

Coaching Corner



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Ring up your voice registers

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Your voice is actually more than one instrument. Because it is controlled by several sets of muscles, you can make several distinctly different sounds with it. These are called registers in the singing world where they are used extensively. They are utilized less frequently in speaking, but they can be very useful.

While voice researchers talk about as many as four different registers, two are particularly useful in speaking, chest register and head register. These are more often called chest voice and head voice. And curiously they have nothing in particular to do with your chest or your head.

Chest Voice

Let's start with chest voice. This is the default voice for most male speakers, although many women use it as well. The easiest way to describe this voice is to have you imitate Santa's hearty "ho ho ho" laugh. This sound may feel like it resonates in your chest as there is often sympathetic vibration in your ribs. But there actually is no real air flow or resonance in that area, as no vibrating air goes that direction after passing your vocal cords.



If you practice this hearty sound and how it feels in your throat area, you'll find that you can speak in that voice quite easily without the Santa effects.

Chest voice can often bring a sense of authority or power to your message. It can consequently bring your audience to view you as authoritative



or powerful as well. This can be good or maybe not so good depending on your message or your

audience. It's pretty understandable that most athletic coaches use chest voice nearly exclusively. However chest voice can often be intimidating, too, which is perhaps inappropriate when speaking to individuals who need emotional support or to children (except maybe when disciplining them).

Head Voice

The other register of interest to speakers is head voice. The easiest way I have found to describe head voice is as follows. Imagine you are speaking to a two year old little girl, saying, "What a cute little girl. Are you Daddy's (or Mommy's) little girl?" in that light sing-songy voice we've all used with toddlers. That's head



voice. If you practice speaking with head voice, minus the sing-songy effects, you'll find it can be quite easy to do consistently.

If you imagine saying the same words above with a robust chest voice and its likely effect, you can see that head voice can be very useful in the right contexts. It is gentler than chest voice. It may seem to be more melodious than chest voice. Many women and some men speakers use it as their default register quite effectively.

Which register should I use?

Any speaker, male or female, can use one register as their default voice and the other for

particular emphasis or variety. Here are a couple examples.

If you use your chest voice as your regular voice, imagine using head voice to bring in your audience on a little secret you're going to share with them.



Or maybe to suck them in on your special personal story or anecdote.

If you use your head voice as your regular voice, imagine using your chest voice to show your indignation over the wrongs done to your audience that you want to correct. Or to deliver your impassioned call to action.



If you get really good at using both chest voice and head voice, you'll find that you can go back and forth for effect,

even in mid-sentence, or even mix them together in a hybrid sound. But even if you never develop that facility, each register can be useful to bring variety, interest, and enhanced impact to your speech.

Summary

Practice with both registers and see if you can find spots where one may be more effective than the other. Then go ahead and use them regularly as part of your vocal plan for every speech you give.