

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 342a: BASIC VOICE
Course #: 63059
Units: 2
When: SP 2022 — TTH — 8:00 – 9:20 am
Where: Zoom & MCC 106
Instructor: Brent Blair, PhD
Office Hours: MCC 101b, TH 2 – 3 PM *By appointment*
Contact Info: bblair@usc.edu; (323) 356-2552 (cell)

Course Description

This course is an examination of the individual voice centering on resonance, tone, flexibility, and support through dramatic selections for transmitting meaning and emotion of character.

It will also introduce the student to the mechanics of the voice and provide the tools for a fully embodied vocal warmup.

Course Philosophy

This course follows a progression of exercises developed by Kristin Linklater as outlined in *Freeing the Natural Voice*, a required text for the course, designed to help students develop an understanding of their individual voice and discover ways to release it from habits that can hinder spontaneity. In order to explore the connection between voice and self, the class will be encouraged to arrive at a common vocabulary for the workings of the expressive voice. Once the class agrees on a model for how the voice works, they can set to work exploring how it does not work. During the first semester students will explore the contribution of the entire body towards the free release of the voice, and observe personal barriers to this release. Course work will include student-led warm-ups, reading assignments, individual work and a group autobiographical performance collage at the end of the semester.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this semester, students will:

- gain access to a more open and less effortful physical body to support vocal production
- find a subtler and more responsive relationship to free breath and imaginative / emotional thought
- explore fuller and purer vibration in a more expressive and less effortful way
- increase awareness of how resonating chambers support range of thought and emotions
- expand breath capacity to gain access to a more powerful, less effortful voice
- develop a playful in order to acquire a fuller and freer 3-4 octave speaking range
- increase expressive power of articulation in spoken text with more vulnerability and less effort
- understand the reasons behind, and be able to clearly execute, all voice exercises learned in class
- plan and implement a full vocal warm-up

Zoom Platform

You will be working for the first two weeks through the online platform known as Zoom. Familiarize yourself and practice this platform before classes begin. Please reach out to me prior to class if there are conflicting time zone concerns or concerns in working with Zoom or how to manage your space for this class. Please review the “Zoom Etiquette” section at the end of this syllabus for more information.

Blackboard

All content, announcements, and assignments are exchanged via this site. Please observe and adhere to submission deadlines and protocols for all written assignments.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Freeing the Natural Voice, by Kristin Linklater (2006 edition, the “yellow book”), Drama Publishers.

Occasional articles, poems, etc. available for free download through Blackboard.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Weekly Reading reflections

Each week students will read from the book, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (FNV). They are expected to write a brief paragraph-long reflection directly addressing the text from their personal experience. The purpose is to inquire into the work, not just to summarize what you have read.

REFLECTION PAPERS MUST BE IN THE FOLLOWING FORMAT:

1. MS Word attached with this title:
2digitweek#.your your surname.assignment.docx – so: **“01.blair.FNV1-10.docx”**
2. Header clearly identifies the assignment: i.e. “FNV pp. 1-10”
3. Body of response includes DIRECT QUOTE from the reading to which reader is responding
4. Submit via **Blackboard ONLY** (This is a PAPERLESS CLASS. No hard copies, please.)

Weekly Experiential Reflections

1. Reflection papers are assigned each week and designed to respond to a particular exercise done during class. They are typically due the Tuesday after the Thursday class in which the exercise was experienced.
2. Reflection papers must be submitted in MS Word attached with this title:
2digitweek#.your surname.title.docx – so for me: 01.blair.myvoice.docx

FINAL RIVER STORIES EXPERIENCE:

DUE on the day of the final exam

The final class will be a shared performance of content devised during the last part of the semester, based on autobiographical information designed to present the student’s authentic experience through primarily the means of vocal/emotional communication in short formats for the rest of the class. Three formats expected include “six words”, “brief poem”, and “brief song”. More to be revealed in class on this exercise, but for now students should know that this performative experience is intended to evaluate their understanding of the vocal instrument as a conduit for authentic, spontaneous, human experience. This invites an emotional courage and clear expression through the vocal instrument. Lastly, it is a given that the texts used for the performance will be known thoroughly and not read from in scripts or hand-written notes on the day of the sharing. Evaluation is based on the threefold criteria of vocal ease, clarity and freedom; emotional accessibility; and textual preparedness with rigorous critical understanding of the story.

Grading Breakdown

Attendance and Participation	10%
Weekly reading reflections (2-3 paragraphs)	15%
Weekly class activity 1-2 page reflections	20%
Voice warm-up, self-evaluation	10%
Mid-point simple text work	10%
Midterm exam	15%
Final River Story Performances	20%
Total:	100%

A = 94 – 100
A- = 90 – 93
B+ = 87 – 89
B = 84 – 86
B- = 80 – 83
C+ = 77 – 79
C = 74 – 76
C- = 70 – 73
D = 60 – 69
F < 59

Assignment Due Dates & Grades

- No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.
- Assignments due on date listed in the syllabus. Late assignments up to one week will be accepted at 50% of the credit, and will not be accepted after that except in cases where the instructor has been notified and agreed in advance.
- Every effort will be made to return weekly assignments to the student within two weeks, midterm within three weeks.

