

STUDENT PRESENTATION GUIDE

DRAMA

MISSION

To elevate the ability of those gifted and involved in the worship arts through information and recommendations that are both empowering and quickly accessible.

PURPOSE

By being better prepared for the experience of God's presence, leaders, vocalists, musicians, and worship team members will be able to use their God-given gifts more effectively, resulting in the changed lives of their listeners and furthering the gospel of Jesus Christ.

VISION

To come alongside pastors, worship pastors/leaders, youth pastors, and their churches, giving support to and having influence on as many musicians, volunteers, and technical team members as God has prepared worldwide.

CONTENTS

HOW TO USE YOUR STUDENT PRESENTATION GUIDE	1
SELECTION	2
COMMUNICATION	10
PRESENTATION/TECHNIQUE	18
EFFECTIVENESS	26
FINAL COMMENTS	33

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How to Use Your Student Presentation Guide

With your Student Presentation Guide, you now have access to a variety of materials. These materials allow you to access and learn valuable information related to your presentation—and your worship ministry as a whole now and in the future. Whatever your particular area of gifting, you can find expert tips and recommendations from worship and music industry professionals to improve your specific worship/arts gifts and skills.

Section 1 covers Selection—how to choose ideal song(s) for you or your team’s style, gifts, event, and audience. Section 2 offers help in Communication—ensuring you know the message you want to convey and can find the most effective way to do so. Section 3 deals with Presentation/Technique—not overlooking any aspect of how to employ the proper technique in your musical area to create the best possible presentation of your song(s) and message. Finally, Section 4 wraps it up with Effectiveness—how to assure you do everything you can to effectively bring God’s message to listeners through your performance.

You’ll find the information easy to access. Each chapter lists a number of steps in bold, with an expanded explanation following. These short, organized chapters are filled with tips, instructions, and help for all aspects of your musical gifting and potential future ministry. The table of contents lists each of the smart chapters so you can quickly locate what you want to work on at any given time.

One thing you’ll find in each Student Presentation Guide is repetition. Many areas of musical preparedness overlap, but it’s been proven that repetition is a great way to really learn! So, as you read through your guide, continue to take in all the tips and recommendations with determination and passion as you explore and improve your gifts.

Those who created this guide for you desire that this be a place to discover, develop, and deploy your gifts—and that as a result, your upcoming presentation gives you a goal to work toward as you press on toward God’s gifting and calling in your life now and in the future.



SELECTION

INTRODUCTION

Script selection is the base foundation upon which your dramatic presentation must be constructed. This guide provides some specific direction in this area.

Your drama presentation should be appropriate for the event or worship service for which it is planned. Your script must present a Christian perspective and message that provokes effective ministry. Originality and fresh, new approaches to existing material will breathe new life into your script and ultimately your performance. Be sure you keep in mind the event's theme when you select or script your presentation, then creatively weave this theme throughout your selection.

There is no easy way to select an appropriate script. When planning and selecting scripts, you may have long, passionate, and heated discussions among your team members. Reading scripts is time-consuming, and sometimes mind-numbing, work. But it simply must be done. There are no shortcuts. In this section you'll find ideas on what to look for in a script, what makes a great script, and how to determine whether a script meets the criteria for effectively communicating the theme of your event or worship service.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

There are four smart chapters in the Selection section. All four should be read prior to attempting to select a drama presentation for your event or service, because all four have relevant information that should be considered.

01. DETERMINE WHETHER YOU WILL WRITE YOUR OWN SCRIPT OR CHOOSE ONE THAT IS ALREADY WRITTEN. KEEP IN MIND THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUR OWN ORIGINALITY AND CREATIVITY; IF YOU HAVE THE CHOPS TO DO IT, WRITING YOUR OWN SCRIPT CAN PAY BIG DIVIDENDS. IF YOU WISH TO USE AN EXISTING SCRIPT, GIVE YOURSELF PLENTY OF TIME TO READ THROUGH THEM.

02. DON'T SETTLE FOR SECOND BEST. KEEP LOOKING UNTIL YOU FIND THE ONE SCRIPT THAT YOU SIMPLY MUST DO. YOU'LL KNOW IT WHEN YOU SEE IT.

03. READ THE FINAL SCRIPT WITH A CRITICAL EYE. REMEMBER TO LOOK FOR APPROPRIATENESS, EVIDENT CHRISTIAN MESSAGE, INCORPORATION OF THE EVENT THEME, AND WAYS TO INJECT ORIGINAL THOUGHTS INTO THE PRESENTATION.

04. CUT THE SCRIPT. JUST LIKE A DIAMOND IS JUDGED BY THE FOUR CS—CUT, CLARITY, COLOR, AND CARAT WEIGHT—YOUR SCRIPT MUST BE SHAPED IF IT IS TO SPARKLE AND SHINE. KEEP IN MIND THAT PLAYS ARE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. SOME PUBLISHERS DO NOT PERMIT THEIR PLAYS TO BE ALTERED IN ANY WAY. ALWAYS RESPECT THE COPYRIGHT.

05. DON'T RELY SOLELY ON YOUR OWN OPINION WHEN SELECTING A SCRIPT. SOLICIT INPUT FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES.

Appropriate

Any Christian drama presentation should reflect a Christian worldview and be performed with ministry effectiveness in mind. Be aware of your target audience and dress and perform appropriately. But who exactly is your target audience and what is appropriate for them? “Ay,” as Hamlet would say, “there’s the rub.”

1. Determine your target audience by asking, “Who is going to see this performance?”

Are you doing a sketch for children’s church where all the kids are in elementary school? Did the pastor ask for a drama sketch to illustrate a sermon point for the Sunday morning service where the congregation is all ages? Are you using the piece as an evangelical tool for street ministry where the audience may not have any religious background? In order to choose or write an effective dramatic piece, you must know who your audience is.

2. When choosing a performance piece, make sure the subject is appropriate to the audience.

Anyone who has spent any time reading the Bible knows it deals with some pretty dark and gritty subject matter. Murder, adultery, deceit, greed—all the big sins are there, and sometimes in great detail. Dramatic people tend to enjoy sinking their teeth into a really juicy role, and while the story of David and Bathsheba might make a great movie of the week, it is probably not the best drama sketch to perform for Miss Margaret’s preschool class.

3. Avoid harsh language.

Some words are simply inappropriate. Cursing, swearing, taking the Lord’s name in vain, scatological references, coarse jesting—it isn’t difficult to figure out that those words are a no-no for ministry presentations, or for life in general.

4. Avoid questionable language.

Every generation has their own slang, and sometimes that slang can be offensive to the previous generation. Many words have connotations that are meaningful, positively or negatively, to a particular set of people. If you have any question about whether a particular word or phrase is appropriate, run it by several adults. If you are still in doubt after talking to them, cut the word or phrase.

