

Anybody Can Lip Trill!

A Voice Teachers Guide to Teaching Difficult-Lip-Trill People

Train your brain to expect a certain outcome, and your body will deliver!

When you learned to ride a bike, you didn't learn by intending to balance, pedal, and steer. You learned because you were intending to ride the bike. You were focused on the end-game. You learned to balance by feeling what *not balancing* felt like. Eventually, you added up the feelings of both the

1. times that you balanced and
2. the times you did not balance.

Your brain then had enough information to "do the math" based on your experience. Once your body knew what feeling to expect, everything lined up to make your intention happen.



The same thing happens when you learn to do the *lip trill* exercise. As you hold your intention in mind, your brain registers everything that does, and does not, get you your intended outcome. The times when you *do not* reach your intended outcome are as *important* as the times that you do.

Getting back to you and your bike riding:

If you got scared, you quit.

If you were too tense, you couldn't balance.

If you had someone helping you who assured you that falling was part of the process, and encouraged you to keep trying, then you stayed engaged in the process without feeling afraid. You kept trying without anxiously anticipating fa



In the process of learning this exercise, you're that encouraging, reassuring presence for your student. You want to keep them from taking this too seriously. You can help them by allowing them to stay focused while balancing their effort and relaxation.

Let's Do It!

1. **Don't worry** about how they're breathing. You can address the way they're breathing later.
2. Have them **touch** the tips of their index fingers to the corners of their mouth. Not squishing, not stretching, just touching. (This keeps them from having to think about creating that perfect pressure with the labial muscles.)
3. Have them **fix their gaze** on something approximately head-height and at least six feet away.
4. Explain to them that **you** will keep a steady (slow) beat. These will be a slow, continuous, predictable four-beat pattern. You will play a pitch for two beats, and then they will "shoot" their sound to the thing they're looking at for two beats.

Demonstrate this.

5. Explain to them that **if** they **don't** get their lips to trill, **or** they don't hit the right pitch, **or** they don't hit *any* pitch, **they don't care**. They are just movin' on. They are not to pay any attention to any outcome that does not match their intention. They're just going to go to the next one. Next, next, next.

(You'll have to help them with this. It's kind of hard to not try to

“fix” something, but to just move on. Your job will be to be very relaxed and reassuring. Everything they do is good. Keep them relaxed. You want to either break the anxious association they have with this exercise or not create it in the first place.

Refer back to Step 1.)

6. Choose an octave that will be **comfortable** (e.g., E4-E5 for a woman) and do Step 5 in half-steps up an octave. Rest. Do it again. Be done for today.
7. **Eventually** (typically 2-5 lessons) your student will get this.
8. When they know they can do it (without stressing about it) then start helping them work relaxed inhalation into the pattern. Then start changing the pattern to slightly longer patterns.

Remember that your job is to stay patient and encouraging; trusting in the reliable way that we all learn motor skills. Have fun!