Online / In Person Presence in Class:

The nature of this work is such that whether we are meeting virtually through Zoom or in person in a shared space, any class missed by one is a loss for all, as it is collaboration that provides the canvas for most of the learning in this course. Therefore, the only excused absences are extreme illness (accompanied by physician's note) or bereavement leave. Students with positive COVID tests or failed Daily Passes are expected to join the session live via Zoom.

Promptness:

Tardy attendance if less than 15 minutes will result in half point deduction from the attendance grade for the day. A tardy arrival of more than 15 minutes will result in no points for attendance recorded for the day.

Attire:

Students should wear loose, comfortable clothes -- shorts or sweats, and loose t-shirts or tank tops, etc. Be prepared to work barefoot, in stocking feet or with ballet slippers or the like. You may want to have a towel or blanket ready for floor work, and a small container of water.

Do not show up in: tight jeans, belted trousers, skirts (unless over leotards), dresses, good nylons (unless you don't mind working barefoot in them), or any other hindering garments. We will do a lot of moving and getting on the floor, so be prepared. Coming unprepared to class may result in being counted absent.

FINALLY, Some Acknowledgments, Accommodations, and Understandings:

I acknowledge these are extraordinary times. There is a detailed description of Zoom protocol at the end of this syllabus, but for now, I want to acknowledge a few limitations and contexts for many of you during the first two weeks online of this semester:

- I understand the demands of "home zooming" many of you may face. This is a voice class, and though free vocal expression is one of the principal goals of this course, your home Zoom environment may impose certain emotional, physical, or auditory constraints on your ability to express yourself. *Do your best*. There will be no attempt to force, entice, or encourage students to jeopardize their well-being by pressuring them to be "louder" or more "expressive" if that isn't possible. What you may be constrained to do in volume, I hope you will find yourself discovering new levels of minimal, intimate vocal authenticity.
- There may be family / pet / other unexpected interruptions. Please do your best to protect the sanctity of your Zoom space, but I acknowledge that "life happens" and it may not always be possible to secure complete uninterrupted privacy during our class.
- Despite the rigorous attendance policy, home circumstances may directly interfere with your capacity to arrive precisely at the moment our class starts. Please just let me know any circumstances beyond your control in a private email and I will make accommodations and support you in as understanding a manner as you would hopefully expect.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown (For details, see the page on Blackboard)

1

Week One **Introductions & background of voice work** **Jan 11 & 13**

Experiential

Class exercises to better know ourselves, know our voices; how voice works, doesn't work

Written

"My voice" reflection journal (1-2 pages) *Due Jan 18*

Title your submission: 01.your surname.myvoice.docx

Read (and submit one paragraph personal connection to this passage)

FNV pp. 1-28 Introduction, How voice works / doesn't work *Due Jan 13*

Title your submission: 01.your surname.fnv1-28.docx

2

Week Two **Physical Awareness** **Jan 18 & 20**

Experiential

Class exercises to assist with alignment of spine, relaxation of muscles

Written

"My stance in the world" reflection journal (1-2 pages) *Due Jan 25*

Title your submission: 02.your surname.mystance.docx

Read (and submit one paragraph personal connection to this passage)

FNV pp. 29-42 Workday One: Physical Awareness *Due Jan 20*

Title your submission: 02.your surname.fnv29-42.docx

3

Week Three **Breath Awareness** **Jan 25 & 27**

Experiential

Class exercises to explore the natural and habitual rhythms of breath, release, depth

Written

"My breath dance" reflection journal (1 – 2 pages) *Due Feb 1*

Title your submission: 03.your surname.mybreathdance.docx

Read (and submit one paragraph personal connection to this passage)

FNV pp. 43-64 Workday Two: Breathing Awareness *Due Jan 27*

Title your submission: 03.your surname.fnv43-64.docx

4

Week Four **Vibration Awareness** **Feb 1 & 3**

Experiential

Class exercises to explore clarity, resonance, awareness of vibrations in body, spine, and hum releases.