5. Only use costume pieces to reveal the character.

It has been said that clothes make the man or the woman, and nothing gets an actor into character like getting into costume. If your drama participants can wear costumes and that costume would help develop your character, by all means wear one. But keep in mind the costume must be appropriate to both the character and to the audience. A skimpy outfit might be a good indication of a woman of loose morals, but it would not be appropriate for ministry presentations.

6. Make sure the motivation behind your story or character's action is a factor of faith.

Having a good moral to your story doesn't mean it has a Christian worldview. Remember, God searches the heart, not the actions.

7. Make sure your message is the focal point of your presentation, not an afterthought.

St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." This famous quote is especially appropriate when applied to drama. Ministry takes place by keeping the message front and center throughout the drama. Ministry is particularly effective when you don't have to explain what you mean.

TIP

SOMETIMES IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE WHETHER A PARTICULAR DRAMATIC PIECE IS APPROPRIATE BY SIMPLY READING IT TO YOURSELF. READ THE PIECE OUT LOUD TO SEE HOW IT SOUNDS. READ IT WITH THE ENTIRE CAST. READ IT IN FRONT OF OTHERS IN YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE RANGE TO GAUGE THEIR REACTION. READ IT TO ADULTS AND SOLICIT THEIR OPINIONS REGARDING THE PIECE'S APPROPRIATENESS.

Christian Message

There is a fine line between a moral perspective and a Christian perspective. There is also a fine line between doing what is right and doing what is right for the right reasons. Your drama presentation should offer a Christian perspective and provide a message that keeps ministry effectiveness in mind.

1. When choosing or writing a drama sketch, you must have a specific goal in mind that you want your performance to accomplish.

Remember the Cheshire Cat from *Alice in Wonderland*? When Alice came to a fork in the road and asked the Cat which way she should go, he responded, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” “I don’t much care where,” Alice replied. “Then it doesn’t much matter which way you go,” the Cheshire Cat answered. Having a clear idea of your goal will narrow your focus and help you laser in on an appropriate script.

2. Be able to articulate the Christian perspective of your dramatic piece in one or two sentences. Use the “elevator conversation” method to describe your dramatic piece. You should know the underlying message of your dramatic presentation so well that you could encounter a stranger on an elevator and completely explain the message of your dramatic piece before they get off the elevator.

3. Have the response you wish to elicit from your audience clearly in mind.

Jesus taught in parables—little dramatic sketches, you might say. Each story had a specific spiritual application carefully designed to elicit a specific response from His audience. If your presentation does not elicit the response you wish, it will probably not be effective for ministry.

4. Examine the motivations of the characters in your dramatic piece.

Not every character in your dramatic piece should be a “good guy” or has to be motivated by Christian charity, but the overarching message that comes through must leave no doubt in the audience’s mind regarding your intentions.

5. Don’t be afraid to combine subtlety with the obvious to convey your intent.

Dramatic presentations allow for wonderful moments of subtlety, but keep in mind you only have five minutes to get your message across. You don’t want to immediately blurt your message out, but you do want it to be obvious enough that no one walks away scratching their head and wondering, “What was that all about?”

6. Be aware of the distinction between moral, religious, and Christian perspectives.

A dramatic piece that reflects a truly Christian perspective will always be grounded in love. Just doing the right thing is not enough. Remember the story of the widow’s mite? Doing a staged adaption of one of Aesop’s fables won’t cut it, no matter how great the “moral of the story” may be.

7. Make room for the audience to respond.

In many ways a drama sketch is like a sales pitch. You present the benefits of your product and create a sense of need, but if you never ask anyone to sign on the dotted line, chances are you are not going to sell anything.

Originality

“Sometimes people say, ‘Here is something new!’ But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new” (Ecclesiastes 1:10, NLT). The words of King Solomon might appear to cast a gloomy pall over your attempt to use original and creative ideas, and to demonstrate a fresh approach to your material. Fortunately, we have been created in the image of God and one of the first attributes of God revealed in the book of Genesis is His creativity. If He is creative, then you are creative! It’s time to tap into that creativity.

1. Write your own material.

Original material may not be required for your particular presentation. However, originality and creativity should always be a goal for your presentation, even if using previously written material.

2. Collaborate with your team.

If you are participating as part of an ensemble, gather other members of the group together and bounce ideas off one another. Start a brainstorming session to get the creative juices flowing. Even if you are doing a solo presentation, you still have a team—friends, parents, and youth group members who support you. Enlist their help in creating a dramatic piece that is uniquely you.

3. Use your own experiences to your advantage.

There may not be anything new under the sun, but dramatic people can make that work to their advantage. If you have an experience, good or bad, chances are a lot of other people have had similar experiences so they will be able to relate to how you felt at the time. By incorporating your experiences into your dramatic presentation, you bring a sense of something that is both uniquely personal and universally accessible to the table.

4. Put a new twist on an old standard.

Did you ever wonder why Hollywood keeps remaking old movies? It’s because what worked once will probably work again. But keep in mind that while people may love a specific story, they want to hear it in a fresh way or they will get bored. Consider taking a well-known tale but changing the setting from contemporary times to the old West or change the gender of a major character and see how she would react to the original situation.

5. Establish a fixed script and stick to it.

Whether presenting entirely original material or drawing on an existing script, it is important for every member of the team to know what every other team member is going to do. Getting creative at the last minute can throw people off.

6. Keep the event’s theme at the center of your story.

Don’t allow your creativity to push your story beyond the limits of your particular event or worship service’s theme.

7. Know when to rein yourself in.

Creativity is a marvelous gift but left unchecked it can easily drift into unsavory directions. Use wisdom in putting boundaries around your creativity.

Theme Development

Why do scary movies always seem to have a group of teenagers in a spooky old house when they hear a noise, and they all decide to split up and investigate? Didn't anyone tell them there is safety in numbers? Don't they realize how much more effective they would be by posting a united front? That's the same idea behind using a theme in a worship service or presentation. With every person and element focusing on a single theme, the total impact is exponentially greater than the participants going their separate ways. Make sure your dramatic presentation stays true to your theme.

1. Dissect the theme.

Words are marvelous things. They can mean dramatically different things to different people. The same words might even mean different things to the same people at different times and in different situations. Go beyond the surface definitions of the words to discover more than meets the eye.

2. Get personal.

Consider how a theme or topic impacts you personally. Inject your personal experiences and viewpoint into your presentation.

3. Weave all the elements of your story together around the theme.

Take some time to critically examine your script. Each character, situation, and line of dialogue should wrap around the central theme and move the story forward.

4. Don't be afraid to cut your script.

A two-hour movie might have time to chase bunnies; drama presentations as part of a larger event don't have that luxury. Anything that does not move the story forward toward the central theme should be cut.

5. Don't be afraid to push the envelope.

The theme of your worship service or event may mean something completely different to you than it does to someone else. It's okay to push the envelope when developing your piece to fit the theme, just make sure to consider the appropriateness of your creative decisions.

