

# Dave Hegarty's Performance Notes

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## SOME GENERAL NOTIONS ABOUT THEATRE

The essential purpose of theatre is to provide excitement, illumination and fulfilment for the audience. Excitement is achieved by sensory stimulation; illumination through the discovery of something about ourselves or the world that reveals the essence of our lives in a way that day to day living cannot; and fulfilment by means of some form of intellectual, emotional or spiritual catharsis.

Theatre does this by showing objects and events to the audience, without explaining, describing or defining them. Meaning is derived from the performance by using signs that are presented for interpretation by the audience.

Source	Coding	Transmission	Reception	Decoding	Meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playwright</li> <li>• Script</li> <li>• Director</li> <li>• Performer</li> <li>• Technician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Performer               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Personality</li> <li>➢ Voice</li> <li>➢ Facial Expression</li> <li>➢ Gesture</li> <li>➢ Movement</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Makeup, Hairstyle and Costume</li> <li>• Props</li> <li>• Setting</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Sound</li> <li>• Smell</li> <li>• Touch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic</li> <li>• Visual</li> <li>• Aural</li> <li>• Olfactory</li> <li>• Tactile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eyes</li> <li>• Ears</li> <li>• Nose</li> <li>• Skin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Cultural</li> <li>➢ Theatrical</li> <li>➢ Performance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual</li> <li>• Emotional</li> <li>• Spiritual</li> <li>• Aesthetic</li> </ul>

Thus, the coding, transmitting/receiving and decoding are the central part of the theatrical experience, linking the script via the director and the performance to the audience. In effect this is a language in the sense of “A language is a system in which all the elements fit together, and in which the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others” (Saussure 1983). The end result is the creation of a mental image for each member of the audience.

The signifiers used for the coding and decoding can be representative, indicative or symbolic.

Representative or indicative signs are typically understood through observation.

Symbolic signs require the use of an agreed code that is clear to both the performance and audience. The three types of “code” used for symbolic signs are:

- ⇒ Cultural codes are those things that each member of the audience brings with them to the theatrical experience. This includes their intellectual, historical and social background, education, mood, physical and mental abilities, and their personal prejudices and expectations.
- ⇒ Theatrical codes have to do with the distortion of signs by increasing their communicative powers. This is done by the very act of lifting those signs out of the context of everyday life and placing them on the stage.

Both of these codes are beyond the control of the theatrical production process, though they should still be respected by it.

- ⇒ Those codes that are established in and for the individual performance.

It is the job of the director to select, create and control the code for the performance and to position the signifiers in the foreground and background appropriately to create the desired meaning for the audience. This process requires skills in the visualisation, interpretation and manipulation of the linguistic, musical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic and interpersonal aspects of the production

## **A Note on Post-modernism in the Theatre**

Post-modern theatre revolves around the idea of not bringing a single meaning to each spectator. In the most extreme manifestation, this means jettisoning elements such as linearity and “reality” and manipulating the coding to generate a montage of information, impressions and images, creating a synthesis of elements in a new and artificial arrangement, like a cubist drawing. There is no longer a universal meaning or a single reading of a

performance, making it harder for the spectator to interpret or judge the performance immediately, and emphasising the experience of an experience.

## CHOOSING A PLAY

The decision of which play to perform depends on a number of factors:

- ⇒ The audience dictates matters such as taste, entertainment value, level of insight possible.
- ⇒ The actors available dictate whether the play will be fun to **play** and will be a creative experience, or whether it will be a lot of **work**.
- ⇒ The technical expertise available determines which effects can be used.
- ⇒ The director's ability determines how much can be made of the play, and whether it can be brought to life.

## **Casting**

The actor for a part needs to have the correct character qualities, the seed of the character in terms of voice, presence, and bodily quality, as well as having the necessary

## **BUILDING A PERFORMANCE**

You don't have to be good at talking about performing to be a good performer. And never forget that acting is about **playing** a role, not **working** a role.

Playing means the state of a sportsperson, present, in the present time, in the moment of playing, exploring the possibilities of the situation and working towards the goal, rather than merely remembering and reconstructing a given situation. This is a state which can only be reached by submerging the processes (opinions, attitudes, judgements intellectualisations, mannerisms and memories concerning culture, race, education, psychology, and age) required by the acting and immersing oneself in the character in the character's present, and with the character's preoccupations.

There are six foundation skills that should be mastered until they are as good as automatic. Most of these skills need to be developed individually, rather than as part of rehearsals.

The foundation skills are:

- ⇒ Imagining,
- ⇒ Concentrating,
- ⇒ Communicating,
- ⇒ Accessing emotions,
- ⇒ Observing, and last and by no means least
- ⇒ Relaxing.

Additionally there are the structural elements out of which a performance is built. Again here most of the groundwork needs to be accomplished alone, rather than as part of the rehearsals, though here the individual characterisation for a particular role may need to be brought more into the work.

The structural elements are:

- ⇒ Vocal delivery,
- ⇒ Movement and gestures
- ⇒ Facial expression,
- ⇒ Makeup, hairstyle and costume, and
- ⇒ Personality, where a certain level of "known-ness" could undermine the role being played, but can also provide for a collision with the character being acted that illuminates that character.

## Imagining

To bring life to a character and a scene, requires the imagination to become more fascinated by the problems and obstacles in the character's world than in the challenges in the performer's world. That is, the triumph of the imaginary reality over the actual reality.

If a performer cannot make this leap, how could they expect the audience to do it?

Imagination is the action of forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste).

This can be done REPRODUCTIVELY.

This can be done CREATIVELY.

There is no doubt that everybody has imagination. One must know how to make it work, one must use it frequently enough to have confidence in it.

The tricks in training to control and develop the imagination are:

- ⇒ Be gentle, and patient.
- ⇒ Make time.
- ⇒ See, hear, smell, touch and taste.
- ⇒ Imagine the situation, not the emotional response.
- ⇒ Have a good time.

### ***Exercises for the Imagination***

- ◆ *Do daily routine chores:*
  - *As if you were a scientist about to attend a conference on nuclear waste.*
  - *As if you were about to be married.*
  - *As if you had just arrived back from burying a loved one.*
  - *As if you were waiting for a phone call telling you whether or not you got the lead in the play*  
*The job should be at the centre of your concentration.*
- ◆ *Recite a nursery rhyme you know*
  - *As if you have only just learnt it and cannot quite remember it.*
  - *As if you are making conversation with a stranger while waiting on something or someone else.*
  - *As a sermon.*
  - *As cocktail party chat.*  
*When some piece of your clothing has broken.*  
*Where the party is over full and you have to stand close to people and shout.*
  - *As if you have the giggles.*
  - *As if you are drunk.*
  - *As part of an electioneering address by a junior education minister.*
  - *As if talking to someone you love, but you haven't told him or her of your infatuation yet.*
  - *As a voice over for a television commercial.*
  - *As if to a foreigner with not much of the language.*
  - *As an explanation to somebody why they cannot do the same.*
  - *As a director talking to a bit-part actor in the film of the nursery rhyme.*
  - *As if you are telling a director of a film you want to get a part in about the plot of your last film.*
  - *As if talking to somebody with an obvious toupee.*
  - *As if you are a museum guide describing the picture of the rhyme.*  
*At the end of another gruelling day.*
  - *As if you are a Sunday school teacher with the toddlers class.*
  - *As if one of the characters has just died.*  
*As if you are reading the obituary on the evening news.*
- ◆ *Choose a painting of a landscape, a room, or courtyard and walk into this place as yourself or as a character suggested by the picture.*
- ◆ *Allow music to influence your body and mind, and use it to gain insight into your character.*
- ◆ *Relive an imaginary event.*
- ◆ *Fabricate biographies for people you do not know.*
- ◆ *Immerse yourself in an imaginary scenario stimulated by a "what if" question.*

## Concentrating

To be in character properly, the character's problems and the need to solve those problems should absorb you completely.