Written

"Voice and will" reflection journal (1 – 2 pages) *Due Feb 8*

Title your submission: 04.your surname.voiceandwill.docx

Read (and submit one paragraph personal connection to this passage)

FNV pp. 65-86 Workday Three: The touch of sound *Due Feb 3*

Title your submission: 04.your surname.fnv65-86.docx

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK: SHORT POEM FROM WEEK FIVE ASSIGNMENTS

5

Week Five Warm-up Assessment / Vibrations into Basic Text**Feb 8 & 10***Experiential*

Class work explore connecting breath, vibration, and vulnerability to spoken text. **TUESDAY FEB 8.**

In-class work on moving breath and vibrations into the image of the word. THURSDAY FEB 10

Choose and prepare a short text piece from the list of texts on Blackboard, for work in class THE NEXT WEEK.

Prepared for work on Feb 15 (A) & 17 (B)

"If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people." (Virginia Woolf)

"A good book reads you." (W.H. Auden)

"Stop speaking the text; let the text speak you." (K. Linklater)

Warm-up on Thu Feb 10 with post Self Evaluation due Feb 17

Self-led warm-ups, covering material experienced so far in class, 1-2 pg reflection

Due Feb 17

Title your submission: 05.your surname.warmup1.docx

6

Week Six Basic Text Work (A) & (B)**Feb 15 & 17***Experiential*

Class work explore connecting breath, vibration, and vulnerability to spoken text.

Work on short text pieces from the list of texts on Blackboard, for work in class: GROUPS A (2/15) & B (2/17).

7

Week Seven The Channel (cont'd): Jaw**Feb 22 & 24***Experiential*

Class exercises exploring jaw tension and techniques to release this.

Written

"Grin and bear it: jaw challenges" reflection journal (1-2 pages)

Due Mar 1

Title your submission: 07.your surname.jaw.docx

Read

FNV pp. 129 – 138 Workday Five: Freeing the Channel: Jaw ...

Due Feb 24

Title your submission: 07.your surname.fnv129-138.docx

8

Week Eight The Channel (cont'd): Tongue**Mar 1 & 3***Experiential*

Class exercises exploring tongue tension and stretches to release, free mouth cavity

Written

"Lump in my throat: tongue challenges" reflection journal (1-2 pg)

Due Mar 8

Title your submission: 08.your surname.tongue.docx

Read

FNV pp. 139 – 160 Workday Six: Freeing the Channel: Tongue ...

Due Mar 3

Title your submission: 08.your surname.fnv139-160.docx

Midterm Exam (Available after 3/03 by 9:30 a.m.)

Due Mar 10

Title your submission: 07.your surname.midterm.docx

9	Week Nine The Channel (cont'd): Soft Palate Mar 8 & 10
	<p><i>Experiential</i> Class exercises to explore limitations in the back of the throat; stretches, openness</p> <p><i>Written</i> "When I'm open..." reflection journal (1-2 pages) <i>Due Mar 22</i> Title your submission: 07.your surname.softpalate.docx</p> <p><i>Read</i> FNV pp. 161-172 Workday Seven: Freeing the Channel: The Soft Palate <i>Due Mar 10</i> Title your submission: 07.your surname.fnv161-172.docx</p>
10	Week Ten Lower Resonators: Chest, Mouth, Teeth Mar 22 & 24
	<p><i>Experiential</i> Class exercises to explore pitch and resonance in areas of chest, mouth & teeth</p> <p><i>Written</i> "Masks that reveal and conceal" <i>Due Mar 29</i> Title your submission: 10.your surname.channelresonators.docx</p> <p><i>Read</i> FNV pp. 187 – 198 Workday Ten: Developing and Strengthening... <i>Due Mar 24</i> Title your submission: 10.your surname.fnv187-198.docx</p>
11	Week Eleven Blending Lower Resonators: Triads, Swings Mar 29 & 31
	<p><i>Experiential</i> Class exercises to explore pitch and resonance in areas of chest, mouth & teeth</p> <p><i>Written</i> "My voice rainbow" <i>Due Apr 5</i> Title your submission: 11.your surname.rainbowvoice.docx</p> <p><i>Read</i> FNV pp. 199 – 212 Workday Eleven: Releasing the voice from the body <i>Due Mar 31</i> Review "Intermission Workout", do in preparation for your monologue work in class Title your submission: 11.your surname.fnv199-212.docx</p>
12	Week Twelve Breath Power Apr 5 & 7
	<p><i>Experiential</i> Class exercises to explore power of breath in intercostals, pelvic floor, etc.</p> <p><i>Written</i> "The power of my voice" <i>Due Apr 12</i> Title your submission: 12.your surname.powerofmyvoice.docx</p> <p><i>Read</i> FNV pp. 213 – 244 Workdays Twelve & Thirteen: Breathing Power <i>Due Apr 7</i> Title your submission: 12.your surname.fnv213-244.docx</p>
13	Week Thirteen Upper Resonators / Full Range Apr 12 & 14

Experiential

Class exercises to explore upper range in sinuses, nasal and skull resonators

Written

“The range of my experience”

Due Apr 19

Title your submission: 13.your surname.rangeofmyexperience.docx

Read

FNV pp. 245 – 262 Workday Fourteen - Eighteen: Sinus, Nasal, Range, Skull...

