

7 Steps

Preparing your Shakespeare Speech

By Christina Gutekunst with special thanks to John Gillett and his book 'Acting on Impulse' from which have been taken extracts.

Content:

Step 1: Engaging your Imagination

Step 2: Anchoring impulses physically and with your breath; marking the thought changes

Step 3: Doing it whilst still, exploring keywords and key lines

Step 4: Linking and enhancing what you found out through the rhythm

Step 5: Embellishing your work with the Figures of Speech

Step 6: Bringing it all together: Finding full vocal and physical expression; clarifying your actions

Step 7: Build up Character imaginatively on basis of Actions

Step 1

Engaging your Imagination

- **Analysing the character and the play**

Given circumstances:

1. **Who** am I? My name, sense of identity, what has formed me in terms of background, family, class, background, key events. Find at least 5 contrasting characteristics, status, profession, age, finding out what other people and my character say about my character etc.
2. **Where** am I in the speech? Where have I come from and where am I now, where am I going? What is the specific place, the district, town, country and what is the space around me?
- 3.) **When?** /What time is it in the speech? Time of day, day and date, season, year, epoch?
- 4.) **Why** am I here? What events, people, relationships and reasons bring me to this place?
- 5a) **What** do I want in the speech? Objective
- 5b) What do I want in the play and beyond the play? Super Objective?

- **Analysing the Speech:**

1. Unit title summarising what is happening
2. Making sense of the language-knowing what everything means-being able to say it in my own words

Speak it as yourself in the given circumstances low key

3. Objective
4. Mark thought changes
5. Punctuation: a fundamental assistance to intonation given by the author/editor is punctuation, which clarifies how the sentences are phrased and structured, and therefore indicates where the breath is taken and whether the voice rises or falls.
6. What is at stake?
7. What is my character's obstacle?

Step 2

Anchoring Impulses Physically and with your Breath

'Real action begins when there is no character as yet, but an 'I' in the hypothetical circumstances. If that is not the case, you lose contact with yourself, you see the role from the outside, you copy it'
Stanislavski

1.) Exploring the Impulses behind the language

- **Being in the Present Moment**

"I know nothing but I will find out!"

Start as yourself from a centred, balanced, still position with your centred breath flowing freely, your body being released and your mind engaging into the present moment whilst imagining your given circumstances.

- **Marking every thought change with a move**

Start with the first thought standing still. Let the next arriving thought create a physical response and move on the impulse the thought creates. Then let the thought release out of this by speaking it.

Be strict with yourself!

Don't:

1. Do not move without an impulse
2. Don't move and speak at the same time
3. Don't use gestures
4. Don't perform or play a character but do it as yourself within the given circumstances. Your movements will not be naturalistic but express the impulse that you have received from the arriving thought
5. Don't recite, detaching yourself vocally

Do:

1. Do it as yourself within the given circumstances
2. Open your body's sensory awareness-open your solar plexus/breath area and receive the impulses created by the thought
3. Move on the impulse you have received and **after this** speak the line out of this impulse
4. Wait until the next thought arrives
5. Use your own voice; do it low key to start with; create a relationship between yourself and the text with your own vocal identity

Example: Angelo, Measure for Measure, Act 2, Sc. 2

Objective: I want to work out what is happening to me

What is at stake: my virtue

Obstacle: my desire

/=thought change and requires a move

'What's this? / What's this? / Is this her fault or mine?
/The tempter or the tempted, who sins most, ha?/
/Not she; nor doth she tempt; /but it is I
That, lying by the violet in the sun,
Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,
Corrupt with virtuous season. /Can it be
That modesty may more betray our sense
Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground enough,
Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
And pitch our evils there? / O fie,/ fie, /fie!/
What dost thou? / or what art thou, Angelo?
/Dost thou desire her foully for those things
That make her good? /O, let her brother live!
/ Thieves for their robbery have authority
When judges steal themselves. / What, do I love her,

That I desire her to speak again,
And feast upon her eyes? /What is't I dream on?
(carrion=rotting meat; woman's lightness=easy going sexually)

Step 3

Doing it whilst still-Exploring Keywords, Key Phrases and Antithesis

Let the thoughts arrive. Allow your breath (solar plexus) and body to receive the different thought changes creating different impulses. Speak on these impulses.