The first step in doing this is learning to trust the automatic mind

### **Practice basic acting skills until they automatic.**

If hitting your mark occupies the centre of your awareness while you are playing a scene, you aren't in the scene – you are just an actor hitting marks.

The second step is to train your mind to focus

### **Concentrate, regardless of distractions.**

Above all, you must silence your inner critic. This means: acting rather than watching yourself act (love the art in yourself, not yourself in the art).

Make what interests you, the character, more absorbing than what interests you, the performer.

The tricks in training to control and develop the concentration are:

- ⇒ Use gentle persuasion. (Your mind will respond best to gentle direction.)
- ⇒ Learn from mistakes.
- ⇒ Make the exercises fun.
- ⇒ Nibble away at the work rather than expecting miracles.
- ⇒ Remember that you are reclaiming a lost skill.

### ***Exercise for your Concentration***

#### ***Individual Exercises***

- ◆ *Read.*
- ◆ *Think about something for five consecutive minutes without allowing any distractions (the details of a memory, solving arithmetical problems in your head, or arguing through a personal problem or beliefs). Start at home alone, gradually practice in busier and more distracting environments.*
- ◆ *Learn to listen well.*
- ◆ *Practice remembering people's names as you are introduced, remembering the look of people and places and things – in colour.*
- ◆ *Switch your attention from one type of sensory information to another.*
- ◆ *Find two talk shows play them at the same level, then concentrate on them alternately.*
- ◆ *Turn on TV/Video. Now memorise a poem in front of it.*
- ◆ *Make what you are doing your single point of concentration. Gently redirect your attention to this moment.*
- ◆ *Tackle a job you have been dreading for a fixed period of time.*

#### ***Group Exercises***

- ◆ *Play a game where you have a tray with thirty to forty small articles (pins, coins...); stare at it for three minutes then list the articles. The winner is the person with the greatest number of correct items listed. Items that were not on the tray, but in the list should be subtracted.*
- ◆ *Play the "I went on a holiday, and I packed..." game.*
- ◆ *Hand around imaginary objects, concentrating on the object and handling it correctly, and not your reaction to it. Notice how you react to objects in every day life – the familiar, and the new.*
- ◆ *Perform a monologue while someone tries to distract you.*



## Communicating

"If actors really mean to hold the attention of a large audience they must make every effort to maintain an uninterrupted exchange of feelings, thoughts, and actions among themselves."

(Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*)

Convince the people you are with that you are actively listening to them, and actively talking to them.

### Active Listening

Active listening involves

- Recalling or constructing an internal image of what the speaker is communicating.
- Not only hearing what others are trying to say, but how they are saying it – from their facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, inflectional pattern...
- Testing the truth of what is being said.

Listening actively means using energy.

Active listening doesn't mean active reacting. Reaction are a natural side-effect of active listening.

You will never be a good listener until you concentrate on what you need to hear.

You don't listen effectively if you don't want to hear or if you lack the physical energy; if you have a fear of pain, of revealing yourself, or of forgetting lines ("Have the discipline to learn the lines and the courage to forget them").

Take it personally.

'Load' the words, so that you have a reason to listen because you have something at stake.

If you aren't affected by what is said to you – if there is no interchange of thought, feeling and action – the audience will know that you are attempting to fool them.

### Active Talking

When you are talking, there are two parts to what you are saying:

- What you are talking about
- Who you are talking to – you talk for the benefit of other people, not for yourself,

Your attention is divided between these two elements. You should control where the majority of your attention lies while you are talking.

While you are trying to get your message across by sending out all those verbal and physical signals, don't forget to take in messages from the listener.

The tricks in training to control and develop the ability to communicate actively are:

- ⇒ Anytime, Anywhere.
- ⇒ Baby Steps
- ⇒ Create Desire

### *Listening Exercises*

#### *Individual Exercises*

- ◆ *Hone your listening skills every time you talk to anyone (start with situations where there is little at stake). Learn to generate interest in what the other person is saying; probe for all the hidden meanings; see what the other person is saying.*
- ◆ *Run a cold reading or a memorised text but before you respond with your line, as written, repeat what was said to you, or say something that clearly shows you heard what was said.*
- ◆ *Choose a speaker on radio or television who is discussing a subject that doesn't interest you and create an interest in the subject.*
- ◆ *Study videotape of a well-made film. Notice the amount of overtalking, when the impulse to speak occurs, the silent responses to the speaker, the interchange of feelings, thoughts, and actions.*

### **Group Exercises**

- ◆ *Get somebody to tell you a long story (personal reminiscence, event witnessed, story of a film...). Retell the story in your own words, with as much detail as possible, adding your observations.*
- ◆ *Have two people chatting. A third person has to listen and then relate as much of what they heard as possible, adding their observations. Observe in this case how the listener helps focus attention onto the talkers.*

### **Talking Exercises**

- ◆ *Relate a personal story to somebody (real or imagined). Observe how the words follow the “vision”.*
- ◆ *Learn a short speech that tells a story, and perform them repeatedly until they conjure up their own visions to precede the words.*
- ◆ *Relate personal stories or speeches to:*
  - *Your little child.*
  - *Your teenage son.*
  - *Your best friend.*
  - *Someone to whom you are newly attracted.*
  - *Your lover.*
  - *Your family.*
  - *Your boss.*
  - *A stranger.*
- ◆ *Relate personal stories or speeches:*
  - *To entertain your guests at a dinner party;*
  - *To make someone, whom you suspect doesn't like you sympathise with you.*
  - *To have the last word with someone: you've got to go.*
  - *To recall the events as part of psychoanalysis.*
  - *To talk frankly to a relative stranger, in the hope that they will then open up to you.*
  - *To make conversation, to take your mind of something else, to cheer yourself up.*
  - *To convince a doubting detective of your alibi.*
  - *To cheer up a sick friend in hospital.*
- ◆ *Relate personal stories or speeches to two people present at the same time.*
- ◆ *Relate personal stories or speeches while*
  - *Sharpening a pencil.*
  - *Making yourself up.*
  - *Polishing shoes.*
  - *Washing up.*
  - *Knitting.*
  - *Eating.*
  - *Drinking.*
  - *Reading a newspaper.*
  - *Going for a walk.*
  - *Driving a car.*
  - *Being a passenger in a car, looking at the view.*
  - *Looking out a window.*
  - *Looking out a window, waiting for someone.*

## Reclaiming your Emotions

The essential human emotions are:

- Mad
- Glad
- Sad
- Afraid
- Loving
- Hurt
- Surprised
- Ashamed, and
- Disgusted.

Education teaches you to hide and disguise your feelings and deny your true emotional response to the people and events around you. But even when it may not be appropriate to express them, these deeply felt desires are motivating you. Never deny the existence of your emotions, although it might often be best to behave in ways that do not reflect your feelings.

Emotions aren't things that happen in your head, they happen in your body – specifically in the viscera. If you think you are identifying your emotions, but you are not talking about the list given above, you are probably talking about attitudes or poses you have adapted to cover your feelings.

Emotions are reactions to events, either real or imagined, or our perception of those events.

Learning to be a good performer is partly about breaking down inhibitions, and this is a frightening process because the giving up of boundaries set by the ego can feel like a loss of self. But you can break down your inhibitions provided you do not have a fear of being more vulnerable, you have the courage to endure the failures and the discipline to keep working at it.

The tricks in reclaiming access to your emotions are:

- ⇒ Never forget that emotions are effects, not causes.
- ⇒ Don't expect miracles.
- ⇒ The goal is experience, not just understanding.
- ⇒ You can't will yourself to experience an emotion.
- ⇒ Ask for help if you need it.

