

Vocal & Musical Glossary

(Required academic language for DSA Vocal Music)

9A Cappella: Singing without any form of instrumental accompaniment.

Accompaniment: The instrumentation that plays beneath the singing.

Accompanist: A pianist who plays music beneath the singing.

Adam's Apple: Common term used to describe the part of the larynx (voice box) which protrudes from the front of the neck. More noticeable in men than women.

Adducted: The term for vocal cords getting pulled together when you sing high up in your vocal range.

Alto: Lowest pitched treble voice

Appoggio: A vocal technique involving leaning the abdominal or rib muscles into the ribcage for supported singing. Literally means "to lean."

Aria: In opera, a song, especially a solo.

Arpeggio: A staggered scale going up and down in small intervals, most commonly on the 1st, 3rd, 5th and 8th pitches of an octave.

Ballad: A slow tempo, sentimental or romantic song.

Baritone: Male voice located between bass and tenor in range and tone quality.

Bel Canto: (Beautiful Singing) Singing that focuses on beautiful sound, not on acting or emotion. It's characterized by ornate vocal style.

7Belting: Using excessive air pressure and vocal cord tension in an attempt to sing louder

Blend: In solo singing, the smooth transition between the head and chest voice. Or, when more than one individual is singing, the sound combination between singers, which preferably makes it difficult to pick out one singer's voice amid the group.

Break: The sudden change in tone between the head and chest voice, caused by vocal tension. When a singer hits his or her break, there may be a sound that is jarring and ugly. This can be avoided with good vocal technique.

Breath Support: Efficient use of the singer's stream of breath, controlled primarily by the diaphragm.

Breath vs. Breathe vs. Breathing:

Catch Breath: A quick, short, unobtrusive breath.

Chest Resonance: The resonance sounds it comes from the chest area.

Chest Voice: Also known as "chest register." The lower notes of a singer's range; in the same general range as the speaking voice. When singing in the chest voice, the vocal cords become naturally thick, and the resulting sound is generally associated with deep, warm tones. Achieved by using resonance and voice placement.

Choir or Chorus (*adjective: choral*): A group of singers who either sing in unison or in harmony.

Chord: A group of (typically three or more) notes sounded together, as a basis of harmony.

Chromatic: Altering notes *outside* of the scale or key signature.

Consonant: A speech sound produced as the result of a temporary partial or complete constriction of airflow (b d f g l etc)

Diaphragm: The dome shaped muscle attached to the bottom of the lungs that separates your chest and stomach cavities. Its main function is to initiate inhalation.

Diatonic: The notes *within* a prescribed scale or key signature.

Diction: The clear pronunciation of words. This requires attention to both consonants and vowels. Different types of music may require more or less diction; for example, in musical theatre, it's essential that the audience understands the lyrics, but in jazz or blues, the singer may occasionally slur words on purpose in order to achieve a desired sound. Good diction helps produce good sound, however, so all singers should pay attention to it.

Dissonance (adjective: dissonant):

Dominant: The **dominant** is the fifth scale degree of the diatonic scale, called "**dominant**" because it is next in importance to the tonic, and a **dominant chord** is any **chord** built upon that pitch, using the notes of the same diatonic scale.

Dynamics: The variations of soft and loud singing in a given song.

Epiglottis: The leaf-like cartilage that separates the functioning of your esophagus (channel to stomach) from the functioning of your trachea (channel to the lungs).

Falsetto: (False Singing) In male singers, a high register (actually, sung in the female range) similar to the head voice. However, unlike the head voice, falsetto cannot blend with the chest voice. Female's can also sing in a falsetto range. It has a Minnie Mouse Sound about it

Flat: To be under the correct pitch, not quite in tune.

Full Voice: As loud as a person can sing without creating imbalance between airflow and vocal cord tension. Also refers to a tone that has a balanced resonance quality using both air flow and air pressure.

Hard Palate: The hard area of the roof of your mouth, just behind your teeth.

Harmony: Tones combined into chords to create musical sounds.

Head Resonance: The resonance is created within the head cavity. Chest resonance is created within the chest cavity.

Head Voice: Also known as "head register." Singing in the higher part of the range. While singing in the head voice, the vocal folds are thin; the head voice is usually associated with light, bright sounds. Falsetto is resonated in a head voice.

Homophony (*adjective: homophonic*): Sections in a choir or ensemble whose rhythms and lyrics happen at the same time.

Imagery: The situations, people, or emotions a singer pictures in his or her head while they sing, in order to achieve emotion and a good level of acting in their songs. Imagery may also be used to help a singer achieve better vocal technique.

Intonation: The relation of one note to another, and the relative pitching of each note. Could mean singing in tune or not.

Larynx: The organ at the top of your trachea (windpipe) made up of cartilages, ligaments and muscles. Inside, attached from front to back are your vocal cords. Certain muscles of your larynx affect the tension of your vocal cords as they work with air from your lungs in producing vocal sound.

Legato: Singing as though all the notes were tied together; the notes flow together smoothly.

Major Scale: A diatonic scale with notes separated by whole tones except for the 3rd, 4th, 7th and 8th.

Mask: The area around and including the eyes which is often used to create head resonance.

