INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE

Bringing Words to Life

Travis Kiger & Ganer Newman

NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL FORENSIC LEAGUE

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Writing a book such as this is such a funny thing, as it is as much a collective of the ideas and experiences we've learned and gleaned from others as it is a product of our own ideas and experiences.

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Finally, I would like to thank my parents, who sacrificed so much to facilitate my participation in the activity. My mother, Paulette Newman, judged countless rounds, chaperoned most of our tournaments, and prepared Michelin star quality food for our judges' lounge (coaches of teams well outside our district frequently told me my mother's cooking kept our tournament on their schedule). My dad, Ganer Lee Newman, III, taught me how to teach. He passed away on August 19, 2021, and I hope the many lessons of his I've shared in the book honor his memory. I remember him driving me home after a tournament in high school. I was disappointed I did not advance to the final rounds and dealt with my frustrations by complaining incessantly about the judges and my fellow competitors. After a while, my dad looked over at

me and said, "Son, I'm not an expert in speech and debate, but I know what I like and what I don't like and you do too. You cannot control who judges you or what the other competitors do. I understand it's frustrating, but there was SOMETHING about the other performers that the judges liked and there was SOMETHING about your performance they did not like. Rather than pointing out everyone else's flaws, you might be better off figuring out what the judges like and giving them more of that." I probably shrugged off the advice at the time, but his simple logic will stick with me for the rest of my life.

Both authors would like to thank the NSDA for the opportunity. We hope that you are duly impressed with our efforts.

Foreword

We wrote the first edition of this book in 2012. I was a graduate assistant coach at Western Kentucky University, and Travis taught high school English and Speech, coaching a small team. We'd both been coaching for some time, building experiences with teams big and small, old and new. We were elated to share some product of our competing and coaching journeys. We were mildly concerned about the end-date of a 5,126-year-long cycle in the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar potentially meaning the end of all things, but we were excited to share about speech and debate, nonetheless. After all, the time after a cataclysmic event will demand the responsible voices of our youth.

10 years later. The world was still around, and we were invited to revisit the text. Of course, there were some examples and event updates to do. For example, Program Oral Interpretation (POI) did not yet exist as an NSDA event. Though, there were also changes needed to better reflect our competitive community. In particular, we were charged with revisiting the book to remove ableist language, language that reinforced gender binaries, and any other exclusionary or otherwise problematic textual choices. Oh, yeah—and add our thoughts on a main stage event that didn't yet exist at the NSDA National Tournament (POI). We leaped at the opportunity to amend our ideas, teach the process of composing one of our favorite events, and ultimately develop a more inclusive text.

10 years earlier. At the time we were first asked to write the book, we were running one of the largest summer institute interpretation labs in the country, had recently coached the national champion in Dramatic Interpretation, and were eager to share the lessons we'd learned in our collective 20 years competing and coaching forensics. Since we published the book, thousands of coaches and students have read (or at least, downloaded) its contents. We have mixed feelings about this. On one hand, we are proud that we've shared our vision of making the process of creating interpretation events fun and accessible. On the other hand, rereading the book for this edition left us with a sense of regret that a few of the ideas presented in the book are so inconsistent with our contemporary thinking and approach. For example, our unit on Competing at Tournaments fea-

tured myopic positions on tournament attire that we now believe to be deeply outdated, if not actively harmful. We are sorry these ideas remained in the text for as long as they have, and we are eager to present an approach more in line with the progressive practices we've consistently and successfully applied in the years since the text was initially published.

Upon returning to the book, it is abundantly clear that while certain constants in the activity remain, speech and debate has also experienced substantial change over the last decade. The National Speech & Debate Association added new events to the main stage, including Program Oral Interpretation. We were especially excited to share our thoughts on crafting a POI. I've coached or co-coached POI at Western Kentucky University since 2013, helping more than a dozen students reach national final rounds in the event, including three national champions. In addition to decades of experience coaching students at the highest level possible in Oral Interpretation events, Travis has spent decades teaching students to develop spoken word poetry (with students reaching finals at Brave New Voices) and creative works, as well as coaching POI semifinalists and finalists. We both truly believe in the power of this event. We've seen POIs that sparked tremendous lasting change, and we are excited to watch the diverse array of innovative programs inspired or assisted by this exciting new chapter in the book.

Other aspects of the activity have experienced substantial change over the last 10 years, as well. For one thing, forensics went virtual for the first time since it emerged in ancient Greece (Aristotle was forever complaining of inconsistent WiFi access in Macedonia). The pandemic, which is beginning to subside as we write these words, forced students and coaches from around the globe to find new ways to move audiences over video conferencing technologies. It's been a difficult moment in our world, but it's also been life affirming seeing students boldly sharing their truth in spite of the challenging circumstances.

While the changes brought on by the pandemic have posed their share of complications, other welcome changes have made the activity a more inclusive, safer space. Governing organizations in high school and collegiate forensics have made greater efforts to make the activity more inclusive, from diversifying judging pools to increasing access to a greater range of literature from historically underrepresented artists and content creators. The activity has also prioritized identifying and ameliorating sources of sexism, racism, ableism, cultural prejudices, and homophobia within the competitive community.

One productive change we've seen in the last few years emerged from students and coaches demanding accountability from leaders in the activity and a calling for healthier coaching practices. It's taken me a long time to admit that I have experienced abuse in the activity

that has substantially informed how I view my role as an educator. The worst people in any competitive activity, be it forensics or gymnastics, commonly wield their expertise to groom victims. My abusers, for example, projected a sense that *only they* could provide me the secrets to mastering the activity. For these reasons, and many more, it is important to continue the effort to democratize knowledge in the activity. We hope this book will serve that function by centering positive mentorship, discouraging psychologically unsafe interpretation coaching practices, and providing simple steps to composing powerful performances.

These changes have also changed us for the better as well. I am happy to say our views on the activity have evolved, and the positive potential for change has opened our eyes to new possibilities. With all that has changed in the activity and the world since first publishing the book, what's remained constant is the love coaches bring to working with their students and the arresting power of students connecting with literature. At its best, the activity encourages students to express nuanced ideas, advocate for changes that reverberate through the halls of classrooms, weave their way through the audiences' collective consciousness, and ultimately inform national and global conversations. That product was clear when we wrote the book in 2012, and it is clearer to us now in 2022, that this activity is the incubator of ideas that spark change in the world. Over the past

decade, the core of our wonderful activity, the voices of the students, remain unshakable.

Ganer Newman

INTRODUCTION

The place: any given high school in the United States. The time: entirely too early in the morning. Tens of thousands of students wake up, suit up, and warm up to perform in interpretation events. With categories ranging from humorous to dramatic, solo to duo, interpretation is a genre of forensic performance that allows students to express themselves creatively and exposes them to literature including classic children's stories, contemporary narratives, and Pulitzer Prize winning plays. Students learn to critically analyze text, gain a strong sense of physical communication, develop dynamic vocal variation, and earn increased confidence and poise. Indeed, the benefits gleaned from interpretation events extend far beyond the competition room.

Interpretation is a multi-faceted, dynamic, perpetually evolving genre of forensic performance. Therefore, for new coaches and students, approaching interpretation for the first time can be a daunting task. When we first began competing in the activity, it was overwhelming keeping track of all the vocabulary, rules, conventions, and best practices. On top of that, there are acronyms for all of the vocabulary, rules, conventions, and best practices (oh my!). Over time and through experience, confusion dissipates and the challenges

of crafting competitive performances become an endeavor we enjoy. Now, the year does not feel the same without scrambling to find scripts, the awesome feeling when a coaching session yields a creative idea, the fulfillment when a student "breaks" for the first time. But you don't know what "breaking" is yet. Trust us, we know the feeling. So we promise to take this one step at a time.

So what is interpretation? There are multiple interpretation events recognized by various forensic organizations across the country. The National Speech & Debate Association has four main interpretation events; Dramatic Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, Duo Interpretation, and Program Oral Interpretation. Each event has its own rules and varying perspectives on how to best approach it. These differences can make it difficult to get started. But similar to a track meet hosting an assortment of events that each require unique methods of preparation, so does a speech tournament host an assortment of events that each require a unique method of preparation. But there are also more similarities among the events than not. We'll help you work through the events one at a time, noting similar and distinguishing elements among the events.

This book is most useful for individuals new to interpretation. It is designed to introduce new coaches and students to the four major interpretation events and initiate the start-to-finish process of designing a competitive performance. In addition to explaining the rules and guidelines accompanying each event, this book will share practical insight into the process of finding material and cutting it down to a script appropriate for competition. It will also offer tips on creating competitive performances. Finally, this book will provide guidance on how to prepare for and compete at tournaments. As we begin, it is important to keep an open mind and trust that understanding interpretation is a process that requires knowledge and experience. Certain concepts will be more difficult to immediately grasp than others. Consider if you do not immediately understand a given concept, that concept will likely be explained in greater detail later. Our goal is to help remove the shroud veiling these events, while discovering the many joys and benefits of interpretation.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What are the rules and general descriptions of the four primary interpretation events?*

CONCEPTS: *Interpretation, Dramatic Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, Duo Interpretation, Program Oral Interpretation, Oral Interpretation, Manuscript, Supplemental Events*

UNIT 1

Overview of Interpretation Events

Sam begins their high school experience in similar fashion as any other high school student—absolutely terrified. During the freshman orientation in the gymnasium, a well-spoken senior gave a talk about the **forensic** team. Sam heard that word somewhere before, but from what they gathered, the forensic team had nothing to do with *CSI: Miami.* The senior presented a number of events appealing to a variety of interests, such as public speaking, debate, and interpretation. "Interpretation is kind of like acting," the senior said. Sam had always been told they were pretty good with characters. They thought, *Maybe I'll check out the forensic team.*

For anyone new to the activity, conceptualizing interpretation can be a bit of a challenge. Many newcomers will ask, "Is it acting?" Well, not exactly. While there are those who will say that interpretation and acting are indistinguishable, there are certainly some notable differences, particularly in regard to the confines of forensics. Acting, of course, allows performers

access to stage properties, costumes, sets, and lighting. While in competitive forensics, these faculties must be interpreted by the performer. **Cutting**, or the process of removing text from a full-length play, book, or short story and transforming it into a roughly eight minute piece, is also relatively unique to forensics.

So if interpretation is not acting, what is it? **Interpretation** is a genre of forensics that performatively renders an author's work so as to bring out the meaning of that work in an effort to uncover some truth about the

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Interpretation is a genre of forensics that performatively renders an author's work so as to bring out the meaning of that work in an effort to uncover some truth about the human condition.

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human condition. All that essentially means is that we present literature to demonstrate an argument about who we are. Interpretation is further segmented into different categories or events. Various state leagues and national forensic association tournaments offer a litany of interpretation events. Some events are done exclusively in select regions. For example the Minnesota State High School League offers an interpretation event called Creative Expression, whereby students perform original narratives.

Program Oral Interpretation (where competitors combine literature from drama, prose, and poetry to communicate a unified theme) is now a nationally recognized event, but it began as a regional event available in states like California. There are also events such as Radio Speaking in Illinois and Improvisational Duo in Kentucky.

It's a wild world of public speaking possibilities out there, but this text will focus on the National Speech & Debate Association's four main stage interpretation events that are widely recognized at any given tournament in the country: **Dramatic Interpretation** (DI), **Humorous Interpretation** (HI), **Duo Interpretation** (DUO), and **Program Oral Interpretation** (POI), which involves **Prose, Drama,** and **Poetry**. For the purposes of this text, we will also explore another widely recognized event called **Oral Interpretation** (OI). OI is an individual category in which a student performs (usually alternating) selections of prose and poetry. Given the fact that POI is a main stage event involving Poetry and Prose and the fact that Prose and Poetry are also supplemental categories offered at the NSDA National Tournament, it is useful to explore instructional material on Oral Interpretation as well.

The National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA) recognizes DI, HI, Duo, and POI as the four primary interpretation categories and includes Prose and Poetry as separate supplemental events at the National Tournament.

Event	Acronym	Primary	Supplemental	Time
Dramatic Interpretation	**DI**	✖		10 minutes
Humorous Interpretation	**HI**	✖		10 minutes
Duo Interpretation	**DUO**	✖		10 minutes
Program of Oral Interpretation	**POI**	✖		10 minutes
Prose Interpretation	**PRO**		✖	5 minutes[1]
Poetry Interpretation	**POE**		✖	5 minutes*

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1   * The time limits for Prose and Poetry Interpretation differ. Please refer to the NSDA Middle School Unified Manual for updated Tournament Procedures.

The NSDA rules for each of the four main interpretation events provide further clarity. We will delve more deeply into the minutia of these rules, but for now, the NSDA generally describes interpretation events as, "selections drawn from published, printed: novels, short stories, plays, poetry, or other printed, published works, PDFs, e-books, as well as limited online and recorded works." The time limit in Interpretation main events (Dramatic, Humorous, Duo, and Program Oral Interpretation) is ten minutes with a 30-second "grace period." Each of the main events has its own conventions, but the NSDA rules for DI, HI, Duo, and POI allow for a broad host of interpretive possibilities. As long as the selection fits organizational standards and falls within the time limit, it is allowed for competition. Keep in mind; "allowed" and "appropriate" are not mutually exclusive. Events are judged by individuals from the community. Parents, coaches, clergy members, bus drivers, college

students, and others may judge an interpretation event round, so it is beneficial for students and coaches to choose material that is audience appropriate. More on that later.

Each of the four main events share the aforementioned rule. However, each event has its own nuanced description. **Dramatic Interpretation** "is an individual category in which the selections are dramatic in nature." **Humorous Interpretatio**n "is an individual category in which the selections are humorous in nature." **Duo Interpretation** "is a two-person category in which the selection may be either humorous or dramatic in nature." **Program of Oral Interpretation** is a collection "of thematically-linked selections chosen from two or three genres: prose, poetry, drama (plays)." POI, as in other Oral Interpretation categories, requires students to present selections while holding the **"manuscript**," a copy of the work that is almost always contained within a binder. The binder is usually black, but that's another one of those conventions we mentioned. More on that later, too!

Now that we know the general rules and event descriptions for the four main interpretation events, we will examine the rules and descriptions for Oral Interpretation, or Prose/Poetry. Oral Interpretation is old. Folks like us have been writing about Oral Interpretation since the early part of the 1900s. In this way, OI is sort of like the great-grandparent of the other interpretation categories. While practices and approaches evolved over time, the same

basic mechanics persist. At many competitions throughout the country, students perform a selection of prose that is a maximum of 10 minutes (including introduction) in one round, then perform a selection of poetry that is 10 minutes (including introduction) in the next. These events continue to alternate until the final round. Which selection will be performed in the first round is generally determined by a coin flip at the beginning of the tournament.

Current NSDA rules separate Oral Interpretation into two events of Prose and Poetry. Each category has a time limit of 5 minutes that includes an introduction. In both supplemental events, students are prohibited from using the same source used in Duo, Dramatic, Humorous, or Program of Oral Interpretation at any NSDA tournament—meaning, a student may not use their DI as a Prose when they do not advance to elimination rounds, or out-rounds.

Each of these events will be explained in greater detail in later units in their respective volume. Units 2 through 5 will provide valuable vocabulary that will serve as a foundation for all interpretation events. Some of the language will seem unusual, even to coaches with some experience in forensics. If you have trouble with any particular concept, stay calm—the concept will be reiterated later.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What materials must we create before we build a competitive interpretation performance?*

CONCEPTS: *Piece, Interper, Cutting, Interp, Teaser, Intro, Build, Dramatic Arc*

UNIT 2

Intro to Material Composition

Sam entered the forensic room, a classroom bustling with activity. Students were stationed at the computers reading about politics. Others stood in the corners talking to themselves. One student sat on the floor surrounded by piles of paper. "What are you doing?," Sam asked. The student replied in exasperation, "My piece is going OT so I need to cut!" Sam didn't understand what any of that meant. Then Sam approached another kid practicing different voices and faces in the mirror. After some small talk, Sam revealed their interest in the acting events. "You mean Interp," the other student said. "First, you're going to have to find a piece."

Piece is how **interpers**, or competitors who compete in interpretation events, refer to the literature that they are interpreting. Piece is short for "piece of literature." In interpretation events, competitors arrange the words from works of literature to form a **cutting**, or script, that they use for performance. Cuttings are important because there is a 10-minute time

limit for the event. Also, cuttings allow students to highlight a part of a story to accent a certain theme or relationship within it.

Upon diving into the world of interpretation, or **Interp**, competitors must understand the basic steps that lead to the **composition** of a performance. A composition is a series of parts that form a whole. Your ultimate performance is a series of parts (movement, sounds, words, etc) that form the whole of your 10-minute presentation. Your cutting is a "part" of your "whole" performance, but the cutting itself is also a series of parts forming a whole. We encourage you to view your Interp performances like a series of parts because it makes each step a bit more manageable. If you are competing in DI, HI, or Duo, the steps are generally the same. The steps for building POI vary a bit and will be discussed further in the POI unit.

STEPS TO SUCCESS IN INTERPRETATION

1. FINDING THE EVENT THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU.

Before a competitor can begin building a performance, they must determine which Interp event is best for their performance style. Many competitors compete in multiple events; but, as the old adage dictates, "You've got to start somewhere." The easiest way to determine which event is best for you is to simply watch multiple rounds of each of the events and then choose the one that feels the most comfortable (check with your coach or the NSDA website for video resources featuring past performances). However, as that method is rather unspecific, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you like making people laugh?.. HI
- Do you like making different voices? .... HI, POI
- Do you like making silly faces? .... HI, POI
- Do you like telling dramatic stories? .... DI, POI, DUO
- Are you fascinated with dramatic situations?.. DI, DUO
- Do you like playing "realistic" characters?... DI, POI
- Do you like teamwork and working with a partner? .... DUO
- Do you like reading scripts of dialogue out loud?.................................... DUO
- Do you like coordinating movement?... DUO
- Do you feel comfortable with a faster paced performance?............ HI, POI, DUO
- Are you comfortable with taking your time in storytelling?.............. DI
- Do you like slam poetry?... POI
- Are you interested in drawing attention to social problems? .... POI, DI

INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE: *Bringing Words to Life*

These questions are not a hard and fast guide, but they should get the conversation started in your head. The truth is, as different as each of the events can look, they all employ very similar characteristics in participation. To be done well, Dramatic Interpretation requires an attention to humor. Humorous Interpretation requires attention to conflict. And both Dramatic and Humorous require attention to relationships. Duo Interpretation should employ attention to both humor and drama, as well. POI performance, as you will learn, also benefits from utilizing humor, drama, and relationship.