Note: The impulses that you have discovered and now anchored into your body/muscle memory are the foundation for playing clear psychological actions performed verbally or physically eg. I reprimand, I attack, I embrace, I accuse, I manipulate, I reject, I bemuse, I convince

- **Accentuation: Key words in the line**

The stress or accent should single out the keyword in a phrase.

The keyword(s) will give you a sense of where the meaning of a thought lands. Once the keywords have been found there will be varying degrees of strong and light accentuation, major and minor stresses, that give movement and life to a phrase. The action emerges from the accentuated words; e.g. following actions are possible:

I search and I examine for line 1

I press for line 2

I rule out for line 4

I realise for line 4,second beat and line 5,6,7

1 'What's this/ What's this? /Is this **her fault**, or **mine**?

2 /The **tempter**, or the **tempted**, who **sins** most, ha?/

4 /Not **she**; nor doth she **tempt**; /but it is I

5 That, lying by the **violet** in the **sun**,

6 Do as the **carrion** does, not as the **flower**,

7 Corrupt with **virtuous** season. /Can it be

That **modesty** may more **betray** our sense

Than woman's **lightness**? Having **waste ground** enough,

Shall we desire to **raze** the **sanctuary**
 And **pitch** our **evils** there? O fie, fie, **fie!**
 What **dost** thou? Or what **art** thou Angelo?
 Dost thou **desire** her **fouly** for those things
 That make her **good**? O, let her brother **live!**
Thieves for their **robbery** have **authority,**
 When **judges steal** themselves. What, do I **love** her,
 That I **desire** to hear her to **speak** again,
 And **feast** upon her **eyes**? What is't I **dream** on?
 O **cunning enemy,** that, to catch a **saint,**
 With **saints** dost **bait** thy **hook.** Most **dangerous**
 Is that **temptation** that doth **goad** us on
 To **sin** in loving **virtue.** **Never** could the **strumpet**
 With **all** her double **vigour,** **art** and **nature,**
Once stir my **temper:** but this **virtuous** maid
Subdues me quite. **Ever** till now,
 When men were **fond,** I **smil'd** , and wonder'd **how.**

(carrion=rotting meat; woman's lightness=easy going sexually; waste ground=brothels; art and nature= the artifice of the courtesan with the natural appeal for sex; stir my temper= disturb my mental balance)

Note: when we come to explore the rhythm the above accentuations will have to fit into the five stresses of the pentameter rhythm.

- **Antithesis**

Antithesis will also help to crystallize the sense and impulse of the lines. Antithesis means contrast.

e.g.

hot-cold,

old-new,

summer-winter

Bring out the antithesis that is highlighted in Angelo's speech with your pitch range.

Angelo, Measure for Measure:

'The **tempter** or the **tempted**, who sins most, ha?
 Not **she**, nor does she tempt; but it is **I**
 That lying by the **violet** in the sun,
 Do as the **carrion** does not as the flower,

Corrupt with **virtuous** season. Can it be
That **modesty** may more betray our sense
Than woman's **lightness**?
(carrion=rotting meat; woman's lightness=easy going sexually)

- **Key sentences in the speech**

Just as words will be stressed, so particular phrases or sentences may be accented above others to bring out the relative importance through inflection, pauses, tempo and rhythm. See example below:

