

# AMERICAN ACADEMY OF TEACHERS OF SINGING



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## QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHERS OF SINGING

[Since 1922, the year of its founding, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing has been actively writing and disseminating papers on all subjects pertaining to the teaching of singing. Inevitable changes in the profession itself and in musical life in general have since demanded that the Statements from the Academy be brought up to date. This Statement, changed to its present form in 1997, was originally published in 1975.]

Singing has been defined by the renowned critic William J. Henderson as the interpretation of text by means of musical sounds produced by the human voice. This indicates two-fold responsibility on the part of the teacher of singing: the full development of the vocal potential in each student (range, quality, power, flexibility, control, endurance) and the instruction of the student in the artistic use of the voice in singing. Since the vocal organ cannot be observed visually, as can the actions in playing most instruments, the teacher must have absolute knowledge of the inner physical manipulations involved in vocal production. The legitimate teacher of singing is not just a musician, but one, like a doctor of anatomy, who thoroughly understands the function of the vocal instrument in singing and in speech, and knows how to develop the potential inherent in each voice. Otherwise, one cannot be a *bona fide* teacher, regardless of musical ability.

The skills needed to teach singing are many. The American Academy believes that the teacher of singing should possess the following requisites:

1. A thorough general and musical education, including sight-singing and ear training. A teacher must be musically literate.
2. A substantial background in vocal study with competent teachers of singing over a period of at least five years. Musical and vocal instruction should include a minimum of 90 hours each year.

3. A complete anatomical knowledge of the body (not just the vocal tract), because the vocal system relies on the whole body support system for the production of tone. For too many decades many have relied on phrases passed from studio to studio, generation to generation. Students repeat these phrases like mottos, not truly understanding the semantic implications nor the physical follow-through. Books or models of the entire anatomy should be used in teaching, to make clear the actual positions and possible functions of the organs and muscles.
4. An overview of the contiguous arts and therapies that can ease tensions and aid in such things as posture control, i.e., Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, Rosen Method, massage therapies, dancing, fencing, acting, etc.
5. Sensitivity to accuracy of intonation, quality of tone, and nuance of color.
6. A broad knowledge of vocal repertory, and styles of interpretation appropriate to opera, oratorio, art song, ballad, folk song, and musical theater.
7. Ability to classify a voice. It is generally acknowledged that this important decision dare not be taken hastily. Younger voices take their own time to develop since the larynx itself is still in the formative stage. Correct teaching will allow the voice to reveal its own classification. Caveat: one should not assign music too demanding for the sensitive voice, i.e., freshman voices should not sing senior music.
8. A thorough knowledge and command of the English language; complete mastery of English diction in song through correct articulation, enunciation, and pronunciation; a knowledge of at least three languages (Italian, German, and French) encompassing basic grammar and good performance diction.
9. A basic understanding of psychology and its effective use in the teaching of singing, including a sympathetic, discerning and analytical approach to both personal and professional problems of the student.
10. The ability to demonstrate with his or her own voice the correct principles of good tone production and interpretation. (It must be remembered that many successful and prominent teachers have not been established vocal performers, and many noted singers have not achieved success as teachers.)
11. Some competence at the piano.

In the final analysis the teacher must have the ability, coupled with a compelling desire to impart knowledge.