

# *A Vocalist Guide to Singing with a Mask*

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Singing and talking through a mask is awkward and challenging. The way we hear our voices and the physical sensations we experience are different than when singing without a mask. As we try to compensate for this new “restrictive” feeling, singing with a mask presents the possibility of developing unhealthy and poor vocal habits. Although wearing a mask while singing poses unique challenges, there is an opportunity for student musicians to become more aware of their voices and develop healthy vocal habits that will carry over into improved vocal production when performing with and without a mask.

The following are some ways we can avoid developing bad vocal habits that may harm the voice. We can also cultivate our attention and experience healthy physical sensations that will result in good vocal production. Finally, exercises in resonance, respiratory support, and phonation (sound) quality are offered to help you sing with a mask. These specific exercises will help you discover a voice that can feel good and even sound great when wearing a mask. We got this!

## Avoid Developing Bad Vocal Habits

1. **Louder is not better**, especially when you think you will get there with more air! The masks restrict the airflow regardless (3 - 12 dB). Instead of volume, focus your attention on oral resonance and articulatory precision.
2. Clear voice or clean, clear quality will carry through the mask, **work on improving your phonation quality**.
3. **Unvoiced speech sounds are dampened** by the mask (2000 - 7000 Hz), attend to articulatory precision.
4. Improve your vocal hygiene - stay hydrated. Do not shout or raise your voice for a prolonged time and avoid caffeine to reduce the risk of reflux.

## Cultivate Your Attention to Healthy Physical Sensations

1. Think **RESONANCE!** We hear our voices differently when wearing a mask, so we need to **rely on physical sensations** of resonance/vibration.
2. The mask adds another point of resonance and can help **heighten our awareness of frontal focus** in the oral articulatory space and face (sinus cavity). This focus is what carries the sound forward.
3. Attend to **lower abdominal support**. Keep the upper body (shoulders) off of the lungs with good posture and support the sound with low abdominal tension.
4. **Eliminate laryngeal tension**. Feel the looseness of your tongue and soft palate on the inhalation and maintain that openness when phonating.

## *Exercises to Help Singing with a Mask*

### Resonance

1. Hum on /m/ at a comfortable pitch and slide your voice up and down slowly focus on **maintaining a point of facial resonance** throughout the exercise. Be aware of the mask you are wearing.
2. Sing voiced consonants with vowels such as *ma* or *na*. Focus on what the resonance in the oral space and face feel like and **maintain** that focus when transitioning to vowel.
3. Sing simple phrases with voiced speech sounds that help to **bring attention to frontal focus**. For example: “*my mother makes marvelous muffins*” You can sing on a single pitch, arpeggio, or triads with your friends.

### Respiratory Support

1. Stand or sit with an upright posture. As you breathe, feel the shoulders and chest loosen and rise off of the lungs, and try to feel the **physical grounding** in feet and pelvic floor.
2. Aim to **feel a supportive tension** increase in your lower abdominal and pelvic floor on the onset of phonation. Practice with unvoiced and voiced single repetitive sounds. Then transition to triads, arpeggios, and phrases while **maintaining dynamic tension** throughout the exercise.

### Phonation Quality

1. Choose a closed vowel at a comfortable pitch and begin sound softly, focusing on very clear and pointed resonance. Gradually crescendo and diminuendo **while maintaining a point of resonance**.
2. Perform a vocal tongue trill (not a lip trill) on a comfortable pitch with a loose and semi-closed mouth and move the pitch up and down slowly. Then, transition to a vocal tongue trill to any open, sustained vowel.

### Laryngeal Relaxation

1. Yawn and voice on the exhale, slowly sliding down the pitch, **maintaining a relaxed jaw, tongue, and larynx**.