

Unit 42: Singing Techniques and Performance

Unit code:	A/502/5112
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

This unit encourages the development and maintenance of the voice through regular and sustained practice. Singing at sight is also introduced and developed through the realisation of elementary vocal lines. The unit can be delivered through any vocal style and material presented and studied can be selected to suit the needs of the singer.

● Unit introduction

Of all musical instruments the voice is the most personal. Without a physical instrument to hide behind, singers can feel exposed and this feeling of bareness is amplified by the fact that in all genres of music, from rock to musical theatre, the vocalist tends to be central to the ensemble.

As well as the voice being an instrument in its own right, many instrumentalists use their voice alongside their 'main' instrument as a second study instrument. For 'pop' musicians, the ability to perform backing vocals in live performance as well as recording situations can be a useful skill. For actors and dancers working in the genre of musical theatre the voice can be a central component of the performance work they undertake. For all singers an ability to communicate the meaning of a song is vital to a successful performance.

Whatever the circumstances of the performer, the acquisition of a sound vocal technique is vital to avoid problems with overuse and misuse of the voice. It is also fundamental in developing the voice in terms of intonation, production and improving confidence.

This unit encourages the development and maintenance of the voice through regular and sustained practice. An understanding of how practice can contribute to good technique is also central to the unit. Singing at sight is introduced and developed through the realisation of elementary vocal lines.

Learners will be required to develop skills as an ensemble singer as well as a soloist. The unit can be delivered through any vocal style and material presented and studied can be selected to suit the needs of the singer.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand how vocal exercises can contribute to the development and maintenance of vocal technique
- 2 Be able to follow a regular practice routine
- 3 Be able to realise a vocal line presented using staff notation
- 4 Be able to perform an individual line within an ensemble
- 5 Be able to design and perform a programme of songs as a soloist.

Unit content

1 Understand how vocal exercises can contribute to the development and maintenance of vocal technique

Vocal technique: appropriate to style of singing eg musical theatre, blues, soul, pop, classical; intonation, voice placement, tone, projection, musicality

Vocal exercises: warm-ups; technical exercises eg for development of tone, projection, breath control, range, flexibility

2 Be able to follow a regular practice routine

Practice routine: setting targets and reviewing progress; choosing and performing appropriate technical exercises; individual practice and group rehearsals

3 Be able to realise a vocal line presented using staff notation

Realisation of vocal line: singing at sight

Staff notation: treble or bass clef as appropriate to range of voice; elementary melodies eg moving in step, thirds, fifths and octaves; major and minor keys; elementary rhythmic elements eg simple time signatures, minims, crotchets, quavers

4 Be able to perform an individual line within an ensemble

Performance: style appropriate to chosen material eg microphone technique, intonation, blending and sense of ensemble, musicality, ability to hold an independent line, confidence in delivery and presentation

Individual vocal line: can be melody or harmony but must be distinct from other vocal parts

Ensemble: eg duet, trio, quartet, backing vocals

5 Be able to design and perform a programme of songs as a soloist

Design: choosing appropriate songs from repertoire considering: vocal ability, the needs of the audience, performance space, balance of programme, order of songs

Programme of songs: at least three songs should be presented as an individual recital or as part of a larger event

Perform: style appropriate to chosen material eg microphone technique, intonation, quality of tone, musicality, interpretation, confidence in delivery and presentation

Solo: accompanied or unaccompanied

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 discuss how vocal exercises can contribute to the development and maintenance of vocal technique [IE]	M1 explain how vocal exercises can contribute to the development and maintenance of vocal technique with reference to own practice regime	D1 analyse how vocal exercises can contribute to the development and maintenance of vocal technique with detailed reference to own practice regime
P2 follow a regular practice routine [RL, SM]	M2 follow a regular practice routine competently	D2 follow a regular practice routine efficiently and with attention to detail
P3 sing at sight using staff notation	M3 sing at sight using staff notation competently	D3 sing at sight using staff notation accurately and confidently
P4 perform an individual vocal line as a member of a group	M4 perform an individual vocal line as a member of a group competently	D4 perform an individual vocal line as a member of a group with confidence and flair
P5 design a programme of songs [SM, CT]	M5 design a programme of songs taking into account own vocal ability	D5 design a balanced programme of songs taking full account of the needs of the intended audience, the performance space and own vocal ability
P6 perform a programme of songs.	M6 perform a programme of songs competently.	D6 perform a programme of songs with confidence and flair.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

This unit is designed to allow learners to develop and improve their abilities as singers. It is important that learners work both individually and in groups, not only to develop confidence, but also to enable them to recognise the range and quality of their own voices as well as the voices of others. If working in the rock/pop idiom the development of a good microphone technique should also be included.

