



Showcase - Dramatic Interpretation

In our Showcase: Dramatic Interpretation video, Hall of Fame coach Meg Howell-Haymaker outlines some of the steps needed to take in order to create an effective dramatic performance.



INTRODUCTION

Too often, coaches and students skip from script selection to round one of a tournament without having done some of the preparation work needed to develop a rich performance. Certainly, the majority of the performance and the “fun” part of rehearsal comes after memorization and trial and error. But without some of the pre-work Howell-Haymaker outlines, those practice sessions usually happen without a guide or a plan. The following tips will help a coach and performer make the most out of the rehearsal and performance process.

ROLES



THE PRODUCER – *Choosing the Script*

- Read at least 10 different options before settling on one. Even if you feel like you have found “the perfect piece,” you want to be sure this is the one you want to choose.
- Don’t dismiss pieces on first reading unless they are beyond the performer’s range or could be offensive to the audience. Remember to visualize what the director and designer could do.
- Drama selections can be found in plays, short stories, non-fiction essays, memoirs, biographies, and other first-person accounts. Make sure you have read selections from various sources to expand your options.



THE DRAMATURGE – *Researching the Script*

TOP TIP: Don’t skip this step. Even if the setting of your script is in your hometown, from this year, from a performer your age...there is *always* something to research.

- The dramaturge role can help with visualizations. Find pictures of where the script is set, research restaurants, climate, social events. What are some of the routines your character(s) would have gone through? What are some of the positive and negative interactions they would have had?
- If the setting is fictional—that is, in an environment that is mystical or magical—find artwork that might represent that location and create your own routines for what the characters might have experienced.
- How does the setting (time, location, environment) add to what the character wants/does not want the most? What role does this play in the climax of your selection?



THE DIRECTOR

- The best director is not alone. For each performance, it is best to have a *team* of directors to make sure you are checking each other's blind spots. Sometimes we feel as if what we say or do makes perfect sense. And sometimes it does! But sometimes we are not as clear as we think we might be and need some honest feedback to help us.
- When cutting your selection, follow the plot structure. Depending on the length of the selection, you might be creating a new work from the original work. A lot like a sculpture, you are chipping away the pieces of clay to find a new piece of work.
- Don't assume people know what you know! You may have read the full work, but if you add a reference to something that was cut, the audience won't get it. You have a strict time limit and sometimes that means cutting out some very powerful moments.



THE DESIGNER

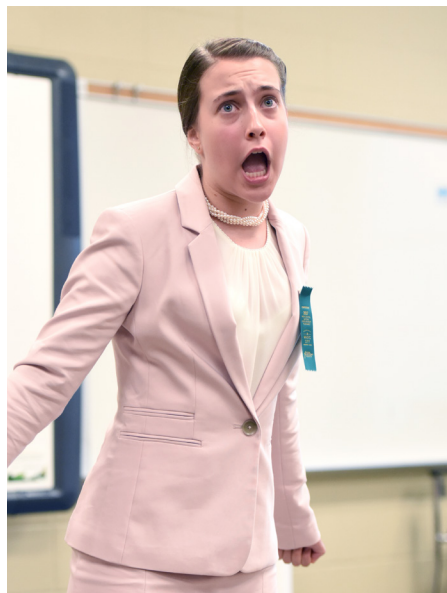
- Remember that there are no state or national rules that govern the way you rehearse! So...get weird and wacky! Go into your theater department's costume shop and prop room. Go to a thrift store and buy what you would need to make this a stage production. Dress up, put the props around you, cast teammates to be the supporting roles. Improvise scenes that may not be in the script. There are no rules and no restrictions for your imagination here as you make it your goal to feel and see what the character would feel and see.
- With this process, take vigorous notes as to your observations. No matter how big or small, these notes can help you when you feel in a rut or are exhausted at a tournament. Re-reading these right before a round is a great way to put the actor in a tremendous frame of mind.



THE ACTOR

- This may seem obvious, but *never stop learning acting*. Beyond the script you have chosen to perform, it is critical that you also study acting. When you see a great performance (live, on television, or at a tournament), ask yourself what it was about that performance that moved you. Ask questions about what you observed and what you wondered about the process.
- This also may seem obvious, but *never stop rehearsing*. Even after winning a tournament, there is always room to improve your performance. And, the best way to improve is...to review the process. Go back and make sure this is the best version of the script for you. Research more of the environment and settings for your character. Find different props or costumes to rehearse with. Videotape yourself and analyze your own acting skills!

One of the best aspects of our activity is that performance is a process. We don't have a one-time performance, but rather a series of performances that allow us to reflect and revise. Up until the National Tournament, keep cycling through these roles to make sure that you have the best, most prepared performance possible!



CREDIT: Icons by the Noun Project. Artists: Hea Poh Lin, Monkik, ProSymbols, and Smalllike.