### ***Exercises for Reclaiming Your Emotions***

- ◆ *Place two chairs facing one another. Sit in one and imagine one of your parents sitting in the other. Explore "Hold me - I'm scared", "Give it back - It's mine", "Don't leave me", "Go away". The goal is to get the emotions evoked out of your head and into your body.*
- ◆ *Keep a daily count of the times you repress or cut off your feelings. Enhance your awareness, and improve your ability to experience them.*

## Observing

Learn to act not only by example (watching other actors) and by trial and error (acting yourself), but also by observing people in everyday situations.

Observe, first-hand, personal eccentricities of speech, vocal patterns, facial expressions, and body language (posture and gait).

Don't get bogged down in analysis or organisation of what you are watching, soak it in on an unconscious level.

The tricks in learning how to observe well are:

- ⇒ Remember that the urge to mimic is innate.
- ⇒ Use your eyes and your heart, not just your head.
- ⇒ Concentration is the key.
- ⇒ Resist the temptation to judge or evaluate.
- ⇒ Give yourself to the mimicry; open yourself to sensory stimulation.
- ⇒ Surrender to the needs of the observed.
- ⇒ Start Small.
- ⇒ Repetition is the secret.

### ***Observation Exercises***

- ◆ *Observe two people interacting, the tempos and rhythms and variations.  
Note how they attempt to communicate successfully, and emotions are the by-product of that.*
- ◆ *Pick a subject and focus on the details of their behaviour.  
Be aware of posture, body language, gestures and facial expression.  
Experience vicariously with your muscles.  
Pay attention to vocal patterns (dialect, rhythm, tempo, energy and emphasis).  
Afterwards, recreate the experience (mimicry, not acting the part)*
- ◆ *Improvise a situation with an observed character.*

## Relaxing

The goal of relaxation is to get rid of all the tension belonging to the performer.

There is a direct, two-way connection between tension in the mind and tension in the body. Containing anxieties requires enormous energy and produces this physical and mental tension, which makes a rigid container of the body and traps and suffocates emotions, and leads to inefficient body use and breathing.

Getting rid of tension:

- ⇒ Makes room for the tensions and anxieties belonging to the character.

When the performer is properly relaxed, then they concentrate properly, and open themselves to experience those emotions appropriate to the character.

- ⇒ Overcomes the subconscious misuse of the body which leads to inefficient
  - movement
  - breathing and
  - voice production.

An incorrectly relaxed posture predisposes the performer to certain attitudes and forms of behaviour.

A relaxed posture starts with relaxing the neck and positioning the head correctly so that the face is directed forward, and the top of the head continues the line of the spine. This should lead to a lengthening and widening of the back.

There should be no tightening of stomach leg or buttock muscles to maintain this, but rather than concentrating on relaxing the muscles, make sure that the hips, knees, ankles and indeed all of your joints are free to move easily. The knees should be slightly bent, so that they are over the toes, and your weight should be evenly distributed on the heels, outsides of the feet, balls of the feet and toes.

### ***Relaxation Exercises***

- ◆ *Developing a relaxed posture is not limited to rehearsals and performing. Be aware of your posture at all times. Use mirrors and shop windows to check*
  - *Your shape*
  - *Your balance*
  - *Whether you are leaning forward or backward*
  - *Whether your jaw and tongue are relaxed.*
- ◆ *Again as part of the time outside of rehearsals and performance, catch yourself “by surprise” while talking.*
  - *What do you do as you begin talking?*
  - *Is your breathing regular, or do you hold it while trying to get into the conversation or while thinking?*
  - *Put your finger on the muscle where your jaw meets your neck. Is the muscle relaxed?*
- ◆ *Lie on the floor, with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Keeping the neck relaxed and leading with the top of the head, stretch and widen the back. Allow all your joints to relax. Take a deep breath and exhale slowly, empty your lungs, then hold for five to ten seconds and then allow your lungs to fill naturally. Repeat three or four times.*
- ◆ *Stand with knees slightly bent and the weight distributed evenly across your feet. Keeping the neck relaxed and leading with the top of the head, stretch and widen the back. Allow all your joints to relax. Close the mouth and breathe in through the nose. Repeat three or four times.*
- ◆ *Visualise breathing into tense muscles and massaging away the tension. Make a body inventory; breathing into any the tense muscles before moving on. Don't forget to scan the face in detail. After the inventory, enjoy the relaxed state for a few minutes before opening your eyes, stretching and getting up slowly.*
- ◆ *Sit or stand and observe your breathing. Visualise the air coming in and out. Count the exhalations, count to four then begin again. Do this for five or ten minutes. Match inhalation and exhalation (2s in/2s out). Repeat for 2 or 3 minutes.*

## Vocal Delivery

It is not just the words alone, but also their delivery influences their meaning for the audience. The delivery defines the masculinity, femininity, personality and temperament of the character, as well as the shifts in their physical and emotional states. Other than in real-life, where the performer's voice reflects all of these things about themselves automatically, in the theatre it must also serve to chunk and communicate this information about the character for the audience by providing the vocal punctuation and emphasis.

The parameters of vocal delivery that can be manipulated to aid the communication process are:

- ⇒ Loudness.  
Loudness is a signifier in that it can be used to emphasise syllables, words, phrases or whole passages of text. Loudness is also an indicator of personality and general temperament or emotional state. Loudness indicates self-assurance or brashness; normal levels indicated manners, rationality (or how boring the character is); quietness indicates shyness, illness, or sultriness and sexiness.
- ⇒ Pitch.  
Pitch is the best tool for expressing precise shades of meaning by moving up or down from the normal pitch. Radical changes in pitch can signify changes in emotional state. Excitement brings a rise in pitch, sorrow lowers it.  
Energy, excitement or increased intensity of purpose raise the pitch, while sleepiness, exhaustion, or shifts in internal equilibrium lower the pitch.  
Masculinity is approximately four full tones below femininity.  
Maturity can be up to an octave lower than immaturity.
- ⇒ Inflection.  
This is the change in pitch within words or sentences.  
Raising pitch (usually with an accompanying rise in loudness) accents a syllable or sentence. Different lifts in the pitch give different relative weights to the accents.  
Upward slides in pitch indicate questions, incomplete thoughts or indecision. (Questions begun with an interrogative do not require pitch changes). Downward slides indicate completion of a thought or strong emphasis. Mixed up and down slides express confusion or uncertainty.
- ⇒ Resonance.  
Three cavities in the head (back of the nose, mouth and above the larynx), and the chest produce resonance. It can be used to produce quality types like richness (round and deep), nasal, breathy, hoarse (chesty), thin, strident (harsh and screechy), falsetto. All of which contribute to culturally coded character types.
- ⇒ Articulation
- ⇒ Tempo.  
Tempo is composed of the length of time for each syllable, the number of pauses, and the length of those pauses.  
Words can be emphasised by extending their duration.  
The length of a pause adds emphasis to the preceding or following idea. Apart from emphasis, pauses can be used to set up punch lines, indicate transitions in thinking, heighten tension, indicate uncertainty, or create atmosphere.
- ⇒ Rhythm

The main challenge of voice production is to produce a natural sounding voice under the unnatural conditions presented by the performance space. This requires manipulating the volume, pitch and resonance.

Fundamental to this is flexible breathing, by which is meant the ability to produce the pressure you need (enough to produce a good voice, but not too much that it is breathy) for as long as you need without physical collapse.

### Breathing

The most difficult part of correct breathing is the expiration, rather than the inspiration. Breathing in is innate. Phrasing should be tackled with regard to, and respect for, how we breathe out.

Use a mirror to check yourself for how you react to breathing difficulties. Breathing in and out should be accomplished without compromising the length and width of the torso. In particular, the shoulders shouldn't move (though they should be able to move).

### Voice Production

The production of the voice is the body's contribution to the voice, the noise and words are provided at the more intellectual level. The voice production provides the emotional driving force for the words. In this way the voice becomes another part of the physical characterisation.

The opening in the vocal chords provides control of the pitch and volume of the voice, this opening, together with the throat, mouth and nose provide the resonance for the voice.