'What's this? What's this? Is this her fault or mine?
The tempter or the tempted, who sins most, ha?
Not she, nor doth she tempt; but it is I
That, lying by the violet in the sun,
Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,
Corrupt with virtuous season. Can it be
That modesty may more betray our sense
Than woman's lightness? **Having waste ground enough,
Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
And pitch our evils there?** O fie, fie, fie!
What dost thou? Or what art thou Angelo?
Dost thou desire her foully for those things
That make her good? O, let her brother live:
Thieves for their robbery have authority
When judges steal themselves. What, do I love her,
That I desire to hear her speak again,
And feast upon her eyes? What is't I dream on?
O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint,
With saints dost bait thy hook! Most dangerous
Is that temptation that doth goad us on
To sin in loving virtue. **Never could the strumpet
With all her and double vigour, art and nature,
Once stir my temper: but this virtuous maid
Subdues me quite.** Ever till now,
When men were fond, I smil'd and wonder'd how.

(carrion=rotting meat; woman's lightness=easy going sexually; waste ground=brothels; art and nature= the artifice of the courtesan with the natural appeal for sex; stir my temper= disturb my mental balance)

Please note that you have already discovered where the accents are through making sense of the thoughts and their impulses behind them. Now we need to link this to the rhythm.

Step 4

Linking and enhancing what you found out through the Rhythm

Rhythm is the pattern of the length and stress of beats of sound or stillness in a particular measure. Shakespeare's verse has five beats to every line-the pentameter and usually the rhythm is formed by the iambic 'de-**dum**'.

De-**dum** de-**dum** de-**dum** de-**dum** de-**dum** *iambic pentameter*

But we find in Shakespeare four other classical Greek rhythms that vary the dominant iambic pattern or metre for the sake of the sense in the line.

trochee	dum -de
anapaest	de-de- dum
dactyl	dum -de-de
spondee	dum - dum

We need to find the 5 stresses of the pentameter rhythm in the line in order to get the flow of the pentameter, taking into account that we already found the stresses/accenuation emerging out of the meaning.

Eg. Angelo, Measure for Measure:

What's **this**? / What's **this**? / Is this **her fault** or **mine**?/
The **tempter**, or the **tempted**, **who sins most**?

3 thought changes in 1st line

Line 1: Action: I search; I confront; question

Line 2: probe

The rhythm according to sense and action is not a regular iambic pentameter for line 1 or two.

- Note if it is a regular pentameter for most of the speech or irregular and what that says of my character's state of mind and the situation.

- Find out how the objective and your sense of the line's meaning stress certain words. See how a regular iambic pentameter might not convey the sense.

The iambic version would be:

What's **this**? What's **this**? Is **this** her **fault** or **mine**?

However what we know about Angelo trying to work out what is happening to him suggests stressing the words like this:

 / / / / /
 What's **this**? / What's **this**? / Is this **her fault** or **mine**?
 / / / / /

The **tempter**, or the **tempted**, **who sins most**, ha?

This creates a 'sprung rhythm' where the sense goes against the iambic rhythm.

- 1 What's **this**? /What's **this**? /Is this **her fault** or **mine**?/
- 2 The **tempter** or the **tempted**, **who sins most**, ha?/
- 3 Not **she**, **nor** doth she **tempt**; /but **it** is **I**
- 4 That **lying by** the **violet in** the **sun**,
- 5 **Do** as the **carrion does not** as the **flower**,
- 6 **Corrupt** with **virtuous season**. /**Can** it **be**
- 7 That **modesty** may **more** betray our **sense**
- 8 Than **woman's lightness**? Having **waste ground** enough,
- 9 Shall **we desire** to **raze** the **sanctuary**
- 10 And **pitch** our **evils there**? O **fie**, fie, **fie**!
- 11 What **dost** thou? Or what **art** thou **Angelo**?
- 12 Dost **thou desire** her **fouly** for **those things**
- 13 That **make** her **good**? O, **let** her **brother live**:
- 14 **Thieves** for their **robbery have** authority
- 15 When **judges steal** themselves. **What**, do I **love** her,
- 16 That **I desire** to **hear** her **speak** again,
- 17 And **feast upon** her **eyes**? What **is't** I **dream** on?
- 18 O **cunning** enemy that, to **catch** a **saint**,
- 19 With **saints** dost **bait** thy **hook**. **Most** dangerous
- 20 Is **that** temptation **that** doth **goad** us **on**
- 21 To **sin** in **loving** virtue. **Never** could the **strumpet**
- 22 With **all** her **double** vigour, **art** and **nature**,
- 23 **Once stir** my **temper**; but this **virtuous maid**
- 24 **Subdues** me **quite**. Ever **till now**,
- 25 When **men** were **fond**, I **smiled** and **wondered how**.

