



# Lance Russell Theory

Music Training for Every Level

## Five Essential Vocalise

### Introduction

Thank you for reading this Lance Russell Theory guide to what I believe are the most important vocal exercises (vocalise) a new singer can practice. Each of these simple exercises are designed to focus on specific parts of the singing process.

The exercises themselves are not complicated. They are not supposed to be. Overly complex vocalise can sometime be counterproductive, since your attention is more focused on singing the correct pattern rather than the techniques with which you sing them. The aim should be to focus on *how* you sing them. The goal is *consistency* of sound throughout the pattern.

### Vowels

It is important to practice each of these exercises using different vowel sounds. It is easy to default to an “ah” sound as you move through these vocalise. But of course, “ah” is not the only vowel sound on which we sing. Further, you will find that singing on some vowels will be easier or harder than others. That is because there are some vowel shapes that may have developed good or bad habits. The “ah” vowel, for example, is often affected by the bad habit of switching to “uh,” in higher notes. That is usually due to tension in the back of the tongue.


Knowing how to recognize different vowel sounds and to develop consistency among them is critical for any singer. Therefore, each of these exercises should be practiced using all five of what singers refer to as “pure” vowel sounds:

[i]	[ɛ]	[a]	[ɔ]	[u]
“ee”	“eh”	“ah”	“oh”	“oo”

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## Onset

Moderately




Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.

The image shows a musical staff in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat. It contains five measures, each with a half note followed by a quarter rest. The notes are G4, F4, E4, D4, and C4. Below the staff are the vocalizations 'Ah,', 'ah,', 'ah,', 'ah,', and 'ah.'.

How one begins the singing sound is of critical importance. It affects the clarity of tone, efficiency of breath, and resonance. To achieve a proper onset of tone, one must prepare their vocal-cords first by holding them closed *before* beginning airflow. This creates an effect called a “glottal-stop,” which we generally do in the English language when we say words that begin with a vowel, like “apple,” or “elephant.”

## Energy & Catch Breath

Slowly



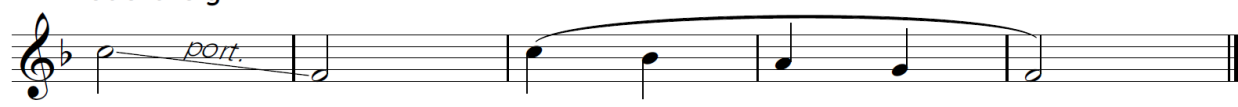
Eh, eh, eh, eh, eh.

The image shows a musical staff in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat. It contains five measures, each with a half note followed by a quarter rest. The notes are G4, F4, E4, D4, and C4. Above the staff are five wedge-shaped markings pointing right, indicating a crescendo. Below the staff are the vocalizations 'Eh,', 'eh,', 'eh,', 'eh,', and 'eh.'.

Once the sound has begun, a singer must be sure to maintain the intensity of airflow throughout the sound. If the airflow is not properly sustained, the sound will begin to fall flat and die out. *Sustained notes need a sense of direction.* One way to promote this sense of direction is to plan a breath for immediately after the sound, often referred to as a “catch breath.” Connect this breath to the end of the sound. I often use the analogy of pulling a resistance band as part of a workout routine. Tension increases as you stretch out the band, and then it will naturally snap back to equilibrium. Singing this exercise should feel the same way.

## Legato (Smooth Singing)

Moderately



Oh, oo. Oh oo.

The image shows a musical staff in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat. It contains four measures. The first measure has a half note G4 with a slur and the word 'port.' above it. The second measure has a half note F4. The third measure has a half note E4. The fourth measure has a half note D4. A long slur connects the notes in the third and fourth measures. Below the staff are the vocalizations 'Oh,', 'oo.', 'Oh', and 'oo.'.

Good singing is dependent upon the ability to connect the notes of a melody together in a smooth, silky way. This is true no matter the musical style. The classical music term for singing/playing in this way is “legato.” Steady, consistent airflow is essential. Practice singing legato by singing a larger musical interval using a technique called “portamento,” which is a method of sliding gradually from one note to the other. Then travel the same musical interval one step at a time in one breath.

## Agility

Quickly

ee\_\_\_\_ , eh\_\_\_\_ , ah\_\_\_\_\_ .

Many singers relish ringing out on a long, glorious note in their songs. These are usually referred to as “money notes.” However, those same singers often struggle with the fast, “little” notes elsewhere in the song, fumbling through and hoping that they don’t throw them off key. Accuracy while singing those smaller, quicker notes will go a long way toward staying in the key of the song. It is also important for developing the ability to do “runs” like one might hear from some of the most popular divas (Mariah Carey, Beyoncé, Rihanna, etc.).

## Volume Control

Slowly

ee, eh, ah, oh, oo.

One of the most impressive things a singer can do is to “swell” their voice by starting a sound softly, then grow to a large and powerful sound, and then back off. There are often various tensions in the jaw, neck, shoulders, or elsewhere that impede a singer’s ability to do this technique (particularly when trying to get soft again). So when practicing this exercise, it is important to pay very close attention to any part of your body that begins to feel like they start to get stuck in place.

## Perfect Practice Makes Perfect

I hope that you find these exercises helpful. I believe that if you drill these exercises regularly, you will begin to see improvements in your voice in a relatively short time. However, one must be focused on the technique behind each exercise. It is not very helpful to merely sing the musical pattern; a singer must be conscious of what part of their voice they are looking to improve. Practice does not make perfect – *perfect* practice makes perfect.

I recommend recording yourself while practicing so that you can self-evaluate. Often what we think we are singing is not exactly what comes across in practice. Of course, you can also hire a vocal coach to guide your development.