

# Techie Guide for Singers

A Techie Guide for Singers in a Digital World

This is a brief introduction to some of the technical issues facing singers in an online world. It will help answer some questions like:

- What is Zoom, and how do I make it work for me?
- How do I record myself at home?
- Why does my voice sound weird / not like me when I record it?
- Does my recording have to be perfect? <sup>1</sup>
- How do I send it to you?
- How do I set up my Zoom to be a performance space e.g. virtual backgrounds and the like...?

If you have any more questions, or other helpful suggestions I can add to this guide, please get in touch: [dave@davecamlin.com](mailto:dave@davecamlin.com)

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<sup>1</sup> The answer's an emphatic 'no' by the way... ☺

## Zoom Top Tips

[www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us) is an online meeting platform that is increasingly being used for music activity. Here's how to use it!

### Getting Started

1. Go to [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us) and sign up (or sign in)
2. Download the Zoom App to your device (computer is best, but smartphone and tablet also work)
3. Find Mouthful Choirs on Zoom using these Meeting IDs:
  - [Mouthful Voices](#): 484-919-009
  - [NE Gospel Choir](#): 597-317-675
  - [Sing In!](#): 732-747-924
  - [Sing Owt!](#): 890-056-717
4. 'Join' the relevant rehearsal / meeting

### Useful Tips and Tricks

Once you're in the rehearsal,

5. Check your audio and video are both working. You can mute and unmute yourself, and you can also turn your video off if you don't want to be seen. If you're using an **Android** phone, you may not be prompted to share your audio / video, and you will need to go in to your phone settings, to give Zoom permission to access them!
6. Change your **VIEW** to change what you see on-screen. Toggle between 'Gallery' view and 'Speaker' view by clicking on the square (with nine little squares in it) at the top right of the Zoom Client / app
  - a. Use **GALLERY** view to see everyone in the session
  - b. Use **SPEAKER** View to just see who's currently speaking (mostly the leader)
7. **CHAT** with others in the group (or with everyone) by using the 'Chat' function:
  - c. Computer: click on the 'Chat' icon at the bottom of the screen to bring up the Chat sidebar
  - d. Tablet: select the Chat option to send a message to someone else or the whole group

### Enable 'Original Sound'

8. Allow '**Original Sound**' in your settings. This will turn off the clever tools which suppress unwanted background noise, but which also make your audio more 'jumpy' if we're trying to sing together unmuted, or generally sound more musical:
  - e. In the Zoom client / app, click on **Settings**.
  - f. Choose the **Audio** tab.
  - g. Check **Allow option for using original sound from microphone in meeting**.

Once in a session, the option to turn on Original Sound will now appear in the top left corner of your Zoom window. Click this button to use Original Sound in this session.

### Enable Stereo Audio

9. This will enable you to hear what's going on in glorious stereo! To update your stereo audio settings you need to log in to Zoom on your browser and then go to 'account management/account settings' - part way down the page there is a toggle button for 'Allow

users to select stereo audio in their client settings'. With this toggled to 'on' you should get an option in your audio settings to use stereo audio. For best results, we recommend wearing headphones!

## Recording Yourself

Firstly, recording yourself is weird. In a choir, you hear your voice:

- A. Through your ears;
- B. Reverberating and resonating in your head / body;
- C. Blended with lots of other voices

When you *listen back* to a recording of yourself in isolation, all you hear is your voice on its own! You don't hear it how you're used to hearing it, resonating in your head / body or with other voices. So it sounds unfamiliar and strange, and you tend to hear all of the little inaccuracies and inconsistencies. It's easy to get a bit down-hearted when you hear a recording of your self but don't be! These inaccuracies and inconsistencies are part of your unique voice's character. In a choir, it's these things (what Charles Keil calls 'participatory discrepancies') which make the music satisfying, and recognisably humans singing music rather than robots. Making a good recording isn't about getting something that's perfect; it's about capturing something that represents *you* as a unique and distinctive wonderful human being.

Obviously you want to be happy with the recording you make, but it's important not to let yourself get hyper-critical about it, as it could unnecessarily dent your confidence. So here's some advice to help you get a good recording when you're recording yourself:

### A. Warm up first!

I know this seems obvious, but it's easy to forget that our voice sounds better when it's relaxed and warm. The reason we warm up at the start of sessions is so that our voices are ready to sing. Do some of the exercises we'd normally do in a session e.g. loosening up your body / face, waking up your abdominal muscles to let them know you're going to need them, sirening up and down your vocal range, lip trills if your voice is feeling 'sticky', lots of humming and chewing, and anything else that works for you.