As young competitors, the similarities among events took us a while to understand. We did not immediately realize that *performance modes* were not so important in making the big *event* decision. Perhaps the truest guiding question is, "What kind of literature do I want to read (or watch) during the research process?" Remember, though, that these questions are only a guide. As coaches, we learn to look for all kinds of literature for all kinds of performers. Some of the biggest coaching successes come from prompting a Dramatic interper to do Humorous Interp—or, even, prompting an Extemporaneous speaker to try Duo Interpretation.

When I first joined the speech and debate team in high school, my coach placed me in Oral Interpretation due to my expressed interest in acting and poetry. I started identifying as an interper totally uninterested in the public speaking, limited preparation, or debate categories. When I got to college, another coach convinced me to try a public speaking event. The decision to be flexible and try new categories changed the way I viewed the activity forever. While cliques inevitably form in any group, it's important to realize the educational potential of opening yourself up to any and every possibility in performance. An extemper can learn about poise from an interper, an interper can learn about argumentation from a debater, a debater can learn about rhetoric from an orator, and so on. The best speakers in the world transcend rigid categorical definitions and frequently flip conventional wisdom on its head.

As a newcomer to the activity, this might not mean very much to you. For now, we simply suggest that just because you are starting in one category doesn't necessarily mean you are stuck there. We want both you and your

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coach to know that anyone can be anything in this activity, regardless of where they choose to begin. Ultimately, the initial decision about picking an event category is more about narrowing the scope of your literature search and less about determining your destiny in forensics. However, we encourage you to embrace the concept that your event interests may change. And when you find something good, try it, regardless of which event it seems to serve on its face.

2. FINDING LITERATURE FOR COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE

After deciding which event is the best fit for you as a performer, you want to start researching material to perform. This step is intimidating. You are not alone in scratching your head about where to start. The most common question that we receive from new coaches and performers from across the country is, "Where do you find literature?" Or, "How do you choose a piece that will serve you well in performance from ALL of the literature from ALL of time from ALL of the world?" Our answer: One book at a time. Many competitors, experienced and inexperienced alike, place tremendous pressure on themselves to find the "perfect piece" for performance. The dirty truth is: yes, some pieces of literature are better for competitive performance than others. And some are better suited for you as a performer than others. And sometimes, interpers seemingly win because of a great piece of literature—but understand this: this is by far a rarity. It is just as common for an interper to not win with great literature than with. The filthiest truth is: the piece does not win for you. Hard work and dedication are much bigger factors in determining competitive success. This means there will not be a perfect piece. Some championships have been won with very simple, little known pieces of literature that you will not find on any Pulitzer Prize list. But through performance and the Interp process, the student effectively communicated a truthful observation about the human condition. Sometimes—we would argue that most times—when a performance is not working, something may be wrong with the performance, and the piece is not to blame. As a competitor, I had to learn this the hard way.

Once upon a long ago, my coach suggested a piece of literature for me to check out for Dramatic Interpretation. I read it, recognized

dramatic potential in the story, and began piecing together a performance for Dramatic Interp. I competed with this performance, and I soon discovered what failure felt like. After two tournaments of abysmal rankings, I suggested to my coach that I switch my piece. I even had, "Try another piece of literature," written on some of my ballots. My coach shook his head and prompted me to fix some of the performance issues before I went back to the beginning in working on a brand new piece. Well, this suggestion made me unhappy. And after some very frustrating rehearsal sessions, some re-cutting, and some tempo and character changes, I was convinced that this piece would never work. And then my coach said this wonderful thing. He said, "If you work on this performance looking for a negative experience, then you are going to find it. Try looking for a positive experience, and you'll be amazed at what might be found there." I'd like to say that those words changed me forever right away, but I had to have another miserable tournament experience and more frustrating rehearsals before my coach told me his wonderful words again. And I heard him the second time. We worked together to fix my performance, and I soon experienced success in DI. And I would not jump ship so quickly on a piece of literature again.

The piece was not holding me back. I was holding me back. Once I figured that out, the search for literature became a lot easier for me. I stopped trying to find the perfect piece, and

forensics made a lot more sense. This is how at forensic camp, we, as an Interp staff, are able to help successfully place literature with 80 competitors within 48 hours. It is not because we have better books than anyone else. We have just learned, through our experience, that the perfect thing isn't out there. We enter the process looking for a positive experience, and when we make a mistake and make a choice that doesn't work, we don't lose hope. There is a lot of literature out there, in all of the world, so it'll only be a matter of time before we find something that works.

Now that you understand that the perfect piece doesn't exist, how DO we decide on a piece to perform? Where DO we look? Here are the steps.

KNOW THE RULES.

The first and most important step to finding literature for performance is to read the rules for the National Speech & Debate Association, your state league, and any other national organizations in which your team participates. Do not depend on veteran coaches to inform you of the rules. The rules change from time to time, and many veteran coaches do not read the rules every year. New media will continue to emerge, and the rules determining acceptable sources for performance material will continue to evolve. This brings me to the next step: Re-read the rules every year. Coaches, talk about the rules with your students. Students, talk about the rules with your coaches. As a

coach, I always demanded much discussion about the rules for literature before competing in tournaments. I believe these discussions to be essential in developing self-advocacy in our young speakers. When petitioning for an explanation of validity in piece selection, I prefer my students to have the tools to engage in an articulate, well-informed discussion about the matter.

Read critically and carefully. Perform close readings of the manual. And when in doubt, email the appropriate league. I contact the National Speech & Debate Association office all the time with questions about the rules, and they are always very helpful. ALWAYS ask. Getting disqualified in a tournament for a rule violation stinks and is very much an avoidable occurrence.

UNDERSTAND LITERATURE IN THIS WORLD OF COMPETITION.

The sheer volume of literature available in the world is not the only reason finding literature is an intimidating process. Once you realize there is no perfect piece, and you are familiar with the rules governing the activity, then you must encounter the culture of competitive interpretation. Admittedly, this is the hardest beast in your forensic endeavor. The subcultural phenomenon accompanying any competitive activity—whether it be folk-style wrestling, competitive jazz dance, spoken-word poetry,

junior spelunkers—can be an intimidating thing. The good news is: the forensic community is a friendly one, and there is never a shortage of seasoned coaches offering to lend a hand. The bad news is: the process is still intimidating, as it is a competitive one, and the only way to get over it is through experience. My advice is to appreciate the adrenaline rush of leaping into the unknown.

Sometimes I miss being new to this activity. When I entered the world of forensics armed only with my knowledge of the rules and competitive spirit, I was not so inhibited by cultural norms and practices. In a way, I felt it easier to innovate and create with original purpose. Still, I do wish that I had a handle on some of the culture stuff to make the transition easier. As the United States Secretary of Defense, the late Donald Rumsfeld, answered a question at a Department of Defense briefing regarding military engagement in Iraq in a poetically puzzling way. "There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know." While Mr. Rumsfeld's response can feel like a funhouse of logic, there is some value in exploring potential unknown unknowns, and the potentially unknown unknowns of Interp are the things we are going to try to help you figure out.

UNDERSTAND TRADITIONAL vs. PROGESSIVE LITERATURE.

With new writers writing new literature every moment, where do we begin in our search? Consider that the National Speech & Debate Association welcomed its first member school in 1925. The NSDA has been around for a while, and so have readers and interpreters of literature. As forensics is research oriented, we can assume that the best choices of literature for interpretation have been used, and are being used, as time marches on. Because of this phenomenon, there is a premium for innovation in forensics. The innovative nature of forensics pushes us to pursue the newest ideas in order to "wow" the judges with spectacle that they have never seen before. Certainly, the newest material can give you an edge. However, sometimes older material is ready to resurface. This cultural occurrence is not unique to forensics, though. Consider the industry of film-making. Every year, some film wows us with its innovative spirit and technical mastery. In 1997, James Cameron used technological advances and innovative story-telling techniques to earn a Best Picture award at the Academy Awards. In 2009, Cameron's direction of *Avatar* changed how we record and experience cinema forever, yet he was not awarded Best Picture by the same Academy. In 2011, Best Picture was awarded to *The Artist*, a silent film. Sometimes the audience wants innovation, sometimes the audience wants something familiar. So how do we decide whether to go all James Cameron or to take a more traditional approach? Consider this.

Older Lit Done Responsibly

Ironically, the answer is NOT in watching trends. Just because "Someone Who'll Watch Over Me" by Frank McGuinness has gone to Duo finals every few years since 1993 does not mean that a school's top Duo team should do "Someone Who'll Watch Over Me." Even though **Artistic Plagiarism,** or "the wholesale impersonation of final round performances," is strongly discouraged in NSDA rules, we frequently meet coaches who record the pieces that do well in finals, immediately buy them, and then have students perform them over the next season. This practice dilutes the research value of the activity. The fact that a piece of literature has done well is not reason enough to choose that piece of literature. Choose "golden oldies" with caution, and only when fueled by an innovative interpretive idea that will bring to light some new truth in the piece. Remember, the goal is to create a strong Interp culture and reinforce Interp skills. Selecting a piece of literature that has enjoyed a glorious run already is limiting the choices and potential for growth in the interper.

So when can we bring back those oldies? The answer is not unlike the one you'll receive when petitioning a lawyer for legal advice at a party. It depends. Like lawyers, a series of tests inform our decisions. Like law, the forensic

culture is forever changing and welcomes well thought-out challenges—but these questions are a good place to start.

▶ *Has it been to a national final round?*

General rule: If it has not been to finals, then the selection is fair game.

▶ *If yes, how long has it been since the selection was in finals?*

General rule: We try to avoid pieces that have been to national finals; however, if the interper is the mirror image of Judy Garland, and Judy Garland was already in Dramatic Interp finals—then ask if it has been long enough since it's been there. We consider five years to be an appropriate waiting period. Remember that there is no perfect piece, and if a performer were to earn a spot in Dramatic Interp finals, then there is a strong possibility that they would have earned that spot with another piece of liter-

ature, as well, for it was informed dedication and work that got them there.

▶ *Has the selection been in frequent circulation?*

General rule: If not, roll with it. But remember that practice of coaches scooping up literature that gets to finals one year and then running it the next year? That actually happens quite a bit, and you will typically find final round pieces in frequent circulation over the next few years. We have noticed the frequency dies down over about five years, which informs our waiting period.

> **TIP:** The NSDA releases a list of all scripts from the National Tournament each year. Access it at www.speechanddebate.org/resources.

► **How successful have subsequent performances been?**

General rule: Performances that are frequently in quarterfinal rounds, semifinal rounds, or local final rounds are much more on the radar than those performances that are not. The more a piece is out there, the more popular it is going to be. Keep in mind that when an audience views a piece that has been done before (particularly if done well), then that experience will inform their next experience in viewing the same literature. In performing frequently done literature, you are competing against every version of that piece that the audience has ever seen. This practice invites an additional challenge to overcome in your journey toward success.

Possible solution: So maybe an interper is the spitting image of Judy Garland. Maybe Judy Garland is their hero and they possess a lifelong ambition to interpret her likeness. Are there similar alternatives? Sometimes, if an autobiography of Judy Garland was done, there might be another literary selection with a similar character. Or there may be a work of fiction that reimagines Judy Garland. Another portrayal of Judy might be available, or another actress from that era.

► **But what of the "real" oldies?**

General rule: Go ahead and bring them back. Contemporize them. One of my favorite places to look for material as a competitor was "back in the day." If I hadn't done that, I would never have found Clifford Odets' 1937 drama "Golden

The most successful team cultures seem to strive for newer material.

Boy," which has since become one of my favorite plays. "Golden Boy" was also the subject of a 2013 Broadway revival. Older literature can certainly still be relevant to a truth worth discovering through modern performance. If the story is compelling, easy to follow, and culturally relevant, then go ahead and bring back "Our Town." Sometimes the stuff you find hidden in the attic can seem as new as the stuff ordered from the "Manuscript Only" section of Dramatists.com. Older literature can be valuable in juxtaposition against new performance techniques, or it can be used to enlighten criticism of some new cultural practice.

Encourage newer selections AND ideas

Again, forensics is about uncovering new ideas to reveal truths about the human experience. New literature and new approaches to older literature help further the activity. The most successful team cultures seem to strive for newer material. One of the hardest and most important concepts to learn when it comes to finding literature is to develop an "eye for forensics." Every time I read an article, watch a play, see a movie, watch a YouTube video, I am trying to reconcile what I just learned with how I can apply it to forensics. It's the forensic

curse—to think about it so much—but, this "eye for forensics" can make your job SO much easier. The ideas are everywhere. Keep your eyes open. Still, there are some conventional places where I will typically begin my search:

- The bookstore. Check out all of the books with new glossy covers. Keep a list.
- Subscribe to new literature email lists through booksellers and publishers.
- Visit indie and college bookstores and try to find lesser known materials.
- Visit indie publishing websites like www.writebloody.com.
- Subscribe to lit journals like *McSweeney's*, T*he New Yorker,* or *N+1.*
- If you think of a character (in the history of entertainment) that could be performatively interesting, perform a web search of the person or story. Many times, Wikipedia will provide a list of stories/plays that have been written about that person or scenario.
- Dramatists.com, brookpub.com, playscripts.com, concordtheatricals.com all typically contain lists of plays, the number of characters and a play synopsis. Also doollee.com is a database of almost every play that exists. If you can remember the name, but not the author, this is a fantastic website to gather more information. The New Play Exchange (newplayexchange.org) is a digital library of plays by living authors.

- Short story anthologies, especially ones edited by hip writers, can be a treasure trove of prose, DI, HI, or Duo possibilities.
- When watching/judging rounds, write down the author names. Then check out other works by that author. This can be very helpful and a great starting point.

Practice makes perfect. There is no one right answer. There is no magic database. We know that finding good literature can be a daunting task. The truth is, you can't get better by resorting to easy fix websites. There ARE hidden gems in quick lit for forensic websites, but they are few and far between, and you are ALWAYS rewarded by taking the longer route. It will be frustrating at first, but you get better. And you will get better quickly—but ya gotta practice.

Tips for reading for performance

Employing a few techniques can save you lots of time and cash in your literature search.

- Read the back cover. If the narrative is already too complicated, then go no further.
- Read the first page and find out if you get a sense of the voice. Then read the first page of the third chapter (sometimes books start slowly).
- Next, read the first few pages of the last chapter.
- Finally, read the last page. After that, you should have a sense if the book will work or not.

- As you read, start cutting in your head. Think about possible conflicts, relationships, climaxes. If you are reading an autobiography about a movie star, look for the chapter where they had trouble making it, or the one about how they hit rock bottom. Start making sense of the relationships in the work. Does the story focus on the relationship of the author with themself, or the author with their father, or lover, or sibling?

Look past the words.

Don't immediately dismiss a selection when the words do not instantly make you laugh or cry. Try to imagine characters, environment, and interesting perspectives as you read. Sometimes, an idea or performance device can get you further than the actual words. Also, try reading with structure in mind. Knowing what you're aiming for helps you find what you are searching for. Learn about cutting structure before you go hunting for literature. Remember—Exposition, Inciting Incident, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Conclusion. This will save you LOTS of time in the end.

Risqué material: Is it worth it?

It is okay to push the envelope sometimes; but, admittedly, pushing the envelope requires some experience to achieve consistent success. You should be aware that some judges will not like edgy material. But, sometimes the provocative nature of a piece pays off. Always remember, the competitors are high school students; and, no matter how seemingly mature, the competitors are still seen as students by the judges—and, most importantly, the competitors will be judged as students.

When considering risk in story-telling, remember some core values. The selection should have *relatable* characters.

Billy Goats, Fluffy Bunnies, and Unicorns, Oh My!

Forensics exists in college as well. And, as one might expect, many collegiate competitors are former high school competitors. Collegiate competitors often give back to their competitive communities by offering a hand to the high school competitors still competing in their wake—thirsty to learn how the best practices of the college competitive world can give a competitive advantage in the high school forensics world. Many years of participating in both communities have taught us a very important lesson. College and High School forensics are different animals.

College Interp requires that competitors perform literature that is brand new. If a script has ever been performed before, it is generally

frowned upon for another competitor to compete with the same work. The stories can have adult themes. Shocking the audience is a welcomed choice. The performances of

> The cutting is an opportunity for you to express yourself as a performer. You get to manipulate other people's words to reflect what you want it to say. Your work is a composition.

literature in college are used to make specific arguments about very specific observations in our culture. Because of the academic nature of college forensic tournaments, competitive Interp rounds are laboratories in which performances are often theoretical in approach and execution. Finding the right script for college performances is like trying to catch the horned ornery goat at the petting zoo. Catching that emperor of the local hardware store funded Feed 'n Pet Center of the Hill County Zoo requires a bit more finesse than maybe catching a more cuddly option.

High school is different. High school performances are more grounded, so the literature tends to involve universal themes. With high school competition, trends tend to shift more gradually, and extremely adult themes in literature are rarely rewarded. While high school students explore vital messages, they tend to side step controversial themes in favor of inspirational ones. Finding the right script for high school performances is like rounding up the bunnies at the petting zoo. While those cute little long-eared darlings have potential for speed, they are largely accessible and easy enough to scoop up into your arms while also docile enough to tolerate the ear and fur tugging of your toddler cousins.

Consider the high school science lab and the university science lab. The high school science lab may dissect a common species of starfish, locating parts of its anatomy and function, and the lesson learned teaches the students about life in the sea. The collegiate science lab may dedicate its purpose to discovering a new species of starfish, and the lab may use the lesson to further theorize potential truths of our evolutionary universe.

There are some fascinatingly puzzling pieces of literature out there. Not all are well-suited for forensics. For example, imagine happening across a book in the library. When you open the book and skim the contents, nothing seems to make any sense. It turns out the book is a surreal encyclopedia of an imaginary world, with fantastical and disturbing hand drawn pictures. The text is written in a seemingly ancient, but totally incomprehensible imaginary language. You are holding a rare copy of *Codex Seraphinianus* by Luigi Serfini. This text, while intriguing to look at, is definitionally unreadable. This kind of story is an example

of what we call a unicorn script, or a selection that is so abstract, it is almost impossible to follow or relate to an audience. We typically abhor the phrase "that will never work" when it comes to anything related to forensics, but unicorn scripts NEVER WORK for high school and rarely work at any level.