6. Keep the theme at the center of your story.

While it is okay to push the envelope, everyone who sees your dramatic presentation should still be able to understand how it relates to the event theme.

7. Get feedback.

Perform your dramatic presentation in front of someone who doesn't know what the theme is. Ask for feedback and constructive criticism. Can they tell what the theme of your presentation is? If they don't get it, chances are the audience won't either.

Selection Notes

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COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of drama is effective communication. A drama presentation should tell a culturally relevant story through words and actions.

Communication never happens in a vacuum. It requires both a sender and a receiver, or the actor and the audience. It is, at best, an inexact science because there are an infinite number of factors that can influence the message being understood.

The communication phase is the preparation phase. Every line, every action, every pause, prop, and sound cue must support the story and propel it forward if effective communication is going to take place. Each aspect of the dramatic presentation must be thought out beforehand, practiced and polished until there is no doubt what the message is. In this section you'll find tips on developing your character(s), improving your stage presence, and making appropriate use of your verbal and nonverbal communication abilities.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

The Communication section is all about preparation.

- 01.** DETERMINE YOUR TIME FRAME. FIND OUT WHEN YOUR FIRST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION IS DUE AND WORK BACKWARD FROM THAT POINT. GIVE YOURSELF PLENTY OF TIME TO SELECT OR WRITE YOUR SCRIPT, THEN SET MINI GOALS AND ASSIGN A DUE DATE FOR EACH. MINI GOALS MAY INCLUDE SCRIPT SELECTION; BLOCKING COMPLETED; OFF BOOK; AND COMPLETE RUN-THROUGH.
- 02.** SET ASIDE SPECIFIC TIME TO PRACTICE ON YOUR OWN, THEN ACTUALLY PRACTICE ON YOUR OWN.
- 03.** CREATE A REHEARSAL SCHEDULE THAT INCORPORATES ALL THE MINI GOALS, AND REHEARSE AS A CAST.
- 04.** MAKE TIME TO OBSERVE PEOPLE. KEEP A CHARACTER DIARY, AND WORK ON CONTINUALLY REFINING YOUR CHARACTER.
- 05.** PRACTICE YOUR VOCAL SKILLS EACH DAY. PRACTICE SUPPORTING YOUR VOICE WITH YOUR DIAPHRAGM, NOT YOUR THROAT. YOUR ACTING COACH OR CHOIR DIRECTOR CAN HELP YOU WITH THIS.
- 06.** EXERCISE, EAT RIGHT, AND GET PLENTY OF REST. YOU MUST KEEP YOUR BODY IN SHAPE IF IT IS TO PERFORM AT PEAK EFFICIENCY.
- 07.** CONTINUE EXPANDING YOUR ELOCUTION SKILLS. THIS MEANS PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU SPEAK, HOW YOU PRONOUNCE WORDS, AND YOUR VOCAL TONE.

Character Development

The mark of a great actor is their ability to disappear into the role. If you describe a movie by saying, “And then Steve Carell and Tina Fey get into this big argument,” chances are people are more aware of the actor than they are of the character the actor is attempting to portray. The character has become plastic, two-dimensional, a disposable cardboard cut-out. While you may care about the actor, you don’t really care about the character. (If you did, you would at least know their name, right?) The characters in your dramatic presentation must come alive. Your audience must care about them in order to relate to them, and they must relate to them if your presentation is to have any impact on them.

1. Name your character.

Do you ever watch movie credits and wonder, “Who was ‘Man 1’?” Man 1 is not a character. Man 1 is an interchangeable prop. Nobody cares about Man 1. Even a character with no lines deserves a name. A wise man once said, “When you give something a name, you give it a soul.” Naming your character can give you some marvelous insight into the character’s personality, background, and traits.

2. Create a background for your character.

What are the names of your character’s parents? Where does your character come from? What does your character do for a living? What are their religious beliefs and how did he or she come to them? Has there been any trauma in their life? Any major successes? How did they do in school? Write down your character’s background so you can refer to it later.

3. Develop a single trait that is unique to your character.

Think about a character trait that can help define your character. It could be physical, such as a limp. It could be habitual, such as twirling her hair with her fingers when she is nervous.

4. Find inspiration for your character by people watching.

Nothing imitates life like life. Go to the mall, a restaurant, or the park. Sit and observe people as they interact with each other in their natural environment. Chances are you will find some great inspiration for your character.

5. Draw inspiration from people you know, but only in moderation.

The easiest people to draw personality traits from are those closest to us, but keep in mind that not everyone is happy with their own peculiarities. Avoid making fun of a trait because you don’t want to inadvertently hurt anyone’s feelings.

6. Practice until your character feels natural.

Performing a character trait that feels unnatural to you will look unnatural to your audience and destroy the illusion. If you walk with a limp in your right leg at the beginning of your presentation, then forget and limp on your left leg, the audience won’t buy your performance.

7. Separate yourself from your character.

Some forms of actor training encourage actors to “become” the character. That is not always a good idea, particularly if your character is an unsavory person. You are an actor. Act.

Expression

Every trade has its tools. A carpenter has his hammer and saw. A mathematician has his slide rule. A doctor has his stethoscope. An actor has his body. Every trade has a purpose. A carpenter builds things. A mathematician computes things. A doctor heals people. An actor communicates. One method of communication that is extremely important for most actors is vocal communication. But an equally important—some believe even more important—method of communication is nonverbal communication, also known as body language.

1. Be aware of personal space.

Proximity to other people (i.e., how close you are to the next person) can have a powerful effect on your scene. Physical distance can convey a range of internal realities and emotions which may, at times, appear dichotomous. Distance between characters may indicate either estrangement or yearning. Closeness between characters may indicate a feeling of intimacy or a sense of threat. Practice your scenes with different distances between characters to determine which best conveys your messages.

2. Use the body God gave you.

Everybody is different. And everybody's body is different. In many ways our bodies define us, and we all tend to make judgments about a person based on outward appearance: fat people are jolly, pretty girls are dumb, and athletic guys are conceited. Most, if not all, of those judgments are basically flawed. Use your body to turn those preconceptions upside down. Cast against the grain.

3. Practice different facial expressions in front of a mirror.

The face has been called the organ of emotion. The eyes have been called the windows of the soul. Classic animators used to sit in front of a mirror and make faces to use as a model for their animated characters. Practice making facial expressions you believe convey such emotions as love, joy, shock, sorrow, pity, anger, fear, giddiness. Consider whether those expressions look real or fake because if you can't convince yourself, you won't convince your audience.

4. Play charades

Yes—the classic party game. Gather your cast members (or a group of friends if you are performing solo) and play charades. Concentrate on using body language, gestures, and facial expressions to convey your meanings. In addition to classic categories like movies, books, and song lyrics, include categories such as emotions.

5. Draw inspiration from classic mimes.

It has been said that “a mime is a terrible thing to waste.” Red Skelton and Marcel Marceau were masters of mime-craft. Studying their techniques (many of their routines can be found online) can inspire fresh ideas on how to get your message across without speaking.

