

The voice enhancement package

5 essential ingredients of any voice method



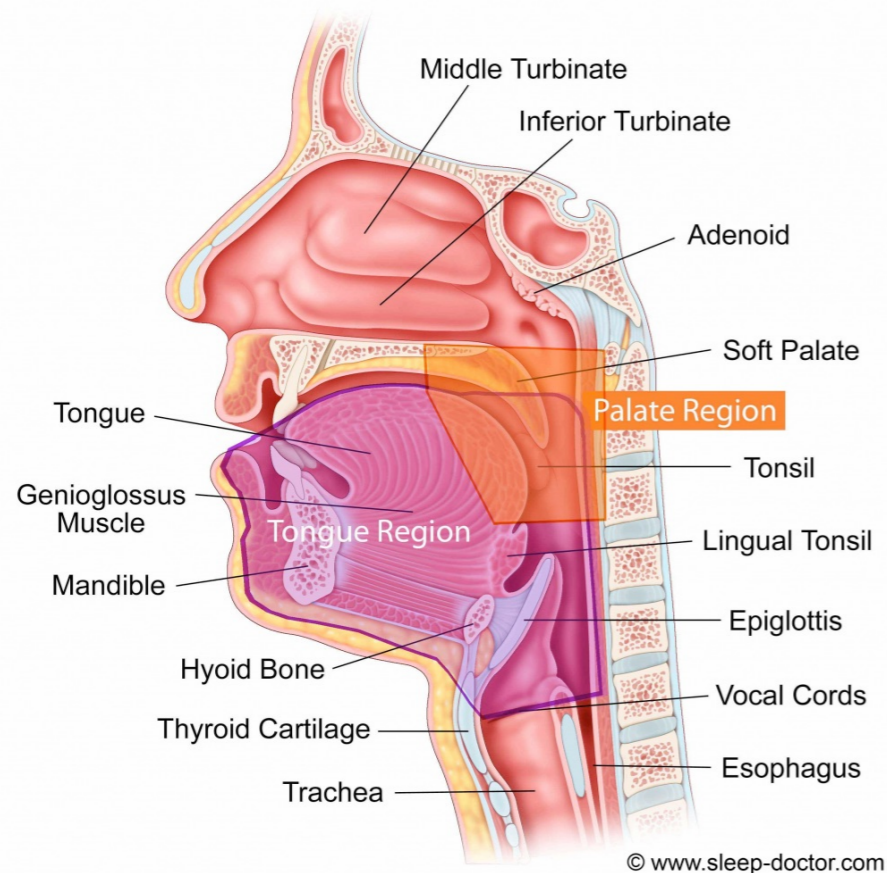
1

Learn basic vocal anatomy and functioning



You might be surprised, but not all teachers or even voice departments at colleges teach vocal anatomy. Hello! Our instrument IS our body, we have to know how it works! It is up to you to educate yourself, and you must do so, to avoid bad advice or basic confusion about how you voice operates.

So be a big boy/girl and go check out this [LINK](#) for starters Prepare yourself to encounter images of your vocal cords, there will be pink and moist tissue around, which not everyone will like. But brace yourself and have a look - you should know this stuff.



Now that you saw how the vocal cords work, it's time to see the instrument from the inside and explain how the voice works:

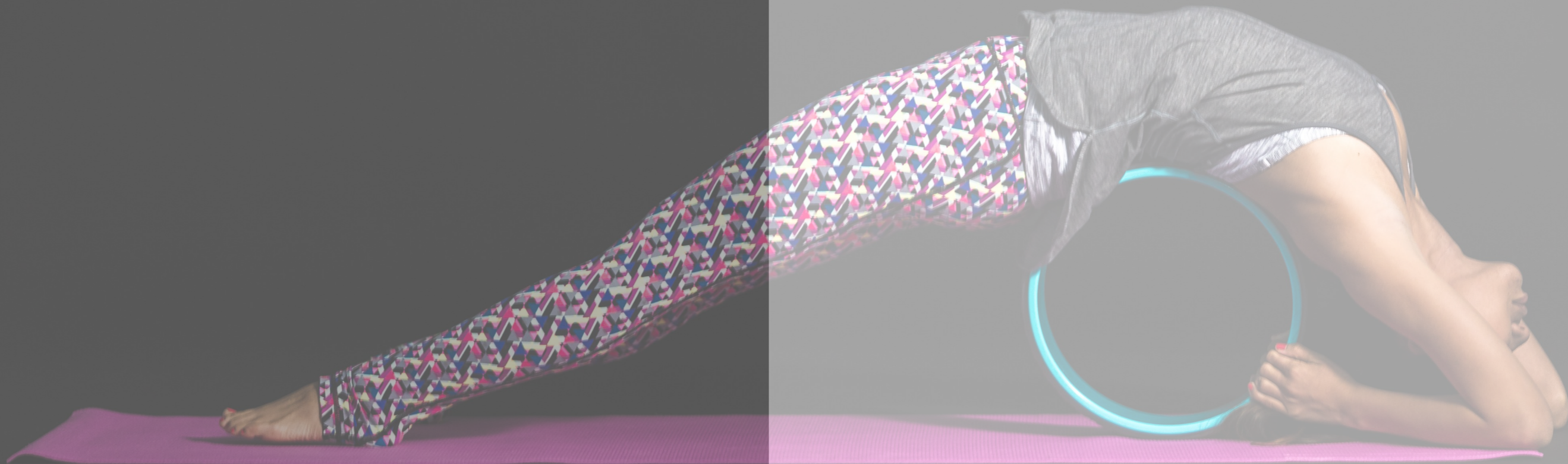
As you make a sound, the air comes up from the lungs, passes through the vocal cords (that have come together) and leaves via the mouth/nose. We get more head resonance if we point the stream of air toward the soft palate*, the back of the mouth's "roof", which is strange, I know, but that is how the sound will resonate in the sinuses, which are a very important body of resonance.

