



# INTERPRETIVE READING

Advanced Communication Series



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Your successful interpretation of an author's story depends on your understanding of its overall meaning. Identify the story's general purpose, then break it down into parts and determine the meaning and purpose of each part. Then focus on communicating the story through your reading voice. Use vocal variety, tempo, rhythm, inflection, and pauses to convey the story's emotions and actions.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- ▶ To understand the elements of interpretive reading.
- ▶ To learn how to analyze a narrative and plan for effective interpretation.
- ▶ To learn and apply vocal techniques that will aid in the effectiveness of the reading.

**Time:** Eight to 10 minutes

# READ A STORY

The purpose of an interpretive reader is to communicate through voice the work of an author. The interpretive reader's goal is to so enthrall the audience with a story that the audience isn't even aware of the reader. The reader makes the story come alive.

## SELECTING A STORY

There are many sources of material for interpretive readings. Essays, short stories, poetry, and drama are a few types of writing that can be used. However, for this project we will discuss only narratives – stories that relate an incident or series of incidents. Anthologies and collections of writings are good sources of narratives; your local library should have a good selection.

A key to the success of any interpretive reading is the story itself. Select material that will appeal to your audience. Your story should stimulate your listeners and offer insight into human nature. The following questions will help you determine if the story you are selecting lends itself to interpretive reading:

- ▶ What is the author's intention?
- ▶ Is the plot or theme universal enough to be of general interest to your audience?
- ▶ Is the plot or theme clear?
- ▶ Are the style and form of the story appropriate to the content?
- ▶ Is the story too obvious or too complex for clear oral interpretation?
- ▶ Is there a dynamic progression in the development of the story?
- ▶ Will the story maintain the interest of your audience?

Read the story several times, and read what other writers and critics say about it. Read the author's biography. These additional sources of information will help you better understand the piece and will help you to decide if the story is appropriate for interpretive reading. Your selection could be a story, a chapter of a book, or a section of a story.

Once you've selected your story, you can begin your interpretation. Interpretation involves three steps:

1. Analysis
2. Planning
3. Presentation

## ANALYSIS

To successfully interpret an author's work, you must first understand the overall meaning of the story. What is the author trying to say? Where does he or she say it? Once

you've identified the general purpose of the story, you can proceed to break it down into parts and determine the meaning and purpose of each part.

Although you may understand the general meaning of the story, parts of it may not be clear to you. The author may use unfamiliar words or phrases. Look them up in the dictionary. Occasionally you'll find a word or phrase whose definitions don't quite fit in the context of the sentence. In these cases, you usually can combine your knowledge of the author and your knowledge of the entire story to arrive at the actual meaning of the sentence.

Once you've analyzed each part of the story, put the parts together again and look at the story once more as a whole. What is the author saying? How is our attention attracted? How does the author build up to the climax? How does the story conclude?

Although understanding of the meaning is an important aspect of interpretation, it alone doesn't make an effective interpretive reading. In addition to meaning, you must be able to communicate the emotions and attitudes of the author. After you've determined the meaning, analyze the story for emotions and attitudes.

What different emotions are present in the story? At what point is the emotional climax? At what other places do emotions peak? What is the attitude of the author toward the subject? Is the author sarcastic, bitter, serious, humorous, envious, respectful, or angry? Break down the story into its parts and analyze the emotions and attitudes evident in each part. Then look at the story as a whole again. How do the emotions and attitudes flow throughout the story?

## **PLANNING**

Now that you understand the meaning, emotions, and attitudes of the story, you can concentrate on communicating the story to your audience. This involves planning.

You communicate the story to your audience through your reading voice. Your goal is to so enthrall the audience with your story that your audience isn't even aware of you. To accomplish this, you must use your voice effectively. You must apply these basic speaking techniques as you read your story: vocal variety, tempo, rhythm, inflection, and pause.

Vocal variety refers to variations in the volume and pitch of your speaking voice. A monotonous, sing-song type of delivery bores the audience. Voice volume should be varied to add emphasis or dramatic impact to your reading. Pitch also should be varied to convey emotion. Low pitch indicates gloom or foreboding; a high pitch indicates joy or excitement.