- The pitch of a sound is determined by the frequency of the puffs of air being passed through by the vocal chords opening and closing.  
In particular, there are two principal registers, the head register and the chest register. The chest register has much greater carrying power, but
- The volume of a sound is determined by the pressure of the air being passed through the vocal chords, and the shape of the vocal chords. A normal side effect of increasing the volume is an increase in the pitch. This is not desirable under normal circumstances on the stage.
- The resonance of the voice depends on
  - ◆ the acoustics of the performance space, and its ability to give us feedback,
  - ◆ the shape of the throat and mouth, as controlled by tongue, soft and hard palates, jaw, lips and cheeks, and
  - ◆ the amount of air allowed into the nasal cavity, which is controlled by the soft palate.

### Common Voice Production Problems

Symptoms	Cause	
Strangled tone and overly glottic attack in the voice (staccato).	Breath locked into the lungs by the vocal chords.	
Too much air escapes on each sound (grainy or husky voice).	Phonation and tuning are bad.	
	Too much pressure put on the consonants, particularly the unvoiced consonants.	
Audible gasp.	Muscles locked at the end of expiration, making inspiration difficult.	
Shortness of breath	Incorrect breathing – posture or weak muscles.	
	Immediate cause	Root cause
Lack of control of the soft palate	Part of throat closed, larynx in poor relationship with breath	Head pulled back
Overly nasal tone		
Strain when using higher notes		
Thinness of resonance	Impeded release of jaw and closing of the back of the mouth	
Gasping for breath		
Inflexible resonance	Tongue root stiffened, due to closing at back of the mouth	
Problems of articulation		
Low energy levels	Rib-cage slumped, shoulders pulled forward, narrowing across the chest, therefore constricted breathing	General pulling down (often accompanying pulled back head)
Monotonous delivery		
Speaking long phrases difficult	Breathing in upper chest	Pulling the back in
Voice shrill and lacking in richer resonances		
Easily excitable speaker with loss of vocal control	Too much adrenaline produced under stress	
Forced or throaty tone	Tension in abdominal muscles	Locked knees (often accompanying pulled in back)

See Relaxing on page 13 for more information on the proper posture.

### Speaking

The two elements of speech are

- Vowels which change the shape of the resonator, but otherwise do not obstruct the airstream, and
- Consonants which form partial or complete barriers to the airstream.

The airstream is further broken up into syllables, which are the rhythm and energy units of speech.

In the theatre the natural tendency to elide, be less definite and to leave words and phrases incomplete needs to be avoided in deference to the audience's need to hear and understand comfortably. Basically this means developing a style that is somewhere between normal conversation and singing.







In particular it means

- Opening the jaw more than normal, and using the nasal cavity to achieve better resonance,
- Increasing the breathing pressure without putting too much emphasis on the unvoiced consonants (making them breathy),
- Articulating more without, over-tensing the speech organs slowing the articulation, causing breathiness in the consonants, or concentrating too much on the consonants, and strangling the vowels.

## ***Breathing Exercises***

- ◆ *Imagine you are a conductor stood in front an orchestra that is about to begin playing. Raise your arms slowly to begin, breathing OUT as you raise them. Just as you are ready, one of the players drops his instrument – drop your arms, breathing in, in the same time. Repeat.*
- ◆ *Blow out imaginary candles at different distances and in different places, focussing on the position of the candle. The head and neck should stay relaxed. Balance the amount of air you breath in with the amount you expel – do not suck in too much air, and make sure to release the breathing muscles properly so that you breath in enough air.*

## ***Exercises for Resonance and Pitch and Volume***

- ◆ *Lie on the floor, with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Keeping the neck relaxed and leading with the top of the head, stretch and widen the back. Allow all your joints to relax. In particular, relax the jaw (smile a normal smile) and tongue and breathe out a silent “ah” through the relaxed vocal chords. Repeat three or four times. Place a finger where the jaw joins the neck and feel the change in tension of the tongue root as you slowly change from “ah” to “eeh”*
- ◆ *Lie on the floor, relaxed as described in the last exercise. In particular, relax the jaw (smile a normal smile) and prepare the mouth to say “mah”, with the lips closed but the rest of the mouth open. Try preceding the exercise with a yawn to open the back of the mouth between the soft palate and the root of the tongue. As you breathe out, voice a descending note from the middle of your range, letting it resonate in the mouth and nose. Let the vibrations fill the head and encourage them into the chest – use your hands to feel the vibrations in the skull, breastbone and rib cage. Repeat with each breath, starting with a slightly higher note each time. Loosen the lips into preparation to say “bah”, sensing the voice moving to the hard palate at the front of the mouth, and listening to the change from nasal to more mouth oriented resonance.*
- ◆ *Lie on the floor, relaxed as described in the last exercise. In particular, relax the jaw (smile a normal smile) and prepare the mouth to say “ooh”, with the lips rounded. At low volume, find the note in your normal speaking range (normally low in your range) that resonates through most of your body. Repeat, listening to the quality of the note, and noting the physical sensations, such as where the centre of resonance is, which parts of you are resonating and how the breathing is affected. Start changing the pitch of the note up and down as high as you can while staying relaxed, keeping the volume constant and preserving as much of the resonance as possible. As you move up and down through your range, note the point where the voice moves from the chest register to the head register, resting for a while on the ‘break’ note. Use a finger in front of your mouth to check for unnecessary air leakage. The finger should be warmed, but not feel any draught. Repeat for an extended “eeh”, then “oh” and “aah”*
- ◆ *Use the following words to explore the changes from chest to head ranges of pitch and resonance:*
  - *WHY?* (to express “explain again”) 
  - *WHERE?* (to express “I can’t see it”) 
  - *I CAN’T DO THAT!* (to express “how ridiculous of you to suggest I could”) 
  - *WHO?* (to express “that’s outrageous”) 
  - *CUTHBERT!* (to express “How dare you”) 
- ◆ *Say the word “miaow” slowly. Repeat, feeling the sound travel from the back to the front of the mouth. Repeat, increasing the pitch range and feeling the resonance move from the nose down to the chest. Use the ‘finger test’ to make sure that no breath is escaping.*
- ◆ *Sing a song, (using only the vowel sounds if you can), imitating the sounds of different instruments.*
- ◆ *Say any nursery rhyme so that every line is consistently loud from start to finish, but alternate whispering, quiet, medium and loud with each line.*



- ◆ *Breathe in deeply and exhale through relaxed vocal chords with your mouth open to produce an “ah”, increase the volume slightly then hold it as long as you can. As soon as the volume feels comfortable and easy, increase it a little.  
Go up and down the scale. The tone should pass from the chest, through the throat directly and unimpeded into the room.  
Repeat with slowly opening “mah”, “lah”, “bah”, “dah” and “kah”.  
If you get a frog in your throat, ease it and release it gently!*
- ◆ *Using the phrases “How are you?”, and “Hey! You over there!”, give yourself a variety of motivations that require you to use the phrase at increasing volume levels.  
Make sure that you have your breathing under control.  
Use the ‘finger test’ to guard against air leakage.*

### ***Exercises for Speech and Pronunciation***

- ◆ *For the jaw:  
Open the jaw until you can insert a couple of fingers between the teeth. Relax the muscles in the face.  
Let this stretching develop into a yawn.*
- ◆ *For the lips:  
Alternately stretch the bottom lip to touch the top and top lip to touch the bottom.  
Next rapidly open and close the lips to make a popping sound.  
Change alternately from wide grin to tight pout and back.  
Keeping the lips closed, open the jaw as far as you can (keeping the tongue relaxed).  
Repeat the following:
 
