

# Body and Voice

## Somatic Re-education

**Marina Gilman, MM, MA, CCC-SLP**

*Illustrations by Alex Rowe*  
*Medical Illustrations by Peggy Firth*



# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<b>PART I</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1. The Somatic Awareness: Body and Voice Working as One</b>	<b>3</b>
Awareness—What Is It?	7
The Somatic Map and Self-Image	12
The Role of Posture	17
Stability and Instability	21
Changing Complex Patterns	23
Pedagogical Methods: <i>Outside In</i> Versus <i>Inside Out</i>	25
Parasitic Versus Diversionary Movements	26
Additional Roadblocks to Look For	27
Learning to See	30
References	31
<b>Chapter 2. Body and Voice: Somatic and Physiologic Connections</b>	<b>33</b>
Anatomy of Connections	36
Current Research	42
Next Steps: Learning to Recognize and Change Patterns	46
References	47
<b>Chapter 3. The Significance of the Unremarkable</b>	<b>49</b>
Diversionary, Parasitic, or Unnecessary Preparatory Movements	52
Clothing Anatomy	56
Clothing Tells a Story	58
References	66
<b>PART II</b>	<b>67</b>
Introduction	67

Understanding the Complexity of Movement	67
Basic Principles and Ground Rules	71
<b>Chapter 4. Diversionary, Parasitic, or Other</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Unnecessary Preparatory Movements</b>	
Introduction	77
When to Use These Lessons	79
Lesson One: Bringing the Head Forward and Back	81
Basic Movements	82
Troubleshooting	86
Case Study	86
Lesson Two: Lifting and Lowering the Shoulders	89
Basic Movements	90
Case Study	92
Lesson Three: Releasing the Jaw	94
Basic Movements	96
Troubleshooting	99
Case Studies	100
Lesson Four: Anchoring the Tongue	107
Troubleshooting	110
Case Study	110
Lesson Five: Externalization of an Internal Process	112
Troubleshooting	115
Case Study	115
Reference	118
<b>Chapter 5. Releasing for Breathing</b>	<b>119</b>
Release of the Breath: Lesson and Variations	123
When to Use This Lesson	124
Basic Movement	125
Discovering the Habituated Pattern	125
Understanding the Action	128
Releasing the Breath—Passive Inhalation	130
Sound Variations—Semioccluded	132
Variations to Increase the Duration and Contour	133
of Voiced Segments	
Positional Variations to Facilitate Abdominal Release	134
Sitting Variation	134
Standing Variation	137
Troubleshooting	139
Case Studies	142

Breath Holding	148
How to Identify Breath Holding or Constriction of Airflow	151
Troubleshooting and Case Study	157
Externalizing Through Hand Gestures and Movement	164
Complexities of Breath Holding	165
A Word About the Words We Use	171
References	172
<b>Chapter 6. Mobilizing the Pelvis</b>	<b>173</b>
Freeing the Pelvis: Lesson and Variations	177
When to Use These Lessons	177
Basic Movements	178
Basic Lesson: Sitting One Hand on the Small of the Back	179
Variation 1: Sitting with One Hand on Small of the Back the Other Hand on Top of Head	181
Variation 2: Sitting with One Hand on the Small of the Back, the Other on the Top of the Head, Head Tilts Up and Down	185
Variation Three: Standing Variation	190
Troubleshooting	195
Case Studies	199
Reference	208
<b>Chapter 7. Improving Stability</b>	<b>209</b>
Stability ≠ Stasis	209
What to Look For	212
What to Listen For	213
Balance, Shoes, and Body Physiognomy	214
When to Use These Lessons	217
Lesson One: Pencil Lesson	218
Basic Movements	218
Lesson Two: Circles Over the Feet	226
Troubleshooting	232
Case Studies	237
<i>Index</i>	247

# Preface

## A Few Words About This Book

---

This book is intended for voice teachers, acting teachers, speech-language pathologists, singers, actors, in short anyone interested in good voice production. The information in this book is equally applicable for purposes of the enhancement of voice use as well as for its rehabilitation. No matter what we call ourselves, or what credentials we have, when working with the voice we are often both teachers and students at the same time.