Tempo is the rate of speech at which you read. Tempo should vary throughout the story as mood and thought change. In tragedy, or serious drama, the tempo is slow. In a comedy the tempo is faster.

Rhythm in literature is the same as rhythm in music – it depends on the recurrence of stress and accent. The English language is composed of words with varied accents. Words with more than one syllable have at least one accent. When we combine words into sentences, the words retain their individual accents, but the sentence also takes on an accent. In the sentence "John rode the bus to school," an accent is placed in accordance with the meaning the reader wants to convey. For example, by placing the accent on 'John,' the reader indicates that John rode the bus, not someone else. If 'bus' is accented, the reader indicates that John didn't ride his bicycle or go to school in some other way. The accents bring out the meaning of the sentence.

Inflection is a gradual pitch change while producing a single sound. For example, when you say, "Where did you go?" the 'O' in 'go' receives a rising inflection. Inflection puts meaning into a word or sentence. Upward inflections carry the listener forward and add tension. A downward inflection indicates finality.

The pause is one of the most valuable tools in interpretation. It's generally used in two ways – to generate anticipation in your audience for what is coming, and to allow the audience to reflect on a

point just made. Longer pauses should be used if the thought expressed is difficult or unfamiliar, or when the reader is trying to impress a point upon the audience. A longer pause also shows uncertainty. In emotional scenes, a long pause indicates the speaker's inability to continue, or it gives the speaker time to regain composure. Whenever you use a pause, it should be packed with meaning and its length should vary as the material demands. Punctuation can serve as a guide to inserting pauses in your reading, but you also should consider the author's meaning and purpose. More information on pauses and punctuation in oral reading appears in the Appendix of this manual.

You've now analyzed your story, its meaning, and emotions. You've also learned how to use your voice to convey the story. Now you must practice reading the story aloud, incorporating everything you've learned into your reading. Following are some tips to remember as you practice:

- ▶ Try to maintain the interest and excitement you had when you first read the story.
- ▶ Be careful not to start the story at such a high pitch of interest that you can't build to the climax.
- ▶ Read the story aloud to your family or friends who have not heard it, and ask for their reactions. Should the story move faster or slower? Is it confusing?
- ▶ Record your story and play it back. What areas need improvement?

### **PRESENTATION**

It's now time to read before your audience. Walk slowly to the front of the room. If you'll be using a lectern, place your open book on it. If you would rather hold your book, place it in the open palm of one hand. Don't clutch it with both hands – you'll look tense and nervous. Hold the book low enough so it doesn't hide your face, and tilt it slightly toward you. Stand straight, shoulders back, but relaxed.

Pause before you begin to speak. This gives you time to compose yourself and attract the audience's attention. Begin your story with a brief introduction to your material (no longer than 45 seconds), including the author, title, and the part you'll be reading. Give any necessary background material (time, place, characters, action) that the audience will need to understand the story. You also may include why you selected this particular story to read. A good introduction should prepare the audience mentally and emotionally.

In narrative reading, you'll want to establish eye contact with your audience and occasionally have a faraway look in your eyes if you want to stimulate the imaginations of your listeners. Admittedly, it's hard to have eye contact with your audience if you're reading from a book. To have eye contact, you must be so familiar with your material that you will need only to look at the page occasionally to get the next idea. Know your material so well that you'll easily find your place when you return your gaze to the book.

When you've finished your reading, pause before leaving the speaking area. This allows your audience time to respond to your performance. Then walk slowly to your seat.

### **YOUR ASSIGNMENT**

Select, analyze, plan, rehearse, and present a narrative that you believe will appeal to your audience. If your selection is too long, edit as appropriate following the guidelines in the Appendix of this manual. Prepare an introduction to your story, too. Use your voice to convey the meaning of the story and the emotions portrayed in it.

Since many people are not familiar with interpretive reading and its purpose, you may want to have the Toastmaster briefly explain the nature of interpretive reading before introducing you.

## EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **READ A STORY**

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Note to the Evaluator:** The purpose of this talk was for the speaker to present a narrative using vocal techniques that help the audience to understand and enjoy the selection. The speaker was to convey the author's meaning and emotions. It is suggested that you read the entire project and the Appendix before the presentation.

- ▶ Was the theme understandable and the storyline clear?
  
