

Practical strategies for minimising voice strain

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide information on the various strategies that can assist teachers in the prevention and minimisation of voice strain.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I use my voice more than I have to?
- Could I effectively use other methods to make my message understood?
- Do I use my voice as efficiently as I can?
- Can I speak at a quieter level during certain classroom activities?
- Is the layout of the classroom conducive to efficient voice use?
- Do I always talk above background noise?
- What is the source of the background noise and how can I reduce its impact on my voice use?

When you have determined the answers to these questions, consider what behaviour modification techniques you could employ to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of your voice.

To prevent/minimise voice strain

This may simply require changing the layout of the classroom, and/or organising a system of times when students are silent, times when they may talk one-on-one and times when they may talk in a group. Set the rules so that you can easily attract their attention without resorting to shouting.

- Turn down, shut out, or move away from noise in the environment while talking.
- Use gesture and other non-vocal signals to give instructions such as clapping your hands to gain attention.
- Talk to groups or classes when the students are quiet.
- Stand in a place in the classroom that will make it easiest for the students to hear you without straining your voice.
- Arrange the classroom so that students who are likely to be noisy or need extra attention are at the front.
- Use methods of behaviour management, which don't involve yelling or loud talking.
- Produce your speech sounds clearly and precisely and slow your speech so that students can understand you, minimising the need for you to talk very loudly or having to repeat yourself.
- Use routine such as playing a particular piece of music or using a bell to signal changes in the classroom activity.
- Move close to students when talking to them.
- Sing only in a range and style that is comfortable for you where possible.
- Give instructions to a small number of students who then have the responsibility for informing the rest of the class.

- Plan the day so that you build in voice rest periods, where you do not need to talk.
- When outdoors or in large open areas, such as gymnasiums, use a megaphone or PA system to project your voice.
- Where supported by medical advice, use a voice amplifier (available from the Organisational Safety and Wellbeing unit).

Strategies to reduce the symptoms of voice strain

You can work on reducing the symptoms of voice strain by using strategies such as:

- Drinking water frequently throughout the day.
- Being conscious of your posture and breathing when speaking (back straight, head up and chin level with the ground).
- Sipping water, swallowing or yawning whenever you feel the urge to cough or clear the throat.
- Sucking on a sweet, but avoiding medicated lozenges, which may irritate your throat further.
- Consciously suppressing the urge to cough or clear the throat.

Coughing may be a symptom of an acute throat infection. It is important to take particular care of your voice if you have an acute infection by seeking medical advice.

Voice amplifier program

The department provides personal voice amplifiers for departmental staff with vocal injury or disability. Staff who supply written specialist medical advice (from an ear, nose and throat doctor or a speech pathologist) stating that they require a voice amplifier to perform their role are eligible for a voice amplifier.

Voice amplifiers are provided as an asset to schools and are loaned to the employee with the vocal injury or disability. Requests for voice amplifiers, with the attached medical advice, can be emailed directly to the Organisational Safety and Wellbeing unit for processing at voiceamplifiers@qed.qld.gov.au.

Useful links

The Victorian Department of Education and Training has developed a 'Voice Care for Teachers Program'. Details of this program, including a number of information resources are available via these links:

- [Voice Care for Teachers : https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/voice-care-teachers/print-all](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/voice-care-teachers/print-all)
- [Voice Care Australia: Tips and Hints : http://www.voicewareaustralia.com.au/hints.html](http://www.voicewareaustralia.com.au/hints.html)