When considering risk in story-telling, remember some core values. The selection should have relatable characters. The National Speech & Debate Association final stage has featured a number of characters from Gabourey Sidibe to Tonya Harding, from Satan to Santa Clause. However, all of the characters that have ever made the final round have had relatable conflicts and easy to comprehend desires and motivations. In Dramatic Interpretation, real stories typically do better than fantasy. In HI and Duo, where many conflicts may be happening, the protagonist(s) should be engaged in core conflicts to which anyone can relate.

Remember this golden rule of thumb: Simple Story Told Simply. Can the piece be interpreted within the time limit? Will the audience be able to digest the story in 10 minutes? Many plays are over an hour long and contain multiple plot lines, but a single story can be cut from the material. However, some plays and books contain a singular storyline that would not make any sense without all narrative elements present in the performance that would be hard to convey effectively in 10 minutes.

A real life example: We found a graphic novel called "The Weirdly World of Strange Eggs" that looked like a fun, potentially competitive selection for Humorous interpretation. The general premise of the book was about a mysterious Egg Man who emerges from a tree in the yard of two siblings, Kip and Kelly. The Egg Man speaks in verse and gives the kids eggs that have the ability to hatch anything the kids imagine. Reading the description on the back of the book, it sounded like everything was there: two relatable kids and loads of blocking potential. Then the story gets even weirder. The kids imagine a small blood-sucking party hat that grows into an enormous blood-sucking party hat. The party hat only has one weakness, grape jelly—obviously! So the kids take all of Egg Man's eggs and imagine different kinds of weapons to kill the gigantic, blood-sucking party hat.

We cut it. We coached it to the best of our abilities. It was an abomination. We were romanced by the unicorn, and we forgot that we were in search of bunnies.

Some Practical Considerations

Request input about the culture in your community. To further complicate the process, different districts reward different conventions in performance—for example, gaudy climax vs. quiet climax. There are two types of performance climaxes—the loud and the soft. Truthfully, it helps to have a little of both to compete on the national level. However, the preference for either of these two approaches to dramatic climax varies from district to

district. Talk to coaches about this. Also, take your own notes when watching rounds at tournaments.

Obvious time and space. It is helpful to have a clear setting in our performances. If a piece does not define this overtly, try to imagine how to create this in building the performance. In DI, it is helpful for the audience to know where the main character is at all times. We suggest defining the "present reality" of the main character in the monologue. Example: In both "Soul of a Butterfly" performances in the 2011 final round of Dramatic Interpretation, Muhammad Ali was speaking to the audience as an old man in a present reality. Both performances included flashbacks to scenes from the characters past that informed their "present reality." This is a successful tactic in DI because it allows for a number of performatively interesting scene shifts. Keeping tactics like this in mind can help in the literature search process.

Point of view and voice. DI and HI selections are generally told in the first-person point of view. Some successful HIs have used omniscient narrators who speak in third-person (e.g., 2008 HI champion performing "Charlie the Caterpillar"). However, this technique has rarely, if ever, made the final stage in DI. It is safer to look for selections written from the first-person point of view.

Tense. It's helpful to find material where the "present reality" is written in past tense. (e.g., "Did you know that the first time I met my husband, we were working as volunteers for a political campaign?"– Sarah Brazier, Dramatic runner-up, National Speech & Debate Association 2010.) However, the tense may shift during flashback sequences to allow the performer to live in the past moment. An excellent example of this is the 2010 National Speech & Debate Association final round winner Mike Dahlgren performing "My Autobiography" by Charlie Chaplin. Mike began, "It was 1914. I was 25 years old, and we were all on set." Then the performer suggests a flashback to the first film the character was in. They pantomime Champlain performing a number of his famous physical bits. At this point, the tense shifts to the present, "...and here I am cramming every conceivable gag I could think of." This same narrative logic is useful in Humorous as well as Duo Interpretation.

3. CUTTING LITERATURE FOR COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE

The performance begins with the cutting. The cutting is an opportunity for you to express yourself as a performer. You get to manipulate other people's words to reflect what you want it to say. Your work is a composition. The cutting is the first glimpse of what that composition is going to be. It is a CREATIVE PROCESS. Unless you are using a play that is written for forensics, you are going to have a play that doesn't follow the structure of performance perfectly. Yes, the playwright had a vision, but you don't have to follow THEIR vision. You only get a good 10

Climax

Rising Action

Falling Action

Exposition

Dénouement

The Dramatic Arc
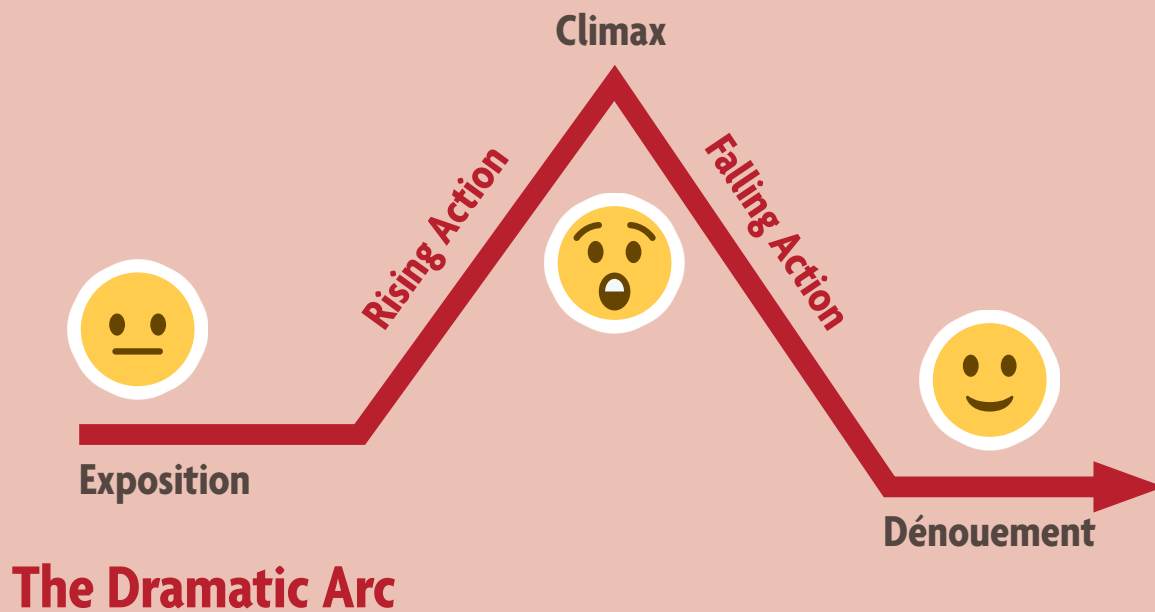
minutes. Feel free to get rid of junk and think creatively.

After finding literature for performance, you encounter the next question, "What is the best shape to tell your story?" Performances have shapes. And performances get their shapes from the shape of their informing texts. Think about any story you have heard. This story was composed of connected events that were organized into a Beginning, Middle, and End. That is the shape of narrative: Beginning, Middle, and End. Time may shift, performance packaging may vary, but every performance must start at the beginning, and every performance must conclude at the end. That is "cutting" in all of its wondrous simplicity. But, this clear simplicity gets clouded rather quickly when you decide to cut a 300-page memoir to a 10-minute performance. When you get

bombarded with all of those words on all of those pages, return to the core story-telling structure: Beginning, Middle, and End.

Lucky for us, German playwright Gustav Freytag complicates this simple structure with the analysis of ancient Greek and Shakespearean drama that we have become familiar with in school: the **Dramatic Arc**. The **arc**, so we have been told by middle school English teachers across the globe, is divided into five parts: **Exposition**, **Rising Action**, **Climax**, **Falling Action**, and **Dénouement**.

The exposition sets the scene, gives background information. In the exposition, we communicate who a character is and where they are. You always introduce the protagonist, or main character, in the exposition; and you often introduce the antagonist, or character or force working against the main character

in the exposition, as well. The inciting incident sets a conflict into motion and represents the beginning of the rising action. Sometimes, the introduction of the antagonist serves as the inciting incident. The rising action complicates the plot, and the climax is when the protagonist changes in the piece. The falling action resolves the conflict, and the dénouement is a little glimpse of life after the resolution.

The arc is important in guiding the cutting process, and is given minorly different treatments in the event specific cutting sections of the event chapters of this book. The dénouement, or the "something after the conflict has been resolved," is not always present in cuttings, though having that last moment can give the audience a moment to digest what they have just experienced. Familiarity with the arc can save time and headache in problem solving with ineffective cuttings. Before you begin, review the arc treatment in each event's chapter.

Even beyond Freytag's dramatic arc, stories vary in shape. Some stories are sad and some stories are happy. The late iconic American novelist Kurt Vonnegut analyzed the shapes of these stories and graphed them to illustrate our digestion of them. These graphs are a great illustration of how stories can be "performed." On the following page is an excerpt from one of Vonnegut's lectures. You can also view Vonnegut performing this same lecture on many video internet databases.

Reviewing Vonnegut's shapes before you cut can help you determine what kind of cutting you are going to pursue. Which shapes lend themselves best to a DI cutting? Which shapes will work best for HI? If you consider these shapes, a cutting can form in your head before you even begin to type it out. After reading a piece of literature, basic memory of the plot should help guide you. I like to plot out a story before I even re-read it. I write out major plot elements, and I try to affix them within Freytag's dramatic structure. I then look for the Vonnegut story pattern that I want to use within the collected plot elements. Once I have decided on a story, I go to the book to find the corresponding passages for each plot point. This "predicting" element of cutting can save lots of money, time, and frustration.

It is important to keep in mind the National Speech & Debate Association rules when drafting your cutting. The NSDA outlines that while we are removing and rearranging texts to shape the story is acceptable, changing the author's words can only be used for very specific purposes. "Changes to the script may only be used for the purpose of transition or to eliminate profane language. The voice of a script may not be changed. For example, changing "She moved to California when she was 13" to "I moved to California when I was 13" is not permitted. Combining small fractions of sentences or singular words to create humorous or dramatic dialogue, scenes, moments, and/or plot lines not intended in the original

THE SHAPES OF STORIES
excerpt from *Palm Sunday* by Kurt Vonnegut

Anyone can graph a simple story if he or she will crucify it, so to speak, on the intersecting axes I here depict:


"G" stands for good fortune. "I" stands for ill fortune. "B" stands for the beginning of a story. "E" stands for its end.

A much beloved story in our society is about a person who is leading a bearable life, who experiences misfortune, who overcomes misfortune, and who is happier afterward for having demonstrated resourcefulness and strength. As a graph, that story looks like this:
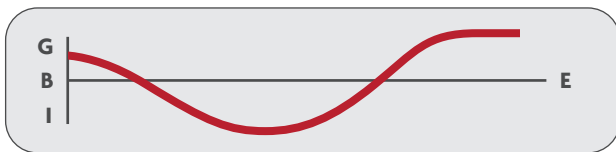

Another story of which Americans never seem to tire is about a person who becomes happier upon finding something he or she likes a lot. The person loses whatever it is, and then gets it back forever. As a graph, it looks like this:
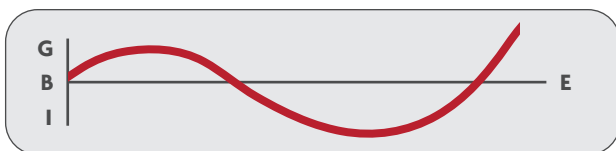
An American Indian creation myth, in which a god of some sort gives the people the sun and then the moon and then the bow and arrow and then the corn and so on, is essentially a staircase, a tale of accumulation:
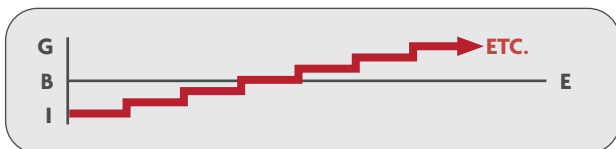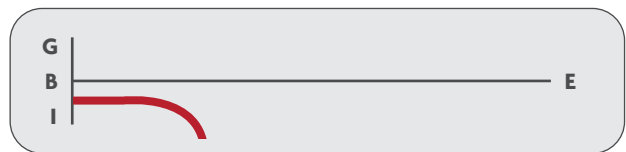

Almost all creation myths are staircases like that. Our own creation myth, taken from the Old Testament, is unique, so far as I could discover, in looking like this:
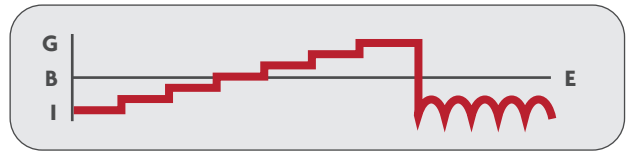
The sudden drop in fortune, of course, is the ejection of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," in which an already hopelessly unhappy man turns into a cockroach, looks like this:

Have a look [at "Cinderella"]:
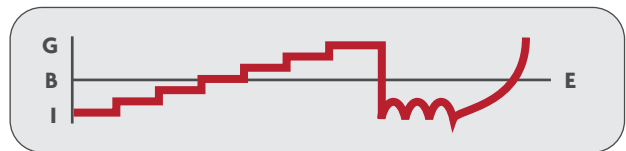
The steps you see, are all the presents the fairy godmother gave to Cinderella….The sudden drop is the stroke of midnight at the ball….But then the prince finds her and marries her, and she is infinitely happy ever after. She gets all the stuff back, and then some. A lot of people think the story is trash, and, on graph paper, it certainly looks like trash.

But then I said to myself, Wait a minute—those steps at the beginning look like the creation myth of virtually every society on earth. And then I saw that the stroke of midnight looked exactly like the unique creation myth in the Old Testament. And then I saw that the rise to bliss at the end was identical with the expectation of redemption as expressed in primitive Christianity. The tales were identical.

literature is prohibited. For example, it is not permitted to take one word from page 13 (e.g., home), a phrase from page 211 (e.g., ran away from), and a name, (e.g., Tyler) from page 59 to create dialogue between characters or events that do not exist in the script. Example: adding "Tyler ran away from home." when this did not occur and was not said in the script is not permitted. Transitions only may be used to clarify the logical sequence of ideas. They are not to be used for the purpose of embellishing the humorous or dramatic effect of the literature."

In other words, you are shaping the cutting based on the author's words, not your own. This is known as "author's intent," which suggests students should make effort to maintain the integrity of the author's story even as they select particular language to either consent the overall story (in the case of a Sparknotes cutting) into 10 minutes are provide a selection of the story (in the case of a Cameo cutting) from multiple possible stories in the text. While few authors "intend" to have their precious words butchered to create a 10-minute public performance, we at least want to do our best to honestly reflect their intended story.

PERFORMANCE STRUCTURE

There is a definite structure to a cutting. Typically, you have 10 minutes to tell a story. Within these 10 minutes, there are conventions usually observed in competitive culture. One of these conventions is the employment of a TEASER. A **teaser** is a one- to two-minute

Teaser . . . . .0:00 – 1:30
Previews the topic and mood of the selection

Intro. . . . . .1:30 – 3:00
Explains the purpose of the performance

Exposition . . . . .3:00 – 3:30
Introduces characters and setting

Inciting Incident . . . . 3:30 – 4:00
Sends the conflict into motion

Rising Action . . . . 4:00 – 7:30
Complicates the conflict

Climax . . . . .7:30 – 8:30
Emotional peak of the performance

Falling action . . . . 8:30 – 9:30
Resolves the conflict

snippet of your cutting located at the beginning of the performance. A good teaser prepares the audience for themes, conventions, settings, and characters to come. In a lot of ways, the teaser "sets the rules" for the upcoming performance. You may also think of the teaser as an "attention getting device" with an especially provocative portion of your text used to make the audience take notice. After the teaser, the performer moves "out of the scene" created in the interpretation and returns to a neutral position where the performer does not represent a character, but speaks as themself on what is to come in the performance. This moment is called the **introduction**, or intro. Further articulation on the teaser and

introduction concepts can be found later in this book, specifically in the event chapters.

When preparing for competition, we suggest that you work within a 9:30 minute time frame, so as to avoid over-time penalties. The timeline above observes the anatomy of a typical Interp performance:

THE STEPS TO CUTTING

1. **READ**. In order to cut effectively, you must read the whole play, story, or book. To make your time more productive, read the work with a pencil and mark interesting passages as you read. If you are reading for HI, then mark especially funny passages. If you are reading for DI, then mark both moments of levity and moments of intensity.

2. **SPARK NOTES** or **CAMEO**. Next, choose what kind of cutting you would like. The Vonnegut story shapes can help you decide.

3. **SPARK NOTES CUTTING** – a cutting that summarizes the entire tale. Often, you will choose this if the climax in the piece will coincide with that of the larger work. Let's say, for example, you wanted to cut the first book of the Harry Potter series. If you choose the Spark Notes cutting route, you may quickly feature each of the book's major plot points to tell a hero's journey from neglected child living under a staircase to hero of Hogwarts fighting off the evil Voldemort.

4. **CAMEO CUTTING** – a cutting that tells just a piece of the story. For example, if you wish to cut one of the Harry Potter

novels for Duo, but you would like to focus on Hermione and Ron's relationship (leaving Harry and Voldemort completely out of it), then that would be a Cameo cutting.

5. **CHOOSE CLIMAX**. Next, you choose the climax. By choosing the climax first, you know where you are going, so it is easier to get there. Use the Freytag arc. Try to assemble different plot elements until you find the most compelling story. This does not always have to be the most dramatic or humorous moment. For example, one of my favorite performances of "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" by Stephen Chbosky left out the most dramatic moment in the book. When I asked the competitor why they chose to leave out this seemingly essential plot element, he said, "I had to choose whether I was gonna tell a story with some sad stuff or some happy stuff. I chose happy stuff." He picked a happy moment in the book as his climax and built the performance around that climax.

6. **CHUNKING**. This is where you will type out the marked passages (or CHUNKS) that relate to the story that you are trying to tell. Chunkings will often be around 3,000 words, but they should not exceed 4,000 words. These passages should coincide with your premeditated plot conceived in earlier steps.

7. **WHITTLE DOWN**. Next, whittle down the chunks into your CUTTING. The goal is to end up with about 1,200 words (or less) of performance material. If you are having a difficult time getting down to 1,200, begin cutting entire extraneous conflicts or characters/relationships. Remember, you want to tell a simple story that can be simply told.