Most lines are male (stressed) at the end giving it a definite quality; Line 2: has an extra syllable ('ha') making it 11 instead of 10 syllables which

unbalances the thought; Line 5 has an extra syllable; line 8 : has one syllable too many but the last syllable is male; line 15: has an extra female syllable unbalancing him; etc

Step 5:

Embellishing your work with the Figures of Speech

Figures of speech perform following service:

- 1.) They lead you to discoveries about your character you are playing
- 2.) They create the emotional tone of the scene
- 3.) They do half the acting for you

Noting the figures of speech in your speech:

enjambment: the effect produced when the sense runs on continuously from one line to the next

imagery: use of visual and conceptual language to represent ideas, objects, actions, feelings, often using metaphor, simile, and symbols

metaphor: implied comparison between two objects otherwise unconnected, e.g. 'He was a lion in battle'

simile: explicit comparison between two objects, e.g. 'He fought like a lion.'

symbol: something that stands for something else, e.g. flag for nation, scales for justice, dove for peace

alliteration: repetition of consonants or vowels in the beginning of two or more words in a phrase

assonance: resemblance of sounds, e.g. cause to curse (same consonants with different vowel sounds between them)

antithesis: Shakespeare: 'Setting the word against the word' - the contrasting of two ideas by using words of opposite meaning in consecutive clauses

pun: a play on a word with two or more meanings to twist the sense, e.g. when Mercutio is stabbed, he says: 'Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a *grave* man.'

Oxymoron: apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction (e.g. faith unfaithful kept him falsely true)

Repetition: Note **repetitions** and how they require a different way of speaking the same words. Why does your character say something twice? Note that there might be different actions required. E.g. below: Angelo, Measure for Measure:

'Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
and pitch our evils there? /O **fie, /fie, /fie!**

The ladder: device for building the intensity of feeling. The ladder starts with an image, a statement, or a feeling which is capped by one that outdoes the other, and then another and another rising to the top climactic rung of the ladder. According to the law of dynamics, this will either be through growing volume, rising pitch and /or increasing pace, the choice between them being determined by the way in which the imagery, the circumstances, the objective, act on the inner energies of the speaker. See pictorial representation of the ladder device:

10 TO MARRIAGE

9 A Pair Of Stairs

8 **And in these degrees have they made**

7 **But they sought the remedy**

6 ***No sooner knew the reason***

5 **But they asked one another the reason,**

4 **But they sighed; no sooner loved**

3 **but they loved; no sooner loved**

2 **but they looked; no sooner looked**

1 **for your brother and my sister no sooner met**

Angelo:

1 What's this? /What's this? /Is this her fault or mine?/
2 The tempter or the tempted, who sins most, ha?/
3 Not she, nor doth she tempt; /but it is I
4 That lying by the violet in the sun,
5 Do as the carrion does not as the flower,
6 Corrupt with virtuous season. /Can it be
7 That modesty may more betray our sense
8 Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground enough,
9 Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
10 And pitch our evils there? O fie, fie, fie!
11 What dost thou? Or what art thou Angelo?
12 Dost thou desire her foully for those things
13 That make her good? O, let her brother live:
14 Thieves for their robbery have authority
15 When judges steal themselves. What, do I love her,
16 That I desire to hear her speak again,
17 And feast upon her eyes? What is't I dream on?
18 O cunning enemy that, to catch a saint,
19 With saints dost bait thy hook. Most dangerous
20 Is that temptation that doth goad us on
21 To sin in loving virtue. Never could the strumpet
22 With all her double vigour, art and nature,
23 Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid
24 Subdues me quite. Ever till now,
25 When men were fond, I smiled and wondered how.