- ▶ To what degree did the speaker achieve the author's purpose in projecting the meaning and emotions of the message?
  
- ▶ How did the speaker emphasize the words which were important in revealing the narrative's meaning and emotions?
  
- ▶ How did the speaker build to the story's climax?
  
- ▶ Did the introduction and transitions (if any) help you to better understand the narrative?
  
- ▶ Was the speaker able to establish and maintain eye contact with the audience?
  
- ▶ Did the speaker appear to be spontaneous during the presentation?
  
- ▶ What could the speaker have done differently to improve the presentation?
  
- ▶ What did you like about the presentation?

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Poetry can be difficult to interpret because a poet often relies on symbolism, imagery, and suggestion to convey its message instead of clear description. Identify the poem's general purpose, then break down the poem into stanzas or sentences and determine the thoughts expressed in each. Poetry makes greater use of rhythm, meter, cadence, and rhyme than prose, so be careful to avoid delivering it in a sing-song manner.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- ▶ To understand the differences between poetry and prose.
- ▶ To recognize how poets use imagery, rhythm, meter, cadence, and rhyme to convey the meanings and emotions of their poetry.
- ▶ To apply vocal techniques that will aid in the effectiveness of the reading.

**Time:** Six to eight minutes

# INTERPRETING POETRY

Poetry is one of the oldest forms of public speaking. Over four thousand years ago, before the invention of writing, poetry was passed from generation to generation through the oral tradition. Poetic forms such as rhyme and meter served a dual role of making oral presentations more enjoyable to hear and easier to remember. After the invention of written language, poetry eventually changed into something more often read than heard. The development of written poetry led to more complicated forms of poetic expression and interpretation, but people still enjoy the simple pleasure of hearing a poem read aloud.

**FINDING THE MEANING**

Interpretation of poetry involves the same basic steps as interpretation of prose: analysis, planning, and presentation.

To interpret a poem, you first must understand the thought and imagery in it. What thought or idea is the poet conveying in the poem? Once you understand this, you can break down the poem into stanzas or sentences and determine the thoughts expressed in each.

To enhance the flow and rhythm of the poem, poets often use long, complicated sentences that can be confusing. In these cases it's helpful to restructure the sentence in your own mind to its normal order – subject, verb, object, etc. – and arrange clauses and phrases to modify the appropriate parts of the sentence. You'll then understand the meaning of the sentence and will be able to read the original sentence, inserting pauses and using inflections to group the words and phrases so their meaning is clear. For example, analyze this poem, "Ozymandias," by Percy Bysshe Shelley:

*I met a traveler from an antique land  
 Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
 Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
 Which yet survive (stamped on these lifeless things),  
 The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:  
 And on the pedestal these words appear:  
 "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
 Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

Reading the poem through, you can see that the poet met a traveler who came upon the remains of a statue of a long-ago king in the desert. The traveler is describing what he saw. The opening sentence is clear and uncomplicated. The second sentence, however, is long, convoluted, and contains several phrases set off by colons, semicolons, parentheses, commas, and quotation marks. "Near them" refers to the "legs of stone." "On the sand" refers to the legs of stone and to the object (the statue's face) which lies near them. "Half sunk" refers to the "shattered visage" (face), which lies near the legs of stone. Paraphrased, the sentence would read, "A shattered visage lies on the sand, half sunk in it, near the legs of stone."

"... whose frown, and wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command," describes the 'visage,' and are emotions which the sculptor understood well and which still survive. The parenthetical remark "stamped on these lifeless things," gives a double meaning to "yet survive." The passions are still present today, and they have survived both the artist's hand that mockingly portrayed them and the heart of the king that fed them.

And on the pedestal these words appear:

*"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"*

The quoted lines are the inscription that appears on the base of the statue. The inscription indicates the arrogance of the king and his dictatorial style.

In the last sentence of the poem the words "boundless and bare" refer to the sands, not to the "colossal wreck" of the statue.

## READING POETRY ALOUD

In planning and rehearsing your interpretive reading, you should realize that reading poetry aloud differs from reading prose aloud. Poetry makes greater use of rhythm, meter, cadence, and rhyme.