8. **MAKE IT COOL**. This is the last step. I think of this step as a glaze on top of a piece of pottery or a glossy finish added to a carefully crafted piece of woodwork. This is where you can toy with words to create interesting transitions, or maybe find moments of text that can be performed in a particularly interesting way (like delivering lines while jump roping, working on an engine, or painting a picture). More tips for making a script cool are discussed in the cutting sections of the event chapters in this book.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR CUTTING

Craft your cutting with an eye for performance. Read the cutting aloud as you are cobbling it together. Think about performance the entire time. Sometimes a story makes sense on paper and makes no sense out loud.

Transitions. How do you get from one scene or concept to the next? Sometimes, the transition is explicit in the text: "That's when I got to college. Let me talk about college." Sometimes, the transition can be motivated by emotions.

You can, in performance, show the thought process as a transition. This can be done by taking a beat (or a pause). If you plan on doing this, write it into your cutting.

Design your cutting like a script. Write in notes about actions and sub-textual elements. Structure the cutting as if you are composing a play by using a play's format.

Utilize an anchoring environment (present reality). This is the environment to which that the character always returns: from where they are telling the story.

Show, rather than tell. For example: introducing a character in a scene by showing physically what they are doing, versus just spelling it out. Write out blocking choices in your script, like [looks at wedding ring], etc. Or show the character having a bad temper, rather than having your character say they have one. Have the character get mad at someone who walks into a room, and then go back to being the way they were.

Choose moments that you can have physical bits. Sometimes choices look better for performance. Picking a woman being interviewed at a dentist's office is more interesting than someone sitting behind a desk.

Save a bin of good stuff. Sometimes we don't understand how a passage can fit into a cutting right away, but it is so cool that we don't want to cut it out. I put these passages in a section at the bottom of my cutting in case I can find room for them. This especially works with funny lines.

Ask yourself, "Are the stakes going to be high enough?" Don't simply select a story within a text because it tells a complete story. The story also needs to be compelling. Try to tell the best story.

And as you read, leave room for physicality. Remember that physical bits take time when you are timing your cutting.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What are the physical tools at our disposal to create a competitive interpretation performance?*

CONCEPTS: *Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response, Repetition, Mirroring, Spatial Relationship, Topography, Shape, Gesture, Architecture, Pops, Morphs, Focal Points, Blocking*

UNIT 3

Intro to Performance Composition

"Interp," "cutting," "piece," "teaser." Sam was surrounded by words. Some words were familiar just with a completely new context. Some were abbreviations that Sam figured someone must have made up to make it sound cool. *Now that I have a sense of how to turn words from a play into a piece,* Sam thought, *what do I do with the words now?*

Now that we have a general sense of how to create material for an interpretation performance, we need to discuss how to create a performance. There are a number of ways to approach presenting an interpretation performance. Since three of the four main interpretation events are delivered from memory, many students will instinctually begin memorizing the cutting. Some coaches espouse the idea of applying an acting method to creating a performance so they encourage students to begin getting into the "mind" of their character. While there is certainly no wrong way to begin working with the delivery of interpretation

selection, some approaches to performance construction are more efficient.

To method, or not to method, that is the question we have pondered since we began coaching competitive forensics. Method acting, introduced by acting teachers like Konstantin Stanislavski and popularized by Lee Strasberg, is an approach whereby performers communicate the inner emotions of their characters by attempting to experience those same emotions in the moment. In this way, if your character is experiencing sadness, a method approach would involve generating sadness in the performer's mind to communicate that sadness to the audience. Students gravitate toward method acting because it is so widely discussed by film and television actors. We admire actors who spend years mentally and physically preparing for a role.

However, such approaches are not particularly appropriate for competitive forensics for a number of reasons. Initially, method acting is extremely inefficient and often inconsistent. Christian Bale spends months of physical and mental conditioning. He has told stories in interviews of isolating himself to mentally prepare for his roles. Bale is a professional actor, not a high school student. Between our various obligations, we have a lot less time to devote to getting into character.

INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE: *Bringing Words to Life* © NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION

Moreover, applying method acting to interpretation leads to inconsistent performance. At any point during a filmed scene, the actor or director may yell CUT! We do not have the luxury of a retake in a competition round. Attempting to "feel" it round to round is difficult. There are hundreds of stress-inducing factors that could disrupt our focus at tournaments. Digging deep into our memory to induce emotionality in a moment is extremely difficult at 7:30 in the morning.

For these reasons, and many more which will be covered over the course of this text, we espouse a presentational, physical approach to performance construction. All that really means is that we think of our performances as a composition, something we build ahead of time, rather than something we intuitively "feel" in the round. To do this, we will first explore some vocabulary that will inform our building decisions.

Much of the vocabulary in this unit is adapted from the book *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau. Instead of establishing an acting method, Bogart and Landau propose a vocabulary, a way of thinking about performance. The authors propose nine viewpoints, four relating to time (tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, and repetition) and five relating to space (spatial relationship, topography, shape, gesture, and architecture). Bogart and Landau assert that these are not the only viewpoints, only the ones they find most useful in their work. Therefore, for the purposes of competitive forensics, we adapted Bogart and Landau's viewpoints and added a few that we find useful for interpretation.

> We think of our performances as a composition, something we build ahead of time, rather than something we intuitively "feel" in the round.

The first of Bogart and Landau's viewpoints, **tempo**, is a critical component of how movement in a performance is perceived by the audience. Tempo simply indicates how fast or slow a movement is performed. Recall the last time you raised your hand to answer a question in class. How fast or slowly you lifted your arm was dependent upon how confident you were in your answer. If you were very sure you were correct, you'd likely raised your hand with a fast tempo. If you were not totally sure yours was the right answer, you likely raised your hand with trepidation, and thus at a slower tempo. Similarly, the tempo of an action gives the audience clues as to how a character feels. If a character is nervous or frantic, a performer might gesture at an extremely high tempo. Conversely, if the piece calls for you to play a teacher, you may choose to deliver gestures with a slow and smooth tempo to indicate

confidence in front of the room. In general, each moment in a performance calls for a different emotional state that the performer must communicate. Therefore, an awareness of the tempo within each of these moments will increase how the emotion is perceived by the audience.

> **When constructing your performance it is useful to imagine what your character's immediate uncensored reaction to an external event would be and then replicate that reaction.**

Duration is how long a performer stays in an action or tempo. One of the biggest challenges we face as performers is an overwhelming discomfort with stillness. An awareness of duration helps the performer get a stronger sense of the timing of each movement in a performance. This viewpoint is extremely helpful in all interpretation events, for as Bogart and Landau note, "duration increases the performer's ability to sense how long is long enough to make something happen on stage and, conversely, how long is too long so that something starts to die" (p. 40). Knowing how long to hold a take in HI to get the biggest laugh possible, or how long to hold the silence in a DI to elicit the greatest emotional response for the audience,

is what makes the difference between good performances and great ones.

Kinesthetic response is the immediate, uncensored response to an external event around you. Recall your grade school years, when recess was a chaotic mishmash of activities. Suddenly someone shouts, "Heads up!" In all likelihood, your immediate reaction was to duck and place your hands over your head. That immediate reaction is the kinesthetic response. Laughing at a friend's joke is also a kinesthetic response. So is a sneeze. When constructing your performance, it is useful to imagine what your character's immediate uncensored reaction to an external event would be and then replicate that reaction. Imagine, for example, your Humorous Interpretation script calls for you to portray a schoolyard fight. In the performance, you choose to show the bully raise his fist and the protagonist react in comical terror. In this instance, you have interpreted the kinesthetic response of the protagonist to be an over-the-top squeal in order to reveal the main character's emotional trepidation in an effectively humorous way. Perhaps, after a funny montage of the protagonist training in the dojo at White Tiger Karate in Victorville, California, the character is confronted by the bully once again. The performer may choose to have the main character kinesthetically respond to the bully's fist with an unflinching glare for they have learned to stay cool under pressure. How we depict our character's reactions to the

events around them provides fertile ground for imaginative performance choices.

Repetition refers to the repeating of something in a performance. There are two kinds of repetition, internal and external. Internal repetition is the repeating of movement within your own body. An example of internal repetition may be a character quirk that reminds the audience of who is speaking. For example, a student may have an HI with three characters. One way to differentiate the characters is by having one character who always gestures in large circles. This internal repetition gives the audience an easy and immediate clue to who is speaking. External repetition is repeating the shape, tempo, or gesture of something outside of your own body. The concept of external repetition is particularly helpful when constructing a Duo as coordinated movements are a major component of blocking in the event. One useful tool for performers to consider when building their performances is the concept of mirroring. Mirroring is a gesture you wish the audience to repeat. For example if a performer has a line in their cutting that reads, "Do you know what I mean?" That performer may say the line while nodding their head up and down in an effort to get the audience to mirror that movement.

Spatial relationship is the distance between things on stage and how it informs the audience's understanding of relationships in the performance. Consider this, when you are angry with a friend, you are less inclined to sit next to them in the cafeteria at lunch. When you and your friend make amends, you either hug it out or shake hands. Your relationship can be expressed by your physical proximity. The same goes for the characters in our performances. We can say a lot about the relationship between two characters in a Duo by the distance we place between them. For example, two students performing in the 2009 national final round Duo performed a piece called "The Rabbit Hole," which is the story of a husband and wife who have grown distant after the tragic loss of their son. The team began the performance standing incredibly far apart to represent the emotional distance between the characters. Spatial relationship may also refer to one body's relationship to a group of bodies, such as the distance between the performer and the audience. The act of leaning in gives the impression of closeness or intimacy in the performance. While turning your shoulder out may create the indication of a character who is uneasy speaking with the audience.

Topography is the design or floor pattern we create in our movement through space. Think about the way you move in your crowded school hallways during passing periods between classes. Now, imagine there is paint on the bottom of your shoes or on the tires of your wheelchair. What do the footprints or the treadmarks left behind after you move through the hallways look like? Are the footprints or tread marks moving in a single file straight line, or are they weaving in and out of

the crush of bodies? What does the way your footprints or treadmarks look reveal about the way you move? Consider the ways in which the floor pattern we create in our movement through space reveals clues about our attitude on a particular day, or about our personalities in general. Now, think about the way you move when you are browsing in an antique store, or looking at exhibits in a museum. You probably move about these spaces differently. Imagine the footprints or treadmarks as you move about the store or museum. Topography encourages us to consider how our characters move about their space. Do they weave in and out, like a soldier running through a battlefield, or do they dance in elegant romantic curves, like Fred Astaire in "Singing in the Rain"? As we mentioned previously, in a stage play or a movie, the setting of the story is provided for the audience through the set. We have to give the audience clues to our settings through our physical presentation. Therefore, when constructing an interpretation performance, it is important to consider the setting. Topography is important to maintaining a consistent setting throughout the performance. For example, if your script is set in a living room, you may wish to include a chair upon which your character may sit. Considering topography, you would remember to move around the chair, rather than through the chair, to maintain the illusion that the chair is really there.

Shape is the contour or outline of the body, or bodies in a Duo, in space. Any shape,

according to Bogart, can be broken down into either lines, curves, or combinations of lines and curves. It really is as simple as that. Consider the act of waving "goodbye" to a friend. What parts of the arms are straight lines? What curves does your arm make as the movement is performed? How do these lines and curves work together to create the full motion of the gesture? In Duo, the team may create a shape together. For example, in the 2009 Duo national final round, the championship team performing the piece "Charlotte's Web" created the shape of a spider spinning her web. Since each actor had four appendages, they worked together to create the shape of the eight legged creature. When we work on blocking our performances, it is easy to get overwhelmed. However, when you consider each movement or gesture as a simple manipulation of shape, our task is simplified.

One of the most used words in human communication is the **gesture**. For our purposes, a gesture is a shape with a beginning, middle, and end. Consider for a moment the last time you introduced one of your friends to another. The gesture that accompanied, "Have you met, Ted?" had a beginning, middle, and an end. All meaningful gestures do. There are two broad types of gestures we have access to when constructing our performances: behavioral gestures and expressive gestures.

Behavioral gestures are the types of gestures we observe in our everyday interactions with others. Behavioral gestures are further

broken down into **public behavioral gestures** and **private behavioral gestures.** Public behavioral gestures are intentional movements we create to indicate or direct those around us. The gestures we typically associate with presentations, shrugging, or waving "hello" and "goodbye" are all examples of public behavioral gestures. Private behavioral gestures are unintentional. When a character scratches his head with curiosity, he publicly communicates but does so unintentionally. Private behavioral gestures are also described as psychological gestures as these gestures can indicate elements of the character's psyche. Take for instance a character who is struggling in her marriage. She may nervously twist her wedding ring.

Another character, who has a headache, periodically massages their own temples or neck. These simple private behavioral gestures give the audience an indication of the character's conflict.

Expressive gestures are those that we do not typically demonstrate in our everyday interactions with others. These gestures express the inner emotional state of the character and are often poetic. Put differently, expressive gestures are "figurative" gestures. For example, if a piece includes the line "I was finally free," one choice might be to present an expressive gesture of a character breaking a chain. This gesture may not necessarily be "natural," but it

could be a powerful expression of the character's emotional state.

Architecture refers to the physical environment in which you are performing and how awareness of it affects movement. The actual physical environment of most performances in competitive forensics is a classroom. At larger tournaments, finals rounds typically take place in larger auditoriums or ballrooms. You will need to adapt your performance to meet the architecture of the space in which you are working. Top performers adapt their physical choices, whether they are in the smallest possible venue, such as a broom closet, or the largest possible venue, the national final round stage. However, as performers, it is also our duty to interpret or suggest a new the physical environment or architecture of the scene. Once you have established the architecture of the scene you inhabit as a character, it will affect that character's movement. For example, your character will look and move about one way if the piece is set in their apartment and a completely different way if the piece is set in a dark, scary cave. Understanding the architecture of our scenes informs the physical decisions we make in our performance.

In addition to Bogart and Landau's terminology, we will describe some language commonly used to describe performance techniques that are relatively unique to interpretation. These important terms include pops, molds

or morphs, focal points, and blocking or tech. Each of these items will be explicated in greater detail in subsequent chapters, but it is a good idea to get some exposure to them now. One of the most commonly used words in the interp world is "**pops**." In many instances in interpretation events, particularly Humorous Interpretation, a singular performer must play more than one character engaging in a dialogue. Pops refer to the quick physical and vocal transition from one character to another. The high tempo of the pop creates urgency in the scene and makes dialogue between two characters seem more fluid to the audience.

Similarly, **molds** or morphs refer to a slower physical transition from either one character to another or from one time or place to another. Molds and morphs are commonly used in Dramatic Interpretation to indicate a flashback. For example, in the 2012 National Speech & Debate Association final round in DI, a student performed a piece entitled "The Face of Emmett Till." In the performance, the student played Till's mother in her old age, reflecting on the events leading up to her son's tragic murder. To indicate a flashback in time, the student molded, or slowly transitioned, into the shape of a younger version of the mother in dialogue with her son. This mold signified a transition in time and gave the audience an opportunity to understand the present character in greater detail.

In solo interpretation events, like DI, HI, and POI, the performer will often have more than one character engaging in dialogue. In sequences where dialogue is used, **focal points** give the audience the impression that two characters are speaking to one another. As opposed to the performer looking at the audience, the performer will use an off stage focal position. For example, in the 2012 National Speech & Debate Tournament Humorous Interpretation final round, one student performed a piece that was set around a dinner table. The protagonists' focal point in dialogue with his father was slightly up and to the right. When the performer popped to the father, the father looked at the son slightly down and to the left. This dynamic indicated that the father was physically taller than the son. The main character's focal point when speaking to his mother was the other direction. The performer's decisions regarding the placement of focal points gives the audience the impression that the characters were sitting at the table across from one another.

A pair of words commonly used interchangeably are **blocking** and **tech**. Blocking and tech refer to all of the physical choices associated with performance construction. A student or judge will often say a performance had "great tech" if said performance had intricately choreographed, dynamic moments of physicality. Blocking involves all of the elements previously mentioned in this unit. Tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, spatial relationship, topography, shape, behavioral and expressive gestures, architecture, pops, molds, and focal

points all inform our decisions when staging movement in a forensic performance. Now that we have a foundational understanding of the equipment we have in our physical toolkit, let's explore the most powerful tool of all, the voice.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What are the vocal tools at our disposal when constructing a competitive interpretation performance?*

CONCEPTS: *Pitch, Timbre, Volume, Vocal Tempo, Silence*

UNIT 4

Intro to Vocal Composition

Sam began thinking of all the performance possibilities. They considered how the body communicates so much. They thought of how they were sitting at their desk and wondered what that communicated to their teacher. Do they raise their hand with a quick tempo or do they do it slowly? *But wait a second,* Sam thought, *weren't you supposed to speak in "speech?"*

Yes, Sam. We do. So much.

And when we speak, we unconsciously activate an organic factory; a cooperative, intricate process that yields the production of human sound. However, as we prepare for competition, it becomes our job to consciously consider this process when constructing our competitive

interpretation performances. This unit will enhance our understanding of interpretation by introducing concepts useful in shaping our vocal performances.

One of the greatest weapons in a performer's vocal arsenal is pitch. **Pitch** is a perceptual ordering of the sounds created by our voices

on a frequency related scale—in other words, the high and low of our vocals. Our voices are capable of producing a tremendous range of pitch. Consider your voice as a scale or spectrum with the lowest pitch your voice can safely produce on the bottom and the highest pitch your voice can safely produce on top. Now say a phrase at the lowest rung of the scale and over the course of 10 steps, reach the top of the scale or the highest pitch your voice can produce safely. Now, slow things down. Try adding an additional 10 steps so it takes 20 steps to reach the top. Exploring the voice's capabilities regarding pitch allows you as a performer to discover a fuller range of vocal characterizations at your disposal. This allows us control over our vocal performance, rather than relying on intuition.

Our voices are capable of producing a tremendous range of pitch. Consider your voice as a scale or spectrum with the lowest pitch your voice can safely produce on the bottom and the highest pitch your voice can safely produce on top.

When we speak, sound is created by folds in the vocal cords. However, where the sound resonates can be manipulated by the speaker.

The location of sound resonation is called **timbre**. If a piano and a guitar play the exact same note, at the exact same loudness, the musical sound remains distinguishable. That is because sound resonates differently from the body of a piano than it does the body of a guitar. This works the same way with human bodies. Our shapes offer distinct possibilities of timbre.