  - *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.  
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers  
where’s the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?*
  - *Peggy Babcock**
- ◆ *To strengthen the tongue:  
With the mouth relaxed, move the tongue into position to say “aah” and then “eeh” alternately.  
Stick the tongue out between the teeth, and without touching the teeth widen and point the tongue alternately.  
Breathing through your nose, using the tip of the tongue, touch the centre of the top lip, the centre of the bottom lip, the centre of the hard palate and then the left and right corners of the mouth.  
Repeat the following:
 
  - *Red leather, yellow leather.*
  - *Red lorry, yellow lorry.**
- ◆ *Go through the consonants from B to Z (including the double ones like Br, Dr, Tr, Thr, Pr, Cl, Shl, Gl, Pl, St, and so on) combined with the vowel sounds ay, ee, i, ow, oo, aw, ah.  
For example: “Bay, Bee, Bi, Bow, Boo, Baw, Bah”*
- ◆ *Do tongue twisters – particularly for the consonants you find difficult:
 
  - *Six thick thistle-sticks.  
Or  
Theophilus Thistler, the thistle sifter, in sifting a sieve of unsifted thistles, thrust three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumb.*
  - *The shrewd shrew sold Sarah seven silver fish slices.*
  - *Amidst the mist of smoking frosts,  
with stoutest wrists and loudest boasts,  
he thrust his fists against the posts  
and still insists he sees the ghosts.*
  - *Betty bought a bit of butter, but she found the butter bitter, so Betty bought a bit of better butter to make the bitter butter better.*
  - *“Do daring deeds! Do damage!” demanded Doctor Doolittle.*
  - *Five flippant Frenchmen fly from France for fashions.*
  - *How has Harry hastened so hurriedly from the hunt.*
  - *James just jostled Jean gently.*
  - *Keencut cutlery cuts keenest and cleanest of all. Keencut cutlery.*
  - *Lucy lingered; looking longingly for her lost lap dog.*
  - *Quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly.  
(To be done quickly!)*
  - *Two toads, totally tired, trying to trot to Tewkesbury.*
  - *Vera valued the valley violets.**
- ◆ *For rolled and unrolled ‘r’ sounds:
 
  - *Round the rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran.*
  - *Reading and writing are richly rewarding.**

To check your 'aw's:

- *I ought to call and Dawley Hall  
where my friend Paul, who is not tall,  
has had a fall from off a wall.  
His sister Maud has bought a shawl:  
I can't afford a shawl at all.*

To check your 'oh's:

- *Golden in the garden, golden in the glen,  
Golden, golden, golden September's here again.  
Golden in the tree tops, golden in the sky,  
Golden, golden, golden September's going by.*

And for general practice:

- *I am the very pattern of a modern Major-General  
I've information vegetable, animal and mineral;  
I know the Kings of England, and I quote the fights historical,  
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical;  
I'm very well acquainted too with matters mathematical,  
I understand equations, both the simple and quadratical,  
About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o' news,  
With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse.  
I'm very good at integral and differential calculus;  
I know the scientific names of beings animalculous.  
In short, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,  
I am the very model of a modern Major General.*

- ◆ For general vocal development,
  - *Read aloud children's stories, developing distinct vocal characterisations for the characters involved.*
  - *Sing.*

## Movement

Movement communicates personality and motivation, and reinforces the dramatic action. It defines components of character, such as nationality/ethnicity, environment, temperament/personality, age/health, profession, masculinity/femininity, and the historical period.

The components of movement are:

- ⇒ Direction.  
Can be stylised into a grid to indicate emphasis.  
Can be an indication of intention.
- ⇒ Speed.  
Can be used to indicate emotional state.
- ⇒ Duration.  
Can be used to indicate the power of motivation, or emotional state.
- ⇒ Intensity.  
Expressed by force, muscular tension and concentration indicates dramatic tension, emotional tension or personality.
- ⇒ Rhythm.  
Signifies personality and emotional state.

## Gestures

“Gesture must always precede speech. In fact, speech is reflected expression. It must come after gesture, which is parallel with the impression received. Nature incites a movement, speech names this movement. Speech is only the title, the label of what gesture has anticipated. Speech comes only to confirm what the audience already comprehends. Speech is given for naming things. Gesture asks the question, “What?” and speech answers. Gesture after the answer would be absurd.”

(Delsarte, quoted in Zorn 1968, 159-60)

### *Exercises for Movement, Posture and Gesture*

- ◆ *Stand.*  
*Relax your shoulders, arms and hands so that your hands hang slightly forward at your sides.*  
*Make sure your stance is neither too wide nor too narrow, and that your feet are turned out just a little.*  
*Relax your head and neck and make sure your head is level, and stays level even when you look right and left.*
- ◆ *Look at your hands.*  
*They should be relaxed, with all the fingers equally slightly curved and slightly separated – the power should travel down the arm toward the hand getting slightly less as it goes.*
- ◆ *Walk.*  
*Don't hold anything or put your hands in your pockets so your arms swing naturally and in a relaxed manner.*  
*Keep your head level.*
- ◆ *Practice different stances.*  
*Practice particularly stances where your hands are not symmetrical.*
- ◆ *Stand and recite a speech/nursery rhyme/poem/...*  
*Do it without moving at all.*  
*Repeat it allowing yourself to gesture (as necessary) with one arm and hand.*  
*Repeat it allowing yourself to gesture (as necessary) with the other arm and hand.*  
*Repeat it allowing yourself to gesture (as necessary) with both, but asymmetrically (one can mimic or echo the other, though).*  
*Repeat it allowing yourself to walk around too (as necessary).*
- ◆ *Moving About*  
*Improvise, write and learn a scene to incorporate lots of moves around the place, using as many objects as possible. Do the scenes as quickly as possible, without pausing.*
- ◆ *Standing about*  
*Improvise, write and learn a duologue for standing around, as on a street corner, without holding anything or hiding your hands. Play it on a street corner, on a walk, in a queue, or in a room.*

## Miscellaneous Exercises

### ***Improvising***

*The lead up story should be as comprehensive as possible and finish just before the moment of the inevitable clash. There should be no new facts about past lives introduced during the improvisation, so that the clash is a question of will against will and not about inventing dialogue.*

### ***Exercising Telephone Conversations***

*Improvise or write both sides of the conversation.*

- ◆ *Play it*
  - *Talking at the same time as each other.*
  - *Interrupting each other.*
  - *Laughing at something the other person has said.*
  - *Being distracted by something else happening in the room you are in.*
- ◆ *Then perform the two sides separately.*

## EXPLORING THE SCRIPT

“...remember, for all time, that when you begin to study each role you should first gather all the materials that have any bearing on it, and supplement them with more and more imagination, until you have achieved such a similarity to life that it is easy to believe in what you are doing. In the beginning, forget about your feelings. When the inner conditions are prepared, and right, feelings will come to the surface of their own accord.”

(Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*)

If you whole-heartedly embrace the character's circumstances as though they were your own, and if you devote your physical and mental energies to satisfying the character's needs, you can trust yourself to behave spontaneously and truthfully, thus telling the character's story and, in the process, revealing the character.

Creativity springs from the tension between limitations (medium / writer / director / setting / performers / costume).

⇒ Trust the writing.

⇒ Remember: "Less is more."

The preparation is your safety net, make sure you have a net you can trust, and then you can fly.

## **Defining the Circumstances**

During the first readings you need to determine how the characters experience things, to store impressions, and to gather intuitive knowledge.

⇒ Illuminate the character. Do not judge.

⇒ Set the CHARACTER'S mind in motion.

Define the environment - The physical setting, the history, and the attitudes.

Research the novel, the real person (meet them or watch videos if you can). Find out about their job and their environment.

Make sure you know your character's "running conditions", their history, facts, intentions and wants. Develop a biography with parents, siblings and friends. Know the home and school and workplace. Know the dates of birth, leaving school, getting married, parent's deaths. Work out what world events they have known, what books they have read, songs they have heard, dances they have danced, what fashions they have seen.

