

Unit 30: Singing Skills for Actors and Dancers

Unit code:	M/502/5107
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to enable learners whose primary performance discipline is acting or dance to develop their singing skills. Learners will be introduced to a range of different styles of singing and will rehearse and sing a number of different songs.

● Unit introduction

Singing is an important addition to the arsenal of skills required by actors and dancers. Many roles require actors and dancers to sing as part of their performance work. Whilst actors and dancers may not consider themselves to be musicians, it is possible for them to develop their musicality. Greater awareness of rhythm, pitch and dynamics can serve to improve the actor and dancer's repertoire of performance skills in their own discipline as well as contributing to the development of singing skills.

This unit recognises that 'non-musicians' generally learn songs by ear rather than from a musical score. This requires them to have well-honed aural skills, so the accurate repetition of musical phrases will be an important activity that will develop and extend learners' aural memory as well as developing an awareness of accurate intonation. Developing a good vocal technique is also vital to avoid problems with overuse and misuse of the voice. It is also fundamental in developing the voice in terms of intonation and production and improving the performer's confidence. Regular technique classes and practice are an important element in the teaching and learning of this unit.

The opportunities for singing are many and varied and learners will be encouraged to participate in ensemble singing as well as solo performances. Equally the range of musical material available is extensive and learners are encouraged to work in a number of different styles. Characterisation in song delivery is an essential skill for the actor/dancer, who should be encouraged to tackle song lyrics in a similar fashion to the way monologues/ duologues are approached.

The development of confidence is vital. Learners will share their work with their peers in workshop performances of solo and ensemble pieces, which will take place on a regular basis.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to develop and maintain vocal technique
- 2 Be able to learn and repeat musical phrases
- 3 Be able to rehearse sung musical material
- 4 Be able to perform sung musical material using characterisation.

Unit content

1 Be able to develop and maintain vocal technique

Singing workshops: eg warm-ups, technical exercises, singing games, rounds, partner songs, call and response exercises

Vocal technique: eg intonation, voice placement, tone, projection, breath control, flexibility, range, musicality, setting targets, reviewing progress

2 Be able to learn and repeat musical phrases

Learn and repeat: recognise the rise and fall of a melody; sing back heard pitches, intervals and rhythms; respond to instructions in terms of tempo, dynamics and phrasing

Musical phrases: melodies in major and minor keys, using simple, compound and syncopated rhythms

3 Be able to rehearse sung musical material

Rehearse: taking part in vocal 'warm-ups', concentration and focus; learning musical material ('note-bashing'), following direction and instructions; listening skills; practising learnt material; waiting for cues; applying vocal techniques appropriately; learning words and movements where required; working with others; self-discipline; cooperative attitude and approach; commitment to the work

Musical material: different genres eg popular songs, show songs, folk songs, choral music, hymns, motets, art songs, rock songs, music hall, ballads, blues, jazz; different ensembles eg solo, duet, trio, quartet, choral group, backing vocals; accompanied and unaccompanied

4 Be able to perform sung musical material using characterisation

Performance: musical accuracy, quality and appropriateness of the interpretation of the musical material; quality of tone; musicality; confidence in delivery and presentation; blending with other voices in ensemble work; conveying the meaning of the words and music

Communication and characterisation: maintaining focus and concentration; communication of mood and emotion; communication of interpretation; communication with other performers; understanding the musical material; appropriateness of the style of presentation to the musical genre

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 perform technical exercises	M1 perform technical exercises competently	D1 perform technical exercises with confidence and attention to detail
P2 show improvement in vocal technique [RL]	M2 show marked improvement in vocal technique	D2 show considerable improvement in vocal technique
P3 sing back musical phrases	M2 sing back musical phrases demonstrating a good ear for pitch and rhythm	D2 sing back musical phrases accurately and confidently
P4 take part in rehearsals of musical material [TW, SM]	M4 take part in rehearsals of musical material responding to direction appropriately	D4 take part in rehearsals of musical material responding to direction and working with confidence and attention to detail
P5 perform sung musical material in character using physical and vocal expression. [CT]	M5 perform sung musical material in character with confident use of physical and vocal expression.	D5 perform sung musical material in character with imaginative and inventive use of physical and vocal expression.

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	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

This unit should establish good practice regarding the care and use of the voice via a regular programme of exercises. Vocal workshop sessions should initially be tutor-led; however, learners should eventually be encouraged to lead their own vocal warm-up and technique sessions on a regular basis. It is important that learners work 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.

