

## **Exercises to improve breathing for wind instrumentalists**

by Wayne Toews conductor@sasktel.net

Posture is important. Sit or stand comfortably erect in a balanced position so that your head is above the base of your spine. When sitting, be sure that you can stand without moving your feet so that some of your weight is supported by your legs and feet. Strive for balance not tension. Stay relaxed while inhaling. Avoid tensing the abdominal muscles until the lungs are full.

### Exercises

1. Sniff in air using short sniffing movements until no more air can be inhaled. Hiss out the air. Breathe through your nose for this exercise only . Always breathe through your mouth when you are playing a wind instrument.
2. Cough lightly to feel the motion of the abdominal muscles when they contract.
3. Pant like a dog, taking more and more air into your lungs with each pant. Hiss out the air.
4. Place or pretend to place a 3 cm tube in your mouth. A cardboard tube from a roll of toilet paper will do fine. A better device is a short plastic tube used to join plastic pipes which is available at hardware stores. Breathe in through your mouth gently and gradually. Exhale through the tube with energy like that used to blow out a candle.
5. Lie on your back. Relax. Breathe in deeply through your mouth. Blow out as if to blow up a large balloon. Avoid tightening your abdominal muscles before your lungs are full.
6. Hold a piece of letter-size paper against a smooth wall. Blow against the paper to hold it firmly against the wall when you remove your hand.
7. Stand comfortably erect with your feet spread to shoulder width. Lean forward until your hands touch your knees. Take your hands off your knees and let your arms and hands hang in relaxed manner. Take a deep breath through your mouth and feel the expansion around your belt line. Exhale through your mouth with a strong burst to feel your abdominal muscles contract. Memorize the feeling. Stand erect and repeat the breathing with the same relaxed feeling during inhalation and a contraction of your abdominal muscles for exhalation.
8. Breathe in through your mouth using the tube from #4. Hiss the air out in pulses. Feel the action of your abdominal muscles.
9. Breathe in through your mouth using the tube from #4. Hiss the air out to produce a long sustained sound. Try to hiss for at least twenty seconds. Keep a record of how long you can sustain the hiss and practise to make the hiss last longer . Challenge your friends to beat you.
10. Breathe in through your mouth using the tube from #4. Hiss the air out and get gradually louder. In this exercise hiss out the air as quickly as possible.
11. Allow your right arm to hang at your side. While you inhale raise your hand out to the side until it is stretched above your head. Exhale by pushing outward and downward with your hand while you hiss. Imagine that your arm is a pump handle which sucks in and expels the air.
12. Watch yourself in a mirror as you do exercises #4 and #8. Be sure that you don't lift your chest and shoulders as you inhale. Avoid tensing your abdominal muscles before your lungs are full because tight abdominal muscles will prevent your from taking a full breath.
13. Study a picture of the lungs. Research the work of Arnold Jacobs who was an expert on breathing for wind instruments. Read books such as the "Art of Brass Playing" by Philip Farkas. Attend workshops and clinics. Ask for suggestions and help.
14. Practise these exercises regularly, even for just a few seconds, and especially before you play your instrument. Practise sustaining a pitch on your instrument for at least twelve seconds.

***Good breathing habits promote good health!***