**Composing for the voice**

**Your texts must be out of copyright.**

**Some informal notes:**

* Felicity and I are both sopranos. You can hear us on the Philomel website: [www.philomel.co.uk](http://www.philomel.co.uk)
* Our best range is about F above middle C to about the F above that;
* We can go down below the stave (I go down to the D below middle C) but it will sound *different* to our ‘real’ singing voices and should be used as a colour or effect only.
* Weakest soprano notes are the D and E immediately above middle C. They are fine to write for but not *ff* !
* Above the stave is also fine (up to C for both of us) but please don’t hang around there. It’s best to keep those notes as part of a moving passage. I like doing staccato stuff up there!
* We can do things like humming, hissing, speaking, glissandi, whispering… (though whispering is tiring on the voice and please don’t ask us to shout or scream!)
* Finding notes: please think where we will ‘get’ our notes from. Felicity has near-perfect pitch (I don’t) but even that can be ‘fooled’ in a piece with complex harmony or if going against the theorbo notes. After an unvoiced or free-pitched section, say a couple of bars of whispering or after a few glissandi, we may want some reference pitches again. Note, this doesn’t have to be our actual note! Just something clear we can hear and relate to.
* Vibrato: we are both ‘solo’ type voices, not choral: we have a natural vibrato. Please don’t ask for *non vib.* unless it’s brief, for an effect/colour: it’s actually more tiring and, of course, less resonant.
* If you are writing for both voices, please don’t treat one as ‘upper’ and one as ‘lower’: treat them as equal voices, and allow us both to move around our vocal range.
* Lots of quiet singing, especially sustained *pp,* is tiring and not very enjoyable. Lots of loud singing, especially sustained *ff,* is tiring and… probably not enjoyable for the audience!
* Word-setting: at the top of the stave and above the stave, we modulate our vowels to allow for a good sound. ‘ee’ and ‘air’ vowels will be ‘er’ or ‘ah’… This means that words are not always very distinguishable, sorry! Melismas and emotions are best up there, really, with ‘words’ and meaning better in our F to F range. But, we’ll give anything a go…
* Including whistling. I love whistling.
* Underlay (how words are set to notes): sorry if this is really basic, but:
  + Splitting syllables: convention would say ‘split-ting’ but if you’d prefer ‘spli-tting’ that’s fine; indeed, you can hint at pronunciation and phrasing by the way you split your syllables. Be careful though: ‘bu------ying’ might lead us (especially if sight-reading) to sing ‘boo-ying’.
  + Melismas: write the syllable out in full at the start. In the example below, if you had put the ‘y’ on the final crotchet, we’d assume you wanted a separate ‘ee’ vowel at the end: ‘a-wa—yee’. Similarly, if you wrote ‘si-----ng’ we’d assume you wanted a significant sounded ‘ng’ at the end.



* + Don’t worry about that old-fashioned one-word-means-one-note flagging: beam the words as you would for an instrument (it’s easier to read); see example below (old editions, would have four separately flagged notes for ‘help you at the’). Slurs/phrase-marks are also really helpful.



* + Please just look at some vocal music and copy how they do things.

**Resources:**

**The 20-odd pages on ‘voice’ in Alfred Blatter’s *Instrumentation and orchestration* are brilliant.** [**https://doku.pub/documents/instrumentation-and-orchestration-by-alfred-blatter-dmqe4oj3wol5**](https://doku.pub/documents/instrumentation-and-orchestration-by-alfred-blatter-dmqe4oj3wol5)

Useful book: Paul Barker, *Composing for Voice.*

<https://www.singers.com/item/Paul_Barker/Composing_for_Voice/5284b/>

this is a **brief** introduction to some of the issues (without giving answers or explanations!):

<https://composerstoolbox.com/2016/06/24/tool-51-writing-for-voice-understanding-singing/>

this is mostly about choral writing but addresses a couple of issues:

<https://www.composercreate.com/voices>