Sing through the song you're planning to record a few times first, 'notice-what-you-notice' about any parts of the song which require you to do something more technical (e.g. high / low notes, big jumps, long notes which require more breath to sustain them) and spend some time practicing those parts

### B. Adjust your headphones

It's easy to get the mix between 1), 2) and 3) above slightly unbalanced, and this can affect the quality of what you record, especially in terms of pitching. We need both sources (ears and body) to sing well, as that's what we're used to hearing when we're singing in a group normally. Adjusting your headphones means partially removing them from your ears so that you can hear more of a mix between the sound in your headphones, the sound of your voice in the air and the reverberations of your voice in your head / body. You might need to make little adjustments to the volume levels in the headphones as well to get a good balance. Too quiet and you're more likely to sing too quietly and shakily; too loud and you're more likely to sing too loud and lose control of your voice.

Noise-cancelling headphones might be wonderful for having a peaceful journey on the Tube, but they're less good for recording with, as they cancel out the sound of your own voice in your ears. Using a headset can work, if you're a parent, maybe you can borrow a gaming headset from your children? Or you can get good-enough ones from Amazon at around the £20 mark - with one or two earpieces.

#### C. Check Your Input Level

If your recording device has a way of monitoring the signal you're recording, make sure it's neither too 'hot' (too loud) or too 'cold' (too quiet). Before you record, check these levels if you can whilst singing, and adjust if necessary. Don't worry too much if you can't work out how to do this – I can boost the signal later. If your signal is too 'hot' however, the recording can 'clip' which will make it sound distorted. If this sounds like it's happening, reduce the level, or if you can't work out how to do that, sing further away from the device!

#### D. Remember to Breathe!

Again, I know this seems obvious, but it's important. If we don't remember to support our singing with good breath, then the ends of long notes especially will become unstable and a bit wobbly. Also, if we're feeling a bit anxious about recording, we're more likely to tense up and hold our breath (preparing for fight, flight or freeze response!) so keeping a good flow of deep breath going helps our body to know it's safe and we're in no danger. If you're using a lyric sheet or a score, put breathing marks to remind you where good places to breathe are

#### E. Sing up!

Unless the music is requiring us to sing more gently, remember to sing up as this will help stabilise your voice too. If it feels like your voice is over-powering the rehearsal track so you can't hear it, you may need to go back to A. and adjust your headphones again. As you warm up, your confidence might grow and you might sing up more, so it's important to keep checking the balance of what you can hear, and adjust accordingly.

#### F. Have Fun!

Above all, remember to enjoy yourself while recording – singing in a group is joyous and uplifting, and we hear the joy in the sounds we make together. The same is true in a recording. If you're not 'feeling it', go and do something else for a bit and come back to the recording when you're back 'in the zone'. Laughter is a great tonic and also helps loosen us up – in the grand scheme of things, no-one is going to suffer if we make mistakes. In fact, no-one need ever hear them! So remember, the thing we most want to communicate in our recordings is the sound of a group of relaxed, happy human individuals doing one of the things that only humans can do!

## Recording Audio

### Recording Audio in Quicktime Player on a Mac<sup>2</sup>

1. Rehearse the audio track you want to record from the Mouthful site, using headphones;
2. Keep headphones on and open Quicktime player;
3. Choose *File > New Audio Recording*;
4. Click on the recording button;
5. Click the start button on the track you have been rehearsing to;
6. Sing your song line;
7. Click on the record button to stop the recording;
8. Listen back using the play button on your new recording to check you're happy with it;
9. At the end make sure you save the file! Choose *File > Save* and fill in the box that appears with the song name and musical part;
10. Save it somewhere you can find it (save it on the desktop if you want to find it easily).

### Recording Audio on a PC

Follow similar process to the one above for mac, but I don't have a PC so I can't be more specific! Maybe someone could send in how they've done it?