But then, suddenly, from the depth of the forest of our vocal system comes out the great threat of the naïve cords+air mechanism – the tongue. A big obstacle, larger than what we might guess. The tongue is a muscle and it contracts pushing down on the larynx – our voice box – and narrows the airway. Both effects are effortful and harmful. Teachers will often work (and must, in my opinion) on eliminating tongue pressure*.

To summarize: one should have a clear picture of the looks and workings of the vocal system. Think and imagine how the air goes in and then out, how you clear its path upwards to the back of the palate, and how the sound hits that spot and goes into the sinuses. Be aware of all this, and make more and more sense of the mystery of the voice!

2

Do a physical activity that improves your body awareness



When I first came to my brilliant teacher in Berlin, Abbie Furmansky, she sent me straight away out of her studio to get some body-work classes. She couldn't do her job with all the muscle tension I had in my shoulders, neck and jaw. I was an extreme case, but everyone has their issues. If body awareness is not a part of your life you will have difficulty gaining new, better habits to improve your voice.

Fortunately, almost all body awareness/body work methods point to the same beneficial principles: relax the upper body and strengthen the lower body (from the pelvis down).



What classes to take? Here's a list of methods I have tried and loved: Yoga, Alexander technique, Pilates, Gyrotonics, Feldenkreis and Greenberg Method.

Each of those has taught me a lot about my instrument. I feature all that knowledge to this day as I sing, and in general to maintain good posture.

How often?

Ideally, take classes at least once a week. Plus do some exercises before you sing at home. Twice or three times a week – even better. Do what you gotta do.

*The most “intellectual” method the one which has given me the best theoretical understanding of the voice is Alexander technique. The best one for my long term maintenance was Yoga. The one that helped me most in the short term, to make drastic changes, was the Greenberg method.

2

**Base your singing
on your speaking
voice**



Now, this is strange for many of us. What do you mean? How? Singing is not speaking, is it? If I just talk there is no music! Whaaat?

Another source of confusion is listening to world class singers giving an interview, and then noting how different their voices are when they sing. But pay attention here: **The difference between singing voice and speaking voice is the result of resonance and air manipulation, not the basic functioning of the vocal cords!**

Provided that your voice is not normally sore - if it is, go to a speech therapist - you are closing your vocal cords in a healthy way when you speak. That is extremely important in singing. So many people sing with all kinds of bad habits, believing that the singing voice needs special, various throat actions or something. No, it absolutely doesn't.

The speaking voice not only closes the vocal cords properly, it also vibrates in the chest, providing the chest resonance aka the chest voice. Chest voice is very important to many singing styles. Opera, Jazz, Pop, Rock and Musical Theater singers would be nothing without their proficient ability to use chest voice. They would rather sound like choir boys - no disrespect, those can sing very well.

How to do it?

