

AMERICAN SINGING STYLE - Diction techniques (Elisabeth Howard, October 2025)

Being AUTHENTIC and making the song YOUR OWN

Pronunciation and Expression

1. Contractions even if the word is spelled correctly.

Takin', goin', doin', makin', sayin', prayin', lyin', sighin', tryin', lovin', dying', etc

Gotta, shoulda, woulda, coulda, mighta etc.

Tell ya, ask ya, want cha, love ya, do ya, will ya, can ya, make ya, take ya,

Would you is Wouldja. Could you is couldja. Won't you is woncha. Can't you is cancha, Got you is Gotcha (but not in I've Got You Under My Skin)

What you is whatcha etc.

Diphthongs = two vowels back-to-back

Note: Brackets [] are IPA pronunciation symbols. International Phonetic Alphabet. My keyboard approximates the symbols.

[ai] "ah" Words: my, by, sigh, die. Sustain the first sound "ah" and shorten the final "ee" [i] sound to [I] as in "it."

[ei] "ey" Words: way, hey, gray, take. Sustain the first sound "eh" and shorten the final ee [i] sound to [I] as in "it."

[>i] "oy" Words: boy, soil, ploy, toy. [>] as in "awe" and [i] ee" as in "see". Sustain the first sound "aw" and shorten the final ee sound [i] to [I] as in "it."

[au] = "ow" Words: now, brown, loud, sound, cloud. [a] as in "at" and [u] oo as in "soon". Sustain the first sound "a" and shorten the final oo sound to [^] as in "could".

[>u] = "oh" Words: show, low, so, doe, crow. [>] as in "awe" and [u] oo as in "soon." Sustain the first sound "awe" and shorten the final oo sound to [^] as in "could."

2. Different vibrato types

Straight tone (no vibrato)

Delayed Vibrato - straight tone followed by vibrato.

Shimmery very fast vibrato especially for scatting.

Throat vibrato- slower speed especially for ballads.

Diaphragmatic vibrato on sustained notes - slower about 6-8 pulses per second.

3. Melody Embellishments

After the melody is clearly stated, embellishments are expected to be added to the original melody by adding grace notes (one step up or down from the written note).

PENTATONIC SCALE

Melismas - groups of notes, also known as “runs,” frequently used in R&B STYLE, are based on the Pentatonic scale. Here it is:

BLUES SCALE

Shorter groups of notes, known as “licks,” from the blues scale, used in most American style songs, including BLUES, ROCK, R&B and COUNTRY WESTERN. Here’s the blues scale. Let’s practice it together.

SCATTING

In Jazz style, scattting, is singing non – sensical syllables, which occur on the repeat of the chorus. The singer must be mindful of the chord progression so as to sing compatible melodies over the instrumental accompaniment.

4. Phrasing and SYNCOPATION

Coming in before or after the down beat, changing the rhythms, and syncopating the rhythms. For example, in 4/4 time the counts 2 & 4 are the weak beats. SYNCOPATION is when the weak beats are accented.

5. Expressions created in the configuration of the vocal tract

Throat cry - for serious, passionate emotions.

Throat laugh and throat giggle - for happy emotions.

Sexy throat - for intimate situations.

Other emotions: angry, mocking, sad, disappointed, teasing etc.

6. Sounds

Breathy - use of excess air in the tone for emotional effects such as sexy, vulnerable, secretive, etc. Be careful though it can cause hoarseness when singing high and loud.

Growl and “creaky door” - “vocal fold fry” used for emotional expression.

Back “L” - tongue depressed in the back under the soft palate used for gutsy, bluesy effect.

7. Consonants

Use vibrato while holding M and N.

Hold back the vowel of the next syllable on the following consonants.

G - Gorgeous

H - Hheaven or hhell.

L - Llove Mmme or lleave Mmme or llet Mmme Be llonely.

M - Mmeeeeen to mmee.

N - Nnobody does it *better*.

P- Think “B” into mic to avoid airy “puh” sound

S - Sssssommmmmday he’ll commme alonnnnnng.

Z- Zzinng! went the Sstrings of mmy
heart!

W = oo. Where or when. Oowhere or Oowhen.

Oowild is the oowind. The ooworld oowill allllooways oowellcome llovers.

Sing Buhllow, Cuhllow, Fuhlly, Guhllory, Suhlleeeepinnn etc.

Bl - Blowin in the wind oowind

Cl- Close to you

Fl - Fly me to the mmmooooonnnn

Gl - Glory, glory hallelujah

Sl - Sleepin' bbbeee

Bureakin', Duhream, Cuhrush, Fuhrrenship, Gurreat, Puhrrayer, Tuhrrue Rright, Rrong,
Vvery etc.

Br - Breakin' up is hard to do

Dr - Dream a little dream of me.

Cr - I've got a crush on you.

Fr- Friendship, friendship,

Gr - It's gonna be a great day.

Pr - Say a little prayer for me.

Tr - Always true to you darling.

R - Right or wrong

V - It's very clear

It's best to use these guidelines when studying a new piece, and by all means, listen to several ELITE RECORDING ARTISTS that sing your song. Learn from the best. That's what these same artists did to get their style. Listen phrase by phrase - the best way to get into your voice the style you want to sing. Copy, copy and copy from the best. Next thing you know you've got your own style! Let it SHINE!