

Classical Audition Speeches

BA (Hons) Acting — AY2627 — Suggestions

Candidates should choose material that feels age-appropriate for them and that they feel prepared to explore honestly. Please note that speeches are not restricted by the gender of the character as originally written — candidates are actively encouraged to choose a speech based on what interests or excites them, regardless of their own sex or gender. The most important thing is finding a speech that feels genuinely enticing to explore, not matching gender to character.

Whilst candidates are welcome to explore whichever character they wish, they will be expected to have read the full play and to understand the context in which the speech sits — what has just happened, what the character wants, and what they are doing in this moment.

The brief synopses and context notes below are intended only as a starting point, to help candidates identify material that interests them before reading the play in full.

A Midsummer Night's Dream — Helena, Act 1, Scene 1

Play synopsis: *Two pairs of young lovers flee into an enchanted forest near Athens, where fairy mischief and magical potions throw their affections into chaos before order — and true love — is restored.*

Speech context: *Alone after her friend Hermia and Hermia's beloved Lysander leave to elope, Helena laments that Demetrius, whom she loves, is instead infatuated with Hermia, and reflects bitterly on the irrationality of love and desire.*

Start: "How happy some o'er other some can be!"

End: "...If I have thanks, it is a dear expense. / But herein mean I to enrich my pain, / To have his sight thither and back again."

Content to consider: *unrequited love, jealousy, and self-deprecation; a plan to betray a friend's confidence for personal gain.*

A Midsummer Night's Dream — Oberon, Act 2, Scene 1

Play synopsis: *Two pairs of young lovers flee into an enchanted forest near Athens, where fairy mischief and magical potions throw their affections into chaos before order — and true love — is restored.*

Speech context: *Oberon, King of the Fairies, describes the secluded bower where his estranged queen Titania sleeps, and instructs Robin to use a magical flower to make her fall in love with the first creature she sees upon waking, as punishment for her defiance.*

Start: "I pray thee give it me."

End: "...But do it when the next thing he espies / May be the lady."

Content to consider: *use of magic to manipulate perception and affection without consent; marital conflict and revenge between Oberon and Titania.*

As You Like It — Rosalind, Act 3, Scene 5

Play synopsis: *Banished to the Forest of Arden, Rosalind disguises herself as a young man and orchestrates the romantic lives of those around her, including her own.*

Speech context: *Disguised as Ganymede, Rosalind intervenes when she witnesses the shepherdess Phoebe cruelly rejecting a devoted suitor, Silvius.*

Start: "And why, I pray you? Who might be your mother..."

End: "...Cry the man mercy, love him, take his offer; / Foul is most foul, being foul to be a scoffer."

Content to consider: *mocking tone towards a suitor; mild references to physical appearance and desirability.*

Hamlet — Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2

Play synopsis: *A Danish prince is charged by his father's ghost to avenge his murder, and spirals into doubt, feigned madness, and delay.*

Speech context: *Alone after watching an actor perform an emotional speech with ease, Hamlet berates himself for his own inaction in avenging his father's murder.*

Start: "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I"

End: "...The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King."

Content to consider: *self-loathing; themes of grief, guilt, and revenge.*

Henry IV Part 1 — Prince Hal, Act 1, Scene 2

Play synopsis: *A wayward prince spends his time among thieves and tavern-dwellers, to the despair of his father the king, whilst rebellion brews across the country.*

Speech context: *Left alone after carousing with his disreputable companions, Prince Hal reveals to the audience that his behaviour is a deliberate strategy to make his eventual reform appear more impressive.*

Start: "I know you all, and will awhile uphold"

End: "...Redeeming time when men think least I will."

Content to consider: *calculated deception of friends for political gain; mild references to drinking/tavern culture.*

Henry IV Part 2 — Rumour, Prologue

Play synopsis: *Following the Battle of Shrewsbury, in which King Henry IV's forces defeated*

the rebel Hotspur, the kingdom remains unstable as further rebellion brews.

Speech context: *Rumour, personified and "painted full of tongues," addresses the audience directly, boasting of its power to spread false reports — and reveals it intends to trick Northumberland into believing his son Hotspur won the battle he actually lost.*

Start: "Open your ears; for which of you will stop"

End: "...And not a man of them brings other news / Than they have learn'd of me: from Rumour's tongues / They bring smooth comforts false, worse than true wrongs."

Content to consider: *deception and manipulation; references to war, though no violence depicted directly.*

Henry VI Part 3 — Queen Margaret, Act 5, Scene 4

Play synopsis: *Set during the Wars of the Roses, rival factions battle for the English crown across a cycle of escalating violence and revenge.*

Speech context: *Despite the capture of King Henry and the death of key allies, Margaret rallies her remaining forces ahead of the Battle of Tewkesbury, refusing to yield to despair.*

Start: "Great lords, wise men ne'er sit and wail their loss"

End: "...Why, is not Oxford here another anchor? / And Somerset another goodly mast? / The friends of France our shrouds and tacklings?"

