What we need to know when the Professional Voice breaks

✈ Introduction:
Voice Disorder textbooks include broad interview guides for voice diagnostics. But what do you ask clients who are pastors or teachers? What voice care beliefs do you explore in singers? This session will explore data from these professionals and relate the data back to the diagnostic interview. We will also discuss the use of vocal warm-ups and vocal cool-downs to help preserve the professional voice.

The learning objectives are:
1. Discuss possible additions/modifications to a patient interview to elucidate problems specific to singers, clergy, and teachers.
2. Identify at least 2 voice use/voice care misconceptions commonly held by singers.
3. Describe at least one approach for use as a vocal cool-down.

✈ Who are professional voice users?
The range of professions included here is varied and includes who we routinely think of, including singers and actors. Additionally, there are those professionals we may not routinely think of, such as air traffic controllers.

✈ Key elements of a voice evaluation interview
Textbooks with a focus on voice disorders often include suggestions for what to explore during the patient interview. See below for a consolidation of these suggestions from several textbooks with a range of publication dates from 2002 to 2021. While the items are open-ended and explore key areas, more elements specific to a profession are interesting to explore, and yet difficult to assume the clinician will be sufficiently aware to pursue them.
What challenges do professional voice users face?
As a professional voice user, teachers are at very high risk for developing voice problems. Experiences of teachers, including a sample of teachers with spasmodic dysphonia, will elucidate some of the responsibilities both in and out of the classroom that may challenge a teacher’s voice. Another category of voice professional receiving research attention in recent years is the clergy. Factors such sanctuary size and quality of sound system can result in voice stressors for the clergy. And, what of singers? Singers are perhaps more aware than others that their voice is their “instrument.” But, do they really know how to care for their voice? Where singers get their information is highly varied. Some internet sources provide erroneous information and depending on the level of training, a singer may not adequately discern reasonable from unreasonable. We will examine some beliefs represented in a survey to reveal the wide range of information available.

Finally, how can we help these voice users? Education on vocal health is helpful, as are the use of vocal warm-ups and vocal cool-downs. A class of exercises, semi-occluded vocal tract exercises are easy to teach and implement.
The Interview: a summary of suggested elements from a variety of voice disorder textbooks.

First, elements that were common to all:

- History of the vocal diagnosis,
  - When did the voice problem(s) begin?
  - How did they begin? Was it gradual or slow?
  - Did you notice it or did some one else?
- Perception
  - How do they perceive their voice?
  - How is their voice perceived by others?
- Alcohol, smoking, and marijuana use - use caution when asking these questions because some people
  - How often do they drink?
  - How much do they drink when they drink?
  - Do they smoke socially?
  - Do they smoke on a daily basis?
  - What is their drug use?
- Social
  - How does their voice use impact social life?
  - Are they unable to be heard or have vocal strain in noisy situations?
- Vocational
  - How does their job impact their voice use?
  - Are they a singer, teacher, actor?
- Family History
  - Is there a family history of voice problems?
  - Has any of their family received voice treatment?
- Medical History
  - Have they had any medical procedures done that would affect their voice (i.e. intubation)?
- Vocal Health
  - What settings does the client yell in?
  - Is there a time of day that their voice is better?
  - Is there any pain when they speak?
  - How much water does the client consume on a daily basis?

Elements not common to all

- What hobbies do they have?
- Do they have any psychological problems that could contribute to their voice?
  - How does their voice impact their personality?
  - Does their voice play a role in how they self-identify?
  - How are their emotions conveyed in their voice?
- Are there any neurological problems that affect their voice?
Reference Texts for Interview Questions


Additional References

This list is far from exhaustive but does include some of the key publications on the topic.


Meerschman, I., Van Lierde, K., Redman, Y. G., Becker, L., Benoy, A., Kissel, I., Leyns, C., Daelman, J., & D'haeseleer, E. (2020). Immediate effects of a semi-occluded water resistance ventilation mask on objective and subjective vocal outcomes in musical theater...