Just like the sound produced by a violin is different from the sound produced by a cello, the sounds we produce resonating from our noses sound differently than our sounds resonating from our throats. There are a host of possible vocal resonators: the chest, the larynx, the pharynx, the oral cavity, the nasal cavity, and the sinuses.

Consider Margaret Hamilton's performance as the Wicked Witch of the West in Victor Fleming's 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*. Now think of the way Hamilton delivered her most famous line, "I'll get you my pretty and your little dog, too!" From where did the sound primarily resonate? If you've referenced a video of Hamilton's delivery and listening while you read, you're hearing that the sound resonates largely from the nasal cavity and the larynx, which is our high frequency resonator in the throat.

As an experiment, try to imitate Hamilston's delivery. Then perform your best impression of Santa Claus saying "HO! HO! HO!" Hear the difference? The Ho! Ho! Ho!s should resonate primarily from the lower portion of your chest and the pharynx. When we construct

our competitive interpretation performances, it is important to consider how sound can be shaped based upon the origin of resonation.

Make Sure to Reach Your Audience

The goal of interpretation, or for any public speaking event for that matter, is to communicate with an audience. A critical component of communicating a message is whether or not that message is spoken loud enough to be heard. Therefore, when constructing our vocal performances, it is important to consider volume. **Volume**, sometimes referred to as projection, is described as the loudness or quietness of sound. It is important that the language of a performance be heard by the totality of the audience. However, how loudly or quietly a character speaks suggests personality traits for the audience. For example, in the 2011 National Speech & Debate Association Tournament Humorous Interpretation final, a student performing "The Putnam County Spelling Bee" had a character who was extremely shy, so they performed the character at a quiet, though still registerable, volume.

Projection is one of the keys to successful communication. If you are not understood by the totality of your audience, you are missing an opportunity to leave a lasting impact in the

round. Understanding how to project can be a challenge; however, there are a few useful tips anyone can employ to become more proficient projectors.

▶ Tip #1

If you think you are being too loud, be louder. When we tell our students to "be louder," many of them look at us like we're crazy and say, "THAT wasn't loud enough?!" A major hurdle for performers is understanding that while your own ear is just inches away from your mouth, the audiences' ears are 10, 20, even hundreds of feet away. Performers should learn to let go of the self-consciousness associated with being heard. We have seen countless rounds determined by the simple measure of which performance was best heard.

▶ Tip #2

Project beyond the last row of seats. Many coaches ascribe to the idea of communicating to the audience member at the back of the room to ensure that the performance is understood by all. However, projection is about more than simply being heard; it's about filling the room with your presence. A better way to approach projection is to focus on being heard just past the last audience member. If you think about projection this way, you will fill the room with your voice without looking like you are screaming.

▶ Tip #3

Think like a soprano. No, not a fictitious New Jersey gangster from an HBO series—a singer.

Your voice is a tool, so you have to understand the mechanics in order to most effectively utilize it. When going over your piece alone or with your coach, make sure to practice deep breathing to exercise your diaphragm. Allow air to fill up not only your chest, but all of your rib cage. Even your stomach should be filled with air. You will soon realize that your lungs can hold a lot more air than you ever thought. When breathing correctly, your shoulders should not even rise when you take a deep breath. This will improve the sound quality of your voice and your ability to fill the room.

Pacing

Vocal tempo, much like physical tempo, is how fast or slow a sound is performed. Vocal tempo is sometimes described as vocal acceleration and deceleration, or as considered in the musical world, duration. The vocal tempo of a performance can go a long way in characterization. One iconic example is Ben Stein's performance as the economics teacher in the John Hughes classic *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. Stein's delivery of the line "Bueller...Bueller... Bueller" became the classical example of the boring teacher archetype, simply by his adept manipulation of vocal tempo.

In consideration of pacing a vocal performance, one of the most powerful attributes of a strong vocal performance is the use of **silence**. The choice to use silence can elicit a maelstrom of laughter or bring an audience to tears. Consider the last time you told a wild

Our Vocal Toolbox
Just like you need to know what's in your toolbox before you set to building a birdhouse, we should inventory our vocal toolbox before we set to building a performance.
☑ **Pitch**
☑ **Timbre**
☑ **Volume**
☑ **Vocal Tempo**
☑ **Silence**

story to a friend. Perhaps silence was a critical component in that exchange. If your friend did not observe silence, you would likely think they were not paying attention. You may have used silence either before or after you gave the shocking conclusion to create suspense. The same tactics are used in competitive interpretation performances. Silence can be used to indicate confusion, compassion, fear, bewilderment, or shock to either humorous or dramatic effect. As we will explore in the proceeding units in this volume, the ability to convey emotion through the manipulation of silence is critical to all interpretation events.

A pitfall of many young interpretation performances is a vocal delivery that more or less mirrors the intuitive cadence of the performer. This can be challenging, because sometimes the characters we have chosen to embody are not so similar to ourselves. Performers may often say words (and keep saying words) because they are present in the script, but they forget that we can vocally shape our messages.

The words inform our performances, but they are not in charge. We are. We tell them when to stop and go. We tell them when to rise and fall. Understanding these vocal performance tools will help you wield your ultimate vocal performance power in creating intentional vocal performances of purpose tol a wonderful impactful end.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do we create a performance that is competitive in the event of Dramatic Interpretation?*

CONCEPTS: *Presentational vs. Representational, Teaser, Introduction, Exposition, Inciting Incident, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, Monologue, Dialogue, Here & Now Drama, Flashback to Drama, Anchor Reality, Environment, Circles of Comfort, Self-Disclosure, Flip-Book, Diversity in Emotion, Hit Lines*

UNIT 5

Dramatic Interpretation

W At the team's first showcase, Sam saw a performance by a classmate that left them feeling like they'd just seen a movie. The performance made them laugh and cry while also helping them to better understand what life was like for another person living a different kind of life. Sam wondered if they could elicit that kind of response from an audience after watching a performance they prepared. Sam sought out the team Dramatic Interpretation captain for help in figuring out where to begin.

What do Katherine Hepburn, Paul Robeson, Vivian Leigh, Muhammad Ali, rock star Nikki Sixx, Judy Garland, the hunder-year-old Delany sisters, and an eleven-year-old with a photographic memory have in common? They are all characters who have graced the National Speech & Debate Tournament final round stage in Dramatic Interpretation. Dramatic Interpretation is the communication of ideas drawn from a text to create a dramatic effect. The purpose of DI is to explore an author's work through a dramatic lens in order to uncover

some truth in the human condition. The ideas that best present this truth will be what you interpret by creating a physical performance. Sometimes our understanding informs the performance choices, and sometimes the choices inform the understanding.

At times, DI appears similar to acting; however, there are distinct differences. The biggest difference is the mode of performance. In DI, we use a **presentational** mode of performance. Acting most often uses a **representational** mode of performance. In DI, we do this by offering an introduction as well as making blocking choices to suggest reality more than create a reality for the character. While we might make choices that suggest realistic environments in interp, we do so acknowledging that our performance is designed to communicate ideas to the audience. Representational modes of performance try to represent reality, typically ignoring the presence of an audience. Distinguishing the difference between the two modes is hardest with DI, because monologues often develop into a performance that closely resemble reality. This unit is going to make it easier to distinguish between the two modes.

The key to the event is to choose fragments of the text that best support the truth you are trying to uncover for the audience. Performers use these fragments to compose complete ideas. Typically, these ideas will elicit emotional responses from the audience. The performance that covers the most emotional ground will usually win the round. If we think of our judge as having an emotional neutral point of 0, the student who takes the judge the greatest emotional distance from neutral thus covers the most "emotional ground" in the round. So how do we do all of that? We will learn the steps for composing a competitive DI performance from start to finish. As with the other interpretation events, those steps include script selection, script cutting, performance composition, and presentation.

ANATOMY OF A DI

Before we go forth in preparing the next gripping dramatic performance, it is important

that we first explore the anatomy of a DI. While no interpretation performance is exactly alike, most DI performances include the same general components:

- Teaser
- Introduction
- Exposition
- Inciting incident
- Rising action
- Climax
- Falling action

Most performances begin with a **teaser**, a section of the performance, usually 45 seconds to 90 seconds long, that gives the audience a preview (hence "teases") of the topic or mood of the selection. Following the teaser is an **introduction**, or "intro." The **intro** is a roughly 30- to 45-second long explanation of the performance written by the student. After the intro, the student returns to the performance of the script with an **exposition** that introduces the characters and setting of the piece. In general, an **inciting incident** sends the conflict into motion. The tension created by the conflict mounts and grows increasingly complicated in the **rising action** before reaching the **climax**, or the emotional peak of the performance. The performance ends with a **falling action**, which generally, though not always, resolves the conflict. The structure is very similar to that of a short story. A major difference is that the climax is not necessarily a "turning point," but is the moment when the stakes are highest for the protagonist.

SCRIPT SELECTION FOR DI

Dramatic Interpretation performances can be drawn from most print publications: published plays, novels, memoirs, short stories, or other published works (though, if the source is an anthology collection of short stories, plays, or novels, each selection of literature is independent and only one selection can be used, even if it is written by the same author). The NSDA has expanded the parameters of possible material, though, and competitors are now able to draw performance material from select digital mediums. It is important to read the rules carefully before beginning your search, as the rules are often changing in response to the competitive needs of the NSDA and contemporary competitive cultural climates.

Using a published work that is dramatic in nature as source material is helpful and expected but not always necessary. Cuttings may consist of monologues or scenes that require dialogue or the portrayal of several roles. When looking for Dramatic Interpretation selections, keep in mind that competitive dramas include: 1) a state, situation, or series of events; 2) interestingness or intensity; 3) conflict of forces.

Recall Unit 2 when we discussed finding literature. Now that you know what kind of literature can be used for DI, you should consider the competition. Remember when we said that the performance that covers the most emotional ground usually wins the round? Well-known literature, or literature that has been used often

for DI, will have a lessened emotional impact on the audience because the audience can predict what happens next for the character. If you do choose a well-known piece of literature to guide your interpretation, you should consider recency (or the last time a performance of that piece of literature was in circulation).

Another important consideration should be the possible emotional distance of a potential cutting of the piece. It is true, Dramatic Interpretation performances are often sad, although, when we say a performance "covering the most emotional distance" wins, we do not necessarily mean the performance that is the saddest wins. When looking for literature to perform in DI, consider Vonnegut's explanation of The Shapes of Stories. Humor or levity can be used to achieve a greater "high" for the audience. In this way, the "low" does not have to be as low.

CUTTING A SELECTION FOR DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION

We cannot overstate this. The performance begins with the cutting. Once you begin manipulating the text, you begin shaping the story that you will tell. Cutting is just as important to the performance as the actual physical representation is. Our cuttings guide and are guided by our creative, interpretive processes. The fact that two students can successfully perform the same play with vastly different cuttings and interpretations is a testament to this concept.

As you cut, it is important to keep in mind what the performance will look like. One great practice is reading lines out loud as you cut the script. This allows the performer to get a sense of how the story might sound and can aid in the development of vocal characterization.

Just as with all of the interpretation events, when cutting the piece, you are (above all) looking for a story. When reading for DI, you should think about things that make DI work: interestingness, intensity, and diversity of emotion. **Interestingness** suggests moments of the work that provide a source of intrigue for the audience. A good story keeps us guessing and wondering what will happen next. Intensity can be understood as the depth of a character's conflict. A story about a man losing his cell phone may not grip the audience, unless, of course, the man is trying to retrieve the cell phone because the last recorded sounds of his late wife's voice are saved to the voicemail box. Interestingness is helpful when tempted to choose a story simply because its plot tells the tale of a traumatic experience. Consider the driving plot device of grief. Grief, of course, is a valuable human experience that deserves to be explored; however, before choosing a story of a grieving character, ask yourself what is particularly interesting about the character's story. What novel detail of the experience will drive the interest of the audience? Or, is the grief so commonplace that that alone makes it interesting—something all humans experience but find difficulty in communicating?

Next, you should consider the potential **intensity**, or **stakes**, of a piece before choosing it for interpretation. When the conflict of a story is unimportant or mundane and the **stakes** seem low, then the audience will be less compelled by the drama. This does not mean, though, that you should only seek out stories that bring us to the precipice of world-ending scenarios.

Finally, **diversity of emotion** refers to the emotional levels of a selection. Think about the last time you were at a social function with new people. When we first interact with strangers or acquaintances in everyday life, we often avoid sharing deeply personal information about ourselves. We tell jokes to lighten the mood, we smile and sip our punch. As our friendships develop, we share our "selves" more deeply in a process of self-disclosure. In a similar way, compelling characters don't spill the emotional beans upon first meeting. It takes a bit more time to disclose their deepest secrets (usually about seven minutes and 45 seconds). We want scripts that offer at least a splash of humor or moments of levity.

Remember that our first step is locating the climax. However, in larger plays and especially books, there may be multiple gripping moments that may serve as the climax for the DI that are not necessarily the climax of the work. While bracketing chunks of material while you read, make special marks around potential climaxes. These should be parts of the story that will be the most interesting or where the conflict is the most intense. Look for moments in the text where the protagonist is at a breaking point, or where your protagonist comes to some beautiful realization.

When determining the overall structure of your cutting it is important to consider what style of Dramatic Interpretation you are attempting to create.

After you have marked several potential moments for a climax, ask yourself what will be the best way to tell the story? Which story is the most interesting? The most intense? When determining the overall structure of your cutting, it is important to consider what style of Dramatic Interpretation you are attempting to create. If you are cutting a longer work, decide whether you will pursue a Cameo cutting or a Spark Note cutting. While no DI is exactly alike, and while there are certainly exceptions, there are two long-lasting stylistic archetypes: the **Here & Now Drama** and the **Flashback to Drama**. Consider the differences between the 2011 and 2021 national champions in Dramatic Interpretation. The 2021 national champion performing "Mala" by Melinda Lopez is an example of a Here & Now Drama. The character was speaking to the audience entirely from her present reality; a young woman in her own home reflecting on her experience caring for

her ailing Cuban mother. While the protagonist reflects on the past, they do so entirely from the present reality. The drama unfolds in that character's present, hence "here & now." If we look to the 2011 champion performing "Soul of a Butterfly" by Muhammad Ali, the main character, Muhammad Ali, is seen in the present reality as an older man suffering with Parkinson's disease reflecting on his younger self. When he reflects, the performer molds into a younger version of the character. The drama of the present character is informed by his past, as seen through the flashbacks. Whichever style of cutting you choose, it is helpful that your cutting has an **anchor reality**, or a clearly defined present time and space for your protagonist to inhabit. After you have chosen what kind of cutting you will pursue, choose the best climax to serve that kind of cutting. Choose one of the potential climaxes that you have already marked. Now you are ready to chunk.

Chunking for DI is tricky because you don't want the piece to be boring. The thing to remember is: think about performing the entire time that you are cutting. Chunk the parts of the literature that are necessary to serve your story. In addition, chunk out pieces that can be interpreted to add levity to the piece. Remember, we want DIVERSITY OF EMOTION. If you find a piece of the literature that is especially funny, include it in your cutting. If you read a line that is particularly stirring, include it in the chunking. Such gripping lines, or **hit lines**,

may be useful later. Type out the CHUNKED portions of your text into one document. For a full length DI, the chunking should be around 3,000 words. The chunking should NOT exceed 5,000 words. The smaller the chunk, the easier it will be to cut.

Now WHITTLE your chunking down to somewhere below 1,200 words. We have observed that the average person can understandably speak approximately 1,200 to 1,450 words in 10 minutes. However, when one includes elements critical to success in DI such as emotional beats, physicality, environment, and silence, you are no longer dealing with an "average" speaking rate. We have also noticed that a major pitfall of many Dramatic Interpretation cuttings is that they simply contain too much text. Eliminate places where the protagonist repeats an idea or emotion. Keep in mind that certain text may better serve your performance as subtext. Eliminate characters that do not serve the story. Memoirs, a commonly used resource for Dramatic Interp, often contain prosaic language that distracts from the dramatic situation. Eliminate any unnecessary language, while keeping the MOST interesting, the MOST diverse, and the MOST intense language. As you cut, you should also be thinking about performance transitions and how you will get from one scene to another, or from one character to another.

Finally, you need to make it cool. This step is what separates good cuttings from great cuttings. One way of making your cutting cool is

by finding HIT LINES. These are lines that shake the audience in their boots. These lines make the audience think, "UHHN, holy smokes!" You should already have a bank of these lines from when you created your initial chunking. The addition of a motif, such as recurring symbolism, through the cutting adds to the cool factor. Explore ways to surprise the audience with humor or by setting up a twist in the story.

BUILDING A COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE FOR DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION

There are many ways to begin constructing a Dramatic performance. Instinctually, many students will begin memorizing the lines of the script out loud. We have noticed that when students do this, they often memorize intonations and inflection patterns. Once this happens, it is incredibly difficult to break those patterns. Try to keep in mind that our instinctive choice is not always the most effective choice. Therefore, we encourage students to initially read the cutting out loud only once to double-check the flow of the performance. If moments sound awkward or wordy, make final language eliminations.

Now that we have an effective cutting, we can build our performance.

Environment Construction

Since we do not enjoy the benefits of scenery and prop pieces in competitive Interp, the first step in building a performance for DI is creating a set. Our behavior is heavily influenced by our environment. The way we interact with our parents' homes is very different from the way we interact with the environment at school. The way we behave in a quiet church is very different from the way we behave at a baseball game. Therefore, we should craft an environment to demonstrate our character or characters' circumstances in order to build a complete performance. In the absence of a physical set, we must create an environment for our characters to inhabit.

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There are three aspects of an environment that we may establish to make more informed physical decisions; the **THINGS AFFIXED**, the **THINGS NEAR**, the **THINGS BEYOND**.

Things Affixed

Things Affixed refers to the character's costume, or the items on the character's immediate person that indicate something about who that character is. For example if a character is wearing a pearl necklace, white gloves, and a diamond encrusted evening gown, then that suggests that the character is wealthy, or perhaps she is living well beyond her means. Determine what your character is wearing head to toe. How long or short is your character's hair? Do they have hair? Making physical choices can suggest your character's costume and relay important physical traits of your given character.