Content to consider: *war and impending battle; themes of loss and resilience under pressure.*

Julius Caesar — Cassius, Act 1, Scene 2

Play synopsis: *A group of Roman senators, fearing Caesar's growing power, conspire to assassinate him — with devastating consequences for Rome.*

Speech context: *Cassius argues to Brutus that Caesar, despite his human frailty, has been allowed to tower over ordinary men like a colossus, and that this is a shameful state of affairs.*

Start: "Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world"

End: "...Now is it Rome indeed, and room enough, / When there is in it but one only man."

Content to consider: *political manipulation and incitement to violence/assassination.*

Macbeth — Lady Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 7

Play synopsis: *A Scottish general is driven by prophecy and ambition to murder his king, unleashing a spiral of guilt and tyranny.*

Speech context: *When Macbeth has second thoughts about murdering King Duncan, Lady Macbeth ruthlessly taunts and manipulates him back towards committing the deed.*

Start: "Was the hope drunk / Wherein you dress'd yourself?"

End: "...When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man."

Content to consider: *manipulation, ambition, and coercion within a marriage; premeditation of murder.*

Macbeth — Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 1

Play synopsis: *A Scottish general is driven by prophecy and ambition to murder his king, unleashing a spiral of guilt and tyranny.*

Speech context: *Alone before he goes to murder King Duncan, Macbeth hallucinates a floating dagger leading him towards the deed.*

Start: "Is this a dagger which I see before me"

End: "...Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives. / [A bell rings] I go, and it is done. The bell invites me."

Content to consider: *premeditation of murder; hallucination and psychological breakdown.*

Measure for Measure — Angelo, Act 2, Scene 2

Play synopsis: *A strict deputy ruler is left in charge of Vienna and enforces its laws with unforgiving severity, until his own hidden desires are tested.*

Speech context: *Left alone after being petitioned by the novice nun Isabella to spare her condemned brother's life, Angelo is disturbed to find himself drawn to her.*

Start: "What's this, what's this? Is this her fault or mine?"

End: "...Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid / Subdues me quite."

Content to consider: *coercive sexual desire towards a novice nun who has petitioned him for her brother's life; themes of abuse of power. Recommend flagging clearly to candidates in advance.*

Much Ado About Nothing — Beatrice, Act 4, Scene 1

Play synopsis: *A sparring couple, Beatrice and Benedick, are tricked into falling in love, while another couple's wedding is derailed by a cruel deception.*

Speech context: *Beatrice's cousin Hero has just been publicly and wrongly accused of infidelity at her own wedding. Beatrice demands that Benedick prove his love by avenging her.*

Start: "Kill Claudio."

End: "...O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace."

Content to consider: *themes of public shaming, betrayal, and violent anger; references to honour and reputation.*

Othello — Emilia, Act 4, Scene 3

Play synopsis: A military general is manipulated by a trusted subordinate into a jealous rage against his innocent wife.

Speech context: Emilia, lady-in-waiting to Desdemona, speaks frankly about the double standards men hold over women in marriage.

Start: "But I do think it is their husbands' faults"

End: "...The ills we do, their ills instruct us so."

Content to consider: infidelity, domestic double standards, and marital mistreatment; discusses husbands' behaviour towards wives in frank terms.

Twelfth Night — Viola, Act 2, Scene 4

Play synopsis: Shipwrecked Viola disguises herself as a man, Cesario, and becomes entangled in a love triangle while serving a duke she has fallen for.

Speech context: Disguised as Cesario, Viola hints to Duke Orsino about her own hidden love for him, describing it as if speaking of an imaginary sister.

Start: "She never told her love"

End: "...We men may say more, swear more, but indeed / Our shows are more than will; for still we prove / Much in our vows, but little in our love."

Content to consider: unrequited love and concealed identity/gender disguise (Viola is speaking as Cesario).

Two Gentlemen of Verona — Proteus, Act 2, Scene 6

Play synopsis: Two close friends' loyalty is tested when both fall for the same woman, leading one to betray the other.

Speech context: Alone, Proteus wrestles with and ultimately justifies his decision to abandon his love for Julia and betray his best friend Valentine in pursuit of Sylvia.

Start: "To leave my Julia, shall I be forsworn"

End: "...For Valentine, myself; for Julia, Silvia."

Content to consider: betrayal of a partner and a close friend; self-justification for dishonest behaviour.