Learners should establish good practice regarding the care and use of the voice via a regular programme of vocal classes. They should gain an understanding of how technical exercises can be used to develop a good technique and correct faults. The tutor should run an initial programme of vocal technique workshops to establish individual vocal ability and to give learners an understanding of how exercises can be used within a practice regime. Learners should produce a written or oral presentation on the use of vocal exercises to develop and maintain vocal technique, covering the development of tone, projection, breath control, range, flexibility and diction. They will then use this knowledge and experience to design and carry out a practice regime of their own.

Singing at sight should be a regular activity for both individuals and groups with confidence being developed through the study of a range of progressive exercises.

Learners should be encouraged to develop a performance repertoire, which includes a range of contrasting styles within their chosen idiom, as well as experimenting with other vocal styles and techniques. They should ideally work with a range of accompaniments, including live musicians, eg piano, guitar or a musical ensemble or group. Recorded backing tracks may also be used. Learners should regularly perform before an audience (of peers, for example) to develop confidence. Learners should also be encouraged to engage in regular listening activities and to view live work whenever possible. Working with other vocalists within ensembles and/or through the performance of harmony backing vocals should be a regular activity, with listening, as well as performance, skills being developed. Learners will need to demonstrate the ability to perform an individual vocal line within an ensemble.

The unit should culminate in a performance of songs chosen by learners. They will need to construct a programme of at least three contrasting songs from their repertoire, taking their own vocal ability into consideration as well as the context of the performance event.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to the unit and structure of the programme of learning.
Understanding the voice (learning outcome 1). The elements and importance of a good vocal technique – tutor presentation, practical exercises and discussion activities. The singer's toolkit – learners are introduced to a range of vocal exercises that can be used to improve and develop technique and correct errors.
Assignment 1: The Voice as an Instrument – P1, M1, D1 Learners produce a presentation on the use of vocal exercises to develop and maintain vocal technique covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• development of tone• projection• breath control• range• flexibility• diction.
Designing and implementing a practice regime (learning outcome 2). Vocal skills audit: tutor-led workshops to enable learners to identify own vocal ability and set targets for improvement.
Assignment 2: Practice Makes Permanent – P2, M2, D2 Setting targets. Choosing appropriate technical exercises. Undertaking a regular practice regime. Reviewing progress. (Work on this assignment will continue for the remainder of the unit with learners reviewing progress and setting new targets at regular intervals.)
Sing at sight (Learning outcome 3) Tutor-led sessions to introduce staff notation and singing at sight to learners.* Following a simple melodic line in a major key – rise and fall, movement by step, 3rds, 5ths and octaves. Rhythmic elements – clapping basic rhythms in simple time. Singing simple melodies from notation. Moving on to minor keys – the minor 3rd. Compound time. *These sessions should be spread across the unit to allow a gradual development of the skill.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Assignment 3: Sing at Sight – P3, M3, D3

Learners demonstrate the ability to sing at sight using staff notation.

Solo and ensemble singing (learning outcomes 4 and 5).

Tutor-led workshops providing learners with experience of singing solos and ensemble pieces in a style appropriate to the focus of the BTEC programme and learners' vocal styles, eg lead and backing vocals, solo and choral singing, musical theatre repertoire.

Learners build a repertoire of appropriate pieces.

Assignment 4: Ensemble Performance – P4, M4, D4

Learners demonstrate ensemble singing skills in performance.

Assignment 5: Solo Performance – P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6

Learners construct a programme of three contrasting songs and perform them to an audience.

Assessment

Grading criterion 1 requires learners to demonstrate understanding of how vocal exercises can contribute to the development and maintenance of vocal technique. This could be evidenced through a written document or a recorded oral presentation. For P1, learners will provide unelaborated descriptions of specific exercises that can be used to improve aspects of vocal technique, such as voice placement, flexibility and breath control. For M1, learners will be able to give details of how these exercises work and how they should be incorporated into a practice regime. To achieve D1, learners will also be able discuss the merits of a range of exercises providing details of why particular examples are suitable to their own needs.

A logbook or practice diary will be the main source of evidence for grading criterion 2 although tutor observation records and recordings of milestone sessions will also be useful. Learners should set targets and document their progress with reference to the technical exercises undertaken. To achieve P2, learners should demonstrate that they have undertaken practice on a regular basis using vocal exercises as appropriate. For M2, learners should track and discuss their progress and review their own targets. To achieve D2, learners should be responsive to their own development, adjusting their practice routine to take into account progress and renewing targets on a regular basis.

