

KEEP YOUR VOICE KILLER



FOR A KILLER SESSION

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My name is Jason Reif and I am music producer and engineer from Bethlehem Pennsylvania. I've been recording vocalists for over 8 years professionally, and have had the privilege of watching how different people treat their voices and get them ready to sing.

Your voice is such a delicate instrument and it's a struggle to keep it healthy. You want it to work for you when you need it rather than getting in the way of your performance. I know that all you vocalists are always looking for something new to try.

Vocal recording can be super exciting but also very nerve racking. You are about to be exposed in front of a microphone that will reveal all your vocal faults.

It's okay though! You got this!

The better you prepare, the smoother things will go, and the easier it will be to sing your best.

I've taken some notes over the years and have finally put it together in a resource that I'd love to offer to the community. I'm sure it's not exhaustive, but it includes a lot of tips that many people haven't heard before.

I hope it's beneficial to you!

Jason

TIPS FOR PREPARING/ REHEARSING

- Know the song(s) backwards and forwards. Be over prepared and you won't have to focus on what to sing during your session.
- Look up some vocal warmup techniques and pick a few that feel helpful to you. (These can be very odd and embarrassing sounding, but trust me they work)
- If you can, record yourself as you rehearse. Then listen back to yourself and critique your weak points.
- If you have a recording setup of any kind, try rehearsing with a mic and headphones. Get used to the setup, it is very different than performing on stage.
- Practice showing the emotion of the song. Your expression and body language will come through in the performance.
- If you have the means, get a few vocal lessons before your session. It always helps to have someone else critique your weaknesses.
- Listen to your favorite vocalists, and think about what you like about their performances. Is it Emotion? Grit? Flow? What can you learn from them?
- Give your voice a day off once in a while, it needs to rest just like the rest of your body

THE DAY OF YOUR VOCAL SESSION:

- Make sure you are in your best state of mind. Get a full night's sleep, keep your normal routine and don't get drunk or overeat the night before. Your body is your instrument. Treat it well!
- Attempt to focus your mindset positively on how the session will go. Avoid stress and anxiety if possible. Give yourself plenty of time to arrive so that you don't have to rush.
- Do whatever makes you feel great, hit the gym, do yoga, meditate, listen your favorite songs etc.
- Exercise in your comfort range the day before or in the morning. Cardio is best, it will get your breathing muscles moving and ready to support your voice.
- Sleep with a humidifier in the fall and winter, or use a personal steamer. A sauna would be a great idea too.
- Stay hydrated regularly. (8-10 glasses of water a day is recommended)
- Make sure to take your allergy medication if it is an issue for you. Keep clear of antihistamines- they can dry you out.
- Eat healthy, balanced meals beforehand, and stay away from things that can cause you acid reflux.
- Wear something you are comfortable in and is not noisy when you move. Avoid excessive jewelry that may cause noise.
- Be sure to warm up in a comfortable range and do not push your voice to extremes or overuse it beforehand.

DURING YOUR SESSION:

- If you wrote the song, review the reason you wrote the song, including the events and people that were a part of it. Revisit the story and try to stir up the emotions surrounding it, regardless of how uncomfortable they may be.
- If you didn't write the song, try to think of an example from your own life that can help you relate to the emotion in the lyrics.
- Don't be afraid to "over do it" or be "over the top". You have to make up for the missing visual element of your performance and exaggerating your emotion can make it translate better.
- Don't be afraid to ask the engineer to change something in order to make things more comfortable. Ask for reverb, a change in the mix, different lighting, better fitting headphones, etc.
- If you perform best with your instrument, ask the engineer to find a way to allow you to play while you sing.
- Turn off your phone or leave it in another room so it is not distracting, and so that it does not make noise.
- Take plenty of breaks, and don't attempt a long session if your voice isn't used to it. A couple hours at a time is a great idea.
- Trust your instincts- if a take feels like "the one" there's a good chance it is.

HELPFUL FOOD/ DRINKS

- Room Temperature or Hot Water
- Melon Water (Keeps your vocal cords hydrated longer)
- Pineapple juice (sparingly to lubricate)
- Hot Herbal Teas (throat coat, peppermint, chamomile)
- Honey (just eat it by itself if you need to)
- Hot Soup
- Greasy potato chips (the cheap thin ones)
- Fish and nuts (The oils are great for the voice)
- Olives
- Black Licorice
- Ginger (anti inflammatory)
- Lemon (only to cut phlegm, and not too much)
- Cucumber and Watermelon
- Unsalted crackers

SUBSTANCES TO AVOID

- Milk and Dairy Products - (they create phlegm)
- Carbonated Beverages
- Caffeine within 2 hours before singing
- Throat Lozenges
- Overly acidic foods
- Spicy Food
- Nicotine and smoke
- Alcohol of any kind
- Chocolate - create phlegm
- Excessive sugar consumption
- Drugs (prescription or recreational)

TROUBLESHOOTING YOUR VOICE

- **It Hurts to Sing-** If you are singing normally and things get painful, take more warmup time, try less difficult song, or postpone your session to rest more.
- **Not Enough Breath-** If you can't fit all the words into one breath, make sure you are standing up straight and breathing from below your stomach. Take some deep breath to stretch your diaphragm muscles and try again.
- **Can't hit the notes-** Notes that are on the edge of your vocal range take a lot of breath and energy to hit well. Breathe correctly, and shorten your phrases to hit them better. Try pointing your head up so your vocal cords are not restricted.
- **Singing out of Tune-** Make sure you can hear yourself well. Get more of you in the headphones, maybe take one ear off so that you can hear your voice more naturally in the room.
- **Words slur together and are hard to understand-** Be more intentional with your approach. Separate your words when appropriate and enunciate the letter sounds more. Over pronounce your words even if it seems silly. All your words will be much more intelligible.
- **Getting lightheaded or blacking out-** Make sure your knees aren't locked while you stand and sing. Your whole body should feel loose and never stiff while singing.

- **Too Much Mouth Noise-** Eat an apple. It will help get rid of excess saliva that may create noise while singing.
- **Poor Tone-** Make sure you are shaping your mouth correctly for the style of singing you are doing. A closed mouth can drastically hinder your tone. Again, breathe correctly! Thin and wimpy singing feels like it is all in your head, strong and full singing feels like it comes from your gut.
- **Boring Performance-** Are you getting into the emotion of the song? Or are you singing stiff and lifelessly? Smile when appropriate. Dance a little, move around and feel it. Exaggerate the emotion and it will translate better to audio.
- **My voice doesn't last long-** Make sure you aren't over singing. While some songs call for it, try not to push too hard in regular conditions. Practice more outside the studio- the more you work out your voice, the longer you will last under pressure.
- **Its just not working-** Take a break and come back to it another day. Stressing out over your performance will only make it worse.





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