Things Near

Things Near refers to the manipulatable objects in the immediate vicinity of the character with which they can interact and manipulate. If your character is a teacher, the things in their immediate vicinity could reasonably be a blackboard, an eraser and a piece of chalk, a desk, pens, the students' desks before them, even the students who inhabit the desks. One way to establish the objects that the character can manipulate is to design a floor plan of the scene. If the setting of a given scene is a living room, then determine where the couch would be positioned. Decide where the bookshelf is positioned in the room and what items are placed on the shelf. Make your floor plan as detailed as possible to ensure greater access to creative possibilities.

Things Beyond

Things Beyond characterizes the forces outside the character's immediate reach that the character can interact with but cannot manipulate. The things beyond may include environmental elements such as the weather that can help shape the scene. Consider how the mood of a scene can be created by the external environment. Envision a character hearing thunder, looking to the window, and drawing the curtains. This interaction between the main character and the thing beyond creates an ominous mood without the help of textual cues. The scene will play out a bit differently if it were a sunny day. The things beyond may also be secondary characters who influence the story but are not physically present in the scene. For example, a child may hear their mother calling "Dinner time!" from downstairs. The child may interact with their mother by shouting back "I'll be down in a minute!" but they may not physically engage their mother since she is not in the scene. The things beyond can be critical to the physical and vocal performance of a dramatic scene depending on the circumstances set forth by the work. In the play, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Anne and her family hide from evil Nazi soldiers in the sealed-off upper rooms of her father's office building. The presence of the Nazi's are critical to this scene as Anne must tread carefully and speak quietly in order to avoid detection.

Circles of Comfort

Our "self" consists of our goals, fears, failures, and dreams. In this way, our self is the deepest part of who we are. The process of sharing this information with close friends and loved ones is an act of self-disclosure. It can be extremely uncomfortable to share our deepest secrets with strangers. As we do not typically like to feel uncomfortable, we protect ourselves with emotional defense mechanisms. We have jokes that we tell when meeting people for the first time or we talk about the weather. We wrap ourselves in a **Circle of Comfort** until we feel like we can trust a person enough to self-disclose. This trust takes time, and we do not normally disclose all of our "self" at once. In DI, the process of self-disclosure takes eight minutes, with the climax of the piece representing the most intense disclosure of the character's "self."

We want to give our audiences the impression of a self-disclosing act. One way to do this is to envision the Circle of Comfort as an actual circle with the character in the center. The outside of the circle is **Self-Disclosure**. As the story unfolds and the character reveals more intimate details, they move closer to the edge of the circle. Upon realizing they are sharing too much, they attempt to return to the center of the circle, to regain a sense of comfort. Here, the character attempts to change the subject, they may tell a joke to lighten the mood, the tempo, and the volume

of their voice. An important rule of thumb to keep in mind is that a level change should happen when a character attempts to regain comfort. Since we cannot un-say what we have already said, we can never return fully to the center of the circle. This process repeats itself until the character reaches a point of no return, where self-disclosure is imminent. This occurs in the rising action and concludes with the climax. After the climax, in the falling action, the character makes one last effort to return to a comfortable state. However, at this point, they are forever changed.

PERFORMANCE CONSTRUCTION

Now that we have created a scene for our DI character(s) and understand the concept of Circles of Comfort, it is time to design a **Flipbook** of our performance. Have you ever created a short cartoon on the corners of your notebook? Cartoons are created by drawing a series of pictures that vary gradually from one page to the next. Once the pages are turned rapidly, the movement appears fluid. We can construct our performances in a similar way by designing a series of striking images and moving fluidly from one image to the next.

We espouse a psycho-physical approach to interpretative performance construction. As mentioned previously in Unit 3, there are many challenges to applying an acting method, particularly emotional recall, to forensics. Rather than recollecting emotional trauma in order to feel an emotion prompted by the text, a psycho-physical approach encourages students to craft interesting images that suggest the emotion they wish to communicate. Picture a man sitting on a bench. His shoulders are slumped over and his head is buried in his hands. How does he feel? Such a position universally signals grief, right? We need not know what is actually going on inside the man's head to know he is upset. Humans have a strong tendency to physically indicate our emotional state. We smile when we are happy. When we lie, we look down and to the right. When we are angry, we open up our shoulders and clench our fists. Therefore, it stands to reason that creating a physical posture can suggest a character's emotion for the audience. We can do this very simply through the creation of dynamic physical images or "flips."

How do we create a Flipbook? The first step is to break the script down into Beats. **Beats** are emotional transitions, moments of self-disclosure, or moments when a character attempts to regain comfort. Indicate beats by placing a small vertical line. Once a student has broken the script down into beats, they can choose a moment (beat) to "animate." This moment should be a completely still image (like a photograph or a sculpture). Does the moment call for a character to manipulate an item from the Things Near? Ask yourself what is the best image that will communicate the emotion of that moment. Perhaps the character makes a Private Behavioral Gesture. The moment may call for an Expressive Gesture. We then perform this task throughout the performance, initially creating 20 or so striking pictures with your body throughout the piece. If we were to mold into each of these images silently in succession, the audience should have a pretty solid understanding of a story.

After the student has created broad stroke images of major emotional shifts in the performance, the student begins adding in more "pictures" to fill in the gaps between moments. For example, let's say a major emotional moment in a piece occurs when the main character opens the door to his home. The first image the performer would create is the picture of the character looking around the door. The performer has now crafted an emotionally resonant physical image. Now the performer has to fill in the gaps to get there. The performer creates an image of reaching for the door. Then the performer creates an image of squeezing the door handle, followed by an image of turning the door handle clockwise, followed by an image of pulling the door toward him. Finally, the performer has now arrived at the image of looking around the door!

Next, consider tempo and duration. Increase or decrease the tempo based on the emotional

defined vocal choices in the performance. Decide the character (or characters) timbre, or from where the sound will resonate. Perhaps you've decided your main character has a loud boisterous voice, so perhaps you may choose to have the sound resonate from your chest. If you are playing a young child, maybe the sound will resonate from the larynx or the nose. If you are playing a real life person, as opposed to a fictitious character, consider researching archival footage of the person. Are there ways you can manipulate the pitch, timbre, volume, vocal tempo, of your voice to authentically match the vocal characteristics of the person you are portraying?

Keep in mind, though, you don't necessarily need to mimic an existing figure to capture their essence in a performance. Consider Michael Fassbender's performance as tech pioneer Steve Jobs in the so-titled 2015 film compared to Ashton Kutcher's performance as the same historical figure in the 2013 film *Jobs*. Kutcher does arguably better work at resembling Jobs. Fassbender, though, looks very little like the tech giant and even seems to take on a peculiar accent in some parts of the film. Still, it is Fassbender who delivers a performance that best captures Jobs' intensity and entrepreneurial spirit. Director Danny Boyle confesses that Fassbender is able to do this because the actor worked to inhabit Jobs. He moved like him and enunciated like him. Those physical choices were more important than an aesthetic or vocal likeness, and that is why Fassbender's

choice. If the main character is afraid to open the door, perhaps the tempo will be incredibly slow. If the main character is angry that they have been disturbed, then maybe they'll open the door with increased tempo. Once the performer increases or decreases the tempo, they now have a blocked, clean, emotionally resonant moment! The process may seem time consuming. However, it is much easier to block performances this way. The vague concepts of "blocking" and "being clean" are operationalized and simplified.

As you build a strong physical performance based on the piece's emotional beats, we suggest beginning the process of making more

performance was praised while Kutcher's was largely panned as imitation.

Beyond the voice of your character, consider how you will manipulate your vocal tools to capture the emotional context of the moment. You might decide that a line will be delivered in a quick tempo and a very low volume because, at that moment, your character is having a hushed phone call with a 9-1-1 operator with a dangerous presence within earshot. Another student might look at the same line and decide to deliver it with a loud volume at a slow tempo. It really depends on what the student thinks will best capture the emotional context of the moment.

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PLEASE PAUSE READING

(take a deep breath in)

(exhale)

(take an even deeper breath in)

(exhale slowly)

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Consider the power of silence. Consider the way our breathing communicates. Consider what the way we breathe communicates about us. About our disposition. Our situations. The proximity our bodies may be to perceived danger. Or grief. Or joy. As you rehearse the performance, begin folding everything together. Gain feedback on your choices from your coach or teammates to gauge their effectiveness. If you have access to a mechanism to record your performance, we encourage you to do so.

Watch your performance and be kind to yourself. There may be moments where you cringe and the first run through of the performance may make you cry for the wrong reasons. But always be kind to yourself. It's the only way to fall in love with performing. If you are unsatisfied with a particular choice, or if the choice does not quite capture the emotional context of the moment, consider the ways you can make small adjustments to improve the overall composition. Above all, try to comprehend the journey as a process. Your process.

WINNING THE ROUND

The performance that covers the most emotional ground will usually win the round. To do this, we must strive to compose a performance that emotionally resonates. We want to immerse the audience in the world of our characters. The more attention to detail in the environment construction, the more vivid the scene will be for the audience. When constructing images and rehearsing the performance ask yourself, "How will this image stand out?" and "Is this the most effective way to communicate the emotion of this moment?" Whenever we do this, we challenge ourselves to become BETTER than our performance instincts and craft the most emotionally powerful performances possible.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do we create a performance that is competitive in the event of Humorous Interpretation?*

CONCEPTS: *Humorous Interpretation, Presentational, Humor, Device, Protagonist, Antagonist, Conflict, Crisis, Bit, The Knee*

UNIT 6

Humorous Interpretation

H *CHI-KEH Errrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr* Sam heard what sounded like a door open. Then what sounded like footsteps on an old wooden floor *creak, creak, creeeaaaaaa-k* *Weird,* Sam thought, *these floors are made of tile.* Sam looked over and saw another student sharply moving their body into different positions, performing a silly looking pantomime to a few other students in the team room. The student raised their pitch, then shifted their body and said something funny with a deep pitch. Sam couldn't quite decipher what the student was saying, but it must have been hilarious as the small audience erupted in laughter. Once the student stopped for a drink of water, Sam walked over.

'What are you doing?" Sam asked.

The other student said, "I'm Josh!" Josh was very sweaty. "Don't mind me, I'm just practicing my pops!" Josh asked a teammate, "You got a mop?"

Humorous Interpretation is cool. National Speech & Debate Tournament final round: 3,000 people laughing at one time. Because of one performer. Who made one smirk. That's cool.

The purpose of Humorous Interpretation is to explore an author's work through a humorous lens in order to uncover some truth in the human condition.

And perhaps, because it is so cool, or because the mode of performance seems less natural than Dramatic Interpretation, or because a fear of not being funny when you are trying to be can be scarier than not being dramatic if you are trying to be, Humorous Interpretation can seem like such an arduous endeavor. Some people feel that they are just not funny. The good news is—you don't need to be the funniest person at the dinner table to excel at this event. You don't even have to think yourself funny at all. You only need to understand how to build a humorous performance by interpreting a written text. This building process can be taught, and we are going to teach you.

Recall a performance that you have seen on stage or on screen that made you laugh. What do you remember most about the performance? What did the performance look and sound like? What was funny about it? Humorous Interpretation is the communication of ideas drawn from a text to create a humorous effect. The purpose of HI is to explore an author's work through a humorous lens in order to uncover some truth in the human condition. The ideas that best present this truth will be what you interpret by creating a physical performance. Often, HI is represented as a silly event, full of students making silly noises as silly characters to make the audience feel silly. Well, some of that is true. Competitors do often make silly noises; but, if the event is done well, then those noises are performed with purpose in consideration of a potentially purposeful impact. Legendary teacher Stephen Leacock believed, "Humor is a part of the interpretation of life." If we are interpreting works to find truth in the human condition, then humor is a large part of that. Not to mention, it is also a lot of fun to make people laugh.

Like DI, in HI, we use a **presentational** mode of performance. This mode of performance helps us create multiple characters that can move through space and time and from scene to scene and still have the audience follow along. Other hallmarks of this presentational mode in HI include sound effects, exaggerated gestures, and absurdly unrealistic portrayals of characters. The key to the event is to choose humorous fragments of the text that best support the truth that you are trying to uncover for the audience. Performers use these fragments to compose complete ideas. Typically, these

ideas will elicit emotional responses from the audience. In HI, these emotions should have a humorous subtext in order to elicit laughter, or at minimum—a pleasant feeling, from the audience. An HI that communicates the sharpest attention to its ideas (or story) AND elicits the most laughter from the audience will generally win the round. Note that there are two components composing the deciding factors figuring the results of an HI round: Laughter and Story. LAUGHTER + STORY = WINNING HI. There should be both.

ANATOMY OF AN HI

Humorous Interpretation performances can be drawn from a published play, novel, memoir, short story, or other published work, in addition to the available digital formats outlined in the NSDA rules. Using a work that is humorous in nature as source material is helpful and expected but not always necessary. Cuttings may consist of monologues or scenes that require dialogue or the portrayal of several roles. Thus, the elements of HI include research, composition, performance, and the audience.

As we did with Dramatic Interpretation, we will guide you through the steps for composing a competitive HI performance from start to finish. Similar to the other interpretation events, those steps include: script selection, script cutting, performance composition, and presentation. Also, as with DI and Duo, the structure of HI is very similar to that of
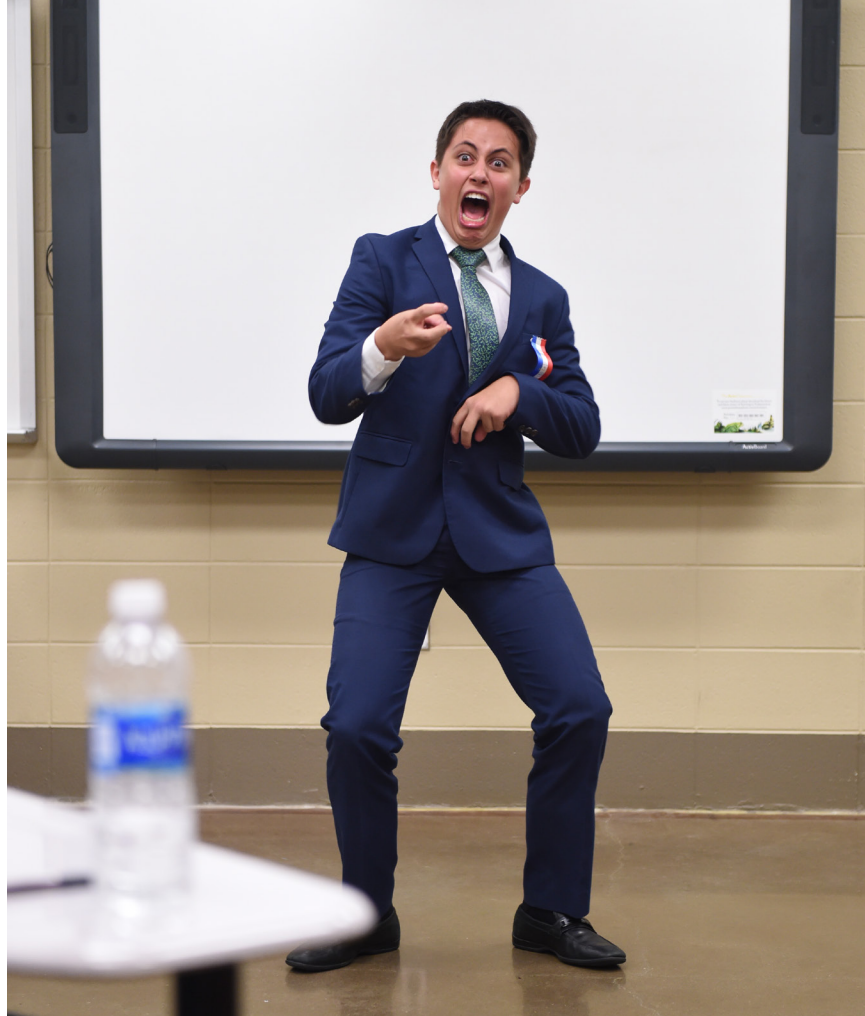
Freytag's model of dramatic structure we reviewed in Unit 3. In Unit 5, we described the climax in DI to be the moment when the stakes are highest for the **protagonist**. In HI, this may also be true; but, more specifically, an HI climax will be when the piece is the MOST humorous. This moment should elicit the biggest laugh, with laughs before it builds to that moment. An HI performance should try to elicit volcanic laughter from the audience, erupting at the precise moment of your intention. After the climax, the falling action is typically brief. You want the audience and the judge to hold on to that wonderful feeling that the climax gave them, that feeling of sublime laughter.

SCRIPT SELECTION FOR HI

First, you start with the story. For consistent success, an HI must have a story. A student once pitched to us that he wanted to create an HI of *Webster's Dictionary*. While, admittedly, his interpretation of the word and definition of "absenteeism" still conjures a giggle, the student ran into trouble by the fourth or fifth word. This was because there was no story. There was no **conflict**.

A major difference between searching for literature for DI and searching for literature in HI lies within a matter of parts of speech. Often, we can read a work and determine that it is suitable for DI based on its nouns. Cancer is dramatic. Death is dramatic. Addiction is dramatic. But what nouns make us laugh? Birthday parties? Sweaters? Penguins? For HI, in addition to nouns, we have to look to verbs. A birthday party failing can make us laugh. A penguin knitting a sweater can make us laugh. So when looking for HI literature, look to the things happening. Look to the verbs.

So how does laughter make us feel? What does it look like? Can it be built? Well that's the tricky thing, isn't it? There is definitely an art to eliciting humor; but, lucky for us, it is an art that can be taught. Before diving into the oceans of books at your local library for HI piece ideas, think about what kind of literature you are seeking. You are not just looking for something that makes you laugh. More specifically, you are looking for humor; and, no, they

are not the same. Laughter is what happens when a humorous text is interpreted well: INTERPRETATION + HUMOR = LAUGHTER. But the text need not make you laugh right away. Read with imagination in search of humor. So, before you even begin your search, understand the tools described in the Performance Composition sections of this book and keep them in mind when reading potential material. Try to imagine voices and scenes that you can create with the words. Sometimes, humor is sneaky. And, to be better humor detectives, we need to understand what humor is.

Humor is a state, situation, or series of events of comedy, absurdity, or surprise that amuse us. Humor amuses. Comedy makes us laugh. So how do we get laughter out of the things that amuse us? Think about this the next time you are watching a funny movie or a stand-up comic. Were the words themselves funny? Or was the voice or face the performer made funny? Typically, even if the words are funny right off of the page, the performance enhances them to make them even funnier. That is interpretation, and that is largely what HI performances do.

