

Hello All,

Welcome to the college. The voice team at RWCMD are looking forward to working with you in September and we have **three requests as part of your preparations.**

1. Please **make a short recording of yourself** and send it to us via email **by 1st September 2024.**

Please email it to alice.white@rwcmd.ac.uk with your name and course title in the subject line and label the file NAME.COURSEINITIALS.2024. eg. AliceWhite.MASSR.2024

Course Initials - BA Acting (BA), BA Musical Theatre (BAMT), MA Musical Theatre (MAMT), MA Acting – Stage, Screen, Radio (MASSR)

The recording should be of you reading a **short children’s story** (or excerpt thereof) and should be around **1.5 - 2 minutes** in length. Please record this through as good a quality microphone and sample rate as you can manage (a smart phone recording should be fine).

We are looking for a record of your natural sound and prosody so please do not overprepare or manufacture the reading, or “put on” a voice. By all means read it well and with expression, but don’t feel the need to hide any problems you face with reading or with your voice; try not over think it and change your voice to what you think we might want to hear and most certainly do not make it “theatrical”!

2. In your email, please let us know if you have any concerns about your voice which it would be useful for us to know about prior to you starting.
3. Please find some time to **read the next page** which contains extracts from three books by leading voice practitioners about why we do voice work. Jot down any reactions, reflections, or questions you have about these extracts, and we can discuss in September. You may not understand, engage with or even like all that is written in these extracts, but they are a fantastic starting point for us to think about why voicework is important in actor training. Further reading and equipment needed for your course will be sent to you in a separate email.

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

We look forward to meeting you all and getting started!

RWCMD Voice Department

Why Voicework?

Extract from The Voice Book by Michael McCallion:

The processes of voice and speech are tested more thoroughly in the theatre than anywhere else...The voice is an expression of what is going on mentally and physically in the speaker. It follows that we must find a way of training the mental and physical processes involved so that we produce in our voice and speech what we really choose to produce, so that we communicate what we wish to communicate.

Most of the things which go wrong with the voice do not begin with the vocal organs. It is a basic premise...that most people actively interfere with the way their voices should work, and that interference begins with the way they use the body as a whole. If we can stop that interference the voice will work well.

...The task is to get the voice functioning really efficiently all the time as part of a larger efficiency in the use of the whole body so that the heightened demands of playing a role...can be easily met because no fundamental change of voice use is called for.

Using your voice well means three things:

1. You should be able to produce your voice without every hurting yourself in the process.
2. You should be able to use your voice fully and energetically for several hours a day and have it as free and flexible at the end of your day's work as at the beginning.
3. Your voice must be capable of conveying all the nuances of meaning your work demands; it must be completely flexible and accurate instrument of expression and communication which remains absolutely under your control.

The voice as an expression of the whole person

The most important physical elements in voice production (breathing, phonation and articulation) are all processes which occur because of the response of muscles to nervous stimulation...so it is about body use.

You cannot separate your voice use from the rest of you. The impulse to communicate vocally comes from and uses your whole person, not merely the vocal organs. And your whole person is affected in a mechanical or physical way by such things as your environment, your relationship with yourself and other people and your intention of the moment. And however mechanical use is affected, so is your voice, which is an expression of yourself and what all of that self is doing.

So it is worthwhile thinking about what you do with your body before you begin to work on your voice, because for good or ill, that is the foundation upon which your voice use rests.

(McCallion 1998)

Extract from Freeing the Natural Voice by Kristin Linklater

(This book) aims...to provide a series of exercises to free, develop and strengthen the voice as a human instrument and to present a lucid view of the voice both in general context of human communication and as a performer's instrument.