Rhythm is the regular recurrence of stress and accent. Rhythm adds to the emotions being expressed in a poem.

Meter is the systematic rhythmic pattern of lines arranged in stressed and unstressed syllables. Meter helps to establish rhythm and enhances the emotional content of the lines.

Meter can change.

Cadence is a pattern of sound and silence – words sandwiched between pauses. Often cadence is marked by punctuation.

Rhyme is a correspondence of sounds in two or more words – cat and rat, for example. Rhyme usually is found at the end of lines, but internal rhyme may exist between a word in the line and one at the end. Rhyme is pleasant to listen to and it accentuates the rhythm of the poem.

A common error in reading poetry aloud is the tendency to allow the rhythm, meter, cadence, and rhyme to carry you away, resulting in a sing-song, jingle effect that ruins the mood and feel of the poem. Many people feel that they must drop their voice at the end of each line. This isn't always so. Poetry must be read in phrases, not in lines. For example, in the first sentence of the above poem, you may be tempted to drop your voice and pause after saying "land," at the end of the first line. That isn't necessary, and could confuse your listeners. You should drop your voice and pause briefly after "said" in the second line and after "desert" in the third line. You may find it helpful to read poetry as if you were reading prose.


A common error when reading poetry aloud is for the reader to lapse into a repetitive recitation that breaks the poem's mood and ambiance.

## PRESENTATION

When reading your poem before your audience, don't look at the audience as often as you would when reading prose. Direct eye contact may inhibit the audience's response. Also, speak slower than you would when reading prose. Imagery is more difficult to assimilate than a story. The audience needs time to hear the words, create the images, and respond.

## YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Select, analyze, plan, rehearse, and present a poem that you feel would be of interest to your audience. (You may find the poems of Emily Dickinson, Willa Cather, Rudyard Kipling, and Robert Frost appealing.) Prepare an appropriate introduction of no more than 45 seconds. Use your voice to convey the mood, meaning, and emotions of the poem. Since many people are not familiar with interpretive reading and its purpose, you may want to have the Toastmaster briefly explain the nature of interpretive reading before introducing you.



**Imagery is more difficult to assimilate than a story and the audience needs time to hear the words, create the images, and respond.**



## EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **INTERPRETING POETRY**

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Note to the Evaluator:** In this project, the speaker's task was to present a poem, using vocal techniques to capture the imagery and rhythm of a poem and to convey its meaning and emotions to the audience. It is suggested that you read the entire project and the Appendix before the presentation.

- ▶ How was the speaker able to express the thoughts and emotions of the poem?
  
- ▶ Did the speaker understand the poem? Was the speaker able to envision the pictures painted by the poet?
  
- ▶ Did the speaker make effective use of pauses, rhythm, and cadence?
  
- ▶ Did the speaker avoid a "sing-song" rhythm?
  
- ▶ What kind of eye contact did the speaker have with the audience? Was it appropriate for the type of presentation?
  
- ▶ Was the speaker well prepared and familiar with the material?
  
- ▶ What could the speaker have done differently to improve the presentation?
  
- ▶ What did you like about the presentation?

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

In a monodrama, the speaker portrays a single character, striving to bring that character to life through voice, gestures, and mannerisms. Usually the speaker appears to be talking to an unseen person who seems to motivate the speaker's words and actions, but in some situations the speaker may be talking only to himself. Analyze your selection for meaning and emotions, study the character's personality and relationships with others, then determine which vocal elements and body movements would best reflect the character to your audience.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- ▶ To understand the concept and nature of the monodrama.
- ▶ To assume the identity of a character and to portray the physical and emotional aspects of this character to an audience.

**Time:** Five to seven minutes

**In a monodrama, a speaker portrays the inner thoughts and feelings of a protagonist on a matter of personal importance using voice, gestures, and mannerisms.**

# THE MONODRAMA

The monodrama is a form of interpretation in which one person tells or acts out a dramatic story and assumes the one chief role. All attention is focused on this person and situation. Usually the speaker appears to be talking to an unseen person, whose unheard questions and statements seem to motivate the speaker's words and actions. However, in some situations the speaker is talking only to himself; this is called a soliloquy. Whether the speaker has a listener or not, he is not merely making a speech. The speaker is revealing innermost thoughts and feelings on some matter of personal importance, and thus is highly emotional. Monodramas may be written in prose or poetry. Some examples include Robert Browning's "The Patriot" and "My Last Duchess," and Tennyson's *Ulysses*.