Some examples of Figures of Speech: We have already found the antithesis-see Step 3; read the speech and discover the monosyllabic words that slow down the tempo and give gravitas to what is being said. There are loads in this speech.
Line 1: repetition of question; Line 3,6,8,12,15,19,21,24: caesuras and enjambments; Line 4: imagery violet/sun=innocence; line 5: imagery: carrion=rotting, corrupted meat line 7
alliteration: **m**odesty **m**ay **m**ore

Step 6:

Bringing it all together: Finding full vocal and physical expression and clarifying your actions

- **Magic 'If'**

Doing it as myself in the given circumstances

If I am the character, what do I do in this situation for real?

Really consult your 5 W-Questions and place yourself into the situation. **Don't think** what you would do but **experience** what you would do. 'If I am in these circumstances, imagined as if they are real, what **do** I do intuitively, spontaneously, unpremeditatedly, in response to them?'

Do:

- Really go through all the 5 given circumstances in detail and place yourself within them
- Where? mark yourself a stage set, imagine your environment
- Focus on the actual problem moment by moment as your neutral self, engaging into your detailed imagined given circumstances.
- Approach this with a calm centred mind and a released, centred body and breath
- Detail counts! Moment by moment.
- Receive responses, also emotional ones and allow gestures that are specific to your character and the situation to arise
- Go through the speech whilst standing still and concentrate on the gestures your character will make but don't use gestures that describe your thoughts

Don't :

- demonstrate an emotional state or wring for emotions
- detach yourself and demonstrate what is happening
- generalise!

Clarifying the actions

Going through the speech again, note if you really have clear actions. Clarify them. Think of a range of clear action verbs. Inhabit the actions. Play with different ones.

Note: You are now finding organic movements within the 'where?', the 'what?', the 'when?' and the 'why?' that are connected to your body (will) and your mind (thoughts) and emotional responses

Vocal Performance

Vowels and consonants

Vowels are the emotion and consonants are the shape of the embodied thoughts

First make sure that you are on your rooted, centred breath:

Vowels:

- Go through your speech just using the vowel sounds and sense what type of vowel sound is predominant in the speech giving you a pretty good clue what is happening emotionally to your character
- Note the vowel sounds on your key stresses and how they connect and become your emotional response to the action you are playing
- Link the above to clear RP vowel shapes

Consonants:

- Now go through the speech only using the consonants. Sense what type of consonants are in your speech. Are there a lot of fricatives or are there a lot of plosives? How does this work with any alliteration that might be in your speech?
- Note the consonants on your key stresses and how they highlight your action
- Make sure that you use clear RP consonants and clusters.

Step 7:

Build up Character imaginatively on the Basis of the Actions

Character

Now go through it letting your character's qualities and everything you know about your character affect you.

Work under the influence of what you have discovered.

'If I am the character

- How do my characteristics influence my body and gestures
- How do I walk?
- What tempo do I have?
- What imaginary centre leads?
- Laban effort (s)?
- What is my psychological gesture? (non naturalistic, expressive gesture, using the whole body, expressing the Super –Objective of the character)
- What is my vocal centre in terms of the ZOO, Woe, Shaw, Go ,MA?

Do:

- Improvisations on a daily activity your character might do and work under the influence of the above
- Stay centred and at ease with a free flowing breath and let your body respond and not your cerebral brain

Don't:

- Demonstrate choices.
- Detach yourself.