6. Practice until your actions feel natural.

Just like playing the piano or learning to type, the body has the unique ability to retain muscle memory. Repeated practice of special facial expressions or body movements to indicate particular emotions will make the performance appear more natural.

7. Record your performance and critique your nonverbal communication.

Some people don't like to watch themselves on video. If you are one of those people, get over it. Watch yourself. Critique your performance. Pay particular attention to the way you stand, the way you move, the gestures you make, the expression on your face, the emotion in your eyes. Do you believe yourself? If not, make the necessary changes. Then repeat the process until you believe your own performance.

Posture

Comedic actor Don Knotts, best known as the bumbling Deputy Barney Fife in *The Andy Griffith Show*, was a master at using his whole body to enhance his character. In several of his films he was fond of assuming a karate stance and announcing to the world, “Karate...made my whole body a weapon.” Whether you are a karate master or not, learning to employ your whole body is central to the actor’s trade.

1. Re-examine the character.

You already know your character’s name, heritage, and personal history. You already have developed a unique character trait. Now, determine your character’s physical characteristics. The physical characteristics of your character will help to determine how she or he carries themselves (e.g., a ballet dancer will walk differently than a body builder). Write them down.

2. Consider how a character’s physical limitations may affect other characters in the scene.

Your character’s physical limitations will determine how you play the role, but it will also affect how other characters react. Elderly people may move very slowly, which makes everyone else wait. Do the other characters wait patiently, or do they get angry at the delay? Athletic characters may elicit responses ranging from envy to admiration. Characters with physical, emotional, or mental handicaps can produce a wide range of responses from pity to compassion. Write down your character’s limitations.

3. Observe people who have similar physical characteristics to your character.

Take a notepad to the mall, the park, or the recreation center and watch people in their natural habitat. When you see someone with similar characteristics, pay careful attention to how their whole body moves. Make notes but be unobtrusive. Don’t embarrass anyone or make them feel uncomfortable by staring.

4. Compile a list of physical movements based on several different people that you have observed.

Never use a single person as your source material, unless you are portraying a public figure. It’s okay to study Billy Graham’s physical mannerisms if you are playing Billy Graham. But if you are playing a generic Southern evangelist, you’ll need to expand your points of reference.

5. Spend some time studying anatomy.

An actor’s body is their primary tool for communication. It is important to know how it works, what it is supposed to do, and what it can and cannot do.

6. Practice until your actions feel natural.

Unless you are playing yourself, chances are your character is going to walk, stand, sit, and interact with others differently from you. The only way to make those differences look natural is to practice.

7. Record your performance and critique your posture.

It is important to not only get your posture right but to keep it right throughout the entire performance. You may not even be aware that your body is slipping out of character unless you watch yourself.

Stage Presence

There is an old saying in the military: When in charge, take charge. The same can be said of every actor who steps on the stage. When you walk on the stage, you should own the stage. And nothing helps you own the stage like preparing ahead of time.

1. Rehearse.

Proper planning prevents a pitifully poor performance. Nothing destroys an actor's stage presence like being unprepared. So, in order to appear comfortable, confident, in control, and in command of the stage, you must rehearse.

2. Rehearse on your own.

No actor can afford to wait for a scheduled rehearsal to learn lines and develop his or her character. Invest as much time as required to get your lines completely memorized. Rehearse your character's mannerisms, character traits, and peculiarities. Walk through your blocking in your living room. Don't waste your fellow actors' rehearsal time by showing up unprepared.

3. Rehearse with your fellow actors.

No amount of individual rehearsal can take the place of rehearsing together with your fellow actors. Timing, the delivery of lines, and the development of characters all take on a new meaning when actors perform together.

4. Prepare for the unexpected.

Actors forget their lines. Costume pieces get lost. Props get forgotten. It happens. But knowing this, you can prepare for the inevitable beforehand. Learn your material well enough so if a fellow actor drops a line, you can help get the scene back on track. Practice improvising with your fellow actors, but never improvise during a performance unless it is absolutely necessary.

5. Get to the performance location early.

Feeling rushed can heighten your sense of nervousness. Getting to the performance location early helps avoid one point of stress. If possible, take a few moments to walk the stage or performance area, particularly if you are unfamiliar with it. It can help you acclimate to the environment before you go in.

6. Practice relaxation exercises before you take the stage.

Stage fright, preshow butterflies, call it what you will—when the curtains go up, the adrenaline tends to start pumping. In order to command the stage, you need to feel relaxed and in control. Breathe deeply in through your nose and out through your mouth. Clench your fists, then relax your fingers and stretch out and loosen your muscles. Say a few tongue twisters out loud to get your mouth and vocal cords working.

7. Respect your fellow actor's preshow time.

Every actor approaches the stage differently. Some have no problem discussing serious topics right up until the curtain rises. Others need quiet time alone to get into character. Unless you are doing a solo performance, commanding the stage is a group mission. Don't jeopardize it by interfering with your fellow actors' preshow time.

Vocal Clarity

Acting is all about communication. Communication does not and will not happen when your audience does not understand you. When it comes to effective verbal communication from the stage, your words must be loud enough to be heard, enunciated well enough to be understood, and delivered with enough emotion to be felt.

1. Become completely comfortable with your script.

That means completely making sure you know the proper pronunciation of all of the words. Nothing kills a moment on stage like getting a snicker from the audience during a serious moment if an actor mispronounces a word. When in doubt, look it up.

2. Pay special attention to any lines that may cause you to stumble.

Not all lines fall trippingly off the tongue. Some lines are tongue twisters and can leave an actor tongue-tied. If you happen to have some of those kinds of lines, spend extra time reciting them aloud until you can quote them without hesitation.

3. Warm up your facial muscles and vocal cords with tongue twisters.

It is no accident that reciting tongue twisters with the whole cast prior to a show is a theater tradition. It loosens up the facial muscles, warms up the vocal cords, and gets the actor in a frame of mind to let their words flow.

4. Slow down.

Adrenaline typically kicks in when the curtain goes up. If adrenaline could talk, it would quote Jeff Goldblum in Jurassic Park: “Faster. Must go faster.” Going faster might help you elude a marauding T. rex, but it will not win you accolades from your audience. Going faster might make you slur your words. Going faster means your audience will have trouble understanding you. Going faster hinders your ability as an actor to communicate. Make a conscious effort to slow down and speak clearly.

5. Become familiar with your performance location.

Different venues have different acoustics. Performing in a cozy black box theater may give you the freedom to whisper onstage, but a whisper won't cut it on the main stage in a 1000-seat auditorium. You must have a sense of the performance location in order to know how to pitch your voice.

6. Project.

Some theaters provide microphones. Many do not. Either way, it is the actor's responsibility to ensure they are heard and understood by the audience. The best way to do that is to project. Support your voice with your diaphragm, not your throat. Speak clearly. Enunciate each word. Even if you have some form of amplification, act as if you don't.