**ALMOST AN ACTOR**

Monodramatic readers border on being actors in some respects. They portray a single character through identification with the character by voice, gestures, and mannerisms. If the person represented is a villain, the reader must make his speech sound villainous. If the person represented is a king, the reader must make himself sound royal. Monodramatic readers draw upon all of their observations, past reading, and imagination to make the character come to life. Some even use makeup, costumes, and props to add impact to their reading. Others memorize their lines and don't use books or lecterns in their presentations.

**KNOW THE CHARACTER**

Successful presentation of a monodrama begins with complete understanding of the material being presented. Analyze your selection for its meaning and emotions, plot and climaxes, as outlined in Project One of this manual. Then turn your attention to the character who is speaking. Is the person strong or weak, timid or confident? Angry or sad? Does the character express true emotions or conceal them? To whom, if anyone, is the character speaking? What kind of relationship exists between the two people?

Once you've established the mental and emotional aspects of the character, you're ready to work on the vocal and physical aspects. What vocal elements – rhythm, inflection, pitch – would most accurately and quickly suggest the character to your audience? What gestures/body movements best reflect the physical characteristics of the person? Be sure to read the Appendix for tips on using gestures/body movement in interpretive reading.

## **PRESENTATION**

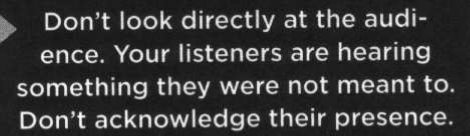
When reading a monodrama, don't look directly at your audience. In these situations, your listeners are overhearing something that they were not meant to hear. Don't acknowledge their presence by looking at them.

## **YOUR ASSIGNMENT**

Select, analyze, and present a monodrama. The monodrama may be in prose or poetry. Use your voice and body to convey the mental, emotional, and physical characteristics of the person who is speaking. Prepare an introduction (of no more than 45 seconds) to your selection. If possible, memorize your selection. If you can't do this, at least try to refer to the book as little as possible as you speak.

You may use props if you feel they will add to the impression you want to make on your audience.

Since many people are not familiar with interpretive reading and its purpose, you may want to have the Toastmaster briefly explain the nature of interpretive reading before introducing you.



**Don't look directly at the audience. Your listeners are hearing something they were not meant to. Don't acknowledge their presence.**

## EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **THE MONODRAMA**

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Note to the Evaluator:** In this project, the speaker was to present a monodrama, assuming a character who reveals his innermost thoughts and feelings on some matter of importance. All attention is focused on the speaker, and the speaker may seem to be talking to a second, unseen person whose unheard questions and statements seem to motivate the speaker's words and actions. The speaker was to use voice and body to convey the mental, emotional, and physical characteristics of the person who is speaking. It is suggested you read the project and the Appendix before the presentation.

- ▶ Was the character clearly defined by the speaker?
  
- ▶ Did the speaker effectively express the conflict in which the character was involved?
  
- ▶ How effectively did the speaker use voice and gestures/body movements?
  
- ▶ Did the speaker successfully avoid eye contact with the audience?
  
- ▶ With what parts of the monodrama did the speaker appear most comfortable?
  
- ▶ Did the speaker display any distracting mannerisms?
  
- ▶ What could the speaker have done differently to improve the presentation?
  
- ▶ What did you like about the presentation?

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The interpretive reader of a play reads the parts of more than one character, using different vocal qualities and body movements to distinguish between them. Select a play or portion of a play that involves only a few characters or you may confuse the audience. Practice the reading until you can smoothly change characters.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- ▶ To adapt a play for interpretive reading.
- ▶ To portray several characters in one reading, identifying them to the audience through voice changes and movement.

**Time:** 12 to 15 minutes

## THE PLAY

A play is a story told in the form of action and dialogue. Plays usually are presented on stage, with lighting, costumes, scenery, makeup, actors, and props. However, the interpretive reader of a play ignores all of these items and merely suggests the essence of the play through voice, body, emotion, and imagination.