### Recording Audio in an App

There are plenty of Apps around to record audio in. The one I use is called Shureplus MOTIV and is available for both iOS (iPhone, iPad) and Android. You can download it here:

[https://www.shure.com/en-GB/products/software/shure\\_plus\\_motiv](https://www.shure.com/en-GB/products/software/shure_plus_motiv)

It's easier if you have two devices you can use:

- i. One to play the rehearsal track on, that is connected to your headphones;*
- ii. One that you're going to record on.*

Decide which is going to be your playback device, that you can have the rehearsal tracks playing on, and which is going to be your recording device. If you're not sure which is best to use for recording, use the newest device for recording. You can get apps that do clever things like let you record at the same time as playing something back, but it's more fiddly.

The principles for audio recording are the same in different apps.

1. Rehearse the audio track you want to record from the Mouthful site, using headphones and your playback device;
2. Keep headphones on and open the (Shureplus MOTIV or similar) app on your recording device;
3. Select the 'recording' screen (microphone icon in Shureplus MOTIV);
4. Check your input levels (see [C. above](#)) and adjust if necessary;
5. When you're ready to record, click the recording button (big red button!);
6. On your playback device, click 'play' on the track you have been rehearsing to;
7. Sing your song line;
8. Click on the record button again (or the 'pause' or 'stop' button) to stop the recording;
9. Listen back using the play button on your new recording to check you're happy with it;
10. At the end make sure you save the file! (In Shureplus MOTIV, click the 'tick' icon and enter a name for your recording to save the file)

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Gill Greenhalgh in Sing In! for this helpful 'how to...' guide to using Quicktime and Wetransfer on a Mac

11. Select the 'Files' screen (waveform icon in Shureplus MOTIV) and then 'select' your file (in Shureplus MOTIV, click 'Select' at the top right of the screen, then tag your recording
12. Choose *Save As > Share >* then either 'mail' to send it directly, or 'Save to Files' to send by [Wetransfer](#).

#### Recording Audio in Garageband on an iPad or a Mac<sup>3</sup>

GarageBand allows you to import the rehearsal track and then record yourself on a second track alongside the rehearsal track using the internal mic while listening through headphones to both the practice track and your voice. Once you're happy with a recording, you mute the rehearsal track and then export the recording of your voice as an mp3 file. It takes a little setting up, though, so might be worth attempting once you're more familiar with something like Quicktime Player.

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Malcolm More for this suggestion

## Recording Video

In general, think about what your shot is going to look like. Top tips include:

- a) Make sure you're well-lit i.e. not in shadows;
- b) Avoid filming into the light, as it will backlight your shot and make you hard to see;
- c) Think about what else is in shot, and move things that don't need to be seen;
- d) Generally, landscape mode (phone on its side) will capture more, so use that unless you need something full-length, in which case use portrait mode (phone standing vertically);
- e) Do a test recording to make sure what you think you're capturing is the same as what you're actually capturing.

### Recording Video in Quicktime Player on a Mac

1. Rehearse the audio track you want to record from the Mouthful site, using headphones;
2. Keep headphones on and open Quicktime player;
3. Choose *File > New Video Recording*;
4. Click on the drop-down arrow to the right of the Record button and choose the camera and microphone you want to use
5. Choose the highest quality settings available i.e. 'High' or 'Maximum'
6. Click on the recording button and then click the start button on the track you have been rehearsing to;
7. Sing your song line;
8. Click on the record button to stop the recording;
9. Listen back using the play button on your new recording to check you're happy with it;
10. At the end make sure you save the file! Choose *File > Save* and fill in the box that appears with the song name and musical part;
11. Save it somewhere you can find it (save it on the desktop if you want to find it easily).

### Recording Video in an App

There are plenty of Apps around to record video in, but the easiest way is probably to use your phone's camera. Again, it's easier if you have two devices you can use:

- i. One to play the rehearsal track on, that is connected to your headphones;*
- ii. One that you're going to record on.*

Decide which is going to be your playback device, that you can have the rehearsal tracks playing on, and which is going to be your recording device.

The principles for video recording are similar to that for recording audio:

1. Rehearse the audio track you want to record from the Mouthful site, using headphones and your playback device;
2. Keep headphones on and open the camera app on your phone / tablet;
3. Check your input levels (see [C. above](#)) and adjust if necessary;
4. When you're ready to record, click the recording button (big red button!);
5. On your playback device, click 'play' on the track you have been rehearsing to;
6. Sing your song line;
7. Click on the record button again (or the 'pause' or 'stop' button) to stop the recording;
8. View back using the play button on your new recording to check you're happy with it;
9. Send your video by [Wetransfer](#) (see below).