Teaching voice can be accomplished through a wide variety of teaching and learning modalities. We teach through imitation or modeling of sound, posture, and vocal gesture. We teach through imagery evoking sensations, directions for the production of sound, or quality of the sound. Teaching voice can be improved through an understanding of the anatomy and physiology of the structures or of acoustic interactions. Students with a strong visual or tactile sense may learn through synesthesia, replacing sound with color or texture.

Yet no matter what the modality for teaching and/or learning there are times when nothing seems to work. Students try, practice, struggle to do what they think they should be doing, but fail. The teacher begins to think the student is lazy, lacking talent, motivation, or awareness. Students view the teacher as incompetent, insensitive, or mean. In short both teachers and students alike are frustrated making the entire situation worse.

As teachers we can only suggest change. Students need to learn to embody the changes. They need to understand at a somatic level what they are doing, what their internal processes are, and only then can they effect change. Many have a “natural” talent or an innate sense of their voice and its capabilities; for others they have to learn through repetition. More often than not, this is not a problem. A suggestion is made; the student begins to do what is asked.

This book is about the times when students cannot effect the change, not because they are stupid, lack talent, or do not practice, but because they cannot conceptualize somatically. They are not aware of what they are doing so cannot do what is being asked of them. By the same token the teacher needs to be able to see the problem and then guide the student in a process of self-discovery and awareness. The teacher, coach, trainer, therapist needs to be able to sense where and how body dynamics, whether viewed as posture, alignment, or something else, are not meeting the needs of the voice or vocal production. The teacher must then be able to effect the necessary changes in the student by providing the appropriate instruction to enable the student to bring about the necessary changes from within.

This book is designed to help both teachers and students through these moments. In these situations the student is often stuck in a somatic pattern that neither the student nor the teacher recognizes or understands. Body and voice need to work together yet often they work against one another. Patterns of standing, breathing, strange images of what *should* or *should not* happen result in a body or somatic self-image that inadvertently creates maladaptive patterns of muscle and musculoskeletal interactions.

The following chapters develop both a theoretical and practical framework grounded in somatic education in order to understand and recognize the somatic patterns that create the maladaptive embodiment. These are the patterns that prevent our students from using their voices to the best of their abilities. In the world of evidence-based practice, it is also important to understand the anatomy, physiology, and science that support what we do with our bodies. To this aim I will briefly present the anatomical connections within the body that are important to the physicality of vocal production. This information is by no means comprehensive, but my hope is that it will provide a backdrop for learning to problem solve with your students. The aim of this book is to help you as a teacher and performer to look to the whole, not just the parts; to be able to sense strain in the sound, effort, or limitations of expression; and to begin to identify the somatic blocks or gaps in somatic map getting in the way of a free voice.

PART ONE offers a theoretical overview of the importance of our somatic image or body map in voice production and training. I present a paradigm that for many is new but for some may be similar to what they have been teaching. It stresses somatic re-education from the inside out, helping the student to recognize current patterns of movement, breathing, coordination of sound, breath, and body, through developing a self-awareness through movement lessons and explorations. Only then can alternatives be explored that provide new options. The final chapter in this section focuses in a more concrete way of recognizing potentially maladaptive patterns through what I refer to as “clothing anatomy.”

PART TWO is organized around themes related to breathing and stability. Specific lessons are presented. All the lessons are designed to build awareness of somatic patterns. They are designed to provide options and new pathways for negotiating the complex somatic associations necessary for effective vocal production. The verbally directed exploration lessons are divided into sections addressing common roadblocks students encounter. They are intended to provide a framework and context for addressing issues common to students of all levels. The lessons are presented in specific contexts with commentary pointing the teacher how to observe and guide the student through the discovery process. Troubleshooting sections and case scenarios are presented in narrative form, to provide a real world context to the lessons.

As you begin this journey remember this book is NOT about direct connections and doing things because they look right. This book is about learning to recognize and change from the inside out.