Any play you select for presentation should have a good story that attracts attention and moves along quickly. The story should be suspenseful, too. It should rise steadily to the climax and quickly close. The story also should involve only a few characters, for ease of comprehension. After all, you will be reading the parts of all of the characters, distinguishing them by different voices and actions. If there are too many characters, you and the audience will become confused.

### ADAPTING THE MATERIAL

Most plays are two to three hours long – far too long for one person to present. This means the play must be cut to a manageable length, yet still make sense. Read the Appendix at the back of this manual for tips on proper cutting of your selection.

Since much of the play is cut out, the audience won't understand the part being presented unless you provide some introductory material. Introduce each character you will be presenting and give one or two sentences of description for each. Also describe the setting of the play and any action that has taken place earlier. Then move easily into the play.

You won't read everything in the script to your audience. You won't name each character before she speaks, although the name always appears before each new passage of dialogue in the script. You must

identify the different characters through your voice. Use a different pitch and tempo for each character, making sure the pitch and tempo match the type of character speaking. For example, a young, happy girl should have a higher pitched voice and speak more rapidly than an older man.

Be careful not to overdo your differentiations. Your goal is to suggest different characters, not to actually become them as you did in Project Three.

**Identify each character through your voice, using different pitches and tempos for each character.**

You won't read most stage directions (those words in parentheses in the script) either. Stage directions describe a character's movements or expressions which would enhance the scene if acted. In some cases, though, stage directions should be read.

Robert: Mary, I cannot tolerate such lies any longer!  
(Robert leaves, slamming the door behind him).

Robert's exit should be noted because of its effect on the scene. However, you may want to paraphrase the directions to smooth the transition.

Be careful not to make one character sound more interesting or more important than called for in your story. Don't let a minor character steal the scene or destroy the emotional impact of a scene. Reflect the feelings of the characters in the way you read their lines. Increase the emotion as you approach the climax of the story.

Practice reading the play aloud over and over, until you are comfortable with the character changes and transitions. Record your reading and play it back to see if the mood and emotional impact you're striving for is achieved. Are your characters clearly delineated? Does your vocal interpretation of each character detract from the story? Is the action understandable?

Reflect the characters' emotions in the way you read their lines.

### **PRESENTATION**

When reading a play, don't look directly at your audience. In these situations, your listeners are overhearing something that they were not meant to hear. Don't acknowledge their presence by looking at them.

### **YOUR ASSIGNMENT**

Select, rehearse, and present a play or portion of a play. (You may find the plays of James M. Barrie and Eugene O'Neill of interest.) Edit the material as necessary to fall into the given time frame, following the guidelines in the Appendix at the back of this manual. Your play should have no more than three different characters. Use your voice and gestures/body movement to suggest each character to your audience. Be sure to review the tips on gestures/body movement and reading in the Appendix. Prepare an appropriate introduction of no more than 60 seconds.

Since many people are not familiar with interpretive reading and its purpose, you may want to have the Toastmaster briefly explain the nature of interpretive reading before introducing you.

## EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **THE PLAY**

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Note to the Evaluator:** The speaker was to present a play, or portion of a play, using voice and gestures/body movement to suggest the different characters. It is suggested that you read the project and the Appendix before the presentation.

- ▶ Were the characters vocally, physically, and emotionally distinct? Were character changes smooth and quick?
  
- ▶ Did the pitch or tempo of any character distract you?
  
- ▶ Was the plot of the play clear? Was the play properly cut so it flowed smoothly? Were transitions clear?
  
- ▶ How did the speaker build to the climax of the play?
  
- ▶ Did the speaker have eye contact with the audience? Was eye contact appropriate for the presentation?
  
- ▶ What could the speaker have done differently to improve the presentation?
  
- ▶ What did you like about the presentation?

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Presenting a speech given by someone else can be challenging. In this project, you must use all of your interpretive reading skills to bring to life someone else's speech. This most likely will involve establishing a relationship with the audience, convincing them that your viewpoint is the best one. You must move them with your passion and sincerity.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- ▶ To understand the structure of an effective speech.
- ▶ To interpret and present a famous speech.