If you start watching comedic performances closely, you will notice that laughter is most often elicited from conflict and irony. The absurdity of Jim Carey's rubber face is funny because of how surprising, or ironic, his reactions to conflict are. The same applies to HI. So when reading for HI, imagine potentially absurd, surprising, and exaggerated reactions

to the conflicts in the story, and that is where you will find your comedy. Notice how it starts with the story? *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* was funny because it was about a pet detective making funny faces. As talented as Jim Carrey may be with that rubber face of his, he would also have trouble competing with an HI of the dictionary (I would love to see his interpretation of "absenteeism," though).

So now that we understand humor a bit better, let's recall the unit on Finding Literature. Now that you know what kind of literature can be used for HI, you must consider the competition. Well-known literature, or literature that has been used often for HI, will have a lessened humorous impact on the audience because it is difficult to surprise an audience with the irony or conflict of a piece they have been exposed to multiple times. That's the thing about irony, it works best the first time around. And remember, "the funny" is in the conflict. "The funny" is in the irony. If we are searching for "the funny," then that is where we look. Often, accentuating the conflict can make a situation funnier. The same goes for accentuating existing irony, or making ironic choices to surprise the audience. For example, give a tiny voice to a very large character, or have a tough character react to a scary situation like a small child. The opposite of what is expected is a great place to start brainstorming for how to add humor to pieces. Think about these possibilities as you read. You will find that reading with possibility

fueling your imagination is one of the most important practices of interpretation.

Next, think about the structure of your performance while you read. Remember Vonnegut's story curves that were introduced in Unit 3? Think about which of the curves are best for HI. How do we want the audience to feel at the end of the performance? Hint: In HI … the answer is HAPPY. VERY HAPPY!

If you start watching comedic performances closely, you will see that laughter is most often elicited from conflict and irony.

So where do we find this great literature for HI? Unfortunately, the realistic answer is everywhere. However daunting this answer is, always keep it in the back of your head. Keeping an eye for forensics is the best way to find cool literature. Practically, though, start small. Start with a search for comedies at drama publishing houses like Dramatists and Playscripts, Inc., then subscribe to their email services so you receive updates of new plays. One of our favorite places to go for HI material is, perhaps, the most obvious one: the humor section of bookstores. We've also found great HI ideas in memoirs of comedians, children's literature, and graphic novels. If there is an old campy movie that you think would be fun to reimagine as a solo performance, check online for a novelization of the movie. The novelizations

are often very similar to the script and can lend great freedom and fun for interpretation. Recently, the national competition circuit has been graced with HI performances of *The Karate Kid*, *Indiana Jones*, and *The Exorcist*. Each of these performances were vastly unique from their popular film counterparts, and each of these performances were great fun. Just remember the story. Your HI has to have one.

CUTTING A SELECTION FOR HUMOROUS INTERPRETATION

We've said this before and we'll say it again. The performance begins with the cutting. Once you begin manipulating the text, you begin shaping the story you will tell. Just like you had to use your imagination when searching for your literature, you must also use your imagination in cutting your piece. As you cut, it is important to think about what the performance will actually look like. I like to cut HI around other people so I can try some of the lines out loud to figure out if we can make them funny. It also helps to read out loud as you cut to ensure that the audience can follow the story. Sometimes with HI, we build a story on paper with multiple characters and places and conversations; then, when we try to build the performance, we learn that it makes no sense. Reading out loud can save you time and energy so you won't have to needlessly re-cut.

As with the other Interp events, the first step in cutting is looking for a story. Decide whether you are going to use a Cameo or Spark Notes cutting. Remember, you do not have to tell the story of the entire work. Sometimes, the plight of one character or scenario is more than enough material for an Interp performance. Some competitors like to have some kind of feel-good morality lesson in their HI stories. This can help create a competitive advantage, as a judge may choose a performance with "moral substance" over an equally funny but less compelling story, but this is not a requirement of the activity and it does not always result in superior outcomes. Consider the 2019 national final round in HI. John Duncan and Conor Sherry both delivered physically precise, hilarious performances. One area of distinction is that John's HI "Fresh Off the Boat" included more dramatic beats and dedicated a bit more to the sentimental aspects of the story. This choice was appropriate, as John's piece dealt with more serious themes involving immigration and racism. Conor's performance of "Kicking and Screaming" also included sentimental moments, but these moments were less emphasized. Depending on the judging panel, one style of storytelling might have won out over the other.

Once you've decided on a story to tell, then it is time to cut. Similarly to DI, our next step is deciding on a climax. It is easier to make decisions on how to best take your audience on a journey if you know where you're going. While bracketing chunks of material as you read, make special marks around the parts that

could be REALLY funny. I make two different kinds of brackets—straight lines for the parts essential to telling the story and squiggly lines for potentially funny moments.

Once you have decided on a climax, then begin mapping out the steps on how to get there. As with DI, you need to make decisions on what setting the reality of the performance will take place as you go. If you want to tell a story with multiple settings and time frames— or if you want to show flashbacks to memories—then realize that you will have to build a transitional **device** into your performance (sound effect, physical transition, etc.). Also, when cutting HI, think about things that make

HI work: interestingness, irony (and absurdity), ironic reactions, abrupt tempo changes, opportunities for interesting images/blocking, and memorable characters. Also, it is often helpful to have at least one character that is somewhat grounded in reality to juxtapose the more wacky/ironic characters.

Now, you must move on to chunking: HI style. Chunking for HI is tricky because the piece often requires many characters. The thing to remember is: think about performing the entire time that you are cutting. Every character needs to be memorable in some way. Most of the time, a character will need to appear more than once (this is not a rule,

as there are exceptions). Chunk the parts of the literature that are necessary to serve your story. In addition, chunk out pieces that you can use to add bits. **Bits** are humorous motifs. They can exist as a tic that a character is given that surfaces every time she is stressed, or bits can exist as long drawn exaggerations of events or occurrences. Think, a string of jokes that are often physical and require sound effects. For example, once upon cutting a piece for HI,

> Eliminate places where the protagonist repeats an idea or emotion. Eliminate characters that do not serve the story. Eliminate any unnecessary language, while keeping the MOST interesting, the MOST punctuated, and the funniest language.

we ran across a scene where the protagonist baked a cake. We saw this as an opportunity to create a bit that showed the character struggling with the elements of the kitchen and ingredients of a cake. We figured that this bit would last about 30 seconds, so we kept that in mind as we finished the cutting. Remember: bits can help characters be more memorable. Referring back to the performance of "Kicking and Screaming," Connor featured a son character who had exaggeratedly crossed eyes. The audience understood every time Connor's eyes

crossed, Connor was portaing the son character. At the end of the piece, the bit pays off, when another character gives the son character with crossed eyes a pair of goggles. Connor pantomimes the child placing the spectacles on his head as his eyes spin comically. Make notes of the bits in the chunking to help "see" the piece on the paper. After you've chunked, type out the chunked portions of your text into one document. For a full length HI, the chunking should be around 3,000 words. The chunking should NOT exceed 5,000 words. The smaller the chunk, the easier the cut.

Now whittle your chunking down to around 1,200 words. Eliminate places where the protagonist repeats an idea or emotion. Eliminate characters that do not serve the story. Eliminate any unnecessary language, while keeping the MOST interesting, the MOST punctuated, and the funniest language. Often a joke appears in a text in several ways. Keep the BEST way only. Unless you think the performance can build to make the joke funnier each time it appears. As you cut, you should also be thinking about performance transitions and how you will get from one scene to another, or from one character to another. Transitions and character differentiation are two of the biggest challenges in HI, but also offer tons of opportunities for creativity!

Finally, you need to make it cool. Remember, this step is what separates good cuttings from great cuttings. One way of making your cutting cool is by determining the bits and/or devices. Another example of a bit: If one of

your characters is a baseball coach and another character is a player with a conflict of the player getting signs from the coach mixed up, you might create a bit where the coach is constantly swatting flies away from his face with his hat so it looks like he is giving crazy signs when he isn't. That bit can play out throughout the entire performance and elicit building laughter as the swatting becomes more extreme. The laughter does not just come from the fly swatting, but also from showing the player misinterpreting the signals. Work these bits into your script. Other ways to make cuttings cool are by adding a motif (repeated symbol) through the cutting, adding a surprise twist, or surprising the audience in some other way.

Another way to make a cutting cool is by including a showstopper moment in the script. Some of the funniest HIs to ever compete on the national final round stage seem to feature a moment that we call "the showstopper." The showstopper typically finds the characters in the moments of greatest tension in the story. The stakes are comically elevated and the characters are typically involved in some sort of physical hijinx. In the showstopper moment, the funniest bit in the performance returns in the funniest way possible. In this moment, the performer often shows off some hidden

talent. If the performer is a great dancer, their showstopper will feature an awesome demonstration of their dance moves. If they beat boxed at recess growing up, you can bet they'll beat box. If they can safely do a backflip ... you get the idea. But that's why the showstopper is a showstopper. It's an exhilarating demonstration of a student's unique gifts. You'll know it's a showstopper when everyone is on their feet, cheering on your moment of elemental joy.

While celebrating one's own unique gifts in conceptualizing your HI is absolutely encouraged, it is unacceptable to craft laugh ideas at the expense of other people or groups. Avoid using the degradation of historically marginalized groups for a laugh, even if that material has been a go-to in performance for a long time. Mickey Rooney might not have realized his racist portrayal of I.Y . Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was racist in 1961, but it was and it is forevermore. Still, as racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, or otherwise offensive caricatures and stereotypes are continuously used in mainstream media for laughs at the expense of others, we challenge you, as the future leaders of our country, to use this activity as a opportunity to oppose that practice. You can totally be really funny (really, really funny) while avoiding racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, or transphobia. Leave any jokes that function at the expense of someone else's identity out of your text.

PRACTICE AND EXTRA TIPS FOR CUTTING HI

We encourage you to try cutting the following portion of an HI. Manipulate the following sentences to make them more suitable for performance. You may cut as much as you like. Try to achieve the most humorous effect.

I saw Sam at the supermarket. He was struggling to push a cart that held more than 10 bags of ice. I approached him and asked, "What are you doing with all of that ice?" He looked at me with desperation. "I think the AC went out in my grandma's apartment," he said. "That stinks," I replied, "but how is the ice going to help cool off the apartment?" "It's for my grandpa. My grandma said that he was 'hot-to-trot' with all of his new clothes," Sam said with haste, "so I'm going to try to cool him off."

What did you come up with? This is our version:

I saw Sam struggling to push a cart that held 10 bags of ice and asked,

Me: What are you doing with all of that ice?

Sam: I think the AC went out in my grandma's apartment.

Me: That stinks, but how is the ice going to help cool off the apartment?

Notice how the end result creates more abrupt tempo changes and conflict. Also notice the deletion of words that don't translate well into oral performance ("he said," "I said.") Those phrases can often be "filled in" with reactions to what was said (or done) by another character. Other deletions (e.g., "I approached," etc.) can be shown with physical action. When cutting, taking language from prose and putting it into "script" form can be helpful. Humor books, comics, graphic novels, and autobiographies of comedians make great sources for HI pieces; however, they are often littered with prosaic language that gets in the way of your cutting being as compelling as it could be. This prosaic language also gets in the way of your protagonist, or main speaker, sounding like they are really speaking to the audience. Another difference between HI and DI is that multiple characters are easier to "handle" in HI cuttings (and are often expected to be present). As conflict and ironic response makes comedy, sustained scenes between multiple characters are often ideal (this is a guideline and by no means a "rule") for HI.

Many competitors are scared of cutting, or think themselves not good at it. Do not succumb to this frame of thought. Cutting is a PART of the performance. It is a PART of the competition. Cutting is not excluded from the performance process. If you realize and understand this, then the process will be enjoyable. Take pride in cutting. As with anything, the more you do it, the better at it you will become.

BUILDING A COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE FOR HUMOROUS INTERPRETATION

In order to create a performance that is competitive, we need to determine what a competitive performance looks like. Advice to this end is sprinkled throughout this book;

but, for HI, I like to return to one question: What kind of characters make-up a memorable HI? Because when I remember HI, I remember characters.

Humorous Interpretation lends us this awesome opportunity to stretch and exaggerate characters. Keep this in mind as you begin the performance building process. Think about what an evil character might look like. Then streeeeeeetch it. Think about what a virtuous character might look like. Then streeeeeeetch it. Then apply clues from the text to your archetypical body molds. As discussed in Intro to Performance Composition, these shapes burn pictures into the minds of audience members.

Once you know the shapes of your characters, then you can begin making decisions on how they sound. Use levels in height, span, and focal points. Focal points are especially important for showing transitions between multiple characters. After you have defined body molds for each of your characters, think about potentially ironic performance choices like abrupt changes in tempo and shape. Also, look for places in your cutting for surprising reactions.

Have you noticed that I have not instructed you to memorize yet? So many competitors stress over memorization and so often get stuck at that point in the activity. Do not be one of those competitors. By determining

physical choices throughout the performance building process, memorization often happens quite effortlessly, so trust the process.

One important factor in performance composition that is somewhat unique in HI is a tie to reality. I say that this factor is unique in HI because the event encourages so much departure from reality. I have seen a character reach into their own chest cavity and perform their own heart surgery, a character representing the anthropomorphic shape of all human joy, and a character that spoke backwards and in rhyme … and all of them had to have some tie to reality. We want you to be creative. HI needs you to be creative. But in doing so, make sure your choices work according to the physics and reality that you've determined in the world of your performance. Make sure that the physics and realities that you create are consistent, and that the audience will be willing to take that trip with you.

Tell a story, be imaginative, manipulate the tempo, respond with irony, create bits, assign body molds, "pop" through transitions, and determine focal points. And after ALL of that—be specific and consistent in your execution. If you create a wondrous environment that exists under the sea—be specific. If you create a cake-baking scene that lasts 1:30 minutes—be specific. And MOST importantly, if you have multiple characters that require multiple body molds and multiple focal points—be consistent. I have seen so much awesomely creative work get muddled through a performance

that lacked execution and specificity. Amend our original equation to: (STORY + LAUGHTER)(EXECUTION) = WINNING HI. It's that important. The execution doesn't "happen" with practice, it begins in the building phase. Lay a strong foundation, and practicing will be much more enjoyable.

As you build your performance, be careful to have your characters responding to one another. Often, when I see a well-executed HI that tells an interesting story that doesn't work, I scratch my head and try to figure it out. Many times, the problem is a hidden one—hidden under all of those body molds, sound effects, and character voices. Somewhere along the way in the process, the competitor lost sight of conflict, and, thus, forgot to have the characters responding and reacting to each other. I think that this is the most overlooked detail, and I think it essential to a winning HI.

WINNING THE ROUND

We determined at the beginning of the chapter: the HI that communicates the sharpest attention to its ideas (or story) AND elicits the most laughter from the audience will likely win the round. Consistent execution of your performance is the only way to achieve consistent results throughout a tournament or season. And consistent execution requires consistent energy. HI is a labor intensive performance mode. In order to bring winning energy every round, you need to be in performance shape.

Once your performance is competition ready, practice it multiple times a day for multiple days to replicate the tournament experience. Drink lots of water. Forensic tournaments are marathons, as often the resulting ranking of a final round is determined by energy.

Lastly, one of the most intriguing secrets of HI has only recently come to my attention. A few years ago, I was working at a camp with two-time consecutive National Speech & Debate Association Humorous Interpretation champion Lindsay White (name drop), and she explained to me a concept she learned from accomplished coach Jim Fedje. She called this concept the Knee. **The Knee** describes the words or physical bits that link the jokes in your script. Lindsay pointed out to me that EVERY moment can be funny in the HI, not just the voices and dialogue, but every word and in between. Performers should strive to make ALL moments humorous in their pieces, not just the joke moments. Brainstorm how to use irony, surprise, conflict, physical comedy, and absurdity to accomplish this tough feat. Think about Matt LeBlanc's character in the sitcom *Friends*. He turned the simple phrase, "How you doin?", into a laugh line, and, later, into a trademark. In a similar fashion, Lindsey employed the concept of the Knee in her senior year HI, "Fat Kids on Fire." There was a scene in which the main character, Bess, was having a conversation with her new friend, Cindy. Lindsey enhanced this simple moment of exposition by having the conversation take place in the locker room.

This gave Lindsey access to a very funny bit; Cindy toweling herself off in an unusual (and very comical) order. Think critically about creating humorous possibilities and you'll find the funny in the least likely places.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do we create a performance that is competitive in the event of Program Oral Interpretation?*

CONCEPTS: *Program Oral Interpretation, Collage, Programming, Thematic POIs, Argumentative POIs, Exigence, Explanatory Literature, Exemplifying Literature, Argumentative Anchor, Affected Character, Thread Pieces, Popcorn Pieces, Artsy Fartsy Stuff*

UNIT 7

Program Oral Interpretation

"Lindsey's about to do her POI!" Sam overhears a student whisper.

"I am obsessed with her program!" the other student replies.

Sam accompanies the team members to watch Lindsey's POI. Lindsey lifted a small black book confidently. She looked down reverently at her book. From the second the book opened to the moment it closed a final time, Sam was transfixed. Lindsey took Sam on an epic journey with her words. The performance tackled powerful themes, but it also involved humor, searing drama, and graceful poetry. Sam thought, *How in the WORLD did she do that?*

Program Oral Interpretation (POI) is the newest addition to the National Speech & Debate Association's lineup of main interpretation events. While the category is relatively new to the NSDA, it has been a mainstay of collegiate forensics for decades. The popularity of the event among college competitors eventually trickled down to experimental status at

some regional high school competitions. High school students around the country gravitated to POI, which provides a unique platform for delivering powerful arguments with dazzlingly dynamic presentations. POI uses a performance technique known as **collage**. Not unlike a collage in which someone makes the shape of a heart from a bunch of cut-up (fragmented) pictures of their family, in POI, the performer

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POI uses a performance technique known as collage. Not unlike a collage in which someone makes the shape of a heart from a bunch of cut-up (fragmented) pictures of their family, in POI, the performer gathers fragments of material from different sources to form a whole and complete performance.

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gathers fragments of material from different sources to form a whole and complete performance. In competition, POI requires the compilation and presentation of performance material representing at least two genres of competitive interpretation (prose/poetry/drama) that communicates some theme, observation, or argument about the human condition. For example, if a student wanted to construct a performance about fatherhood, they could use fragments from Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, Harper Lee's prose, *To*

Kill a Mockingbird, and William Wordsworth's poetry, "Anecdote for Fathers." The sections of each genre are fragmented pieces of Oral Interpretation. When combined, they form a program—a program of oral interpretation.