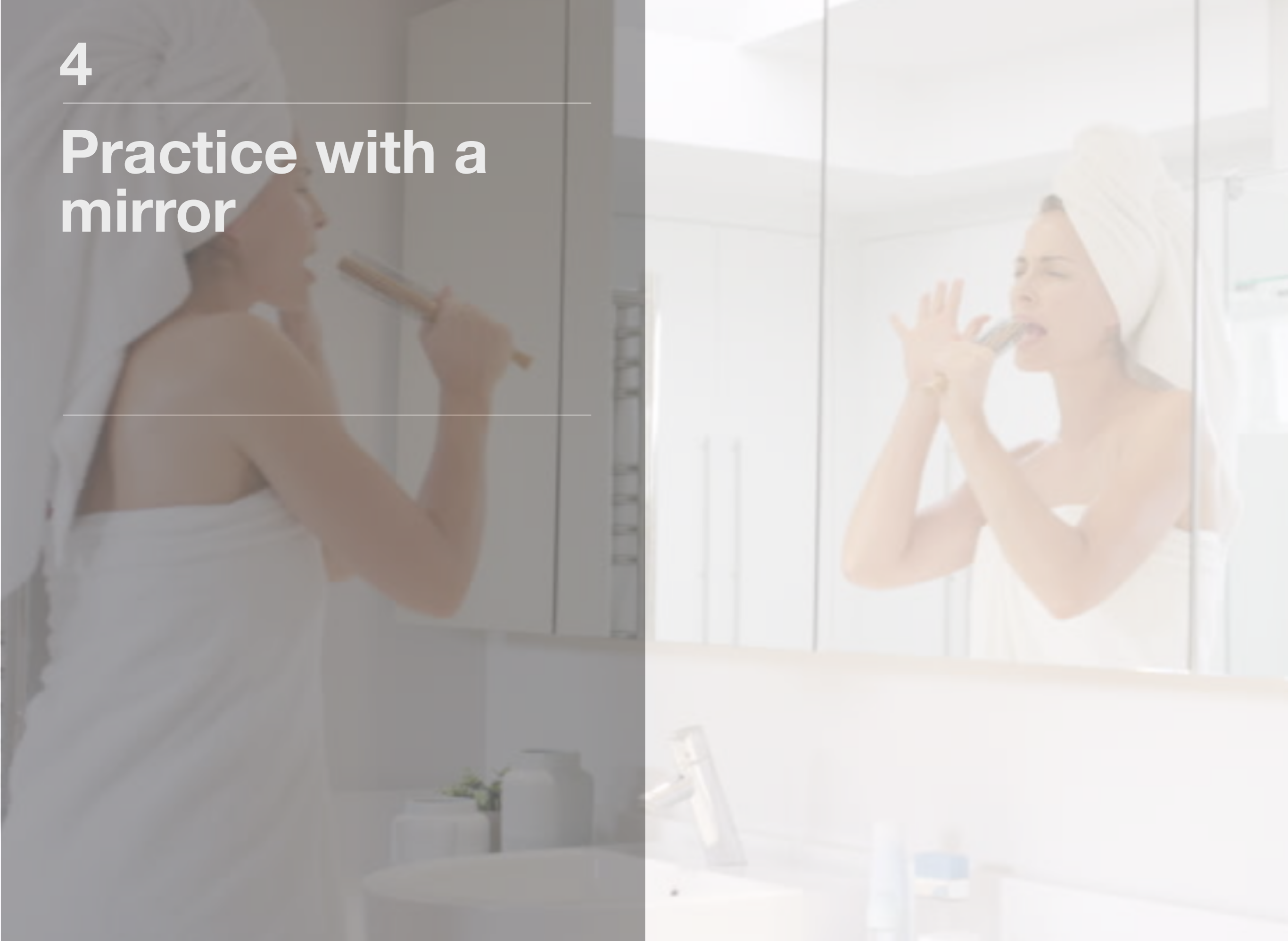
Before you sing a phrase, say it out loud first without the melody. Just the words. Then take the same quality of voice, and apply it to the melody. Don't sing more beautifully, or better, or louder. Do exactly what you did while speaking, only with the melody.

It helps thinking that you "speak on the notes", or imagine that there is a designated area in the brain responsible for the melody and you are responsible only for focusing on the pronunciation of the words.



4

Practice with a mirror



If you've studied Alexander Technique, you probably know already: how our body behaves is almost never how we think it behaves. We have a false perception of our posture and movements. We might think that we open our mouth widely, but it is in fact only half open. We think our head stays still, but we move it forward, or upward. Without noticing we make all kinds of mistakes that our teachers have told us again and again to fix.