Aural memory can be developed through traditional exercises where a short melodic phrase is played or sung by the tutor and repeated by learners. This should begin with short three to four note themes and build up to longer phrases of four bars or more. Call-and-response songs and games can also be employed and learners should be encouraged to take their turn in 'providing' a short melody to be repeated by the group. Movement can also be incorporated into vocal games.

Singers should be encouraged to develop a performance repertoire, which includes a range of contrasting styles including musical theatre, light classics and pop/rock standards. The solo singing aspect of the unit could be delivered in conjunction with the preparation of audition pieces for higher education where a song is a requirement.

Ensemble work undertaken should include unison work as well as pieces in two or more parts. The use of harmony in vocal pieces can be introduced through the performance of rounds and partner songs. The sharing of work is important and learners should be encouraged to perform for peers in workshop situations on a regular basis. It will be helpful to view videos/DVDs of musicals to study how performers communicate character through song.

The unit should culminate in a performance of songs learnt and rehearsed during the unit. Learners should each take part in the performance of three songs using characterisation in their interpretation. At least one of the songs performed should be a solo and at least one an ensemble piece.

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; overview of projects.
Technical workshops (learning outcome 1) Series of tutor-led classes and workshops to introduce learners to the elements and importance of a good vocal technique. Learners should be introduced to a range of vocal exercises and games that can be used to improve and develop technique in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• intonation• voice placement• tone• projection• breath control• flexibility• range.
Assignment 1: Personal Practice Regime (P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2) Learners should: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• undertake a vocal skills audit• set targets• undertake a regular practice regime to include technical exercises suggested by the tutor• review progress. (Work on this assignment will continue for the remainder of the unit with learners reviewing progress and setting new targets with the guidance of their tutor at regular intervals.)
Singback workshops* (learning outcome 2) Learners take part in a series of tutor-led 'sing back' workshops to build and extend musical memory and accuracy of pitch and rhythm through the repetition of musical phrases. *These sessions should be spread across the unit to allow a gradual development of this skill.
Assignment 2: Listen and Repeat (P3, M3, D3) Singing back 4-8 bar phrases in a range of different styles using major and minor keys and simple and compound time.
Repertoire development (learning outcome 3 and learning outcome 4) Learners should work under the guidance of the tutor to develop a repertoire of songs to include solo and ensemble pieces in a range of appropriate styles.
Assignment 3: Rehearse and Perform (P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5) Taking part in rehearsals of three chosen or given songs from the repertoire. Performing songs to an audience using characterisation.

Assessment

Grading criteria 1 and 2 assess learners' ability to perform vocal exercises and show improvement in terms of their vocal technique as a result of sustained practice. This can be evidenced through a process log kept by learners backed up by a tutor observation report which comments on progress made. The process log should be used to document their progress with reference to the technical exercises undertaken and should include an initial skills audit to set a starting point from which progress can be monitored. The performance of vocal exercises during milestone sessions should also be evidenced via DVD or audio recordings.

To achieve P1 learners will perform the vocal exercises set by the tutor. However, this is likely to be done in a rather mechanical manner. For M1, technical exercises will be performed accurately and carefully. To achieve D1 learners will perform technical exercises in a meticulous manner. They will respond appropriately to feedback for their tutor and ensure that all aspects of technical work are undertaken efficiently.

To achieve P2 learners should demonstrate some improvement in vocal technique. This may be evidenced through small improvements made in a number of areas, eg breath control, tone and flexibility, or a more noticeable development in one area of their technique. For M2, development of technique will be more noticeable and will be consistent across a number of areas. To achieve D2, learners must demonstrate consistent development and the ability to build on improvements made to ensure progress continues to be made.

Grading criterion 3 assesses learners' ability to repeat musical phrases accurately on hearing. This should be evidenced via video or audio recordings. To achieve P3 learners should demonstrate the ability to repeat four bar phrases in both major and minor keys. There will, however, be some rhythmic and/or tuning errors that are difficult to ignore. For M3, repetition will be mostly accurate. Any errors will be less noticeable and will only occur when more awkward rhythms (eg syncopated rhythms) and/or intervals (eg 7ths) are tackled. To achieve D3 learners will be able to sing back phrases accurately, consistently and with assurance.

Grading criterion 4 assesses learners' ability to rehearse musical material under the guidance of a tutor as well as in their own time. This could be evidenced through a rehearsal log kept by the learner, tutor observation reports and video recordings of rehearsal sessions. To achieve P4 learners will take part in rehearsals and will become familiar enough with the music and lyrics to be able to perform it but they will tend to be satisfied with a 'note for note' approach and will not pay detailed attention to meaning, characterisation or musical phrasing. For M4, learners will demonstrate that they are able to focus and concentrate on ensuring that the music is learnt accurately and will also be able to consider the use of characterisation in performance through vocal and movement work. They will work cooperatively with the musical director to develop an understanding of the music and lyrics and will be able to ask pertinent questions to help them in their interpretation. To achieve D4 learners will be able to work with the musical director to shape the content and structure of the musical material in order to fully exploit its creative and artistic possibilities. Learners at distinction level will be fully engaged with the musical material work and know how to get beneath the notes and the lyrics.

