

## The Microphone Advantage

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It goes without saying that teaching aquatic exercise has its own special challenges, and we as instructors, need to take care of ourselves while offering the best class experience we can. Slick floors, less than favorable climates, and on deck teaching while demonstrating moves such as suspension and balance are just a few examples of challenges we face. Additionally, perhaps the biggest obstacle is the acoustical quality in the pool area! The pool is a noisy place between swim lessons, children playing, and non-class members coming and going! It can be very hard at times to communicate with our participants, so we strongly encourage the use of a microphone anytime it is available. In this article we will explore the advantage of using a microphone as well as a variety of ways you can increase your ability to communicate with your class participants!

We need to understand that vocal cord damage is preventable! We must take precautions to care for our vocal cords as fitness instructors. Here are some warning signs to look for that could mean you are suffering from vocal cord damage:

- Two weeks of persistent hoarseness or voice change
- Chronic vocal fatigue
- Throat pain or discomfort with voice use
- Breathiness
- Rough or scratchy voice
- Decreased pitch range

Additionally, patients sometimes complain of:

- Neck tightness or discomfort
- Diminishing voice quality with use
- Vocal exhaustion

Vocal nodules are commonly associated with a constellation of symptoms including:

- progressively worsening hoarseness
- Breathiness

These warning signs could mean you have damage to your vocal cords or vocal cord nodules. Vocal cord nodules are benign (noncancerous) growths on both vocal cords caused by vocal abuse. These growths are soft, swollen spots on the vocal cords that develop into harder, callous-like growths or nodules.

If you are concerned that you may be suffering from vocal cord damage, the good news is that it is possible, with proper voice training with a certified therapist, for nodules to disappear within 6 to 12 weeks. However, it is still very possible they will have to be removed surgically.

The BEST way to prevent the onset of vocal cord damage is to use a microphone anytime it is available. We recognize there is not always a microphone available, particularly in the aquatic environment, but never be afraid to ask for what you need! Here are some important details that will help you use your microphone to its maximum potential:

- Place the ball of the mic a few inches from your mouth. The ball should never touch your lips.
- Practice with the mic! Practice makes perfect. Get comfortable TALKING, not yelling, into the mic before you are in front of your class.
- Speak from the diaphragm, talk, avoid screaming. This defeats the purpose!
- Less Words! Plan your cueing; be concise. Pre-plan before you instruct.
- Ask for feedback? Talk to your participants after class and ask them how well your “message” is being received.

Cueing is an essential part of preserving your vocal cords. Listed below are the three primary types of cueing for your review.

- VERBAL CUEING
  - Includes all sounds and language from the mouth
- VISUAL CUEING
  - Includes directive body language and facial expressions
- KINESTHETIC CUEING
  - Involves conveying a sense of how movements feel and where to feel it

By incorporating the following elements into your cueing, you will become much more confident and efficient as an instructor and in turn be doing yourself a major favor by using less words and protecting your vocal cords.

- Pre-Cue
  - Used to set up the move
  - Simple, clear, concise
- Coaching Cues
  - Enhances where the move should be felt
  - Make sure they are in proper position
- Motivational Cues
  - Keep participants going when fatigue sets in
- Non-verbal Cues
  - Visual, body language, mirroring

By cueing specifically and with intention you will protect your voice and increase body awareness in your participants. As we teach in WATERinMOTION®, sticking with the 3M's (Move, Muscle, Motivation) will not only help train your participants but will help you cue concisely and protect your voice!

Cue your next move (both verbally and visually where possible) on the last 4 counts of the move you are performing. This enables your students to complete the move they are doing and think about transitioning into the next. Remember, this ability comes with practice and patience. Do not get discouraged if it doesn't always flow.

## Important Cueing tips

1. Counting down instead of counting up, "4-3-2-1 now kick front, left"
2. Use your music and cueing before the top of the next 32- count phrase to help you change moves. Again, 4-3-2-1 now kick right, left
3. Use concise cueing
4. Practice combining both visual and verbal cues simultaneously so body language complements words.

Music is another huge element of your class that can either help or hurt your vocal cords. Music volume, tempo, and genre all help to create an experience for your participants and balancing these to complement your instruction instead of competing with it will make it more enjoyable for everyone.

VOLUME should be kept under 90 Decibels for all group fitness classes. Decibel applications exist for smart phones that tell instructors the volume of ambient noise. Whenever possible know which decibel levels you can set your gadgets and stereo volume to during the class. Otherwise, we caution you to use your best judgment to keep music at a reasonable level.

Being a fitness professional is so much more than just showing up and teaching a class. Here at WATERinMOTION® we strive to equip you to not just instruct a class but to coach a group of eager participants to become the best version of themselves! Presenting yourself in a professional manner will bring great success! The following are some friendly pointers on how to always put your best foot forward.

- Pre-class preparation
  - Be on time
  - Greet your participants
  - Have the room or area prepared
- Speed and clarity of speech
  - Using your microphone
- Mirroring participants
- Accommodating your participants

We love that we can inspire you with each quarterly release and bring you new, exciting material! Here are some exciting examples of how you can continue to be an "inspired instructor!"

- Energy
- Preparedness
- Current fitness level

- Confidence
- Knowledge
- Motivating
- Eye contact
- Relevant
- Learn Names
- Connecting

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