7. Get intense, not loud.

Any line can take on a multitude of meanings depending on the inflection and emotion with which it is delivered. Try rehearsing your lines with different inflections in order to discover which most effectively conveys your meaning.

Communication Notes

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PRESENTATION/TECHNIQUE

INTRODUCTION

All the hard work goes into the selection of your dramatic piece and the preparation of the piece through practice and rehearsal. The payoff comes with the actual performance. This is where the rubber meets the road, because it doesn't matter how great you were in rehearsal if you can't duplicate it onstage with an audience looking on.

You have limited time to tell your story during the event or worship service. Your entire presentation should be memorized. You'll have no set pieces to hide behind and no stage manager to feed you a line if you forget one. It's just you, your fellow actors, and the audience. Now is the time to make your story come alive.

In this section you'll discover ideas for effectively moving characters around the stage, suggestions for using your voice as well as your body to your best advantage, and tips for staying focused onstage. This is your moment to shine!

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

The Presentation/Technique section all has to do with what happens on the stage during a presentation. But everything that happens on the stage during a presentation is influenced by all the preparation that occurred in the weeks and months prior to the performance.

01. READ THROUGH ALL OF THE SMART CHAPTERS PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTING ANY OF THE SUGGESTIONS. YOU WILL DISCOVER THAT MANY OF THE TECHNIQUES OVERLAP AND CAN BE CONSOLIDATED INTO UNIFIED REHEARSAL OR PRACTICE SESSIONS.

02. SPEND SOME TIME CRITICALLY EVALUATING YOUR SKILLS. YOU NEED TO KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AS AN ACTOR. THIS WILL HELP YOU DETERMINE WHERE YOU NEED TO SPEND THE MOST TIME.

03. SCHEDULE TIME FOR BOTH INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE AND CORPORATE REHEARSAL. BOTH ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL FOR A QUALITY PRODUCTION.

04. RECORD YOUR REHEARSAL SO YOU CAN CRITIQUE YOURSELF. MAKE ANY NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS.

05. SEEK FEEDBACK FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES. YOU CAN'T RELY ON YOUR GUT FEELINGS ALONE. YOU NEED TO HEAR THE VOICES OF OUTSIDERS IN ORDER TO DETERMINE WHETHER YOU ARE ACCOMPLISHING YOUR ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATION. AND YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE THE TIME OF YOUR PERFORMANCE OR EVENT.

Action

Show, don't tell—the cardinal rule of story. William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White said it more eloquently in their classic book *The Elements of Style*. Rule 17 simply says, “Omit needless words.” To put it even more succinctly: Do something!

1. Study the way different people move.

Most of us are so accustomed to how we move that we don't give it any thought. It's time for one more trip to the mall, park, or your favorite coffee shop to people-watch. Pay attention to the way people move. That seventeen-year-old cheerleader may skip up the steps, while that seventy-year-old grandmother may shuffle along and avoid the stairs. A young mother with a toddler on her hip maneuvers differently than an executive with a briefcase. Take notes. When you find someone who moves like your character, practice incorporating their movements into your performance.

2. Warm up your body before rehearsals or performances.

Acting means moving. In order to move freely, your muscles have to be loose and warm. Stretch out. Get limber. Move around and get your blood circulating.

3. Practice improvisational movement.

Incorporate movement that seems natural to you along with dialogue. Consider real life. You rarely carry on a conversation in a vacuum since something else is almost always going on. You may be talking about last night's baseball game while washing dishes or folding the laundry. Consider including everyday tasks into improvisational dialogue and see if it feels more natural, or it may add a new and different dynamic to the scene.

4. Make every moment intentional.

Superfluous movements draw attention and can detract from the story. Every movement must serve to define the character or move the story forward. If you have to choose between the two, in most cases you are better off using movement to advance the story.

5. Make a video recording of your performance and use it to improve your movement.

Watch the recording with a critical eye. Do you see movement that doesn't serve to move the story forward and does not help define the character? Do you see movement that is distracting or detracts from the scene? You may see unnecessary movement that you were not even aware of. Use the recording as a means of refining your movement.

6. Brainstorm alternative action.

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is one of the most produced plays in the country. It's likely that come Christmastime a community theater in the area will perform it. It would be an easy story to go stale, yet actors keep it fresh by playing it differently. George C. Scott and Albert Finney both played the role of Scrooge, and both delivered entirely different performances with essentially the same script. Different action gets different results. Experiment with different actions for the same scene to determine which one provides the best response.

7. Avoid going “over the top.”

Keep the action appropriate to the story. We've all seen big-screen, special-effects movies that were all show and no story. In those situations, you may walk away feeling cheated. Over-the-top acting can have the same effect on your audience. Sometimes a subtle movement or a quiet word can grab their attention more effectively than shouting and waving your arms.

Actor's Focus

Actors play many parts, sometimes in the same show. Patrick Stewart, best known for his role as Captain Jean-Luc Picard in *Star Trek*, is renowned for his one-man Broadway show, *A Christmas Carol*. During the course of the show, Stewart plays more than forty different characters, from crusty old Scrooge to Tiny Tim. Stewart's performance is so mesmerizing that he won the Olivier Award for it. How can one man act forty roles without ever leaving the stage and still make the whole audience believe him? One word: focus.

1. Be aware of your acting environment.

All the world may be a stage, but for an actor the stage must be his whole world. Unless specifically directed by the script to address the audience, actors must not break the “fourth wall”; that is, they must not acknowledge that the audience even exists. If a scene is going to be believable, you must focus solely on your acting environment—the stage, the set, props, and your fellow actors.

2. Get into character.

The effectiveness of your drama presentation includes how well the actor stays in character. You can't stay in character if you don't first get into character. There is no magic bullet for this one. Every actor has to find their own routine, technique, or ritual that works best for them.

3. Learn the script—forward, backward, and upside down.

Chances are at some point in the progression of your performance, someone is going to drop a line, forget the blocking, or miss a cue. If you know the whole script, and not just your own part, you will be able to keep the scene on track and moving forward.

4. Know your character like you know yourself.

Remember when you made that character sheet and created a background and profile for your character? Now is the time to really get inside his or her head to determine what makes your character tick. If you know the script, and you know your character well, when something unexpected happens you won't be thrown for a loss. You will stay in character and respond the way your character would respond.

5. Rehearse with your fellow actors.

You may be a great actor. You may be able to memorize your lines and visualize your blocking in your head without a problem. Your fellow actors may not be that good and will need to rehearse with you in order to become comfortable on stage with you. And even if you don't think you do, you need it too.

6. Prepare for the upcoming scene by reviewing the previous scene offstage.

It is difficult to go into any scene cold turkey. You have to know what happened before that brought your character to the moment where your scene takes place. Pause before you take the stage to let the previous scene play out in your mind.

