



Becoming Professional

1. Project! Have someone stand at the back of the room where you will be performing. Start speaking your lines softly, slowly getting louder until your "listener" can hear you clearly without you having to shout. Make sure that when you speak, you speak from your diaphragm so that you don't strain your vocal chords (see "Finding your diaphragm" on page four).

2. Enunciate! In fact, over-enunciate ev-er-y vow-el and ev-er-y con-so-nant. Don't speak too quickly, and punctuate the beginning and ending consonants of each word. Speak with expression, and animate your face as you speak. As an exercise, try the diction game at the bottom of this page.

3. Memorize! This includes learning the lines immediately prior to your part so that you know when to come in. The best way to memorize is through multiple repetitions, always practicing your part out loud with as much expression and dynamics as you can muster. Try emphasizing different words and phrases each time you speak, to help you decide what sounds best. If needed, highlight your lines, and perhaps even write them out, so you have a "visual picture" of the page to help you remember. Finding time to rehearse lines several times daily will help you remember faster than practicing just once a week for a longer time period. Practice anytime you're alone: while doing dishes, in the shower, in the car, etc.

4. Block it! It is important to rehearse your entrance, exit, and any steps you take throughout the drama piece, until you memorize exactly where you are on the stage at any given moment, and can be consistent in your positioning from rehearsal to rehearsal. This helps to avoid "traffic jams" with other actors on stage during performance. Even if you are a "one-man show": if you are performing at your church on a Sunday morning then you may be sharing the stage with band/songster/platform personnel as well as various furniture obstacles such as the pulpit or the holiness table. Also don't forget about sound system wiring (such as microphone cords) or audience members' legs possibly tripping you up! Depending on the piece, you may be using congregational aisles and sanctuary entrances/exits as well. The more confident you are in your blocking, the easier it will be for you to avoid all these hazards come performance time.



5. Simplify! Usually, simpler is better: it is amazing what an audience can imagine. For instance, the simple change of a hat can mean a change of character. My favourite memory is watching Frank Peretti (the author of "This Present Darkness" and all its sequels) do a half hour monologue in which he used a chair on wheels to represent God. Speaking to the chair (and about the chair) helped both him and his audience concentrate on what he was saying and visualize the scenario. Of course, you need to make sure all props are in their correct (and easily accessible) places before a performance!

Practice your diction...

A great way to practice enunciation is by reciting tongue-twisters. There's no need to say them really fast. The point is to speak it distinctly, animating your mouth with each syllable. As a variation, try out different emotions with each sentence (angry, crying, laughing, nervous...). This is fun with a friend, but if alone, practice in front of a mirror:



Blue bugs have black blood... Unique New York...
Rubber baby-buggy bumpers... Toyboat, toyboat...
Thin sticks thick bricks...

6. Focus! Once you think you have it perfect, try performing it while one or two friends (representing the audience) do everything they can to distract you! Let your friends make faces, noises, whatever it takes, until you can perform the piece without missing any cues. In real life, all it takes is for a misbehaving child or a sudden loud noise on performance night to unnerve an amateur actor on-stage and cause some awkward moments.