Due Apr 14

Title your submission: 13.your surname.fnv245-293.docx

14

Week Fourteen Articulation

Apr 19 & 21

Experiential

Class exercises to explore jointed-ness in language and ease of articulation

Written

“My articulate voice”

Due Apr 26

Title your submission: 14.your surname.myarticulatevoice.docx

Read

FNV pp. 295 – 323 Workdays Nineteen, etc.: Articulating the voice...

Due Apr 21

Title your submission: 13.your surname.fnv295-323.docx

13

Week Fifteen River Stories

Apr 26 & 28

Experiential

Class exercises to explore personalization of voice and connection to text.

Written

River story journals for in class work only

FINAL EXAM

Wednesday, May 11, 8 – 10 am, MCC 106

Experiential

River Stories Group Performance – 3 genres each: 6 words, autobiographical poem (“My voice”), and an original poem.

FINAL EXAM, WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 8 – 10 am in MCC 106

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/departments-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

As voice teachers at USC’s School of Dramatic Arts, we ardently stand for and strive to align ourselves with principles of anti-racism, anti-oppression, inclusivity, and equity in the classroom and on our stages. We stand in support of Black Lives Matter and the voices of BIPOC artists. We seek to educate not as privileged experts, but as facilitators whose hearts and minds are concerned with our students’ health and well-being both as individuals and collectively. We encourage and celebrate students who speak out as advocates for themselves and others. We recognize systemic racism as part of our culture and so we seek to uplift our students to be the voices of change and the bearers of the torch for a new generation, a generation that does not seek to deny its past, nor to downplay the serious challenges of the present, but to face those challenges with resilience and bravery.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Support Systems

Campus Support & Intervention (CSI) – (213) 740-0411

Campus Support & Intervention is an office within Campus Wellbeing and Crisis Intervention. We are a team of professionals here to assist students, faculty, and staff in navigating complex issues. Whether you are here seeking support for yourself or someone else, we are available to help you problem solve, understand options, and connect with resources. <https://uscsa.usc.edu>

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <https://titleix.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://titleix.usc.edu/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

Statement on Zoom Etiquette

This course is being taught remotely via the Zoom platform. A link will be sent to the students by email and may also be accessed through Blackboard in the “Announcements” section. The decision to teach online comes out of an abundance of caution due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to keep our voice students safe while preserving the highest rigor of artistry and academic excellence. To achieve these goals, we are offering some suggestions on Zoom etiquette that will help maintain a professional atmosphere and protect the best educational experience for all students.

It must be stated that the *same etiquette applies to Zoom as would apply in an in-person class experience*. We do not eat or drink, chew gum, wear revealing clothes, or lie down on beds or couches while we are on the ground, so this behavior should also be inappropriate on Zoom. Here is a link to a statement from the USC Career Center on [zoom etiquette](#) which offer context for the following guidelines on etiquette:

- **No eating during class** as you will be actively speaking and listening, and it distracts from the work being done in class. Water is okay, please just be thoughtful and discreet.
- **Please attend to all bathroom needs prior to class.** If the need still arises, please send a private chat to the professor before you leave.
- **Wear appropriate clothing for movement** as mentioned in the syllabus. We will be doing vocal and body explorations. No revealing clothing as we may be on the floor.
- **Please check your media set up** to make sure that there is adequate:
 - o **light** to illuminate the face
 - o **sound** so you can be heard clearly with little or no background noise
 - o **space for floor work** that can be seen by the camera
- **Please maintain professional focus** while on Zoom, as you would for an in-person class.
 - o **No use of phones** during class
 - o **No looking at other platforms** / programs while on Zoom, including checking texts, emails, or social media unless requested by the instructor to do so.
- **There is to be no lying down or reclining** during a Zoom, just as with an in-person class.
- **Zooming from public, outdoor spaces is discouraged** unless cleared with the instructor.
- This is a voice class that requires sounds to be made during warm ups and exercises that may trigger the curiosity of other members of your household. To the extent possible, please alert your household of this need and let them know what times your voice class meets on a weekly basis. If you are in a position where this accommodation for sound production is not possible, or if there is any concern of making noise due to your environment, please communicate this with the professor and you will be assisted in how you might modify the exercise to meet your surroundings.
- **Zoom “chat” function will be restricted.** Just as in-person classes do not accommodate note passing, students are expected not to chat to each other during class. Students are always invited to verbally interrupt the class when needed and ask for clarification. In the case of an urgent matter the student may feel uncomfortable sharing with their peers, the “chat to the host” function will still be available.

Please communicate any concerns our difficulties you may have with this protocol to the professor. All efforts will be made to accommodate students who have special circumstances that challenge any of the aforementioned requests.