

# BREATHING GYM

*Developed by Sam Pilafian and Patrick Sheridan*

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## INTRODUCTION

- Analogy: a car needs gas to make it move just like instruments need air to make sound. The higher the quality of gas, the better the car performs. The same thing is true with air.
- ***Breathing Gym*** is designed to give control and efficiency of breath by developing proper breathing habits
  - Improves tone, stamina, and all-around performance
  - For ensembles, ***Breathing Gym***:
    - Promotes calmer, quieter, and more focused rehearsals
    - Internalizes and improves group rhythm (always use a metronome)
    - Gives more confidence and security to group entrances/releases
- ***Breathing Gym*** can be used as part of a warm-up routine or a mid-rehearsal change of pace while addressing specific issues such as dynamics, articulation, and phrasing
- The ***Breathing Gym*** consists of five types of exercises:
  - Stretches
  - Flow Studies
  - Therapies
  - Strength and Flexibility
  - Breathing for the Brain
- Remember the **LAW OF ACCOMMODATION**:
  - What is difficult today will become easier if practiced
    - Work these exercises just past the point of ease and slightly into discomfort without overexertion

## PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Maintaining a proper and consistent oral shape is essential for maximizing the benefits of these exercises
  - a. During inhale/exhale, the inside of the mouth should feel like a big yawn
  - b. The back of the throat is to remain open and unobstructed
2. Monitoring each breath ensures correct execution
  - a. Inhale
    - i. Form the right hand like a karate chop, but fold the thumb flat against the palm
    - ii. With the right hand in this position, place the index finger just under the tip of the nose (thumb should now be pointing forward)
    - iii. Place top lip on the middle knuckle and the bottom lip on the big knuckle (approx.)
    - iv. Remember the yawn analogy and take a deep breath quickly, letting the only resistance occur at the lips
    - v. If executed correctly, the inhale will have a deep sound like a vacuum with one finger placed over the opening
  - b. Exhale (remove right hand before exhale)
    - i. Hold the left hand with palm facing the body at an arm's length
    - ii. Exhale and feel the constant flow of air on the palm
  - c. The inhale and exhale are to be performed continuously with no break between, just like a pendulum swinging
3. Light-headedness may occur periodically. If this happens, the following method is prescribed: sit down, inhale slowly through the nose, and exhale slowly through the mouth; repeat.
4. All exercises are to be performed in a relaxed manner with no tension in the body

## THE EXERCISES

1. Stretches – loosen up the body for better breathing flexibility
  - a. Trunk Twist
  - b. Flop Over – loose arms, neck, and upper body
  - c. Two-Way Stretch
  - d. Wrist Grab
  - e. Whole Body Stretch
  - f. Neck Roll – roll forward with chin touching chest, do *not* tilt head back
2. Flow Studies – stimulate regular breathing patterns used while playing—move air without resistance or tension. Monitor the air during these exercises to ensure that the air is constantly and consistently moving in and out (comfortably full to comfortably empty).
  - a. 6-7-8-9-10 (11-12-etc.)
  - b. Shorten the Inhalation (in 4 out 4, in 3 out 4, in 2 out 4, etc.)
  - c. Shorten the Exhalation (4-4, 4-3, 4-2, etc.)
  - d. Shorten the Inhalation Variation (4-4, 3-5, 2-6, etc.)
  - e. Shorten the Exhalation Variation (4-4, 5-3, 6-2, etc.)
  - f. Shorten the Inhalation and Exhalation [4-4 (2x), 3-3 (2x), 2-2 (2x), 1-1 (4x), 8<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> (8x), 1-1 (4x), 16<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> (8x), 1-1, 2-2, breathe through nose for 20 seconds]
  - g. Quick Breath Exercise – inhale on the last beat of a measure (i.e. 4/4, 9/8, etc.)
  - h. Bow & Arrow, Toss the Dart, Float the Paper Airplane
3. Therapies – a counterpart to flow studies, therapies are used to inspire better airflow by deliberately creating problems to overcome, such as resistance and suspension
  - a. Inhale Therapy – fight for air with suction
    - i. Exhale all air (sizzle)
    - ii. Place the back of the hand against the lips
    - iii. Fight for air by creating suction for 4-60 seconds, but do not allow any air in
    - iv. After time is up, remove hand and inhale as much as air possible in one gasp (still maintaining the yawn shape)
    - v. With lungs at full capacity, suspend the air while keeping the mouth and throat open for a predetermined duration (4-60 seconds) with shoulders relaxed
    - vi. After time is up, expel air in one big chunk down to a sizzle
  - b. Inhale Therapy Variations
    - i. Expand in Two Areas – during suction, mentally feel your lungs expand toward your chest and back
    - ii. Expand in Four Areas – during suction, mentally feel your lungs expand in 4 quadrants: abdomen, lower back, chest, and upper back
    - iii. Slight Leak – during suction, allow some air to leak
  - c. Oral Shape Therapy – inhale/exhale with the yawn feeling in rhythmic patterns (8<sup>th</sup> notes, quarter-note triplets, etc.) in a given meter to check consistency of air
4. Strength and Flexibility – focus on expanding and contracting the lungs to their extremes
  - a. In, Sip, Sip—Out, Push, Push
    - i. “In” – inhale to maximum capacity for one beat while lifting arms overhead
    - ii. “Sip” – lift arms higher while sipping in more air
    - iii. “Out” – exhale completely in one beat while pushing arms downward
    - iv. “Push” – force the last little bit of air out
  - b. Power Breaths
  - c. Power Bow & Arrow
5. Breathing for the Brain
  - a. Follow Your Breath – breath in through nose, out through mouth—no metronome
  - b. In 6, Suspend 6, Out 6 (increase ratio: 1:1:1, 1:2:1, 1:4:1, etc.)
  - c. Energizing Breath – 4 in through nose, 7 suspend, 8 out through mouth