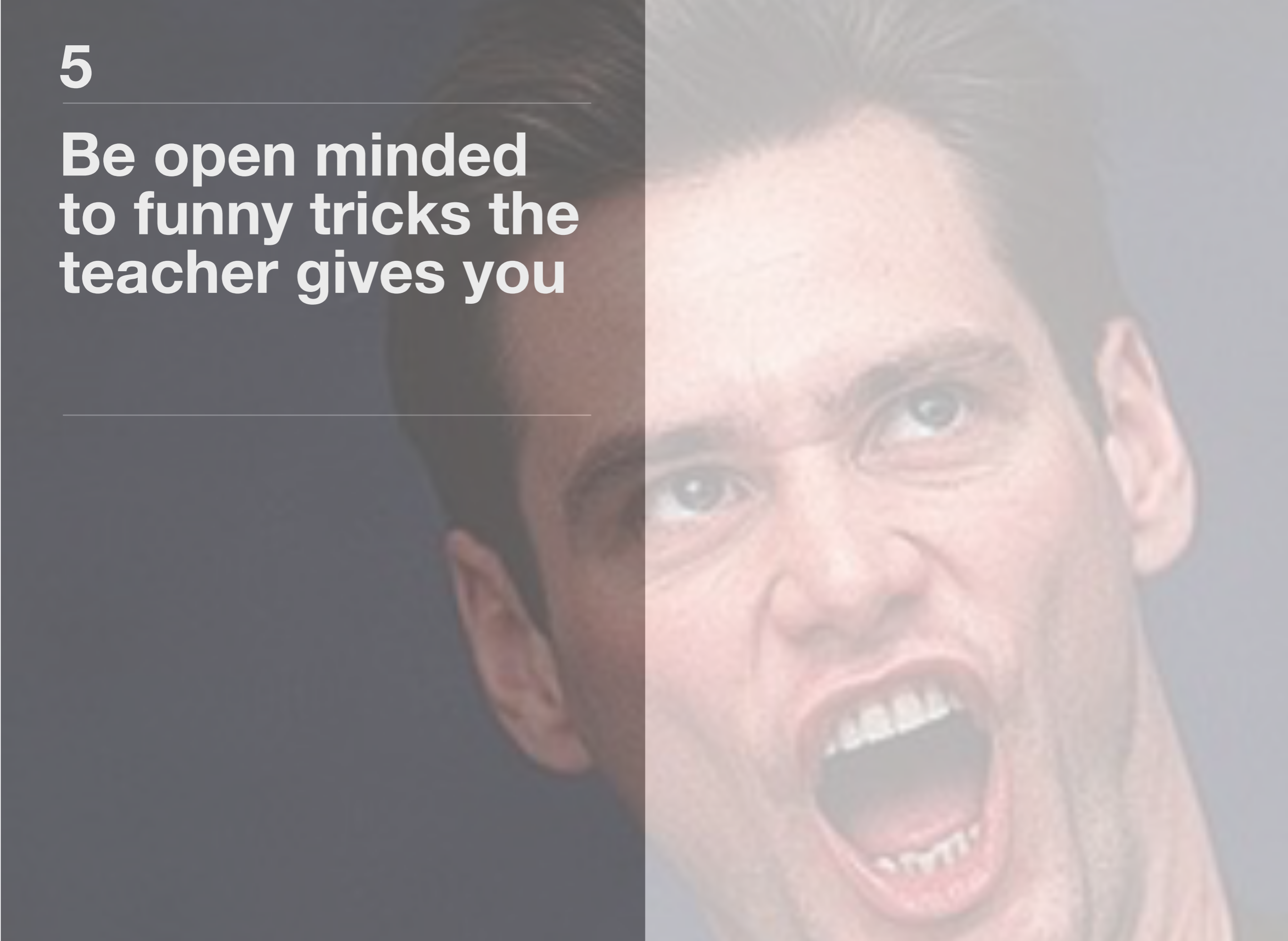
But if we stood in front of a mirror during the practice session we would be able to avoid all of those mistakes. Sometimes merely looking at ourselves will make us drop the jaw, keep our head and shoulders in place, simply standing normally and not slouch. If we do something wrong, we will see it, and we will know what needs correction.

Using the mirror at home will speed up your progress and save you time and money, for you will make a true change, being aware of your wrong actions, and free yourself to move to the next issue with your teacher sooner.



5

**Be open minded
to funny tricks the
teacher gives you**



Actually, this picture here is not just for laughs. Jim Carrey is known for making a fool out of himself (in the best sense), and he **sings pretty well**. Coincidence? I don't think so...

All teachers use tricks. It can be any kind of position or movement of any part of the body, or it can be an attempt to make a funny sound. It can get weird. Very weird. Mostly funny, sometimes hilarious.

My brother found it hard to sing after I gave him the mission to stick his fingers between his jaws through his cheeks. Not because the fingers blocked the sound, rather because he couldn't stop laughing. Eventually he could, and it sounded fantastic.

These tricks usually help to achieve something with your voice, so first of all don't make a face (unless it's a face you were requested to make), don't be taken aback, just try it. If indeed it provides a good change, take it home and practice it. I will tell you how:

Let's say, for example, my teacher told me to get into the famous yoga position "the child pose", and sing while in it. I will practice that for the first couple of days after the lesson, without standing up. I will pay attention to how nice the voice feels, where I feel it, what happens to my body in that position that helps the sound come out, etc.

When I think I have an idea of what this trick does, I will attempt to sing standing up, and see if I can apply the benefits on the

pose like that. I will probably manage sometimes, and sometimes not, so I will go back to the pose and analyze further, try to remember the feeling, and go back to standing. I will go back and forth until my body can, **through muscle memory**, re-enact the same quality of sound. That is when I will have learned this trick and can move on.

Enjoy singing!

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