7. Use physical “tells” when changing characters.

It is not uncommon for an actor to play more than one role in a play. Patrick Stewart played forty roles, remember? It is not enough to simply speak the lines, and there is no time for a costume change. You must develop a physical “tell,” or a characteristic that lets the audience know which character you are playing. It may be a nervous tic, an accent, or an attitude. Whatever it is, it must be immediately understandable to the audience and completely appropriate for the character.

Blocking

Blocking refers to an actor's basic broad movements. It serves as the physical foundation upon which the actor builds his or her performance. Blocking may be written into the script by the playwright, but most of the time the director is responsible for preplanning primary movements, such as entrances and exits, and the positions of actors onstage. Finer, more delicate stage movements are typically developed during rehearsals as the actor begins to "find" their character.

1. Read through the script with the entire cast.

Actors reading their parts together brings a different dynamic to a scene than a director might get from reading it alone. It helps to get everyone on the same page. Interplay between actors typically begins to take place and ideas for movement tend to form naturally.

2. Walk through the entire scene, allowing natural movement to flow.

Primary blocking decisions such as entrances and exits, the locations of major set pieces, and the position of characters should already be in place. Now, act. Allow natural movement to rise from the combination of the script and the character(s).

3. Make every movement meaningful.

Actors standing on stage reciting lines can get boring pretty fast, but actors moving around the stage aimlessly is confusing. Give your character some meaningful movement or action to do that either helps move the story forward or helps develop the character.

4. Consider the audience's line of sight.

Chances are you will be performing your scene more than once and at different locations. No two stages are exactly the same. No two performance venues have the same sight lines. In order for your audience get the full impact of your scene they must be able to see your character's faces. Seek staging that best allows full view of the actor's face and body. When blocking, keep your audience's line of sight in mind and be flexible enough to adjust the blocking to accommodate a different venue.

5. Spread out.

Bunching actors together makes it hard to differentiate the characters. Spread out. Give the actors room to play.

6. Use the whole stage.

Regardless of whether your performance space is large or small, it is your responsibility to fill the space. Use the whole stage but use it wisely. Remember, there must be appropriate motivation for every movement.

7. Once blocking is in place, leave it alone.

Performance time is not the time to improvise stage movement. Everyone on stage needs to be able to count on the dialogue and the blocking to be the same each performance.

Characterization

Characterization involves providing your character with attributes that define them as a human being. In many cases character attributes are obvious from the script. The language choices used, the way they interact with the other characters, the actions they take—these all tell you something about your character. Few playwrights will do all the work for you, however. In order to make your character truly human, you are going to have to create them and breathe life into him or her.

1. Character development.

Your character should present a believable representation of human motives, thoughts, actions, and emotions. You have already developed your character. Now it is time to see how they react onstage.

2. Introduce your character to the other members of the cast.

When you introduce a friend to a group, chances are you will tell more than just their name—you'll give a little background. Spend time as a cast introducing your characters to each other. Then let all the cast members assume their roles and carry on a three- to five-minute conversation, remembering to stay in character.

3. Examine the script for places where specific characterization can take place.

Not every line is fraught with meaning, but there are moments throughout the script that each character can fully come to life. It may be a particularly moving line that your character delivers. It may be in response to something another actor says. It may be a significant movement. Whatever it is you need to find it, identify it, and capitalize on it.

4. Play against type.

All great stories have a protagonist (a good guy) and an antagonist (a bad guy). Keep in mind unless you are playing Jesus or Satan, no good guy is completely good, and no bad guy is completely bad. In order to create three-dimensional characters, you must show both sides of the character.

5. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

Rehearse until you are completely comfortable with your character's reaction to every situation. If you are not comfortable giving the performance, more than likely your audience will not be comfortable watching your performance.

6. Keep it real.

Bunching actors together makes it hard to differentiate the characters and doesn't feel realistic. Spread out. Give the actors room to play.

7. Consider the difference between the way you would respond to situations presented in the script, and the way your character would react.

Once you step on the stage you must remember to respond to vocal, emotional, and physical stimulus the way your character would, not as you would.

Delivery

Delivery—it's not just what you say, it's how you say it. There is more to effective delivery than just the words coming out of your mouth. Just as baseball pitching involves the windup, the pitch, and the follow through, delivering your lines involves a complex series of events in order to be effective.

1. Practice, practice, practice.

Refer back to previous chapters. The advice is the same: practice may not make perfect, but it certainly gets you close.

2. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

No, rehearsal is not the same as practice. Practice you can do on your own, but rehearsal involves other cast members that you must interact with. Practice is imperative in order to get your lines down correctly. Rehearsal is imperative in order to get your timing down correctly.

3. Experiment: say your lines differently.

Take a simple phrase such as “I love you.” Try saying it with the emphasis on “I,” then put the emphasis on “you.” Say a statement, then say it as a question. Say it as a question and add a slight chuckle at the end. Do you see the different meanings you can express when modifying the emphasis you place on words?

4. Examine the words you must say and make sure you know their proper pronunciation: Part 1.

Keep in mind the English language has numerous words that are spelled the same but are pronounced differently (e.g., lead). Lead may be a gray metal used to make bullets, or it may be causing others to follow you. The way you pronounce the word makes all the difference.

5. Examine all the words you must say and make sure to know their proper pronunciation: Part 2.

Some words are hard to pronounce while others are not pronounced the way they look. Try saying exacerbate three times real fast. Façade looks like it should be pronounced with a hard C, but it is not. When in doubt, look it up.

6. Say tongue twisters to loosen your lips.

Reciting tongue twisters before performing is a time-honored theater tradition. Use your whole face to get the most benefit. “A big black bug bit the big black bear, made the big black bear bleed blood.” “Red leather, yellow leather, red leather, yellow leather.” There are a lot more that you can look up and practice.

7. Focus on the character to whom you are delivering your lines.

Unless you are doing a solo or delivering a Shakespearean soliloquy, you will be addressing another character and not the audience. Make sure to deliver the line to that person.

Timing/Dialogue

We've all heard the phrase "timing is everything." In reality, timing may not be everything, but it is a big part of any theater presentation's success. The bad news is timing is not an exact science. It is part preparation and part intuition, and many times it only comes with experience. When it comes to live performances, timing is rarely the same twice in a row. The good news is, with proper preparation you can get timing down.

1. Practice and rehearse.

We harp on practice and rehearsal a lot, but with good reason. If you are not prepared, no amount of natural talent will see you through. Being thoroughly prepared will help you make it through, even if you are not the most naturally talented person in the room.

2. Learn to anticipate while not appearing to anticipate.

Nothing kills a scene like unfulfilled anticipation. Maybe the telephone is supposed to ring right after your line. You say the line and start to reach for the phone, but someone misses the sound cue. You pull back your hand then the phone rings. Now the audience knows something went wrong. Wait for it.