Everyone believes their actions are justified – selfish people think they are prudent; greedy people, deserving; arrogant people, superior – determine your point of view - your assumptions about how the world works, your belief system, the framework in which you operate. This must be something you believe in, something internal, and it must be anchored in events in your character life.

Accept the similarities between yourself and your character, and alter what is different. Exaggerate the differences at first (age, accent, background, speech patterns, vocabulary, period, job, intelligence, and instincts) until they can take care of themselves.

Give yourself choices filled with vivid detail and link them closely enough to your own experience to have emotional heat. Just as events in your actual past influence your experience of your actual now, what you experienced in your imaginary past has to colour your perception of what happens to your imaginary now. Trust your character's memory of the events that you have imagined for him/her. Then, when you are playing, you can direct your physical and mental energies toward solving the character's problems. Trust that the appropriate mental images will be automatically triggered by the events that occur in the character's present moments. Load your emotional landscape with "remember when's" and then you can be certain that when you cross that terrain you will set off some blasts – do not try to generate spontaneous emotions.

However to make sure you don't end up insulating yourself from what is happening to you on-stage, have the discipline to do the preparation, and the courage to throw it away – otherwise you would eliminate action and guarantee dull acting.

(In certain circumstances, when your imagination of the character's past is insufficient, it is a good idea to substitute your own experiences, or those of people or specific models you have observed, for those that make up the character's given circumstances.)

## Discovering the Action

Dramatic action is what people **do** to one another - it is what **happens**.

There is always action AND reaction. There must be a recipient, an object, of your action.

Emotions are by-products of the actions. The purpose is to stimulate the unconscious, not to analyse the script.

At each point, you need to determine

- ⇒ the circumstances at the beginning
- ⇒ the dramatic action
- ⇒ the new information revealed

Always begin the scene from the character's point of innocence. Forget everything your character learns during the action.

Ignoring or denying revelations is a way of eliminating the obstacles in a character's path. When you eliminate obstacles in a scene you create a smooth, uninteresting road for your character and smooth, uninteresting viewing for the audience.

You must be willing to go through what the character must experience (after making sure you have not judged the character or denied the characters revelations)?

### Ask the right questions.

- Who am I?
- Where am I?
- What time is it?
- Who am I talking to?
- What happened to me before the scene?
- Who are all these people we talk about?
- What are all these events we refer to?
- What is my point of view, or how do I think the world works?

## Discovering the Revelations

To truthfully play the moment as a revelation, you must identify what you learn during the action, then set up in you character mind an expectation of the opposite.

Pose questions as the character, not as the performer talking about the character.

As the action moves along, revelations alter a character's outlook. These revelations include the information learnt about the other characters, the people referred to, and yourself and your feelings about the other characters. This altered perspective produces corrective action. Make your revelations potent by endowing them with genuine significance: Humiliation, fear, rage, disgust, joy, or love.

Get the action into your body – remembering that when necessary, you must also make sure not to reveal these reactions. find a metaphor to discover the poetic reality of the scene, then allow those images to feed your imagination, to produce a highly individualised literal reality.

### *Intention or Objective*

- Why do you say that, to that person, now?
- What is my intention or objective?
- What do I need or what must I get from the other character?
- How do I feel about the other character?

The intention must be “on-stage”. Focus on your immediate needs, not forgetting that sometimes your objectives can be ridiculous, or doomed to failure.

### *Stakes and obstacles*

- What are the stakes?
- What will happen if I fail? What will I gain if I succeed?
- What are the obstacles?
- Identify internal, external and remote obstacles (i.e. obstacles not explicit in the scene).

## Testing Your Choices

Don't get bogged down looking for the right answers, just the best ones.

The search itself involves you in the character's thoughts and provides you with something specific upon which you can focus your attention.

Make sure all your choices are stated in the first person.

Make sure your answers produce definite emotional responses that you can feel in your body.

Make sure you can describe your actions with active verbs?

Make sure you have made choices that will cause you to monitor the actions, thoughts and feelings of the other characters.

Find the action, purpose, desire and passion in the scene.

Commit to discovering, and then overcoming, every possible obstacle that stands between you and what you want in the scene

Make choices that clarify the conflict.

Imagine the worst possible scenario.

Keep it short and simple.

When all else fails, consider the "I'm right and you're wrong, and when I can just change your mind and get you to agree with me, we can work this out", "Getting to know you", and "I've got a secret" scenarios.

## Creating a Character

Emotions are by-products of action, actions are the results of needs, and needs arise out of circumstances, therefore pay attention, during preparation, to what you can manage: circumstances and actions IN THAT ORDER!

Circumstances + Action = Character

- ⇒ Immerse yourself in the character's given circumstances, surrender to the character's needs
- ⇒ Commit to play the character's action - Lend the character your mind, body and heart.

Digest what other characters say about you, how they behave towards you, and what you say about them.

Play the actions suggested by the qualities. You say and do things because you think you ought to, or to elicit a particular response, or to try and mask something else. Know the transitive verb for what you are doing (flirting with somebody, threatening somebody, provoking somebody...) – playing the action of a line means using this transitive verb, rather than demonstrating the words. The audience should discover the action, rather than being told it.

## Develop Springboards

Allow props, costumes, tone of voice, feet, ... to stimulate your unconscious.

## Don't Make the Job Difficult

Trust and belief will direct your unconscious to tap into the "you" that is needed for the role. Allow the character to push aside your own needs.

Experience all the mental and physical action as though these things were happening not to someone else, but to you - It is about abandonment, not analysis

## Always Act in Your Own Person

"You should never allow yourself any exception to the rule of using your own feelings. To break that rule is the equivalent of killing the person you are portraying, because you deprive him of a palpitating, living, human soul, which is the real source of life for a part."

(Stanislawski)

## Your Body Doesn't Lie

The only feelings you have to work with are the feelings you are actually experiencing at this moment. Don't manipulate your body to show your emotions.

Never concern yourself with what you need to feel in a scene, only with what you need to do!

- Place yourself inside the character's skin and experience the emotions.
- Remember that there is a difference between emotional response (mad, glad, sad, afraid, hurt, loving, surprised, ashamed, or disgusted) and your intellectual adjustments (affected attitudes: hostile, sarcastic, approval-seeking, contemptuous, bored, etc.) to those feelings.
- Leave it up to the audience to interpret and label the feelings.

## Checklist

- ⇒ Have you defined your character's circumstances? (Defining the Circumstances on page 21)
- ⇒ Have you identified the action? (Discovering the Action on page 22)
- ⇒ Have you done all your work in the first person?
- ⇒ Are your choices emotionally stimulating?
- ⇒ Have you judged the character?
- ⇒ Have you judged the material?
- ⇒ Have you remained flexible?  
Ah-hahs that occur in playing and by contributions from the director should be viewed as springboards, not straitjackets.

## Learning the Lines

Don't separate learning the lines from the rest of the process.  
Learn through interest, not by rote.

Have the discipline to learn the words, and the courage to forget them - trust that the words are imbedded in your character-mind, you will know them "when you get there"!

Bear in mind that most sentences only have one stress.

### Create a Textured Surface

Create detailed 'remember when's - let the emotional response trigger the words, even if the trigger is not immediately obvious (seeming non-sequiters).

For narration "realise" what you describe - see, hear, relive, recall.

Even if you forget specific words, remember the flow and the sense.

Try using (though not memorising) your own words to establish contact.

Avoid fixed patterns in learning lines that tie the words to a particular emotion or context.



## GENERAL RULES FOR REHEARSING AND PLAYING

- ⇒ Always arrive early, never late
- ⇒ Take your acting seriously, but don't talk about it unless absolutely necessary, and above all, don't brag or bitch.
- ⇒ Be positive and cheerful. Share your **GOOD** ideas.
- ⇒ If you are acting, don't become a director.
- ⇒ If you are directing, provide a solid idea of the structure for the actors to act within, but allow enough freedom for the actors to develop their own characters and ideas.  
Directing should start by being descriptive and emotive, enabling the actors and feeding their confidence. Then, as you have earned their trust, be selective (rather than prescriptive) and, finally, technical.