In preparing to write this book, I kept asking myself how much of what I see and teach comes because of the self-awareness I developed during my work with the Alexander Technique and then my training to become a Feldenkrais practitioner? Is it possible to teach in a didactic way something that is inherently experiential? I have come to believe through experience in the private studio as well as providing workshops to voice teachers, singers, actors, and speech-language pathologists that it is possible to open the door to increased awareness. The awareness

# PART I





# CHAPTER 1

## The Somatic Awareness: Body and Voice Working as One

*Claiming that we must get body and voice to learn to work together is a silly concept. We ARE our instrument. We are our voice. It is how we communicate our thoughts and emotions. The vocal mechanism or vocal systems complex (respiration, phonation, resonance) depends on the rest of our systems (skeletal, muscular, nervous) to work. We do not have a voice, a vocal mechanism, which is independent of our body. We could have a body without a voice, both metaphorically and literally, or a disembodied voice, but that is part of a very different discussion. However, neither option is in play when talking about voice training for actors, singers, broadcast journalists, voice-over, or any other voice professional. So, if body and voice are inherently integrated, then why is this or any other book on the topic necessary?*

As teachers we are trained to listen, to observe, to guide. We come to our work with ideas and ideals about voice training. We come to teaching with clear pedagogical models and methods. We often will borrow freely from these models to construct our own unique approach. Because no two students are the same, it makes sense to use good ideas where we find them. However, no matter how successful a teacher or method of voice training is, there are always those students for whom it does not

work. The students will try and try and try, but they just cannot manage to “get it right.” Are they not practicing enough? Do they lack talent? Maybe, but just as often the problem relates to poor or inefficient somatic organization. It is a lack of awareness of how to find within themselves the coordination needed to achieve the vocal color, freedom, and range both in terms of the pitch and expression desired. In these instances the teacher needs to dig deeper into his or her own experience to help the student move forward. Yet they may not be sure what to look for. They sense something is interfering, but do not really understand what is needed to effect change in the student. Teachers often miss the signs and indications of somatic imbalance signaled by the small giggles and wiggles of the student preparing to sing or recite text, stray gestures, excessive movement, or stiff or reduced movement. But even when these gestures or movements are recognized, frequently teachers do not really know what to do, how to redirect the student to more efficient vocal function. Simply telling the student to stop such activities is not helpful unless the student can also recognize what he or she is doing, and even then there are elements of the behavior the student is unable to change.

As voice teachers, trainers, acting/singing coaches, or speech pathologists we come to voice training or retraining from the perspective of our fields. For the singing teachers the exquisite interaction of the vocal tract and resonance is primary; for the acting teacher it is expression both vocal and physical; and for the coach (vocal and/or dramatic) the emphasis is musical and dramatic. The goals are the same, bringing the student to the place of maximal expression and communication through voice. In the process of training young singers, actors, or voice professionals we must guide the student’s discovery of his or her vocal potential toward the ultimate goal developing his or her craft. In the process we must be able to identify and adjust aspects of the student’s vocal production or performance that are inefficient, inappropriate, or maladaptive. As vocal teachers/trainers we need to identify and correct technique then retrain new somatic patterns. To do this we must be able to identify the small somatic, physical aspects students bring to performance that interfere with their ability to do what they want to do vocally

and dramatically. In other words, learning to “see” not only with the eyes, but also through our senses.

I worked with a young high school student who would stick out her neck as though she were bringing her whole head closer to her audience when she began a monologue. Telling her to stop doing it did not help, as she was truly not aware of what she was doing. I needed to find a way to teach her nervous system that there were other ways she could begin her monologue that did not involve bringing her neck forward. Only then could she stop. This approach to teaching is predicated on having a conversation with the person’s nervous system, rather than through their conscious, cognitive mind.

We all have a somatic or body sense. What it feels like to move, our relationship to space both within ourselves and beyond ourselves. Part of this body sense is both a physical self-image as well as a vocal self-image. Voice is sensory, we feel the vibrations, we hear our sound, we experience the emotions imbedded in the text or melody. As we grow from infancy, our somatic sense of self develops through our movements and our experiences. Our neuro-musculo-skeletal system is gradually drawing a somatic map. We both move according to our somatic map or somatic self-image as well as develop our self-image as we move. In the best of all worlds our somatic map will allow us to move, behave, and do whatever we want. In reality there are areas in which it is incomplete or altered, consequently less efficient.

