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 - [Body](#)
 - [Soul](#)
- [Technique](#)
 - [Mastery](#)
 - [Coaches](#)
- [Reviews](#)
 - [Latest Reviews](#)
 - [Live Microphones](#)
 - [Recording Microphones](#)
 - [Vocal Effects Units](#)
 - [Recording Equipment](#)
 - [Books and Accessories](#)
 - [Monitors and Earphones](#)
 - [PA Systems](#)
 - [Mobile Apps](#)
- [Artists](#)
- [Videos](#)
 - [Peer Review](#)
 - [Most Popular](#)
 - [Warming Up](#)
 - [Control Your Sound](#)
 - [Vocal Health](#)
 - [Performance Inspiration](#)
 - [Studio Singing](#)
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-

Technique

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June 8th, 2011 | by VoiceCouncil

Tips for the Tongue & Lips



Harness the power of your natural vocal percussion – urges Kim Chandler

Now for one of my all-time favourite technique topics – articulation!

A unique feature of vocalists is that we are the only musicians who combine music and text (lyrics).

Articulation is the power of the singer and why we are the focal points of bands.

The two main articulators are the tongue and the lips.

The Tongue: Small but Powerful

This important little part of the body is amazingly flexible and is incredibly strong for its size.

The tongue is critical in forming many consonants (e.g. ‘d’, ‘g’, ‘k’, ‘l’, ‘n’, ‘s’, ‘t’, ‘z’) and vowels (‘eh’ and ‘ee’).

I find that many singers I work with have two main tongue issues:

- 1. **A “tide’s out” tongue** – is a tongue that pulls back (retracts) into the mouth on vowels. To get the best acoustic result, the tongue tip should stay in touch with the bottom teeth for all vowels, i.e. a “tide’s in” position.
- 2. **Tongue root tension (TRT)** – a bunching of the muscles under the chin. When this is excessive it can create a “Kermit the Frog” edge to the sound. To alleviate this, do regular tongue stretches, such as poking out your tongue to full extension and holding for a 10-count (very attractive!).

Lip Service

The lips form the end of the vocal tract (tube) and therefore their shape can markedly affect the final sound that exits the mouth.

The lips help form consonants (e.g. ‘b’, ‘f’, ‘m’, ‘p’, ‘q’, ‘v’, ‘w’) and vowels (‘oh’ and ‘oo’).

Not only is it important that we understand what you’re singing about, but for contemporary singers there is also an important rhythmic purpose for making articulation crisp & precise.

Your articulators are the percussive element of your singing – enjoy them!

My Reactions To This Week’s Peer Review Vids

[Tamara Kim](#) – “What to do” (Original)

This is a good choice of style for you and you have a sweet, easy-to-listen to voice with a relaxed delivery. Do you sing in any of the many languages you speak? I do hope so! You might want to consider experimenting with singing with a slightly more relaxed larynx position (it’s quite high at the moment) as this will create a warmer tone. I’d also like to hear more light & shade and less scooping up to notes.

[Brianna Jesme](#) – “Secrets” (OneRepublic Cover)

You have a stylistically sophisticated voice, particularly your lovely vibrato, which is especially noteworthy because of your young age. It was also an interesting angle to do a cover of a male song like this with an Adele-like vocal delivery. On this point though, whilst it’s completely normal to emulate the artists we like, in order to make it as an artist in your own right, you’ll need to develop & nurture your ‘signature sound’.

-Kim Chandler



Kim Chandler is one of the UK’s top contemporary vocal coaches. She has a busy private studio in London and her clients include well-known artists, artists in development, professional singers and other vocal coaches. She is a director of the British Voice Association, and is the creator of the popular [“Funky ‘n Fun”](#) vocal training series.

Rating: +2 (from 2 votes)

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- [MichaelScorpio216](#)

Kim, Its exciting to "HEAR" that your career is flourishing in the UK. I am curious about your insights about the English accent. I've been obsessed with playing with the British accent since a teenage and have done very well to duplicate the Proper articulation. I've discovered the reason why so many musicians from across the pond are so successful with their career has to do with the fact that you all have mastered the art-ticulation of the english language. The american version is bland and lacking substance. The grace and beauty comes effortlessly for you and is obvious that to speak is a great joy! A Brit can have a very fulfilling conversation with themselves and often love to hear themselves talk incessantly. At the same time I question whether I can compete with folks by the millions who possess this awesome gift! Any suggestions? One more question? How did Donna Summer learn how to capture so many variations of hush-tones and non-phonations? What's her secrets. Do you think someday she will share how to establish such a wide range of textures with aspiring musicians before she's too old to repeat her own work. She is in her late 70's or early 80's I believe. Virtually impossible to communicate with. Michael Scorpio

Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

Rating: 0 (from 0 votes)

- [Kim Chandler](#)

Hi Michael. You certainly have some interesting questions :-). Unfortunately I don't believe I can provide too much insight about the intricacies of the 'British accent' except to say that there are lots & lots of different ones. Seemingly each town/village in the UK has its own distinctive accent – the variation is staggering to an aussie such as myself (which has little regional variation in accent)! As for Donna Summer's palette of vocal textures, I think she's the only one who can reveal her secrets on that front...

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- [May 2013](#)
- [April 2013](#)
- [March 2013](#)
- [February 2013](#)
- [January 2013](#)
- [December 2012](#)
- [November 2012](#)
- [October 2012](#)
- [September 2012](#)
- [August 2012](#)
- [July 2012](#)
- [June 2012](#)
- [May 2012](#)
- [April 2012](#)
- [March 2012](#)
- [February 2012](#)
- [January 2012](#)
- [December 2011](#)
- [November 2011](#)
- [October 2011](#)
- [September 2011](#)
- [August 2011](#)
- [July 2011](#)
- [June 2011](#)

- [May 2011](#)
- [April 2011](#)
- [March 2011](#)
- [February 2011](#)
- [January 2011](#)
- [December 2010](#)
- [November 2010](#)
- [October 2010](#)
- [September 2010](#)
- [August 2010](#)
- [July 2010](#)
- [June 2010](#)
- [May 2010](#)
- [April 2010](#)
- [March 2010](#)
- [February 2010](#)
- [January 2010](#)
- [December 2009](#)
- [November 2009](#)
- [October 2009](#)
- [September 2009](#)
- [August 2009](#)
- [July 2009](#)
- [June 2009](#)
- [May 2009](#)
- [March 2009](#)
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