Grading criterion 5 assesses learners' ability to perform musical material. Learners should each take part in the performance of three songs. At least one of the songs performed should be a solo and at least one an ensemble piece. Performances should be videoed. To achieve P5 learners will produce a performance that is mostly in tune and is secure rhythmically for much of the time. There will be an attempt to employ physical and vocal expression, however this will not be completely successful. For M5, the performance will be secure in terms of accuracy of pitch and rhythm. There will be some attention to detail in terms of phrasing, dynamics and using vocal and physical expression to communicate the meaning of the song. Learners will also engage confidently with the audience most of the time. To achieve D5 learners will display an unmistakable confidence in their performance as a singer. As a soloist they will be able to put a song across with flair, an appropriate sense of style and a high level of commitment. As an ensemble singer they are likely to act as an anchor to the group.

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 Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2	Personal Practice Regime	Undertake a vocal skills audit. Set targets. Undertake a regular practice regime to include technical exercises suggested by the tutor. Review progress.	Skills audit. Progress log. Tutor observations. Recordings performance of technical exercises during milestone practice sessions.
P3, M3, D3	Listen and Repeat	Sing back four to eight bar phrases in a range of different styles using major and minor keys, and simple and compound time.	Recordings of singback exercises.
P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5	Rehearse and Perform	Take part in rehearsals of three chosen or given songs from the repertoire. Perform three songs to an audience using characterisation.	Rehearsal logs. Tutor observations. Recordings of milestone rehearsals. Recording of performances.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Performing and Production Arts sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Performing and Production Arts suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Exploring Musical Theatre Skills	Musical Theatre Performance	Singing Techniques and Performance
Exploring Music Performance Skills	Working as a Musical Ensemble	Musical Theatre Performance
	Solo Musical Performance	

Essential resources

A rehearsal space with a reasonable acoustic is a basic requirement. Access to other spaces with variable acoustics would be advantageous. 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 musical director. Depending on the nature of the material being tackled access to a choreographer and/or director may also be appropriate. These roles can be fulfilled by other learners or teaching staff. While the use of backing tapes is a useful rehearsal and learning resource, learners should also be given the opportunity to work with music played live.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Hewitt G – *How to Sing* (Taplinger Press, 1979) ISBN 9780800839802

Miller G – *On the Art of Singing* (Oxford University Press, 1996) ISBN 9780195098259

Peckham A – *The Contemporary Singer* (Berklee Press, 2000) ISBN 9780634007972

Stone J – *You Can Sing* (Music Sales, 1997) ISBN 9780825615153

Vocal anthologies

Musical Theatre Anthology for Teens: Duets (Book and CD) (Hal Leonard Corp, 2004) ISBN 9780634047657

Musical Theatre Anthology for Teens: Young Men (Book and CD) (Hal Leonard Corp, 2004)
ISBN 9780634047640

Musical Theatre Anthology for Teens: Young Women (Book and CD) (Hal Leonard Corp, 2004)
ISBN 9780634047633

Show Hits: Audition Songs for Female Singers (Book and CD) (Wise Publications, 2006) ISBN 9781846092305

Show Hits: Audition Songs for Male Singers (Book and CD) (Wise Publications, 2006) ISBN 9781846092299

Choral music

Gershwin for Girls: Octavo for SSA choir and piano accompaniment with optional bass, guitar and drums (Alfred Publishing) AP WBCH9410

Hairspray Medley: Octavo for SATB chorus and piano accompaniment (Hal Leonard) HL 8621260

Mama Mia: Choral Highlights: Octavo for SATB chorus and piano accompaniment (Hal Leonard) HL 8621354

Sister Act Medley: Octavo for SSA choir and piano (Hal Leonard) HL 8730144)

You Raise Me Up: Vocal score for 2-part chorus (Hal Leonard) HL 8744083

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	performing musical material in character using vocal and physical expression
Reflective learners	taking part in sustained practice sessions in order to improve technique
Team workers	rehearsing ensemble pieces
Self-managers	taking part in rehearsals of musical material.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	finding out about how vocal exercises can be used to improve vocal technique
Self-managers	meeting deadlines during the rehearsal period.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	responding to direction during rehearsal
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	understanding lyrics; undertaking background research to develop a character.