
Lower and Upper Registers

(Techniques CD track 29-33 / DVD chap 10)

The Break

Both male and female voices have two distinct ranges or registers called the lower register and the upper register. The lower register is also referred to as the chest voice, lower voice, alto or belt voice. The speaking voice is usually in the lower register. The upper register is also referred to as the head voice, upper voice, legit, soprano or falsetto.

Falsetto is a term more commonly associated with the upper register of the male voice which resembles the female soprano quality.

Many singers experience an abrupt change in the vocal sound when moving from one register to the other. This change or break takes place in the area where the registers overlap.

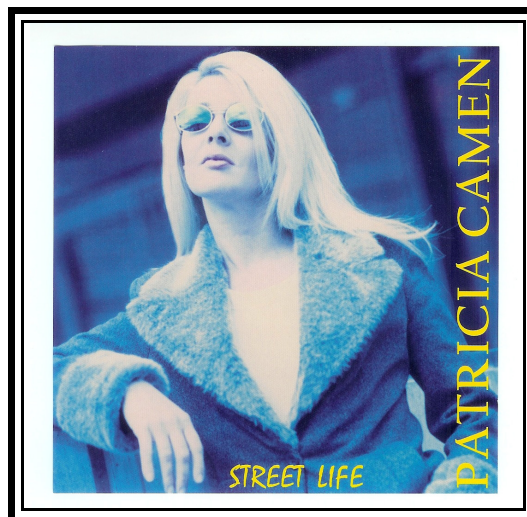
However, in this area of transition, also called the *passaggio*, a blending or mixing of the registers is possible and with practice you can eliminate all traces of a break, both in the sound and in the physical sensation.

To make a smooth transition from the lower register into the upper register, you must control both the volume level and the focusing of the vocal cords. Because the vocal cords require less focusing strength for the lower notes of the head register, excessive air pressure pushes them open, causing sudden breathiness; or the vocal cords may suddenly change their tension, causing an abrupt change in vocal quality, something like a yodel. Both these effects (or defects) are called the break.

If you are singing too loud as you approach the *passaggio*, you will be unable to blend or mix the vocal qualities of the lower and upper registers and the break will occur. Because it is easier to sing louder in upper chest register than in the lower head register, many singers make the mistake of not controlling volume and vocal cord tension in the *passaggio*, making the register break an almost universal experience.

When making the downward transition from the upper register to the lower register, one tendency is to carry the upper register too low, which can cause weakness, breathiness or cracking in the vocal sound. This usually prompts the unskilled singer to overcompensate by suddenly increasing air pressure and focusing strength, causing an abrupt change or break into lower register.

You may also experience a break if you don't maintain good support as you move from upper register into lower register. The throat may suddenly tighten, causing you to lose forward placement and possibly even flat the pitch. In extreme cases, the tension may grab tightly enough to choke off the sound completely.



Patricia Camen, Recording Artist

Notes within the overlap area are usually sung either in the higher part of the chest register or in the lower part of the head register.

The Mix

The *passaggio* is the note range where the registers overlap. The *passaggio* varies slightly from singer to singer, but the technique for mixing or blending the registers is the same for all voice types, male and female. This mixing technique will enable you to make a smooth transition from the quality of one register to the other so that your voice sounds like one voice instead of two.

A sudden vocal change or break will not occur anywhere in the vocal range if you maintain:

1. **Steady support**
2. **Steady focus**
3. **Open throat space**
4. **Pure vowel**
5. **Forward placement**

For a singer who sings primarily in the lower register, the mixing begins higher in the voice, using the upper register as an upward extension of the chest voice or lower register sound. We call this the *uppermix*.

For a singer who sings primarily in the upper register, the mixing begins lower in the voice as a downward extension of the head voice or upper register sound. This we call the lower mix.



Howard Austin – Vocal Power Method