

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO SINGING IN TUNE

The trick for singing in tune is the same trick as for good singing in general (as well as for life in general). The trick is to go from auto-pilot to self-pilot. The trick is to become conscious. This is not an easy task as the auto-pilot approach of opening ones' mouth and letting full throttled emotions come out through sound is such a joy. Ultimately the challenge is to make our joyful expression a conscious expression.

1) **Become Conscious of Breath.** Imagine a table with wobbly legs. It won't support anything and anything placed on it will fall. Deep breath, conscious breath, breath that reaches into the Earth Herself, supports our sound. Deep breath lifts us up physically, mentally, and spiritually. A communal deep breath, all of us breathing well together, can transform us. We use the word "support." "Support" means getting a conscious breath.

2) **Become Conscious of Posture.** A slouched posture is an auto-pilot posture. A good posture (self-pilot) creates the support for conscious breath.

3) **Become Conscious of Vowels.** Vowels are a lot more than those things between consonants. Vowels are at the core of our emotional expressions as living beings. The first humans, many thousands of years ago, expressed love (ah & oh), awe (oo & aw), fear (ee), through vowels. These vowels became universal as early humans spread throughout the planet.

A spoken impure "Oo" vowel is very different from a conscious and pure "Oo" vowel. It is the difference between auto-pilot and self-pilot. The biggest danger is diphthongs, syllables with more than one vowel in it. When one vowel slowly morphs into another vowel (in self-pilot) it tends to drag the pitch down, causing the singing to go out of tune. When we become conscious of our vowels (in self-pilot), the pure vowels are more likely to be in tune. The general rule is to sustain the first vowel in a syllable that has more than one vowel (diphthong).

4) **Become Conscious of Pitch.** This is called listening, but there's a lot more to it. Hearing is an auto-pilot function of the ear. Listening is a self-pilot function of the ear. Listening requires discipline and focus. Listening requires a reaching out to sound, a hunger for sound. Reaching out to sound means listening to those around us, to vowels, phrasing, and pitch. But listening also requires a reaching within. This is called "audiation."

Audiation is the ability to listen to sounds within the head without vocalizing them. The songs we sing are all within a diatonic system, which means they generally comply to the do re **mi fa** sol **la ti** do scale.

The distances between these pitches are called intervals. These are, for the most part, fixed intervals meaning that the interval of a Perfect Fifth will always sound the same (Thirds are adjustable but fifths are not). Practice a phrase in your head (without singing it), and then sing it.

The process of listening internally (audiation) will help to make the singing much more in tune. With each note you sing, listen to the next notes internally before singing them. We'll discuss sub-audiation (the mechanics of singing without the sound coming out).

Those are the BIG FOUR. Other tips: If your right handed, sit with a strong in-tune singer to your right. Sing percussively, as if you were hitting a drum with your voice. Become conscious of where the break in your voice is – between your low voice and your high voice. When singing in that area, become fully conscious of good breath, support, and posture. One last thing: Be happy. Happiness is great for good intonation.