

How to Be Heard and Understood or Projection 101 for Field Heralds

by Countess Lyriel de la Foret

Since the field herald's job is to convey information, whether it be general purpose announcements or getting the fighters to the list on time, the first thing necessary is to *get their attention*. This is not easy—events are often spread all over if the weather is nice outside, or noisy if crowded indoors. The key to making yourself heard is not to yell, but to project your voice. Projection, simply put, is making your voice carry as far as possible with the least amount of effort.

The key to projection is to breathe from your diaphragm. If you have ever taken singing or acting lessons, you are familiar with this idea. Your diaphragm is the large muscle located under your ribcage, and to project, you must force the air from your lungs by actively pushing with this muscle. The harder you push, the more sound you can make.

Here is a way to tell if you are using your diaphragm correctly. Stand in front of a mirror that you can see yourself in at least down to the waist. Breathe in deeply. If your shoulders moved up, you are probably only using the top part of your lungs. With your next deep breath, try to keep your shoulders from moving, and pay attention to your rib cage. When you feel it expand, you are getting a truly deep breath. When you exhale, again concentrate on your ribcage and pushing the air out rather than letting it escape.

Practice makes perfect. Start in your basement or some other large room, and start softly, then see how loud you can become. If you feel your facial muscles tense up, or your throat muscles tensing, you are not projecting but yelling. By doing so, you will lose your voice faster and will find it more difficult to be understood. After you are comfortable inside, go outside and practice (it helps to have someone standing a short distance away to give you feedback on how you're doing).

Now that you have learned how to project, you can be heard. But this doesn't mean that you can be understood! The sounds you are making must make sense to those who are listening, or they will not get the information you're trying to convey. Two rules will help you here: first, you need to enunciate, and second, SLOW DOWN!

Enunciation is another technique singers and actors learn; it just means to speak very clearly. Be sure that you are not slurring your words or dropping letters as we tend to do in informal speech among friends. Open your mouth wide when making your announcement, and exaggerate the words slightly, as if you were talking for a tape recorder. One way to accomplish this is to exaggerate the "long" vowels in the sentence, as in, "Ooooooyeeeeehz, goooooood geeeehntles." Your mouth is like a sound studio and you need to use it to shape the words as well as you can.

Slow down! I'm not kidding! Even if you do not talk fast usually, you must slow down considerably when making your announcement. The sound waves you are making have to travel a long distance to their destination and can get garbled on the way if you talk too fast (the waves will start overlapping). Speak as if you are explaining something to a difficult person who seems to have trouble understanding you. Although you will sound slightly silly to your own ear, you will sound very clear to those around you. Again, practice enunciating and speaking slowly with someone to critique you. You will get the hang of it in no time!

Copyright © 2015 Debra Vigil. Permission is hereby given for members and groups of the Society for Creative Anachronism to use physical copies to be distributed for heraldic consultation or educational purposes, or on SCA-related web sites, provided the material is presented in its entirety and credit is given.