3. Hold for laughs.

Even in the most intense theatrical presentations there is usually a moment of comic relief. The audience needs a place to laugh to break the tension. You know where the funny parts are, so when they start to laugh give them space or they will lose your next line. Hold your position, while remaining in character, until the laughter has subsided.

4. Don't hold if the laughs don't come.

It is an unpleasant fact, but some audiences simply have no sense of humor. If they don't laugh at the funny parts, just keep on going. Holding will only make things feel uncomfortable.

5. Recognize and allow for the natural rhythms of the scene to unfold.

Some moments require more time than others. As you read through a scene, make note of the natural ebb and flow of the action. Incorporate that natural rise and fall into your acting.

6. Act in "stage time" rather than regular time.

"You shall not pass!" Gandalf thunders as he slams his staff into the ground before the oncoming Balrog in *The Lord of the Rings*. It is a powerful line delivered with weight and gravitas, and at just the right speed. Actors love lines like this and want to make the most of them. Unfortunately, many times important lines are either delivered way too fast or way too slow. It can be difficult for the actor to tell if they have the timing down so having an outside source, usually the director, to tell you to speed it up or slow it down is helpful.

7. Keep the action flowing.

Pregnant pauses can kill the momentum of a play.



EFFECTIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of drama is effective communication, but communication will be ineffective—even detrimental to your cause—if the message you send is incorrectly conveyed, garbled in transmission, or misunderstood upon reception. Your responsibility is to know the theme of your event or worship service, understand how your piece fits into that theme, and make sure that message comes through loud and clear.

Admittedly, you cannot control everything. You can't fully understand the background or experiences of everyone in your audience. It is impossible to know what word, phrase, or action might be misconstrued by certain audience members. But proper preparation and plenty of prayer and research can help make the message as plain as possible.

In this section you will be challenged to think critically about your drama piece. You will be asked to look at it from different perspectives and to get feedback from outside sources. You will be encouraged to dissect your dramatic piece to determine if it is really saying what you think it is saying. Ultimately, you will be tasked with being impacted by the message you share with your audience.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

By the time you get to this section on Effectiveness, you should have already spent considerable time writing or selecting your script, developing your character, rehearsing your part, and getting feedback. You've already cut, polished, and set your presentation piece. So, what could there possibly be left to do? Start over from the beginning.

That's right. Chances are, by this time you are so close to your project that you don't see the proverbial forest for the proverbial trees. Looking with fresh eyes can mean the difference between a good presentation and an effective presentation.

01. READ THROUGH YOUR SCRIPT AGAIN. MAKE SURE IT CREATIVELY AND EFFECTIVELY INTERPRETS THE EVENT OR WORSHIP SERVICE THEME. MAKE SURE IT IS EITHER ORIGINAL OR TELLS THE STORY IN AN ORIGINAL MANNER. MAKE SURE THE MESSAGE OF THE PIECE IS EVIDENT AND THAT THE MINISTRY VALUE IS EFFECTIVE.

02. TIME YOUR PRESENTATION DURING A COMPLETE RUN-THROUGH. IN YOUR EVENT PRESENTATION, YOU'LL LIKELY HAVE LIMITED TIME TO SET UP, THEN A PERIOD OF TIME FOR YOUR PERFORMANCE, AND A BRIEF TIME TO TEAR DOWN. MAKE SURE YOU NOT ONLY REHEARSE THE PRESENTATION, BUT THE SETUP AND TEAR DOWN SO AS NOT TO DISRUPT THE FLOW OF THE SERVICE OR EVENT.

03. DO SPEED READ-THROUGHS WITH THE ENTIRE CAST. THIS IS SIMPLY GATHERING THE CAST IN A CIRCLE AND REPEATING YOUR LINES IN ORDER. NO MOVEMENT, NO EMOTION, JUST LINES. THIS WILL SHOW WHETHER EVERYONE HAS THEIR LINES MEMORIZED OR NOT.

04. REVIEW THIS MANUAL ONE MORE TIME JUST TO ENSURE YOU HAVEN'T MISSED ANYTHING.

05. RUN A DRESS REHEARSAL FOR AN UNBIASED AUDIENCE. ONCE YOU DISCOVER WEAKNESSES IN YOUR PRESENTATION, WORK ON THEM AND CONTINUE REHEARSING UNTIL YOU GET THEM RIGHT.

Evident Ministry

Using drama effectively in a worship service or event is not just about excellence in preparation, communication, and presentation. It is mostly about ministry. Just like the Word of God, ministry is a two-edged sword that cuts both ways. For drama ministry to truly be ministry, it must impact both the audience and the actor.

1. Examine the spiritual content of your performance piece.

Every dramatic piece has a message, although not all messages are godly. Not all messages are uplifting. Not all messages are truthful. Not all messages are pure. The Scripture commands us to think on those things that are good, noble, true, pure, and of good report (Philippians 4:8). Examine the message of your dramatic piece and if it does not contain significant spiritual truth, throw it out and start over.

2. Make sure the message in your dramatic piece impacts you.

If the message you are trying to convey through your dramatic piece does not touch your heart, there is a chance it will not impact your audience either.

3. Make sure the message in your piece is obvious even if you don't come right out and say it.

Drama presentations usually have a specific time limit. There is not a lot of time available to get your message across, so you don't really have time for subtleties. Make sure the message is plain enough so no one walks away wondering what the piece was about.

4. Don't preach.

Leave the preaching to a preacher. Your job as an actor is to convey truth through drama. Your challenge is to find creative ways to impart truth to your audience without appearing to preach.

5. Change must be evident.

There are an unlimited number of purposes for dramatic presentations in the context of faith, but they all have one objective in common - to elicit change. The characters in the piece must have some type of arc, or journey from point A to point B. In the end, someone or something must change. The audience must also, vicariously, enter into that change.

6. Change must be from a spiritual perspective.

For a dramatic piece to have evident ministry value, the change elicited cannot just be a call to "turn over a new leaf" or "quit doing that bad thing." Evident ministry is a call to change a person's heart. It must be motivated by love and empowered by the Holy Spirit. You can't do that on your own.

7. Get prayed up.

Pray. Pray for your audience, the message, and the group you are ministering with. Then pray some more.

Interpretation

Acting is a physical art form, and its ultimate goal is communication. In order for communication to occur there must be someone sending the message and one receiving the message. Problems occur when the sender and the receiver speak different languages. But problems in communication can occur even among people who speak the same language due to outside influences such as background, experience, and education—any of which may skew the interpretation of what is being communicated. Your responsibility as an actor is to make sure the overall message you are sending is clear and understandable.

1. Make a definitive determination about the message you wish to send.

You may find the message is inherent to a script you wish to perform, or you may decide to write your own script to incorporate the message. Either way, the message can't be forced. It must arise naturally from the story. Otherwise it may come off preachy, and you don't want to risk your performance being dismissed.