**Time:** Eight to 10 minutes

# THE ORATORICAL SPEECH

One type of interpretive reading is the oratorical speech or declamation. A declamation is a memorized rendition of an address or part of an address by a well-known orator. For example, you may have heard someone read Daniel Webster's speech, "Liberty and Union" or Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address."

## BASIC SPEECH STRUCTURE

To effectively interpret a speech, you need to know the speech's structure. The basic structure, with which you're already familiar, is introduction, body, and conclusion. This basic structure can be further broken down into Attention, Need, Satisfaction, Visualization, and Action. The speaker first gets the listeners' attention, then creates a feeling of need, satisfies that need, makes the listeners visualize the satisfaction, and finally urges the listeners to action. In short, the opening attracts attention and gives some background. The body contains information on need, satisfaction, and visualization. The conclusion compels the audience to action.

A good example of a famous speech is Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address."

## SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Fellow countrymen: At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an important civil war. All dreaded it – all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war – seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was,



somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it.

Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes his aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not, that we not be judged. The prayers of both could not be answered – that of neither has been answered fully.

The Almighty has his own purposes, "Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of these offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through his appointed time, he now wills to remove, and that he gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him? Fondly do we hope – fervently do we pray – that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondmen's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.

In this speech, Lincoln uses the opening to establish his relationship with the audience. In the body he emphasizes that slavery caused the war, and that the North and the South both believe they are right. The body closes with the idea that God has his own purposes for the war. In the conclusion, Lincoln reiterates his desire to end the war. Many of the sentences in his speech are long. Yet they are well constructed and when read with the proper rhythm and inflections, are easily understandable.

The opening attracts attention. The body informs need, satisfaction, and visualization. The conclusion compels action.

### **YOUR ASSIGNMENT**

For this project, you are to select, rehearse, and present a famous speech. Employ all of your interpretive reading skills to bring the speech to life. You are encouraged to use gestures/body movement to enhance your presentation. If possible, dress in costume.

Prepare a brief introduction of no more than 45 seconds for your presentation. Be sure to read the Appendix in this manual for tips on eye contact with the audience and reading the material.

Since many people are not familiar with interpretive reading and its purpose, you may want to have the Toastmaster briefly explain the nature of interpretive reading before introducing you.

## EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **THE ORATORICAL SPEECH**

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Note to the Evaluator:** For this project, the speaker was to present a famous speech, using voice and gestures/body movements to express the original speaker's meaning and emotions. It is suggested you read the project and the Appendix before the presentation.

- ▶ Did the speaker reveal the original speaker intelligently, significantly, and with adequate feeling?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ▶ Was the speaker comfortable with the speech?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ▶ How did the speaker establish rapport with the audience? Did the speaker address the audience, not the book?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ▶ Did the speaker inspire the audience?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ▶ What could the speaker have done differently to improve the presentation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ▶ What did you like about the presentation?

# ENHANCE YOUR READING

## **GESTURES/BODY MOVEMENT**

Interpretive reading doesn't always involve the voice alone. Properly used, gestures/body movements can enhance your reading. But they should be used with care. Too many exaggerated gestures and you will appear to be an actor assuming a character.

In most interpretive reading, you should identify with your characters, but you must remain aware of their separation from you. Your body should respond with muscle tensions rather than overt actions. If one of your characters becomes fearful when someone knocks at the door, show this fear by tightening your posture, facial expression, and voice. As the character approaches the door apprehensively to open it, you might raise your arm hesitantly and then bring the arm in close to your body. As the character sees who is at the door, you might show relief by relaxing your body and voice as you utter the person's name.

In monodramas and oratorical speech, more exaggerated gestures/body movements may be used. However, you should use them only when they will enhance the story and only if they appear natural and spontaneous. Practice any gestures/movements carefully and make sure they do not appear stilted or mechanical.

## **PUNCTUATION AND PAUSES**

Many oral readers are afraid to pause as they read. They think that silence is terrible and that they must never have "dead air." But pauses are an important part of interpretive reading. They show emphasis, and they can be used to create suspense and anticipation about what is to come. A pause also can show uncertainty or emotion in a character. The pause allows time for your audience to think about what just happened or what was just said.

