

Poetry Reading

This is either your first or second speaking project for this class. If you completed The Radio Project, then you have already spent time learning how to use your voice effectively and the importance of practice and preparation. If you did not complete the first project, don't be concerned as your teacher will simply spend a little more time teaching you the skills you need and providing you with models that will clearly illustrate for you what a finished project should look and sound like.

The skills you have either developed or will develop are the following:

1. an awareness of your voice and how to use it as an effective instrument
2. an attention to delivery regarding smoothness and clear articulation
3. the ability to follow directions and use practice time wisely
4. the importance of energy and enthusiasm towards your audience

In this first public speaking assignment, you will now use those abilities and add four more:

1. a command of eye contact with your audience to show your involvement with them
2. facial expression to add emphasis and sincerity to your delivery
3. the use of pause to allow your audience to think or feel more strongly about your material
4. the ability to set a good pace so as to maintain audience interest

As with the first unit we are concerned with making you outstanding speakers and readers, and to create that talent we now turn our attention towards how you appear to people, be it your audience, children or future employers. It is one thing to have a fine speaking voice, but there are a number of skills you have to acquire as well, many of which will never be used at a podium or with large groups of people. Most of these assets will be used in small meeting rooms, factory floors or offices where you have to impress upon people your arguments, beliefs and opinions. In fact, learning to be a great speaker and reader often has little to do with making speeches. The real skill sets we want to provide you with are designed to make you more respected by your peers, more valuable to your boss and more beloved by your children. To be truthful, rarely do any of us make speeches in the adult world unless our career is concerned with presentation work. And so with each project to come we will make you more proficient in your everyday world, in your ability to persuade and discuss, to be more comfortable with revealing your thoughts and insights to others and more talented in your reading skills so that reciting a story to your children becomes one of the best parts of their day. With this project we start you on the path towards these goals.

Eye Contact

Beginning speakers/readers are naturally shy about looking their audience in the eye. For many, it is an extremely difficult thing to do because it tends to make them even more nervous, causing them to lose confidence and, ultimately, to stumble, bumble and fumble their way through the rest of their speech. The alternate fear is that students believe that looking at people will cause them to lose focus and forget what they were about to say. To avoid both pitfalls, beginning orators commonly decide to sacrifice eye contact and concentrate instead on what they have to say rather than how they say it. However, the best speakers/readers understand that to be an effective communicator, you must be willing to really talk to your audience, rather than at them or around them or above them. Audiences pay greater attention to speakers who are in touch with the audiences' reactions and who are sensitive enough to look into the eyes of the listeners and make them feel like an individual being spoken to and not just an extension of the chair. Above all things you have to remember that your audience wishes you no harm. In fact, their feelings are generally the exact opposite. Audiences don't want you to do badly; they want you to do well so you'll entertain them.

No one enjoys sitting through a weak presentation; it's tedious and frustrating. ALWAYS envision your audience rooting FOR you and not AGAINST you because they truly want you to be good, even if it's for selfish reasons. Don't talk yourself into viewing them as people waiting to see you crash and burn because that's really not what the vast majority of people want. At worst they're indifferent as to your presentation and mostly they want you to succeed and make the class more interesting. If you can get yourself into this positive frame of mind it should be easier for you to want to establish eye contact and connect with the people in front of you.

The best way to practice eye contact is to set up chairs and place something on it that will represent your audience. You have to learn to target the eyes of your viewers when you rehearse even if what you practice with is nothing more than a stuffed animal (Which sounds goofy, but it actually works.). When you read your poem(s), look into the "eyes" of your audience and pretend that what you are saying is extremely important for them to understand. This will force you to act the role of "teacher". Whenever you teach anyone anything, you always look into their eyes to make sure they grasp what you're saying. When you're practicing with your younger sibling's stuffed bears, do the same thing. Concentrating on teaching people things instead of worrying about giving a presentation will always lower your stress level because you become more concerned about whether they get it rather than whether they like it.

