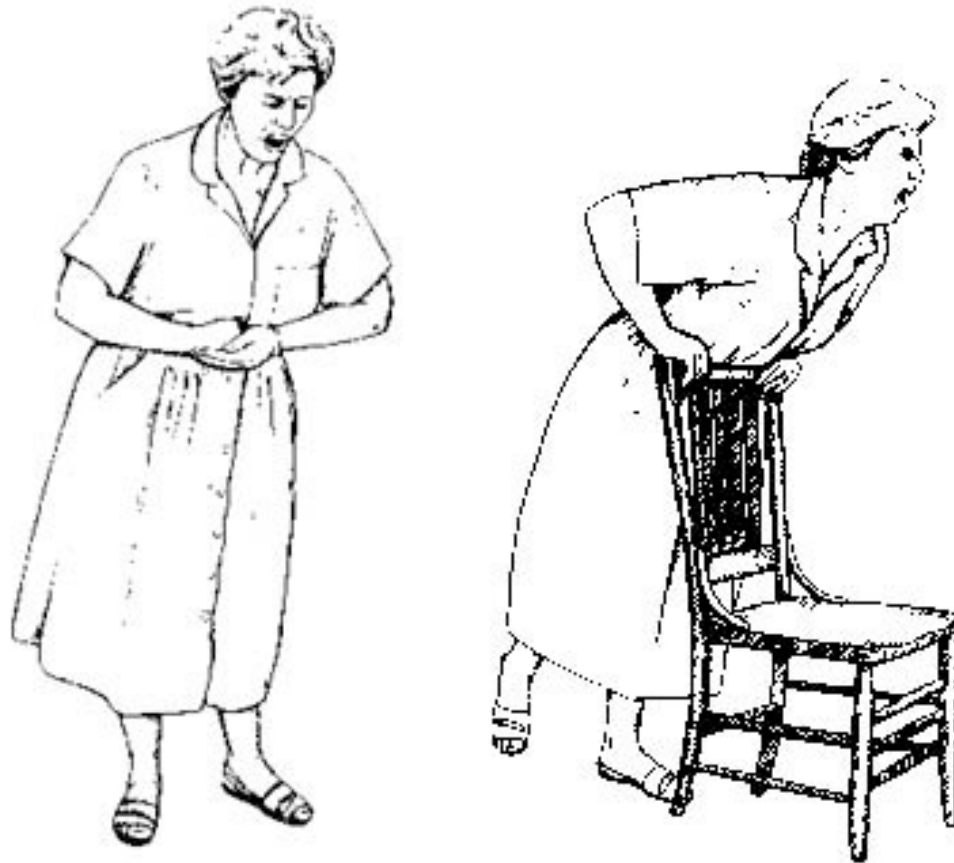
Consonant Clusters

For the beginning, end or in the middle of open vowel sounds

- ch — Initial attack sound
- cch —like in “yecch”. Victim, median or terminal.
- ff, ffh — Victim, usually. either a short clip or with more air expelled.
- Hard G like GAH! Victim or attacker. Really sharp initial sound.
- ggh like auggh! Attacker or victim
- Gggg like a gurgle. Victim for sures.
- H— alone or in combination. Hyah! Hnnguh!
- Ng — usually an attack sound, but good for a howl
- J — like “ch” only voiced. Initial attack sound
- Sh — Initial or median for attack, terminal for victim
- zh (like in seizure) same as “sh”, only voiced.
- y — you can throw this in anywhere.

These are just a few ideas to kick around. Keep a list of the pithy stuff and the wild combos you particularly like.

Heimlich Hitting



Heimlich Hitting. OK, I know it's not called "The Heimlich Maneuver" any more by EMTs but it's the best way to describe the technique of trying to punch yourself in the stomach. Using your own fist and other arm you can give your own diaphragm a shove **that really mimics the sound of being hit near the solar plexus.**

The Blood-curdling Barf



When you really scream, it engages the same spastic musculature as when you throw up. That is: everything from your scalp to your crotch.

Think of the yoga pose for The Lion. Tongue is out, wide open face. A scream of pain or startle has almost as much to do with the seat of your pants as with your mouth.

Guys tend to bellow but the open-mouth, full diaphragmatic support is still there.

A scream, from Bioshock 2

Deck 1

(mutual laughter, man and woman... partway through the following line, some kind of torpedo-lock alert noise sounds, cutting her off) - After '...topside!'

Sammy: All right, Diary -- last entry! ...Lizzy and I... we found a 'sphere and we're we're going home! Ain't that right, baby? Next stop, topside!

mutual laughter, man and woman

Lizzy: I love you. It was you who saved us, Sammy. It was you, button. I ... ,



some kind of torpedo-lock alert noise sounds
What was that?... what's that sound?



Man: Oh god, she's seen us! It's Lamb! Torpedo!!! ... I'll try to... (sounds of impact)

Lizzy: Terrified Scream





Protect those Pipes!

Illustration by Louisa Giffard

Preparation for a vocal session requires a great deal of hydration, but while a heavy-duty session is in progress, a vocalist needs some good, soothing concoctions at the ready to help him or her get thru it. Good, solid stand-bys are tea or hot water with lemon or honey or both. Some folks like a pinch of cayene in that mix. Yipe. I like Entertainer's Secret, a glycerin-based spray that can make a rough voice feel normal.

Postmortem/ Brain Dump for TAKE THAT

- #1— 9am was a deadly time to be doing a vocal work out.
Next time I give a talk that calls for lively interaction, I'll request a late morning or afternoon timeslot. I sure appreciate the level of devotion shown by the people who showed up at 9 ready to scream.
- #2. I had people stand up to feel their diaphragms with their fingers and we did some other vocal exercises, too. Everyone was a jolly good sport and remained standing, but one fellow in the front row wisely sat down after a bit of time passed, and we were simply discussing things. I should have invited people to sit down sooner myself.
- #3. During the Q & A Michael Csurics asked a question about what to do when the script shows up with exertion sounds spelled out. I told him that sometimes, you need to disrespect what's written and go with what you know is right. It occurred to me the next day that my audio pals might be well served with a list of consonant clusters, just to give you an idea of some things to try, especially for recording sound sets. So, I'm including it here, even though it wasn't one of the slides I used.
- #4. Another question was "Where do we find voice talent?" We bandied about some ideas and decided the best thing, if you're not going thru agents, is to ask other audio guys. Avoid the pay-to-play audition sites. Marc Shaefgen has recommendations. Morla Gorrondona suggested GVAC, the GANG Voice Actor Coalition. (audiogang.org) I wanted to add that there are casting places that are specifically geared toward games, like Soundawg (soundawg.net) or Hamsterball Studios (hamsterballstudios.com). You can also go to videovoicebank.net to find demos of voices listed with agencies that handle union or non-union talent. And you can by golly always call me if you need help with casting something.

FIN

DBCooperVO.com

Voiceoverist.com