## **EARLY REHEARSALS**

Carefully listen to the direction or criticism you are given and incorporate the suggestions that are right for you into what you are already doing. Although you will be tempted, never throw out everything and start again. Every thought you have is a direction you give yourself (make sure that they are character thoughts you are thinking).

The very first rehearsals should establish the relationships between the characters rather than details or blocking. It is important to avoid staring at the script – the actors should see and listen to one another – the script should not be gripped with both hands as some sort of life-vest, action cues should be used in preference to word cues. In addition don't start memorising the text before the relationships and the rough settings are known.

## **Blocking**

This involves making sure the performers can be seen by the audience, getting the characters in and out of the performance space, communicating through visual composition, communicating character relationships, motivations and emotions, providing emphasis, and representing the kinetic style of the performance.

There are four principal distances people use from one another: intimate, personal, social and public. These are established according to variables such as personality, emotional attitude, territoriality and interpersonal relationship.

Emphasis is achieved by manipulating a number of elements:

- ⇒ Body position: The more a performer faces the audience, the greater their emphasis.
- ⇒ Relative positioning of performers
- ⇒ Position in acting area: the centre and the front have greater emphasis, as do positions close to central elements of the setting.
- ⇒ Levels: height brings emphasis.
- ⇒ Isolation: isolating a performer increases the emphasis on them.
- ⇒ Eye focus: the audience will look where the performers are looking.
- ⇒ Colour: performers clothed in brighter costumes will have greater emphasis.
- ⇒ Lighting: area colour and intensity increases emphasis.
- ⇒ Movement: moving characters are emphasised.
- ⇒ Speaking: the character speaking gains emphasis.

### **Practical Considerations when Blocking**

- The blocking must make sense as part of what is happening on the stage, rather than as mechanical choreography.
- Characters should have a left and right hand anchor (people, things) to give them opportunities to turn their head, and to make/emphasise points by turning. Make sure the "Think-line" (where one looks when not looking at other characters) is visible to the audience.
- What is being done now must be right for what is being done now AND for what is going to be done next.
- Thoughts do not arrange themselves neatly into sentences, they continue before and after sentences. Use these continuations to pause and move.
- Feet should be relaxed and performers should always have more breath than they need.
- Once someone has started talking about something, they do not need to maintain their connection to that thing any more.
- Use movements to reinforce new thoughts.
- "Have" the idea before starting to move.
- Even moves that are clichéd can be rescued by giving them some sort of practical excuse.
- There is no need to match the speed of the movement to the speed of the thoughts/words.
- Refer to things that are outside the set by looking or gesturing.
- Performers should not be afraid to turn their backs.

## **FURTHER REHEARSALS**

Remind yourself of the story line.

Know what leads into a scene, and how it continues after the action stops.

Know what launches you into speaking, and what you would have said if the next character hadn't interrupted you.

Consider the (always unspoken) other words that are part of your lines.

## **Keeping Spontaneous**

Make sure you know which are the easy things you have to say (habitual phrases, things you know, small talk, things which require no switch of attention or mood), and the difficult things to say (new ideas, hesitations, things you are trying to clarify).

"It's a lifetime's work, learning to be careless".

Try changing the weight or speed at which the character acts and reacts, or playing the character as a particular animal in order to start you rethinking about the character and their emotional, physical and vocal characterisation.

### *Forget*

Carefully.

### *Feel for Words*

Including back-tracking to include words that add emphasis ("I'm distressed...very distressed")

### *New Move on a New Thought*

Using the energy of the new thought.

### *Interrupted Actions/Overlaps/Secondary Tasks*

React when it is right to react, even if you are just about to sip a drink, or if the other character is still talking.

Similarly, even if you are just about to say something vitally important, you can be subject to interruptions that cannot be ignored.

### *Idea, Conformation of Idea, Utterance of Idea*

Or: Look, Move, Speak – see the objects, indicate them, speak about them.

## **Tips and Tricks**

- ⇒ Make sure the first scene is bombproof.
- ⇒ Do not always demonstrate what you are already saying – play the opposite.
- ⇒ Don't be over emphatic, don't explain the text – be monotonous!
- ⇒ Telephone Conversations:  
Invent and write down what the other person says. Leave enough time for them to say it. Interrupt them and let them interrupt you. Talk over them.
- ⇒ Do Not Cheat:  
Write what needs to be written, read what needs to be read.
- ⇒ Know where you are making your entrances. Know where you exiting to. Include appropriate actions.
- ⇒ Breathe in before you drink. Be appropriately (and not binary) drunk.
- ⇒ Eat the easiest food, and in small quantities.

- ⇒ Do something while your hand rests on a switch (to give the technician time to react).
- ⇒ Drunkenness and tiredness can cover rapid mood changes.  
Jollity and laughter can (speed up and) cover clichés.
- ⇒ During duologues, do not stare one another out. Use the area around the eyes – hair, hairline, brow, mouth, neck, or around the head.
- ⇒ When you have to be hot or cold or tired select a place (neck, shoulder...) and be hot, cold, tired there.
- ⇒ Do not tell an acting partner what you need, make them do it – do not wait for a line to tell you to stay, if it doesn't come, leave!

## **Tips for Comedy**

The truth comes before the comedy.

- ⇒ Speak clearly and brightly.
- ⇒ Don't fade out at the end of sentences.
- ⇒ Keep the rhythm of the lines (otherwise the time to laugh is not clear)
- ⇒ Don't be slow.
- ⇒ Exaggerate nothing, except the emotion.
- ⇒ Don't try to be funny. Do know what is funny about the funny bits.
- ⇒ Be as relaxed as possible.

## **Personal Rehearsals**

Rehearse at home too, to escape the pressure of rehearsing with others.

- ⇒ Use the mirror to check things out.
- ⇒ Practice lines that you tend to fluff as if they were tongue twisters.
- ⇒ For difficult passages, put it in your own words and improvise for a while, before returning to the original text.

## **Reality Tests**

Go through the words of your part, but change the circumstances – do it while dusting, or while washing the dishes from the other room.

Try saying the whole part as to your oldest friend.

Tell the story of the scenes, including your own lines, and those of the other characters that you can remember, to a third person.

## FINAL REHEARSALS

In the final rehearsals, more than ever you need to bear the audience in mind. One particular aspect of this involves projecting the piece as a whole to the audience. This involves improving the vocal projection, but also upping the emotional pitch of the piece, bearing in mind that in the final performance this is not something that is done **for** the audience, it done **with** them.

To help with this process, try run-throughs with the following variations:

### *Pace*

Play it faster than necessary. Only take your time when you absolutely have to.

### *The Four Varieties*

Speed, pitch, volume and tone: vary them.

### *Don't Pause*

A pause is only justified when it is more interesting than the author's next line. Try using the four varieties instead to communicate the changes.

Never pause if it leaves a natural opening for another character to move in where they shouldn't.

### *Give the Scene to the Other Actor*

Concentrate on the other people rather than yourself. This is what you actually do in everyday life.

Acting is like tennis, and when it is not your turn, do not distract from whoever who's turn it is.

### *Relax*

Be aware of, and counteract tensions that may have built up in difficult scenes.

### *Do a Rehearsal for Something*

- For total personal involvement
- For listening
- For spontaneity
- For sense of place, surroundings, heat, cold...
- For speed
- For urgency

## THE PERFORMANCE

Relax, and enjoy it!

Nervous tension, has to do with the fear of revealing one's SELF.

Take the hurdles as they come – do not anticipate disaster.

## Warming Up

This warm up is purely to refresh the groundwork of the rehearsals, not to augment it.