Punctuation can serve as an indicator of when to pause as you read. Punctuation marks usually indicate speech phrases. The most common mark is the comma; others are the semicolon, colon, parentheses, and dash. These marks indicate a short pause. Periods, question marks, and exclamation marks always indicate the ends of phrases and sentences and are indicative of longer pauses.

Question marks may or may not indicate an upward inflection, "Did he come?" requires an upward inflection on 'come.' However, "Where were you?" may take a downward inflection if the character is indicating dismay.

In interpretive reading, punctuation can't always be used as a guide in establishing speech phrases. Sometimes pauses are necessary where no punctuation

exists, just to provide emphasis, understanding, and clarity. For example, consider this passage from Robert Ingersoll's "Liberty of Man, Woman and Child:"

... It seems sometimes, as though I had stood upon the shore of exile and gazed with tearful eyes toward home and native land; as though my nails had been torn from my hands, and into the bleeding quick needles had been thrust.

There is no punctuation after "quick" in the last line to indicate a pause is necessary, but one should be inserted to help the audience understand the meaning.

### **READING AND EYE CONTACT**

Eye contact with your audience varies, depending on the type of reading you are doing.

In narrative readings, you'll want to establish eye contact with your audience. Occasionally, though, you'll want to have a faraway look in your eyes if you want to stimulate the imaginations of your listeners.

Admittedly, it's hard to have eye contact with your audience if you're reading from a book. To have eye contact, you must be so familiar with your material that you will need only to look at the page occasionally to get the next idea. Know your material so well that you'll easily find your place when you return your gaze to your book.

When reading a monodrama or play, don't look directly at your audience. In these situations, your listeners are overhearing something that they were not meant to hear. Don't acknowledge their presence by looking at them.

This doesn't mean, however, that you shouldn't look up from your book. You should. But instead of looking at your audience, focus your eyes on some distant object or out in space. The individual you are addressing is present only in the imagination. In order to stimulate the imagination of the audience, you shouldn't break the spell by looking at them.

When giving an oratorical speech, you want to establish and maintain eye contact with your audience throughout your speech. Look at individuals in your audience as you speak.

### **CUTTING**

Usually you must fit your interpretive reading into a specific time frame. If the material you select is too long, you must edit or "cut" it to make it fit.

Your goal in cutting is to discover the real intent of the author and eliminate anything that doesn't enhance it. Generally, you can begin a selection in the middle and then read to the end. This way your reading begins right before the climax and stimulates interest and excitement. A brief introduction should provide your listeners with a synopsis of the action up to the point where your reading begins.

Following are some tips for cutting:

- ▶ In a play, use only one scene or a combination of important parts of several scenes.
- ▶ Eliminate lengthy descriptions.
- ▶ Eliminate a complete episode if the selection still will have harmony and unity.
- ▶ Cut minor characters or subplots if the meaning will remain without them.
- ▶ In a long poem, leave out whole stanzas instead of individual lines because the rhyme scheme may be interrupted.

When cutting, follow these steps:

1. Read your selection carefully.
2. Decide which parts to retain.
3. Eliminate the other parts.
4. Tie the parts together with transitions.
5. Time your reading.
6. Make any further necessary changes.
7. Read your selection again to make sure that the story still makes sense and continues to express the author's ideas and emotions.

For easy reading, you should mark your book so it shows what parts you want to read. You can emphasize the passages to be read by placing brackets around them. For those passages you've eliminated, you can cross them out. When you've left out entire pages, write "Cut to page \_\_\_\_" at the beginning of the deleted portion. Then use a bracket and write "Begin" to show where to resume reading. Sometimes you can use paperclips to hold together cuttings of many pages.

When inserting transitions, you can type the material to be inserted and clip it to the page. Or you can retype your selection and include the insertions.

# PROJECT COMPLETION RECORD **INTERPRETIVE READING**

PROJECT	SPEECH TITLE	DATE	VICE PRESIDENT EDUCATION'S INITIALS
1. Read a Story			
2. Interpreting Poetry			
3. The Monodrama			
4. The Play			
5. The Oratorical Speech			

Save this page to verify your completion of the projects in this manual. Submit the Project Completion Record form from the appropriate manuals when applying for the Advanced Communicator Bronze, Advanced Communicator Silver, or Advanced Communicator Gold awards.