Metronome: A mechanical or electrical instrument that makes repeated clicking sound at an adjustable pace. Used for marking rhythm in practicing music.

Middle Voice: The middle range or register of the voice when singing or speaking. Achieved by resonance and voice placement.

Minor Scale: A diatonic scale with notes separated by whole steps and half steps (different, yet related to) a major scale. There are three forms of the minor mode/scale: natural, harmonic (raised 7th), and melodic (raised 6th & 7th when ascending – and natural minor when descending.)

Mode or Scale: A series of ascending and descending pitches which is the basis for a composition.

Nasal: When the voice is focused purely around the nose and nasal area.

Nodes: A type of polyp on the vocal cords that prohibits good singing. When vocal cords get irritated (from fatigue, poor technique, an infection, etc.), they swell. Singing repeatedly with swollen vocal cords causes nodes. The only way to know if you have or are developing nodes is to go to a throat specialist (ENT). If you have frequent hoarseness or a constant sore throat, see one immediately. Treatment is usually rest, although surgery may be required in severe cases.

Phrasing: Refers to the breaths or “stops” in-between notes. Natural phrasing will include “stops” after all periods, commas, semicolons, or colons. Additional phrasing may be necessary for the singer to take catch breaths or to achieve a certain style. It’s an excellent idea for singers to sit down with sheet music in hand and mark their phrasing before they begin to sing using phrase marks. This helps prevent unexpected losses of breath and awkward phrasing that disrupts the intention of the lyrics.

Pitch: The sound of a particular note. When pitch is referred to, it’s usually in reference to being “on” or “off” pitch. “On pitch” means the singer is singing in tune. “Off pitch” means the singer is either flat or sharp.

Placement: A singing technique that uses the sensation of vibrations in the head to achieve healthy sound that resonates and carries well. Most healthy singing is done in what is often referred to as “forward placement” (or “the mask”), with vibrations behind the teeth/lips, on the cheekbones, and sometimes the forehead and/or nose. The resulting sound is full, not nasally or thin.

Polyphony (*adjective: polyphonic*):

Projection: Generally, the ability to be heard by the audience. Sometimes also refers to the ability to communicate emotion to the audience, as in “she projects great sadness.”

Range: Refers to the notes that a given performer can sing comfortably.

Repertoire: The songs a singer knows and can perform well.

Resonance: Occurs naturally when the voice is free to travel through the cavities above your vocal cords, where it is modified and amplified before leaving your mouth. It determines the final quality of your tone and makes your voice sound different from anyone else’s.

Reverb: A term used by musicians, and sound engineers for reverberation. Usually created by a machine, or mixing desk, it gives the voice more color, tone and presence. Usually used in studio and live performances.

Rhythm:

Scale: A series of notes differing in pitch according to a specific scheme (usually within an octave)

Sharp: To be above the note (often the result of over-pressurizing the throat or larynx) when you can’t hear yourself properly, so you are not in tune.

Sight-singing: The ability to look at sheet music and accurately sing the pitches and rhythms. Most professional singers can read music and sight read with at least some accuracy.

Siren Sound: Making a sound like an old-fashioned war siren.

Soft Palate: The fleshy part at the back of the mouth.

Solar Plexus: Located at the center and base of the ribs, the soft part just above the stomach. The center of diaphragmatic power.

Soprano: High-pitched voice

Staccato: The opposite of Legato. Each note is separate from the one before and after it.

Swallowing the Note: Pushing down too far on the larynx, strangling the vocal cords.

Tenor: Highest-pitched *changed* male voice

Tone: The quality of your voice that results from the resonance reinforcement of the tone initially produced in your larynx.

Tonic: The triad formed on the **tonic** note, the **tonic chord**, is thus the most significant **chord** in many styles of music.

Transpose: To change the key of a song; to lower or raise the notes of a song or a portion of a song.

Tutti: All voices sing together

Vibrato: A slight, but regular fluctuation in your tone. Caused by the normal relaxation and contraction of the vocal muscles as they are activated by alternating nerve impulses. Gives and “energy” to the tone during the vibration process.

Vocal Cords: Two muscular folds that connect from the inside front to the inside back of your larynx. Their change in thickness and vibrating length, due to adjustment in tension, affects the pitch and intensity of your tone. Also called “Vocal Folds.”

Vocalise: In singing, a vocal exercise (a note or sequence of notes sung in a certain manner) used to condition and/or strengthen your vocal muscles to work with the proper airflow.

Vowel: A specific resonance structure through which a tone is sustained. Produced primarily by altering the size and shape of the mouth cavity and changing the position of the tongue, which determines how the resonance cavities will reinforce certain frequencies of the initial cord tone. The result of each alteration is a recognizable sound – Ah Oh Eh Ee Oo.

Warm-up: Anything that helps the singer prepare for a rehearsal or performance. Typically, a warm up consists of vocal exercises, such as running scales.

Other Commonly misspelled words:

Perform or Performance

Definitely

Their vs. There vs. They're

Chord vs. Cord

Note:

This document will be updated as necessary, but you are free to add to it as new vocabulary words arise that are related to vocal or musical knowledge.