



# Characterizing the Roles of Voice Professionals

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), Pan American Vocology Association (PAVA), and the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA)

This article is a joint statement by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), Pan American Vocology Association (PAVA), and the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA). This statement is a revision of the previous 2005 joint statement by ASHA, NATS, and VASTA.

**T**HIS STATEMENT WAS DEVELOPED by a joint committee of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), Pan American Vocology Association (PAVA), and the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA). Members of the Joint Committee included: PAVA Representatives Marina Gilman (Chair), Leda Searce, and Rachel Hirshorn-Johnston; ASHA Special Interest Group 3 Voice and Upper Airway Disorders representative Claudio Milstein; NATS representatives Diana Allan (NATS President) and Allen Henderson (NATS Executive Director); VASTA representative Rockford Sansom, board liaison.

## ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

In 1992 an official joint technical report of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), “The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist and Teacher of Singing in Remediation of Singers with Voice Disorders”<sup>1</sup> was published. This technical report was subsequently revised in 2005 as “The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist, the Teacher of Singing, and the Speaking Voice Trainer in Voice Habilitation” to include the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA).<sup>2</sup> Since 2005, there have been many advances in the field, including the establishment of the new field of vocology as represented by the founding of the Pan American Vocology Association (PAVA).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) founded in 1925, the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) in 1944, the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA) in 1986, and the Pan American Vocology Association (PAVA) in 2014 are dedicated to the understanding, improvement and training of the human voice. Over time, our

understanding of the importance of having healthy laryngeal function in all styles of speech and singing and the existence of efficient and optimal vocal usage continues to evolve. The fundamental mechanism for healthy phonation is essentially the same for both singing and speaking. ASHA, NATS, VASTA, and PAVA recognize that a voice disorder may affect either singing or speaking voice use. The purpose of this current document, therefore, is to:

- Clarify the roles of voice and speech habilitation and rehabilitation professionals,
- Incorporate advances in our respective organizations and professions that apply to scope of practice, and
- Serve those who rely on voice and speech in their daily lives and occupations.

## DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this document, voice “habilitation” describes building, maintaining, and enhancing vocal skills and knowledge in a healthy voice, while voice “rehabilitation” is defined as restoring or maximizing function that has been lost or impaired due to vocal injury, illness, or maladaptive neuromuscular patterns. While the scope of singing training is generally well-understood, for purposes of this document, “speaking training” refers to both performance (such as acting and voice acting) and public speaking in a variety of contexts.

## CHARACTERIZING THE ROLES OF VOICE PROFESSIONALS

Historically, rehabilitation of the disordered speaking voice has been the sole province of qualified speech-language pathologists and other medical professionals. Development of the voice to its optimal function for use in singing or professional speaking has been the province of teachers of singing and voice and speech trainers, respectively. This traditional division of labor has resulted in separate, independent work conducted in a serial approach for the vocal training and habilitation/rehabilitation of speakers and singers.

As noted in the 2005 ASHA joint technical report, “The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist, the Teacher of Singing, and the Speaking Voice Trainer in Voice Habilitation,” this separatist approach may not be in the best interest of singers and speakers with

voice disorders.<sup>3</sup> Rather, ASHA, NATS, VASTA, and PAVA all acknowledge that the most effective path to vocal recovery should include an integrated approach to voice care. Our organizations therefore collectively affirm the importance of interdisciplinary management of speakers and singers with voice disorders. This collaborative approach should ideally include some or all of the following professionals: (1) a laryngologist, (2) a speech-language pathologist with expertise in voice disorders, (3) a singing teacher, and/or (4) a speaking voice and speech trainer. These team members may not necessarily work in the same physical space.

The 2005 technical report noted that “ASHA, NATS, and VASTA recognize that such multiple specialization is rare and that in most cases, the management team will need to consist of at least three individuals.”<sup>4</sup> Since then, an increasing number of individuals have chosen a dual-trained pathway (e.g. experienced performers, teachers of singing, and/or voice and speech trainers pursuing degrees in speech-language pathology). This development has obvious appeal for hiring in a clinical setting. Many established and emerging voice centers are employing dual-trained speech-language pathologists, who have the ability to bill insurance and to provide voice rehabilitation simultaneously for both singing and speaking. However, when the singing teacher or voice trainer works in collaboration with medical providers, they are usually compensated by the patient, since singing teachers and voice trainers are not able to bill insurance. The potential for liability issues is a serious consideration for the singing teacher and/or voice trainer, as these professionals typically do not carry malpractice insurance.

Although ASHA, NATS, VASTA, and PAVA recognize the differences in both professional preparation and the primary goals of their respective members, all four organizations acknowledge the need for broader, interdisciplinary training of speech-language pathologists, teachers of singing, and voice and speech trainers who plan to work with professional voice users. The following general guidelines are recommended:

1. The speech-language pathologist who works with vocal performers (singers, actors) needs to supplement their clinical knowledge with training in voice habilitation to inform their work in the context of rehabilitation.

2. The teacher of singing needs to supplement their knowledge of anatomy, physiology, acoustics, and vocal function with understanding of voice disorders to inform appropriate referrals.
3. Similarly, the voice and speech trainer who works with actors, singers and other professional speakers needs to supplement their knowledge of anatomy, physiology, acoustics, and vocal function with understanding of voice disorders to inform appropriate referrals.

ASHA, NATS, VASTA, and PAVA mutually affirm that the following areas remain the province of our individual organizations to act upon as desired: (a) the development of more specific training requirements for individual members who elect to work with speakers and singers with voice disorders, (b) the development of criteria for evaluation and subsequent recommendation and/or accreditation of training programs, and (c) the development of criteria for identification and/or certification of individual members who obtain the recommended specialty training.

Furthermore, all four organizations recognize the existence of state licensure laws and national laws that govern delivery of services to persons with communication disorders, including voice disorders. All persons who work with speakers and singers with voice disorders are encouraged to become familiar with these laws. ASHA, NATS, VASTA, and PAVA affirm that it remains the responsibility of the individual practitioner to ensure

that their work with singers and other professional voice users does not violate the scope of practice as suggested above and defined by the laws in the state(s) or country where the work is done. All four organizations agree that any time a vocal pathology is suspected, a medical evaluation should occur.

Finally, ASHA, NATS, VASTA, and PAVA encourage their members to cooperate in the development and delivery of interdisciplinary communication, training programs, and services relative to voice habilitation and rehabilitation.

## NOTES

1. ASHA and NATS Joint Statement "The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist and Teacher of Singing in Remediation of Singers with Voice Disorders," *The NATS Journal* 49 no. 2 (November/December 1992): 14.
2. ASHA, NATS and VASTA Joint Statement, "The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist, the Teacher of Singing, and the Speaking Voice Trainer in Voice Habilitation," *Journal of Singing* 62 no. 3 (January/February 2006): 249–50.
3. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), "The role of the speech-language pathologist, the teacher of singing, and the speaking voice trainer in voice habilitation." (2005); This document was rescinded in April 2024. See ASHA website, accessed April 30, 2024, <https://www.asha.org/policy/tr2005-00147/>.
4. ASHA, NATS and VASTA Joint Statement, "The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist, the Teacher of Singing, and the Speaking Voice Trainer in Voice Habilitation," 250.