- ⇒ Begin by relaxing and disposing of the stresses of the day previous to this. Relax the body, and let the spirit follow it:
  - ◆ *Lie on the floor, with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Keeping the neck relaxed and leading with the top of the head, stretch and widen the back.  
Allow all your joints to relax.  
Take a deep breath and exhale slowly, empty your lungs, then hold for five to ten seconds and then allow your lungs to fill naturally.  
Repeat three or four times.*
  - ◆ *Relax the jaw (smile a normal smile) and prepare the mouth to say “mah”, with the lips closed but the rest of the mouth open. Try preceding the exercise with a yawn to open the back of the mouth between the soft palate and the root of the tongue.  
As you breathe out, voice a note from the middle of your range, letting it resonate in the mouth and nose.  
Let the vibrations fill the head and encourage them into the chest – use your hands to feel the vibrations in the skull, breastbone and rib cage.  
Repeat with each breath.  
Loosen the lips into preparation to say “bah”, sensing the voice moving to the hard palate at the front of the mouth, and listening to the change from nasal to more mouth oriented resonance.*
  - ◆ *Now start moving around to get the circulation and breathing going.*
  - ◆ *Blow out imaginary candles at different distances and in different places, focussing on the position of the candle.  
The head and neck should stay relaxed.  
Balance the amount of air you breath in with the amount you expel – do not suck in too much air, and make sure to release the breathing muscles properly so that you breath in enough air.*
- ⇒ The next stage of the warm up is getting a feel for the theatre and how to project to the audience:
  - ◆ *While moving around the performance area, repeat the phrase “How are you?” and try to fill the theatre with it.  
Pay particular attention to the effects of the performance space on your projection, and maintain an awareness of the back row of the audience.  
Follow this by walking and talking in character, to attune both body and voice the job of projecting the character.*
- ⇒ The final stage of the warm up should strengthen the team spirit of the company.
  - ◆ *Stand in pairs facing one another.  
Maintaining eye to eye contact all the time, one person moves and the other person mirrors their movement.  
Start slowly and get faster gradually.*
  - ◆ *One person makes a mechanical, repeated movement with accompanying noise. One at a time, everybody else should join in, adding their own new movement and noise to the already established movements.*
  - ◆ *Starting at a note that is comfortable for everybody, sing a simple canon, with some form of “dance”. For example “Row, row, row your boat...” with accompanying rowing motion.*

## Staying in Character

Staying in character simply means concerning yourself with character needs rather than performer needs. The performer needs should be automatic, like driving a car.

Failure to do this is a failure of concentration or imagination.

If you are doing comedy, you will need to sense the house and whether they sufficiently warmed up? And come in with the next line as the laughter is dying. Do not wait for it to end.

Play the dramatic action and let the part play you.

## Bad Nights

When in doubt make sure the character concerns are more compelling, immediate and visceral than the performer concerns.

- Take another look at what the character has at stake.
- Go home and do some script exploration to refresh everything.  
Imagine new character complications.  
Imagine telling the 'villain' what you think of him/her for getting you into this mess.
- Endow a prop with character connections. In problem situations connect with that prop.
- Pretend the next night is just a rehearsal.
- Perform the next night “For Something”; (see “Do a Rehearsal for Something”).
- Play the opposite of the tips given for Comedy in “Final Rehearsals”.

## Tips for Filming

- ⇒ Don't blink in close ups.
- ⇒ Practice hitting your marks.
- ⇒ Move more slowly when the camera is close.
- ⇒ Talk to the camera side of the person you are talking to.

## Tips for Radio

- ⇒ Be sensitive to the effect of the various extraneous sounds, such as breathing, paper rustling, noisy clothes, jewellery or shoes (and whether they should or should not be heard).
- ⇒ Make sure you have water, out of the microphone area, to combat dryness of the mouth.
- ⇒ Remove any parts of the script you do not need.
- ⇒ Know how far you should be from the microphone.
- ⇒ Make appropriate noises to support the “action”.
- ⇒ Get to know in advance (if possible) the sound affects over which you need to talk over or to which you need to react.
- ⇒ Get involved in the action – feel the movement – to ensure that the sound does not become too cerebral.
- ⇒ For talks, imagine talking to one specific person, rather than the public at large.
- ⇒ If you are writing a script, dictate rather than write it to avoid written diction and formulation.

## SOME THOUGHTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

By which is meant the physical and psychological experiences surrounding the viewing.  
This includes such items as

- ⇒ The location of the theatre.
- ⇒ The lobby of the theatre, and how it has been prepared to create a mood that reflects the performance.
- ⇒ The use of the theatre space, including how the audience enters it (and how long before the beginning of the performance they enter it), how the seating is arranged, the location and size of the stage, and how the performers and audience are separated.
- ⇒ The intellectual, historical and social knowledge brought to the performance
- ⇒ The Script
- ⇒ Other performances of the play
- ⇒ Anticipation
  - The theatre group's reputation.
  - The director's reputation.
  - The performer's reputation.
  - The designer's reputation.
  - Reviews (and the critic's reputation).
  - The advertising, marketing material and media coverage.
  - The cost of admission.
- ⇒ The pre-performances time
  - Whether the stage is visible (to begin the decoding process)
  - Light levels – high to encourage observation and conversation, low to encourage introspection or solemnity.
  - The socio-economic background, the size and the mix of the audience as well as their concentration level and willingness to interact.

The size of the audience, as well as things like applause, talking, movement, gestures, sound and laughter also communicate things about the audience to the performers. Absolute stillness during a performance indicates deep attentiveness.



## SOME THOUGHTS ON VISUAL DESIGN

The basic elements of visual design are line, form, mass, colour, unity, balance and rhythm.

The visual design provides the structure within which the actors act.

### **Makeup, Hairstyle and Costume**

Makeup and hairstyle provide information about

- ⇒ Ethnicity, nationality or race
- ⇒ Age
- ⇒ Health
- ⇒ Environment
- ⇒ Profession
- ⇒ Temperament/Personality/Emotions

In addition, costume can be used to determine

- ⇒ Historical period
- ⇒ Geographical location
- ⇒ Socio-economic conditions
- ⇒ Time of day or year
- ⇒ Atmosphere
- ⇒ Pageantry
- ⇒ Profession/occupation
- ⇒ Femininity/masculinity
- ⇒ Age
- ⇒ Emphasis

### **Setting and Picturization**

The purposes of the scene design are to set:

- ⇒ Historical period
- ⇒ Geographical location
- ⇒ Exact place (bedroom, battlefield...)
- ⇒ Level of society
- ⇒ Time of day, year...
- ⇒ Weather
- ⇒ Atmosphere
- ⇒ Emphasis
- ⇒ Visual Style

### **Lighting**

As part of the setting, the lighting has a number of aspects worth bearing in mind. Apart from visibility, you can use the lighting to sculpt space through highlight, shadow and colour. It can be used for mood – bright light signifies daytime, happiness, aggressiveness, celebration, comedy, energy, and so on; dark lighting signifies night, sorrow, submissiveness, fear, sleepiness, dullness.

Emphasis is achieved through focussing light, by relative intensity, by contrasting colour, by movement, or by the lighting direction – objects lit from the front and above are emphasised.

## SOME THOUGHTS ON AURAL DESIGN

As with all the other elements of design, the aural design can be used for

- ⇒ Historical period
- ⇒ Geographical location
- ⇒ Socio-economic conditions
- ⇒ Geographical location
- ⇒ Exact place (bedroom, battlefield...)
- ⇒ Weather
- ⇒ Time of day or year
- ⇒ Character's Temperament/Personality/Emotions
- ⇒ Atmosphere
- ⇒ Emphasis

In addition, sounds and music can be used to signify

- ⇒ Offstage activity
- ⇒ Framing effects – to set context
- ⇒ Underscoring the dramatic action
- ⇒ Transitions between scenes, actions, events, characters and emotional shifts.
- ⇒ Specific cues, in the form of required music, spot effects and ambience.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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