I often use the tongue trill or rolled /r/ as a vocal warm-up. It is not unusual for my student to look at me quizzically when I model the sound. “How do you do that?” They have no somatic sense of how to make the sound. They cannot find it in their sensory somatic map even to recognize what to do with the tongue to get it to vibrate. This also happens with habitual movements such as with the young girl I just mentioned. She was totally unaware she was bringing her head forward when she began to present her monologue. Somewhere in her sense of voice she felt she had to protrude her neck. Perhaps it came from a misguided ideal of projecting her voice. I have no idea. My challenge as her teacher was to help her become aware of the pattern, and then help her discover from within alternative means of projecting. Bringing your head forward to initiate speech or song in and

of itself is not bad. Dramatically it could be very effective. But as an unconscious habituated movement it is distracting to her audience. More important, it is distracting to her organization. In doing so she is limiting her range of expression, her range in general, and she is creating unnecessary strain in the laryngeal muscles as well as the respiratory system.

It is important to understand that the body is capable of organizing itself well for most activities. HOW the body organizes itself around a given task to produce the desired result is the key element. I urge the reader to keep this in mind. The behaviors or postures discussed are presented in the context that they are NOT serving the student well, not well organized or based on a faulty self-image, and therefore need to be addressed. A similar movement or gesture can be accomplished in such a way that neither vocal nor physical communication are impaired. Let us look briefly at the previous example of bringing the head forward on phonation. If the head is brought forward by compressing the neck vertebrae laryngeal function may be negatively impacted. If, however, the head is brought forward by engaging and lengthening the upper thoracic together with the cervical spine the larynx is able to move with ease. Please keep in mind that the lessons in this book are somatic explorations and not setting up a series of rules and exercises that need to be done right.

The nature of voice teaching is experiential. We all, whether a teacher of singing, acting, speaking (broadcast journalism, voice-over, etc.), or speech-language pathologist working on vocal rehabilitation, take students through a somatic journey of self-discovery, building self-awareness of their voice not only intellectually but through their physicality, sensory, auditory sensations, and perceptions. In the process we are redrawing and expanding their somatic self-image as it relates to vocal performance, no matter what kind. I am not referring to a cognitive or intellectual awareness, although that is part of the picture. I am referring to a conversation between the teacher and the student's nervous system. It is a conversation that results in changes, sometimes subtle, in movement patterns that allow for increased range, flexibility, or freedom of expression. This conversation happens by DOING with attention. I can sing scales on all the vowels for 20 minutes a day for 2 months and if I do not sing them with a certain level of attention to the process, to the

“how does it feel,” “am I keeping the vowels consistent,” “what is happening with my breath,” little will change. I will only be reinforcing old muscle memory and habituated patterns. On the other hand, if I sing the same scales with the same vowels but pay close attention to the quality, sound, feeling, and sensation of what I am doing, changes will begin to take place and by the end of 2 months I will not only be able to sing them consistently and freely but also apply my learning to other patterns and repertoire. I will have learned how to learn.

We know that voice (vocal sounds) is produced by coordination of three systems: respiration (lungs and diaphragm), phonation (the larynx, specifically the vocal folds), and resonance (the movement of the resulting sound waves through the vocal tract, the supraglottic spaces of the mouth and nose). Because the nature of teaching is linear we focus on one aspect of vocal production or expression at a time. Without intending to, the parts are isolated from the whole. We depend on the student to be able to integrate such information on a somatic level. This is the case most of the time. Students are able to make adjustments within the whole body as they go along. But not always. It is at these points that we as teachers need to be able to engage with students' nervous systems to help them develop somatic awareness so they can redraw their somatic maps.

## **Awareness—What Is It?**

---

Let us pause for a moment to talk about the nature of awareness particularly as it relates to posture and movement. I am not referring to a cognitive or intellectual awareness, although that may be a part of the picture. I am referring to a conversation within the nervous system. It is a conversation that results in changes, sometimes subtle, in movement patterns that allow for increased range or freedom of movement or expression. This conversation happens by DOING with attention.

I bend down to tie my shoe. I do not think about how I do it. It just happens. At some point in my life I laboriously had to learn to tie my shoe, but the action of tying my shoe is now so habituated that I no longer need to pay attention. My fingers