

Cultivating a Learning Lifestyle for the Independent Voice Teacher

By Marisa Gray Atha

Every quarter I send a newsletter to my voice studio members, listing the trainings I've completed during the previous three months — typically this will include about 20 to 30 itemized webinars, podcasts, livestreams, recordings, and books. I've kept up this pace for the past five years and have no intentions of slowing down. Perhaps I'll occasionally detour into a more in-depth course and so have fewer training titles to list, but the content absorption rate will remain the same. Why do I choose to spend my listening, learning, and reading time this way, when I already have a Master of Music degree and over 20 years of experience teaching private voice?

Because I've created a studio model that thrives within an atmosphere of growth — both for the student *and* the teacher.

In my studio, students understand that a portion of their monthly tuition payment is allocated to the many trainings I undertake on their behalf. In my newsletters, I provide a detailed list of trainings so that if a topic appeals to a student's curiosity, they can ask me for more information during an upcoming lesson. But more so, I remind students that *the right information finds its way to the right student at the right time*. Since I began undertaking this dedication to a lifestyle of ongoing learning about my craft and vocation, I've enjoyed the rewarding expansion of my own knowledge, as well as my capacity to help students of many ages, abilities, genres, and interests to move forward in their development.

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With three school-aged children at home, a household to run, and a full studio, how do I possibly fit this feast of continued education into my schedule? In bite-size morsels, with virtually no extra effort or time required! With my smartphone on



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hand to broadcast the audio/video, here is what an average weekday of self-school looks like:

5:50 – 6 a.m. (listening) in the bathroom/closet/bedroom while brushing teeth, applying makeup, dressing, making the bed, etc.

6:10 – 6:25 a.m. (reading) while sipping my morning cup of coffee

6:35 – 6:55 a.m. (listening) while unloading the dishwasher, feeding the dogs, cooking breakfast, packing lunches

8:15 – 8:30 a.m. (listening) while commuting home from dropping off the kids at school

2:55 – 3:10 p.m. (listening) while commuting to school to pick up the kids

8:30 – 8:45 p.m. (reading) while winding down for the evening and preparing for sleep

These little snippets of time add up to 1 hour of listening and 30 minutes of reading per day. This turns into 5 hours of listening and 2.5 hours of reading per week, or 20 hours listening and 10 hours reading per month, or *60 hours* spent listening and *30 hours* spent reading every quarter. It's incredible how these little scraps add up to a pile of accomplishment. Now granted, my top [Clifton Strengths](#) include Learner, Input, Discipline, and Intellection, so I may be particularly well-suited for this daily lifestyle habit. If you don't have the bandwidth, schedule habits, or desire to invest in this significant amount of content engagement, try just *15 minutes a day* — this still adds up to 5 hours of fresh instructional material you'd bring into your studio every month!

I'd typically be listening to or reading something anyway during all of these mini-segments of my day — simply because I crave to be entertained or intellectually stimulated while carrying out the mundane, repetitive, mindless tasks of household duties and commuting. And I'd be relaxing in my favorite chair reading each morning and evening because I double-majored in music and English during college and am an avid reader. While I aim

to read at least one to three voice/music-based books every quarter, the rest are for pleasure; I cycle in plenty of fiction and other non-fiction works during my reading hours. Likewise, when my girls are in the car during our school commutes, we are rocking out to our "Girl Power" playlist on Spotify or listening to captivating audiobooks. Sometimes I'll listen to podcasts about yoga or something completely different, but for the majority of those small, yet savory, quarter-hour morsels, I'm ingesting voice- and music-based educational programming.

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Do I retain everything? Of course not. But I find the effort is worth it, nonetheless. I absorb enough to inspire fresh and interesting conversations with my students, to bring in novel vocal exercises, to offer exciting new repertoire options, to experiment with a different approach to belting, or vocal styling, acting, performance, alignment, vibrato, intonation, vocal health, voice science, riffing, energetic awareness, vowel tuning, performance anxiety... the variety is endless, just as are the opportunities for continued learning available.

I pay a monthly subscription to several professional voice organizations, all of which provide monthly content via webinars and recorded or livestreamed trainings. I also subscribe to many voice teacher colleagues' channels and podcasts, and keep my eye out for up and coming single-purchase courses that I might be interested in. I allocate a percentage of studio funds to cover these monthly expenses, as well as the larger expenses a few times throughout the year.

My students' eyes light up when I bring up a new song, performer, technique, or exercise that I learned about. I feel fresh, relevant, educated, inspired, and dedicated when I approach my teaching within the larger landscape of this growth lifestyle. With every new tool that I gain, I am that much more capable of offering it to a new student who comes aboard, or to a student who's been with my studio for years and thrives in this environment that continually provides new insights, strategies, and opportunities for growth. In our voice studios, let's cultivate and nurture a soil rich with the love of learning; here, student and teacher alike may flourish with endless possibility.

Marisa Gray Atha has enjoyed performing and teaching in the genres of musical theatre, classical, pop/rock, jazz, folk, and world since 2002. Appreciating a wide variety of genres, her performance experience includes solo recitals, operatic roles, choral concerts, community outreach programs, venue gigging, and recording. She served as a vocal department artist-in-residence at School of the Arts in San Francisco, and is the owner of *Three Sparrows Studio*, providing private vocal instruction with a holistic approach that empowers her students to find and free their own natural sound. She holds a bachelor's degree in music, with a concentration in vocal performance, master's degree in classical vocal performance, bachelor's degree in English, and a minor in psychology. She is a RYT-200 (Registered Yoga Teacher), certified CoreSinging voice instructor, and she has 40 hours of Alexander Technique training. She has been published in the *NATS Journal of Singing*, *OM Yoga & Lifestyle Magazine*, and she offers all manner of musical, mind/body, and wellness musings in her studio blog at threesparrowsstudio.com/blog.



Call for Submissions

Articles on relevant topics are being accepted for inclusion in the independent teacher section of future issues of *Inter Nos*. Approximately 1,000 to 4,000 words. Submissions should be sent by email to cynthiavaughn@icloud.com.