

McMASTER MUSIC EDUCATION *NOTEBOOK*

Number 1

“Breathing is Everything!”
A Catalogue of Techniques for Teaching Breath Support

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- 1) *Silence is golden*: Breath through your mouth. Silent inbreath, then on outbreath, “air as wind”.
(The idea is to have an open mouth and throat. Sound on the inbreath indicates throat or mouth are not as open as desirable. “Air as wind” establishes air FLOW without hitches or hesitations.)
- 2) *“Haalt”*: On the inbreath, say “Haal”. Then “T” sound on beginning of outbreath. Note what tongue does on “T” - where it strikes, how it moves, how it relates to air. This is the way brass players start every note.
- 3) *“How - Warm”*: On the inbreath, say “How”, then blow out “Warm” air.
- 4) *Flat and Wide*: On inbreath imagine a flat and wide air stream flowing just over the top of your tongue. On every breath, feel the air touching the entire top of your tongue as it flows into your lungs.
- 5) *Purple, Purple, Purple*: Imagine a big purple bubble floating in front of you. With your inbreath draw the bubble toward you until it touches your nose. Now blow it away from you, but pull it back (by breathing in) before it gets too far away. Bounce the bubble off the floor, but be careful not to break it.
- 6) *Silent - Away* : Silent in breath. On outbreath visualize the air in a thick stream moving away from you. Follow the stream as far ahead of you as possible.
- 7) *O - Away*: On the inbreath, say “O”. Outbreath, follow moving, thick air stream as far as possible in front of you.
- 8) *Low and Easy*: Inbreath, listen for a low register sound. Outbreath, let go with no effort at all.
(High pitched sounds on the inbreath are indications of tension or constrictions in the breathing apparatus.)
- 9) *Left/Right, Left/Right*: Place your right hand on your stomach, left hand on your chest. On inbreath imagine your right hand “pulling” your stomach outward. On outbreath imagine your left hand “pulling” your chest outward and your right hand “pushing” your stomach inward. Repeat several times. Now move your hands a few inches in front of your body and repeat, with your hands moving in opposite directions to illustrate the “pulling” and “pushing” movements. Move your hands farther away from your body and repeat. Move larger and larger quantities of air.
- 10) *Empty those lungs!*: Inhale and exhale to a comfortable place. Blow out MORE air. Open mouth and LET the air rush in. Feel how easy it is to take a relaxed breath.
- 11) *Sssh*: Place your index finger in front of your lips as if saying “Sssh”. Breathe, and feel the air rushing past your finger. Now move finger farther and farther away from your lips and maintain the feeling of the passing air.
- 12) *Open mouth, take breath* : Place two fingers vertically between your teeth. Breathe past the fingers. Note the

FLOW of the air. Remove fingers and maintain the same flow of the air.

(Another version for brass players: Place backbore of mouthpiece between teeth and breathe through the mouthpiece. Note air flow. Remove mouthpiece. Maintain flow.)

13) *Down-Out-Up*: Visualize inbreath going “down” to the bottom of your stomach first, then your stomach expanding “out”, lastly fill the upper part of your lungs by thinking “up”. Exhale and repeat.

14) *A Candle in the Wind*: Imagine a candle in front of you. As you breathe in pull the flame toward you. On outbreath push the flame away from you until it is horizontal. Be careful not to blow the candle out. Move it farther and farther away from you.

15) *Low and Slow*: Draw thick air stream in, thinking down to the bottom of your stomach, and moving slowly. Note the feeling. Now take a quick breath getting the same feeling.

16) *Breathing tube*: Form a tube with both of your hands. Breathe through the tube. Make the tube longer by moving one hand farther away. Move large quantities of air.

17) *The yellow balloon*: Place your right hand on your stomach. Imagine you have a bright yellow balloon inside your stomach. Inhale and inflate the balloon. Exhale and deflate the balloon.

18) *“O,O,O”*: Inhale thinking of three “O”s. The shape of the inside of your mouth — “O”. The sound of the air rushing in—“O”. The shape of the air stream —“O”. Exhale and repeat.

19) *Surprises are good* : Take a “surprised” breath. Notice the feeling and the flow of the air.

20) *The Christmas breath*: When inhaling say “Ho”. Exhale with three outbreaths, saying “Ho, Ho, Ho”. Repeat several times increasing the air flow each time. Now reverse the process—say “Ho,Ho,Ho on the inbreath; “Ho” on the outbreath.

21) *Grandma always says*: “When the air is in, the stomach is out,
When the air is out, the stomach is in.”

22) *The birthday breath*: Close your eyes. Imagine a birthday cake with one candle and blow out the candle. Now imagine 40 candles and blow them all out with one breath. Note the difference in air volume and flow. Good players always take a “40 candle” breath.

23) *March time*: Sit comfortably erect. As you inhale lift one foot off the floor. As you exhale let the foot return to the floor. Repeat with the other foot. Note the feeling of the breath flowing in and out. Do the exercise again without moving your feet, but get the same feeling of breath flow.

24) *“HO-OH/OH-HO”*: Say “HO” on inbreath, and “OH” on outbreath. Now reverse—“OH” on inbreath and “HO” on the outbreath.

25) *“Hawaii”*: Take a quick breath in three stages, “Ha-Wa-ii”. On “Ha” feel your sides expand; on “Wa” feel your stomach fill with air; on “ii” feel your upper chest fill with air. Exhale and repeat.