## Sending Files by Wetransfer

1. Open [www.WeTransfer.com](http://www.WeTransfer.com) in your browser;
2. Choose *Select File* and it brings up a file list, select the file you just named, from the location where you just saved it;
3. fill in the details of the email addresses etc and check your emails for an email from Wetransfer with the unique code you'll need to send the files;
4. When you receive the email, copy the verification code and paste / write it in the code box in the Wetransfer window you have been working on in your browser;
5. Click on *Transfer*.

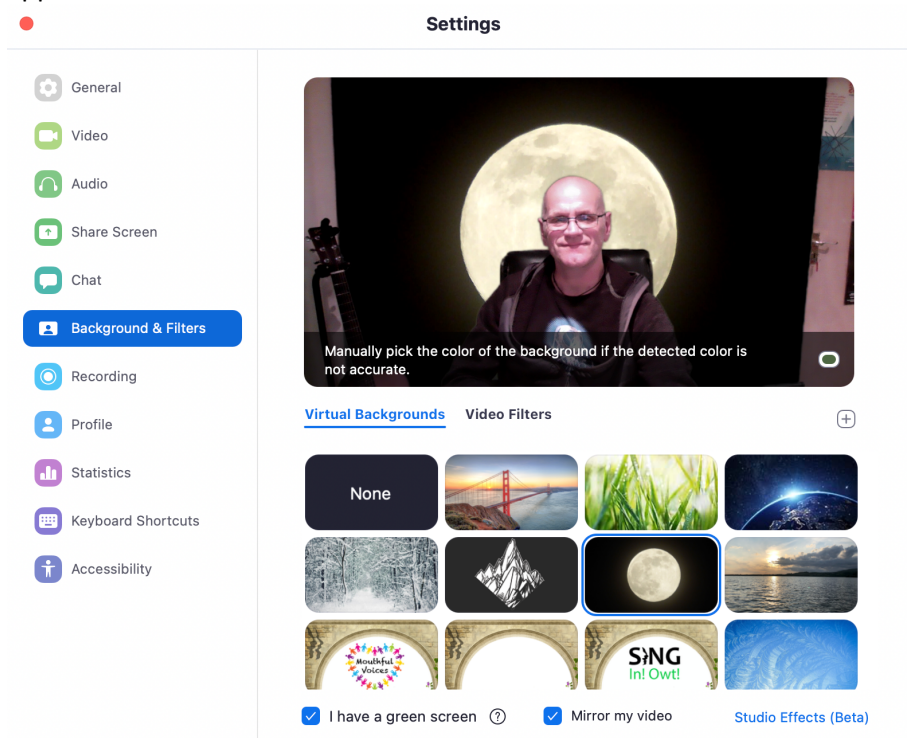
## Using Zoom as Performance Platform

If we coordinate what we do, how we look, and what our screens have in them, we can make Zoom work for us better as a performance space using gesture, costumes, props and backgrounds. If your operating system supports it (not everyone's does...) you can use some 'virtual' effects like backgrounds, using green screen effects.

### Green Screens

A green screen is just a flat single-colour background that can be 'keyed out' by the Zoom software so that it disappears and you can replace it with a 'virtual background' of your choice.

The virtual backgrounds in Zoom are only available in the app, not in the browser version of Zoom, so for best results, download the app to your device, so that you can adjust the settings and get the virtual backgrounds ready too (and also play with video filters). You can find all of the settings for the Zoom Virtual Backgrounds and effects in the 'Settings/Backgrounds and Filters' dialogue box in the Zoom app



Some helpful advice from Pauline Peill, from our west Cumbrian community of singers:



The screen doesn't have to be green – “Any solid background, regardless of colour, will make subject extraction easier as long as there is contrast between the subject and background.”

That must be why my 'black' screen works! I put off all the lights and then, using an LED light which attaches to my PC via USB I pointed it at the wall behind the PC so that you could still see my face but it wasn't lighting up my 'black' screen. I was amazed that it worked so well.

You might be able to get it to work using some sort of directional light that faces away from the 'black' background (or even use just the light from your screen). I noticed when some people did put their lights off there was still too much light from somewhere to make the virtual background effective but if you take some time to set it up and practice, we might even get 80% working.

Of course, some people still need to see their music/words, but if you know how to put it on the screen on top of Zoom, knowing it won't affect the recording that would be better.

Even if you don't have a green screen, you can still make some strange effects... just experiment...