Facial Expression

We use facial expressions constantly when we speak in normal circumstances with our friends, and yet we tend to forget its importance when we speak to audiences. Those who listen to you are far more impressed with your message if your face carries the same feelings that your voice and words do. We tend to disregard or disbelieve the message of speakers whose voice says one thing but whose face conveys little to support it. To allow facial expression to occur without exaggerating it in an artificial way, pick material that has a message or a feeling that you genuinely believe in or that you find entertaining. If the material you choose holds interest for you or provides you with amusement, you will almost certainly demonstrate these feelings to your audience in a natural way.

That's why you take the time to pick out material that is well suited for you and not simply something that completes the requirements. Don't settle for the quick solution to the task; get poems that would be fun to read even if there was no one in the room. If you do that then your facial expression will appear with little effort. It is said that the "eyes are the mirror of the soul". There is great truth to this and our heart's feelings are best conveyed through our facial reactions. If you select material that you agree with or feel strongly about, your face will naturally register your emotions or convictions. When you are given the time to research, use it all to locate the very best poetry you can. Don't just settle for material so that you can get on about the business of preparation and performance. This project has time enough for the assemblage of good selections and the delivery of them. Don't cheat yourself by rushing through an area that requires good judgment.

Pace and Pause

The trouble with too many beginning speakers is that they are too afraid of silence. They tend to associate silence with negative images of losing their place, running out of things to say or simply freezing with a bad case of brain lock. Silence is something that works FOR you once you learn how to use it. The only way to let your audience really feel about what you have to say is to give them the opportunity and time to do so – silence, not sound, does that for you. More can be said by a speaker by letting their words float down on an audience and quietly watching them, than by filling up that quiet space with words or vocal pauses such as "um", "uh", "like" etc. The same holds true for comic timing which we will explore more completely in future projects.

When you are going through your material, look for those lines which really drive home a message or a point with your listeners. When you speak to them, take your time and let your audience see you thinking as

you speak, as opposed to letting them work under the impression that your delivery is just a memorized bit of material that sparks little or no feeling within you. This is particularly true of humorous poetry. If you don't give your audience the opportunity to enjoy thinking about what comical thing has just been said, then they will either stop laughing altogether or give you minimal reaction. This comes about because you trained them to act that way because of the speed of your delivery and the lack of pause that you gave them. Remember that your purpose is to provoke thought or emotion in your audience. Even if you're trying to make your audience laugh, you still have to give them the chance to do so. You cannot do that if you rush them through the performance.

What is the best way to train you for this? For one thing, remember that your script is YOUR script. Just because a poem was written a certain way doesn't mean you have to keep it that way. When you're writing or typing up your final draft, set your lines and stanzas up in such a way so as to make their delivery easier for you with special attention given over to setting up natural pauses at the end of a phrase. Secondly, your material doesn't need to be a work of art. Make whatever marks on it that you need to make in order for you to easily recognize when to incorporate silence, emphasize words or easily deal with phrases that trip you up. If you are serious about using your practice time well, you should never come through the process with a clean script.

One last thought? Note that your target audience for this project is only eight people of your own selection. Pick people, whether they be friends or not, who would not make you uncomfortable with the quiet moments or the slower pace of your delivery. Be very judicious with who you choose. They will prove to be just as significant a selection as the material you end up reading.

Requirements

1. The presentation will be 3-5 minutes in length and you may use anywhere from 1-7 total poems.
2. The titles of all poems must be given or you will simply tell us that a poem is "untitled" if such a condition exists.
3. You need not tell us who the authors are, though if you wish to inform us that the poetry is yours you are free to do so.
4. You must have an introduction that greets us and tells us how many poems you are presenting.
5. You will address eight students seated in front of you.
6. These eight students will be selected by you.
7. You may present to us from a standing position or from a stool. Keep in mind that if you stand you should provide proper posture.
8. Material may be gained from any poetry source, including music, but it should contain neither obscenity nor anything that the teacher would deem "in poor taste".

Presentation: 200 Points

Audience number: 8