Singing at sight for grading criterion 3 should be evidenced through video/audio recordings. Examples of sight-singing material may be songs in a style with which learners are familiar or a series of sight-singing exercises. Tutors should provide the starting note for the exercise and a simple accompaniment can be used to support learners. To achieve P3, learners should be able to sing a simple melody at sight. The realisation of the melody will be mostly accurate but learners will have a tendency to stop when an error is made rather than being able to keep going. For M3, performances will be mostly accurate and learners will be able to keep going throughout the performance. To achieve D3, learners will be able to realise melodies correctly in terms of pitch and rhythm. Melodies will also be performed with assurance.

Ensemble work undertaken for grading criterion 4 should allow learners to demonstrate the performance of an individual vocal line that is distinct from those performed by other singers in the ensemble. This should be demonstrated through the performance of a piece in an appropriate idiom. The performance should be recorded and tutor observations used to supplement recordings where an individual voice is difficult to distinguish within a recording. Achievement should be based on intonation, the ability to hold an independent line, musicality, sense of ensemble and confidence in delivery. To achieve P4, learners should perform an individual line with good intonation. This line may be the melody with other singers providing harmonies. For M4, learners should be able to sing an independent harmony line with accurate intonation, musicality and a sense of ensemble. To achieve D4, learners will sing with style and assurance.

For grading criteria 5 and 6 learners should design and perform a programme of at least three contrasting songs as a soloist. Although pieces may be of a similar idiom, some degree of contrast should be included. Learners should produce a programme note giving reasons for the choice of pieces. Recordings of performances should be made as a matter of course. When choosing repertoire for performance, learners should be careful to ensure that whilst they select materials that will provide a challenge and a chance for them to demonstrate their abilities, the pieces shouldn't be at a level with which they will struggle. The needs of the audience, the venue and context of the event should also be taken into account.

To achieve a pass learners will be able to choose songs in an appropriate idiom, however choices are likely to be influenced by learners' tastes rather than a serious consideration of ability and/or the context of the event. In performance learners will demonstrate a degree of technical and musical competence, however this will not be secure throughout.

To achieve a merit learners will think more carefully about the choices made. Songs chosen will be appropriate to the context of the event and will allow learners to demonstrate their vocal ability. Performances will be technically and musically sound.

To achieve a distinction learners will take care to design a well-balanced programme that not only suits their level of ability but also takes account of the needs of the audience and the venue and context of the event. In performance, learners will demonstrate a high degree of technical ability, musicality, assurance and style.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Pearson assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	The Voice as an Instrument	Produce a presentation on the use of vocal exercises to develop and maintain vocal technique covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of tone • projection • breath control • range • flexibility • diction. 	Written or oral presentation.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P2, M2, D2	Practice Makes Permanent	Design and follow a regular practice regime: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting targets • choosing appropriate technical exercises • undertaking a regular practice regime • reviewing progress. 	Practice logbook. Recordings of milestone sessions.
P3, M3, D3	Sing at Sight	Undertake a range of sight-singing exercises using staff notation.	Recordings of sight-singing exercises.
P4, M4, D4	Ensemble Performance	Rehearse and perform an individual vocal line within an ensemble.	Recording of performance. Tutor observation report.
P5, M5, D5, P6, M6, D6	Solo Performance	Construct a programme of three contrasting songs and perform them to an audience.	Programme with notes. Recording of solo performance.

Links to other BTEC units

This unit forms part of the BTEC Music and Music Technology sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Music and Music Technology suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
		Musical Theatre Performance
		Solo Music Performance
		Music Performance Techniques

Essential resources

A rehearsal space with a reasonable acoustic is a basic requirement. Access to other spaces with variable acoustics would be advantageous.

If the unit is being studied through a pop/rock idiom, access to a PA system is a necessity.

Learners will need to have access to an accompanist or backing tracks. Tutors should have access to a range of sheet music.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

To emulate vocational conditions, learners should experience working with a singing coach and/or musical director as appropriate. These roles can be fulfilled by other learners or by teaching staff.

While the use of backing tapes is a useful rehearsal and learning resource, learners should be given the opportunity to work with music played live.

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Creative thinkers	designing a programme of songs for performance
Reflective learners	following a regular practice routine, reviewing progress on a regular basis
Self-managers	following a regular practice routine, reviewing progress on a regular basis
Effective participators	investigating how technical exercises can be used to develop and maintain a vocal technique.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
Mathematics	
Select and apply a range of skills to find solutions	using numeracy to understand rhythmic aspects of staff notation
English	
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	using background material in relation to the content of a song to develop an interpretation.