2. Discuss the message with every person involved in the production.

God's Word declares how pleasant it is when we are in unity (Psalm 133:1). The opposite is also true. A production will go awry if all of the members are pulling in different directions. Read the script together and make sure everyone is in agreement with the message being conveyed.

3. Consider secondary messages that may be inherent in the script.

It is possible—even likely—that your scene will lend itself to subplots and secondary messages. It is good to know that they are there but remember to keep the “main thing” the main thing.

4. Seek fresh eyes.

It is easy to get so close to a project that you assume everyone else knows what you know. Perform the scene in front of people who have never read the script. Ask them what they think of the overall message is. If they don't understand it, chances are your intended audience won't either.

5. Don't be afraid to tweak your scene to make the message clear.

We've all heard the saying, “When in doubt, throw it out.” If what you are doing on stage doesn't work—if it does not move the story forward or serve to make the message plain—cut it, tweak it, rewrite it, or start over if you have to.

6. Make sure the message supports your event or worship service theme.

Your drama presentation should creatively and effectively interpret the theme.

7. Show, don't just tell.

The purpose of drama is to lead the audience to your conclusion, and they can experience joy in the discovery. There is a fine line between showing the audience your message and telling the audience your message. If you have to tell them, you might as well have passed it out in written form.

Preperation

Garbage in, garbage out. How many times have you heard that phrase? It means the end result is usually determined by the quality of effort put into the preparation. Sometimes you might get lucky and have one of “those” moments when everything just falls into place. But those are few and far between, and you can’t always count on them. Most of the time great scenes happen because the actors make them happen by being thoroughly prepared.

1. Begin with prayer.

Prayer may sound like basic advice, but it’s not and it never goes out of style. Pray about the script. Pray about the cast. Pray over every person involved in the presentation. Prayer is the key foundational stone that you must build upon.

2. Be diligent in searching for the right script.

Whether you choose to write your own script or find one in the commercial marketplace, the one thing you cannot do is settle for second best. If you are prayed up, you will have an idea of what you are looking for. Don’t stop until you find it.

3. Make sure the script you select adequately matches the theme of the event.

An effective drama presentation will creatively and effectively interpret the theme of your event or worship service. The best script in the world would be inappropriate if it did not meet this goal.

4. Seek wisdom from those who are wiser than you.

You’ve prayed, you’ve sought, you’ve found. Now lay it in front of someone spiritually mature who you trust to confirm your selection.

5. Make it your own.

Some performance pieces out there are proven winners and are used over and over. However, even proven winners can get old, dusty, overused, and boring at some point. Regardless of whether you write your own script or pull one from the commercial market, you must find a way to make it your own. If you connect with the script, more than likely your audience will find it easier to connect with you.

6. Learn your lines and blocking.

To be its most effective, your entire presentation should be memorized—lines, expressions, and movements. No excuses.

7. Practice and rehearse.

The famed pianist Ignacy Paderewski once commented, “If I miss one day of practice, I notice it. If I miss two days, the critics notice it. If I miss three days, the audience notices it.” The effort you put into practicing on your own and rehearsing with other cast members will be obvious in the final product.

Effectiveness Notes

To minister the most effectively through drama, your entire presentation must be memorized. Lines, blocking, everything. Yes, it will be hard work, but here are some tips to help with memorization. Not everyone is wired the same way, so implement the suggestions that work for you and don't worry about the ones that don't.

1. Break down your lines into bite-size pieces.

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. It's the same with memorizing your lines. Don't concentrate on tackling that big speech first. Concentrate on one sentence, or even just one phrase, of that speech. Once you have pieces of it memorized, then work on putting all the parts together.

2. Read your lines out loud (over and over again).

Abraham Lincoln used to drive his law partners crazy by reading the newspaper to himself out loud. When asked why he did it, Lincoln explained that using multiple senses (speaking, hearing, and reading) helped him better comprehend and retain what he was reading. Try it; you might be surprised at how effective it is.

3. Record your cue lines.

It is not always possible to get in as much rehearsal time with your fellow cast members as you should or would like. By recording your cue lines, you can play them back and respond with your lines anytime you have free time to practice.

4. Take advantage of the isolation of your automobile.

Commuting to school or work is a great place to get in some practice time, particularly if you are driving alone.

5. Walk through your lines.

Dialogue is not performed in a vacuum; rather, it is performed in context. You have to move from point A to point B during your performance. Walking through your blocking while reciting your lines will help to link the dialogue to the movement in your mind and in your muscle memory.

6. Listen to your fellow cast members.

You can't afford to simply wait for your cue so you can recite your next line. You must actively listen to your fellow cast members and respond appropriately. Pay attention to what they say and what they are doing so you can react naturally.

7. Develop a preshow routine.

Stress can hurt or hinder your ability to remember things in critical moments. It helps to be relaxed. Develop a preshow routine that works for you. Some actors need to be alone in a quiet place, while others need to move around and get loose. Find out the routine that puts you in the best frame of mind to deliver on stage.

Understandable Concept

What makes a drama presentation great? Characters? Plot? Staging? All of these and much, much more. The ultimate goal of drama is communication, so the real test of great drama is whether or not you attained the desired response from your audience. That is determined by whether you have chosen the right script, honed your craft, and delivered on stage.

1. Understand your medium.

This is live theater—not the movies, not television. Live theater operates with a different set of standards compared to any other communication medium. You must learn how it works, which you can do by going to see plays. Watching theater will help you understand what works and, perhaps even more importantly, what doesn't work.

2. Less is more.

Keep the concept simple and the set uncluttered.

3. Focus on the primary message.

Be sure the main idea is communicated.

4. Tell the story.

Start at the beginning, move in a linear fashion, and finish strong at the end.

5. Develop your character.

Only you can introduce your character to your audience. The audience doesn't have to like your character, but they must know your character in order to care about what happens to your character.

6. Learn your lines.

It's not always fun or easy, but it must be done.

7. Get started and don't stop.

Performing is like driving on ice—you have to go with the flow. Slamming on the brakes or turning too sharply is a recipe for disaster. Similarly, once you get started on your drama presentation don't stop. Move through dropped lines and missed cues. Take your audience on a journey and do what you can to ensure they are glad they came along for the ride.

Final Comments

Drama is the very act of creation, and nowhere is human nature closer to the divine nature than when we are creating.

Drama presentations can be powerful tools—for good or for evil. They can make people laugh or cry, feel giddy or disgusted. They can motivate change and inspire action. The best of them point people toward the truth.

Acting is both an art and a science. Techniques can be learned. Lines can be memorized. Audience reaction can be measured. But the connection between the actor and the audience is more of a spiritual equation that can't be studied under a microscope. Some actors have it naturally while others develop it over time.

The lure of the stage can be a powerful thing. People take the stage for a number of reasons, and many times it is because they have a certain desire for fame. Some actors have compromised their values or morals for fifteen minutes of fame. It's imperative that you check your motives before stepping on to the stage. If you do it for any other reason than love, you risk becoming another “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1, NLT).