This approach to voice is designed to liberate the natural voice and thereby to develop a vocal technique that serves the freedom of human expression. The basic assumption of the work is that everyone possesses a voice capable of expressing...whatever gamut of emotion, complexity of mood, and subtlety of thought he or she experiences. The second assumption is that that the tensions acquired through living in this world, as well as defences, inhibitions, and negative reactions to environmental influences, often diminish the efficiency of the natural voice to the point of distorted communication. Hence, the emphasis...is on the removal of the blocks that inhibit the human instrument as distinct from, but not excluding, the development of a skilful instrument. I must outline at the outset that in our perception of our own voices there is a vital difference to be observed between what is "natural" and what is "familiar".

The result of the work will be to produce a voice that is in direct contact with emotional impulses, shaped by the intellect but not inhibited by it. Such a voice will be a built-in attribute to the body. It will have an innate potential for a wide pitch range, intricate harmonics, and kaleidoscopic textual qualities and will be articulated into clear speech in response to clear thinking and the desire to communicate. The natural voice is transparent, it reveals, not describes, inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously. The person is heard, not the person's voice.

To free the voice is to free the person, and each person is indivisibly mind and body. Since physical processes generate the sound of the voice, the inner muscles of the body must be free to receive the sensitive impulses from the brain to create speech. The natural voice is most perceptibly blocked and distorted by physical tension; it suffers equally from emotional, intellectual...and psychological blocks. All obstacles are psychophysical in nature...

Physical awareness and relaxation are the first steps in the work to be done on the voice. The mind and body must learn to cooperate in activating and releasing inner impulses...The voice communicates the inner world of the psyche to the world of attentive listeners both on the stage and in life...

The paradox is that actors must *train* their voices so that they can sacrifice them. Actor's voices must learn to be dissolved by the impulses of thought and feeling. Actors must not use their voices to transcribe and to transmit the story, but their voices must be wide and long and strong and tender enough to reveal the breadth and depth of their imagination.

(Linklater 2006)

Extract from Finding Your Voice by Barbara Houseman:

Voice work can release an actor. The voice is the bridge between the inner and outer worlds and, if the voice is free, it can reflect the inner world with great accuracy, revealing each actor's unique response to character, situation and text...

We need to work on the voice with respect. The voice is an expression of self. It expresses our ease or lack of ease both with ourselves and the world. It cannot be bullied into shape.

To work on your voice you need to start by getting to know it: approaching it with curiosity and respect rather than judgement and demand. Then you will start to understand you voice and any necessary change will be much easier and more pleasurable to achieve.

Our voices naturally have the potential to express our inner thoughts and feelings so powerfully and accurately yet often this potential becomes obscured. This can lead us to believe that we never had the potential in the first place. As a result we may try to copy someone else, whom we feel does have a powerful and expressive voice. This never works. Such a voice can never reveal our inner responses. If you wish to find a voice that truly touches an audience, you have to find your *own* voice...

When we are very young our voices are strong, free and connected. The reason for this is that we trust ourselves. We have a clear connection with how we feel and we have the freedom and confidence to express this – without doubt, judgement or effort,

Over the years we often lose this trust in ourselves. Doubt and judgment start to erode our sureness and we either draw back...or we overcompensate...

Where we have drawn back, the voice will often be quieter and less expressive. Articulation will often be less firm and clear. The voice may lack support and resonance. There may be a sense of the voice being swallowed or trapped in the throat.

Where we have overcompensated, the voice may be strident, and perhaps shrill or tight when emotional. It may be over emphatic, over expressive and over articulated. Although it may seem a strong voice it may still lack support and resonance and instead be pushed from the throat causing, in time, vocal strain...

So, you need to work with generosity towards yourself: with the kind of generosity you would show towards someone you care for very much. Think of someone for whom you would have endless tolerance and acceptance, and then, apply that tolerance and acceptance to yourself.

Light but Full of Awareness

Ease

Interest

Generosity

(Houseman 2002)

Houseman, B., 2002. *Finding Your Voice*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Linklater, K., 2007. *Freeing The Natural Voice*. London: Nick Hern Books.

McCallion, M., 1998. *The Voice Book*. London: Faber and Faber.