

## When do you think about your vocal health?

Rutgers University has made this article freely available. Please share how this access benefits you.

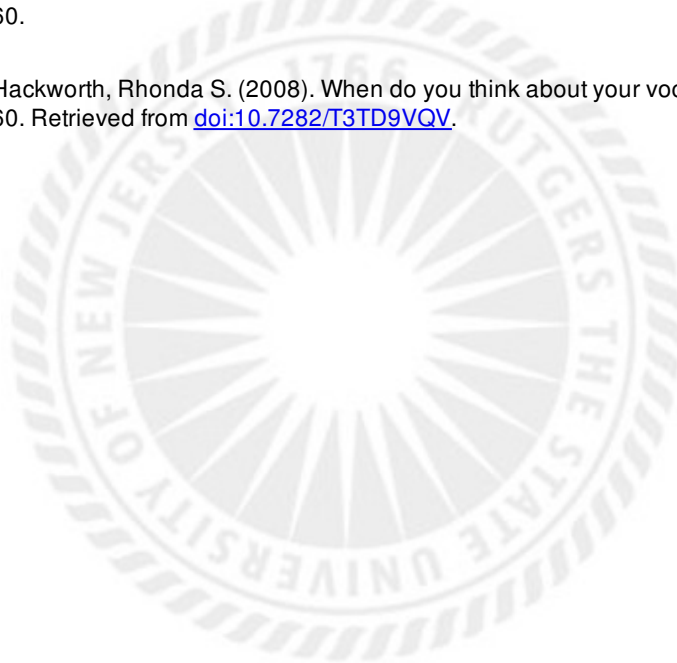
Your story matters. [\[https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/36589/story/\]](https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/36589/story/)

### This work is the **VERSION OF RECORD (VoR)**

This is the fixed version of an article made available by an organization that acts as a publisher by formally and exclusively declaring the article "published". If it is an "early release" article (formally identified as being published even before the compilation of a volume issue and assignment of associated metadata), it is citable via some permanent identifier(s), and final copy-editing, proof corrections, layout, and typesetting have been applied.

**Citation to Publisher** Hackworth, Rhonda S. (2008). When do you think about your vocal health?. *Tempo October 2008*,  
**Version:** 60.

**Citation to *this* Version:** Hackworth, Rhonda S. (2008). When do you think about your vocal health?. *Tempo October 2008*,  
60. Retrieved from [doi:10.7282/T3TD9VQV](https://doi.org/10.7282/T3TD9VQV).



**Terms of Use:** Copyright for scholarly resources published in RUcore is retained by the copyright holder. By virtue of its appearance in this open access medium, you are free to use this resource, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings. Other uses, such as reproduction or republication, may require the permission of the copyright holder.

*Article begins on next page*



## When Do You Think About Your Vocal Health?

Several years ago I was working on a research project investigating vocal health coupled with behavioral change. A middle school choral teacher was especially interested in participating because she'd had vocal problems in the past and had even sought voice therapy. Upon visiting her classroom, a cause of her voice problems was quickly apparent. None of her students was talking very loudly, but 30-40 students all talking at the same time creates a low roar. The teacher passed out progress reports by loudly yelling the individual names over the noise.

Could this teacher have handed out progress reports without compromising vocal health? Absolutely. One approach would be to demand quiet in the classroom, and some teachers do this very effectively. Other teachers might value giving middle school students a few minutes to blow off steam at the end of a rehearsal. Even then, vocal health can be preserved. This teacher could have allowed quiet talking from the students while she silently handed a slip of paper to each student. Or she could have devised a more elaborate, non-verbal communicative device. Yelling was not the only option.

Vocal health seems to mean a lot to music teachers, especially once it is compromised. The more I talk to music teachers about vocal health, the more I realize how the demands of the job often overwhelm and make us believe maintaining our voices might be a losing battle. We may not pay close attention to vocal health until our voices are injured.

In a more recent study, I asked experienced and pre-service teachers about their perceptions of vocal health. The teaching activity rated highest for vocal stress was "speaking over noisy classroom conditions".

The noisy conditions could be: (1) the rattling A/C unit that never seems to work correctly; (2) trying to teach music on the stage while lunch is being served on the other side of the curtain; (3) construction outside; (4) hallway noise; or (5) choral/general music classes sharing a space with band/orchestra separated only by a vinyl divider. How do we compete with conditions like this? Sometimes requests for a venue change are granted, so never give up on that. In the meantime, take a look at your classroom. What can be rearranged to keep noise to a minimum? Can you move the focus away from the rattling A/C unit? Is there some type of sound barrier material that could be placed near it that would soften the blow without compromising the air output? Could a choral and band director agree to orient sound away from one another's rehearsal space if it is close together? The answer to all these questions is "yes".

I believe the solution to vocal health is not always as complicated as we might think. Adjusting the pattern of your thoughts to include prevention of vocal damage can make a profound difference in the state of your overall vocal health. Here are a few suggestions for better vocal health:

### 1. Hydrate regularly

- If you aren't drinking a lot of water, gradually increase intake (most doctors I've talked to recommend six to eight 8-oz. glasses per day).
- A sudden increase of water intake can be problematic for teachers who have one class after another with no time for a restroom break. I recommend working your way into drinking more fluids over a school break. By the time you start teaching again your body will be more adjusted.

### 2. Warm up before teaching/rehearsing

- Many vocalists would never dream of singing without warming up. So, why do we dive into a full day of teaching without doing the same? At the very least, hum or sing while you drive to school.

### 3. Pay attention when your voice gets tired, and STOP

- Take vocal rest breaks.
- Use non-verbal commands – they can extend the life of your voice, plus they are a more effective means of communication in many situations. Make a habit of using them before your voice gets tired.
- Use a student to model the singing while you rest your voice

### 4. Check your posture.

- Do you sing while hunched over the piano? This puts tremendous strain on your vocal mechanism. Turn the piano and sit down while you play.
- The posture you use at your desk can positively or negatively affect your overall muscle tension, which in turn affects your vocal mechanism.

If you're already experiencing vocal problems, seek the expertise of a medical professional such as a laryngologist or speech-language pathologist as soon as possible to prevent further damage. It's easy to think about these things when not caught in the moment of teaching. Common sense may guide you to many other realizations about maintaining good vocal health. The key is to have the subject on your radar, preferably before you develop a problem.