Programming in POI describes the research, collection, and organization of the material. In POI, students are essentially designing a one-person show on a theme or topic about which they are passionate. And organizing information is not unlike putting together a news report, complete with colorful eyewitness characters. For a moment, imagine that you are a documentary filmmaker. One day, while scouting for your next big film project, you learn that a factory in your hometown is responsible for polluting a nearby lake and a small coalition of activists are working to ensure the lake remains clean for future generations. You decide this story will be your next short film. What materials would you use to tell that story? You would probably want to start with researching the lake, what it was like before the factory moved into town. You may decide to include archival footage of the lake to show how it's been a part of the community for generations. You would also need to include footage that details how the company moved into town, chronicling the foul practices the company employs resulting in the pollution of the lake. You might interview the CEO, who seems to care more about profits than the health of the community. He'll make for a great antagonist in your documentary. Perhaps you

will want to include an interview with a woman who has lived on the lake for many years. She wrote a beautiful song about the lake. You collect a recording of her performance that you will feature in the short film. You recall being a kid during the hot summer months in the same community. You always loved jumping into the refreshing lake. Perhaps you will also include some of your home movies from your childhood supporting your deep personal connection to the lake.

After you've collected enough material through the research and collection stages of the documentary's development, you would arrange the footage with music and employ editing techniques to tell the story of one community's fight to save their beloved lake. In POI, you are essentially putting yourself in the role of a short subject documentary filmmaker. Your documentary may not be about pollution. You may instead tell the story of an unjust policy, unearth a little known event from the past, expose a problematic social behavior, or perhaps you will shed light on some other aspect of being a person in the world today. Or maybe your program will be a thematic piece about your passion for kittens! Whatever story you decide to tell, you will collect different pieces and perspectives and compile a 10-minute public performance. In a

short subject documentary, the filmmaker uses footage to tell their story and activate advocacy. In POI, students use a performance from various sources of literature to tell the story of a conflict through a variety of perspectives.

In performance, POI differs from HI, DI, and Duo as it requires the use of a manuscript, conventionally a black book.

Students on the final round stage of POI have used the event to confront critical social issues and challenge systems of oppression. Students weave together poetry, drama, and prose to compose powerful performative rebukes against systematic violence, racism, sexism, and anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination. Programs frequently draw thematic parallels, allowing the audience to appreciate these issues in a completely new light. Ultimately, great POIs provide a vision for a better future. If the prospect of POI sounds powerful, **it is**. POI empowers students to address social problems through the prism of their individual perspective. This means that even if one student's theme or argument is similar to another, every POI is completely unique. However, conceptualizing and constructing a POI is also challenging. We hope to alleviate some of the confusion by breaking down the process of constructing a POI performance from start to finish.

ANATOMY OF A POI

The scripts of POI performances are composed from a collection of thematically linked selections of literary merit, chosen from two or three recognized genres of competitive interpretation (prose/poetry/drama). A substantial portion of the total time must be devoted to each of the genres used in the program. In other words, a well balanced POI with two sources of literature would feature four minutes of one genre (like poetry) and four minutes of another genre (such as drama or prose). POIs commonly feature at least three genre selections, which would change the time allocation. A POI with three selections would equal roughly three minutes of poetry, three minutes of drama, and three minutes of prose. Different genres means that material must appear in separate pieces of literature. For example, a poem included in a short story that appears only in the short story does not constitute a poetry genre. In performance, POI differs from HI, DI, and Duo as it requires the use of a manuscript, conventionally a black book. The maximum time limit of the event is 10 minutes, including an original introduction and/or transitions.

We will guide you through the steps of constructing a POI, from developing a thesis all the way to presenting a polished performance. Like HI, DI, and Duo, the steps of composing a competitive POI involve: material selection, script cutting, performance composition, and presentation. While these steps are largely

similar, the thematic/argumentative concept of the event, combined with the event's dependence on multiple genres, means there are many different approaches to the script development process. As with all of the interpretation categories, the structure of a POI aligns with Freytag's model of dramatic structure. However, what differentiates POI from other interpretation events is the weaving together multiple selections of dramatic, prosaic, and poetic literature, which themselves have their own internal dramatic structures, and fitting those different selections into the larger dramatic arc of the program. In other words, any selection in the program will have its own Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, and Falling Action, but each section will also serve a function in the overarching narrative of the program. When a student begins programming the different works, they will fit together to tell a new story, the story of their theme or argument.

General POI Structure	
Teaser	Lays the groundwork for the argument or general theme of the program.
Exposition	Typically introduces the various voices (representing different genres) that will appear in the program. The student arranges their pieces of prose, drama, or poetry to provide the basic framework of the program's argument or theme. The exposition of the POI highlights the key problems, or illustrates the key themes, the program seeks to address.
Rising Action	The ideas build upon one another. The argument becomes more urgent, intensifying the conflicts presented in the exposition.
Climax	The literature builds to the point of greatest intensity in the program.
Falling Action	Resolves the conflicts and usually equips the audience with proposed solutions that address the problem (or otherwise view the issue in a different light).

Thematic POI vs. Argumentative POI

At this point, you probably have a clear understanding that your POI will be a collection of different types of literature. From your experiences in English classes, you have at least some understanding of the differences between poetry, drama, and prose. However, it can sometimes be difficult to conceptualize the distinction between a collection of literature surrounding a *theme* versus a collection of literature that demonstrates an *argument*. In this section, we will try to parse out the differences between POIs based on a THEME, or **Thematic POIs**, versus POIs based on an ARGUMENT, or **Argumentative POIs**.

As we have noted previously, there is a distinct difference between rule and convention. For example, a rule: the manuscript must be present. A convention: the manuscript must be present in the form of a 9" x 7" black binder. In competition, you will notice all sorts of conventions. It is helpful to take note of them and to even ask other coaches or competitors about them. There are even conventions regarding how to open and close the peculiar little 9" x 7" black book. The only *rule* of POI, though, is that the student must collect at least two genres of literary merit that meet the NSDA's public accessibility standards under a theme.

Let's say you absolutely LOVE turtles. All kinds. Box turtles. Sea turtles. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. You love turtles so much that they

are practically all you think about. Technically, you could compile four minutes and 30 seconds of poetry about turtles and four minutes and 30 seconds of prose about turtles. Slap on a 45-second introduction about your love of turtles and BAM! You've got a POI on the theme, "I Like Turtles!" You did it! You made the POI of your dreams.

Consider, though, that even if your "I Like Turtles!" thematic program follows the rules of POI, that status does not ensure the competitiveness of the program. In the competitive ecosystem, your thematic POI "I Like Turtles" will compete against other students and their themes or messages. One student may perform a POI deconstructing "The Talk" that Black parents frequently have with their children about how they should behave in police encounters. Another student may perform their POI confronting the rise of anti-Asian violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another student may unpack gender roles and how they create unfair pressures on trans youth. And another may challenge standards projected on social media today, comparing them to the media landscape's disparaging portrayals of women in 1990s sitcoms. After all that, after the audience dried their tears from the last impassioned performance, after the judges are ready to mobilize and work against the awful structures that subjugate so many in this world, you're up next. It's "Turtle Time!"

If you are feeling a bit of secondary embarrassment, you are beginning to see the forces that shape conventional wisdom when it comes to conceptualizing a POI. A level of seriousness is not something required to build a POI. However, when stacked up against some of the more personal, urgent, well-researched, creative programs, the concept of performing 10 minutes lightly reflecting on a general theme seems likely to encounter competitive disappointments. You can substitute "I Like Turtles!" for "I Like Planes!" or "I Like Cinnamon Crunch Cereal!" or "I Like Fighting Robots that Turn into Cars!" There is literally nothing explicitly stopping you from collecting words on a theme only you care about. You do not have to discuss a serious theme or argument. However, you should know that if your POI is POInt-less, it's unlikely to win out over programs featuring clearly defined issues that resonate with a broader audience. We refer to this convention in POI as a program's "exigence." **Exigence** is an urgent need or demand. When a program has a high degree of exigency, it means the issue is important to our world right now and actions must be taken by the audience to correct the issue or else there will be immediate consequences. In our experience, programs with higher levels of perceived exigence generally win out over programs with less exigence. So, if you really love turtles, and you would like to compose a competitive performative program about turtles, perhaps try to exhibit ways turtles (or the idea of turtles) can be important to everyone else. Establish why we (the audience) should care.

Equipped with a better sense of why you may wish to go deeper with the themes you'll present in your program, let's explore the distinction between themes and arguments. **Thematic POIs** use literature to explore general thematic connections or parallels between

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> When a program has a high degree of exigency, it means the issue is important to our world right now and actions must be taken by the audience to correct the issue or else there will be immediate consequences.

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otherwise unassociated concepts. Example: Let's say your program explores a theme suggesting technology makes us feel less connected to one another. You may select a contemporary spoken word poem that addresses how social media makes us less personally involved in social issues. You may also select a drama about a man who works as a content moderator for a famous social media website. Reviewing the worst posts from around the world for 40 hours a week can leave one feeling disconnected, so this selection fits the theme well. You may also include a performance piece from the 1950s explaining how the rise of TV will lead to the disintegration of local communities. The historical aspect of the piece suggests this social fragmentation has

persisted for a long time and might give your theme more historical weight. Your program is not *arguing* people *should* disconnect from technology, it is simply highlighting the theme that technology can, and often does, leave us feeling alienated from one another.

Students have used the event to explore themes ranging from the historical origins of Black Americans' traditional aversion to water to the persistent detrimental impacts of the colonial concept of Manifest Destiny. These thematic pieces highlight key issues in contemporary society by generally exploring their origins and social or individual impacts. These POIs begin with a theme and then use different perspectives to highlight different angles of the theme or reiterate the various ways these themes interact with the human experience.

Argumentative POIs, on the other hand, use literature to highlight specific problems that detrimentally impact a population, causes of the problem, and ways in which the audience can enact resolutions to ameliorate the problem. Let's say you are building a POI on how the pressure to succeed has detrimental impacts on the mental health of high school athletes. You know this pressure from personal experience, but you also read a powerful exposé on the subject in *Sports Illustrated* that really resonates with you. In this example, you have identified a problem, detrimental mental health impacts for high school athletes, and have isolated a root cause, the pressure to succeed. Once you find a reasonable solution to the problem, you have

outlined the basic structure of your argument: problem, cause, solution.

THESIS CONSTRUCTION FOR POI

Whether you gravitate toward a more thematic program or a more argumentative one, you will need to begin with a thesis statement rooted in your personal interests and research. Well, we suppose you could generate a thesis statement based on *someone else's* personal interest and research, but then you'll be the sad sap performing *someone else's* personal passion project. There are infinite ways a student may develop a thesis statement. We encourage students to view thesis development in a three-step process. Step 1: Make it PERSONAL. Step 2: Make it IMPACTFUL. Step 3: Make it MEANINGFUL.

Step 1: Make It PERSONAL

We think that any argument a student makes in any forensic performance should have personal meaning to that particular student. After all, a chief purpose of coaching forensics is to help students compose and present their own ideas, not represent the coach's perspective. Increasingly, we are seeing students in final rounds of forensic events sharing painful, and occasionally even traumatic, personal details.

COACHES' NOTE: We believe that as individuals, we all should have complete control over how we perceive and communicate our past experiences, even difficult ones. The same holds for students. If a student wishes to share a personal experience with housing insecurity in a college essay, we believe the student should be able to make that decision for themselves. We also believe that students should have autonomy over their personal narratives in forensics. However, we believe it is an ethical imperative that coaches refrain from encouraging students to share personal information they do not wish to share with others. **It is not our intention to suggest students should reveal personal information in exchange for competitive success.** We plainly rebuke any effort from an educator to extract personal trauma from students to achieve some performative benefit. We believe coaches should be aware of the detrimental psychological impacts of reliving traumatic episodes on developing minds of children. Coaches, please coach with care and allow students to lead in choosing to explore their personal messages. The student's personal interests, attitudes, and beliefs should drive the formation of a topic.

When developing ideas for a topic, we suggest drafting a general list of the things that interest you (not unlike a brainstorming activity for an English essay). Perhaps you are an athlete or a musician in a band. Maybe there is some intriguing aspect of your cultural identity you

are particularly proud of that doesn't get a lot of media attention. Perhaps there is a cultural practice you grew up with that you now consider to be problematic. Maybe you are interested in anime, or professional wrestling, or Dungeons and Dragons, or fashion, or video games, or magic—or turtles. Maybe you are passionate about politics, volunteerism, or community activism. Whatever your individual passion, we suggest beginning the thesis development process by drafting a list of these interests.

> If building a POI is like building a house, a student's personal passions serve as the foundation of the program.

Step 2: Make It IMPACTFUL

You might stop at step one and simply commit to the first idea that comes to you, but as we discussed previously, we think exigence is important to success in POI. For this reason, we suggest finding ways of communicating the impact of your topic. Once you have aggregated your list of personal interests, start looking around for news sources on each of the subjects. If you are interested in the school marching band, for example, look into some of the recent news on bands. How have bands changed during the pandemic? What issues are band members facing in the world today? You may come across a terrific feature news

story that offers the contemporary problems, the root causes, and some of the solutions different organizations are attempting to employ to correct the problem. As you search for data to construct your program topic or thesis statement, you should be sure to save articles or selections that may be used later. This approach allows you to both search for data to back up your argumentation, but also perform a survey of available literature on any given subject.

This inside out approach, where we generate topic areas based on our personal passions and then use research to fill in the argumentative gaps, helps us to generate a program thesis that maximizes the personal significance and still communicates the public exigence of the program. If building a POI is like building a house, a student's personal passions serve as the foundation of the program. News and commentary help the student design the frame of the house, or the pillars of the theme or argument they are attempting to convey. In Step 1, the student begins the research process knowing that they have a personal interest in the program. In Step 2, the student conducts research to uncover the ways in which their personal passion overlaps with the public's interest now and in the future.

Step 3: Make It MEANINGFUL

This is typically the step where you develop what you would like the audience to ultimately DO once they have experienced your

performance. Do you want the audience to think about the issue in a new way? Do you want the audience to engage in some type of action to improve the situation? Do you want the audience to change the way they conduct themselves in the future? Perhaps you would like to have the audience remember a historical figure or get exposed to some hidden history. Whatever it is, we think you should ask yourself the question "What is the meaning I want the audience to make of this performance once I have delivered all of the pages in my program?" After you have drafted your list of personal interests and found strong research explaining some of the impactful problems involved in your area of interest, you should consider and write down what you think it all means and what you want the audience to think it all means.

- **Step 1:** Express your interest in history.
- **Step 2:** In researching, you discover your hometown was the site of a little discussed act of violence.
- **Step 3:** What is the meaning?
  - I want the audience to learn about this hidden history.
  - I want to honor the lives lost.
  - I want the audience to donate to a fund dedicated to commemorating the event.
  - I want to interrogate why this history is hidden from students like me.
  - I want to explain what it means to me to learn about my past.
  - I see history repeating itself today, and I want to ensure it doesn't happen again.

Taken together, these steps allow you to generate topics that are personally salient, have impacts that appeal to a broader audience, and determine a creative direction for the performance that will ultimately guide the rest of the literature search process. Upon completion of these three steps, you should craft the first draft of the thesis statement or topic sentence. We suggest forming an initial topic sentence following this approach. Once you have collected all the literature necessary to construct the program, you can return to the thesis statement, making alterations as needed based on the results of the literature search. Once drafting your topic sentence or thesis statement, we suggest performing a preliminary survey of available literature to determine if adequate literature is available on the subject.

SCRIPT COLLECTION FOR POI

Once you have generated your topic, you will need to find literature to communicate the main ideas of the program. Unlike other interpretation events derived from a single text, constructing a POI can feel like playing in a sandbox the size of Texas. It's helpful to direct your search a bit by determining some of the boundaries of the category. First, let's cover a few of the NSDA rules for acceptable literature in the event.

First, the NSDA clarifies, "At least two pieces of literature that represent at least two separate genres must be used." The NSDA provides distinctions between these genres (see table below).

The NSDA also specifies, "Competitors are encouraged to devote approximately equal time to each of the genres used in the program. This distinction pertains to these two or three genres as a whole, not types of literature within a genre (such as fiction/nonfiction)." Taken together, these rules outline that two genres (at least) must be present and the judge should be able to distinguish between the genres in order to determine the relative balance in the program. We will refer back to these rules later in the chapter as you learn both how to compose a balanced cutting and how to highlight the distinctions between the genres in the performance itself.

In addition to these genre rules, students may use materials that are publicly available throughout the duration of the tournament. This openness of the NSDA's rules regarding

Prose	expresses thought through language recorded in sentences and paragraphs: fiction (short stories, novels) and non-fiction (articles, essays, journals, biographies).
Poetry	is writing which expresses ideas, experience, or emotion through the creative arrangement of words according to their sound, their rhythm, their meaning.
Drama	is writing meant to be performed on stage or screen by actors.

acceptable literature means that there are quite literally infinite performative possibilities in POI. In order to streamline our search, we can specify the types of literature we need for the program. We know we will need at least two selections, and those selections will need to represent at least two genres of literature. We will look for poetic, prosaic, and dramatic literature that communicates our message. However, it is also helpful to conceptualize all the literature as fitting one of two broad categories needed to communicate the ideas of our thesis; literature that *explains* your theme or argument and literature that *exemplifies* your theme or argument.

First, It is useful to provide literature that *explains* the theme or the argument you are presenting. Like all the other interpretation categories, the introduction of a POI provides the student with the opportunity to articulate the main ideas of the performance in their own words. However, many successful programs also feature literature that guides the audience through the logical connections between the various selections or to advance the argument established in the introduction. This explanatory literature often provides data and statistics, explains the historical context underlying your theme or argument, or helps explain the connections between the different ideas presented in the program.

While this practice is absolutely a matter of preference, when researching literature, we recommend finding a selection that will serve

as the **Argumentative Anchor** of the program. This selection, typically a long form article or opinion piece, explicates the major issues or

It is also helpful to find literature that exemplifies the argument or reveals the impact of the theme. This type of literature provides an on-the-ground level look at the problem, or theme, and how it impacts the lives of real people.

themes of the program. It may also provide shocking or interesting statistics in order to increase the intensity of the rising action. We call this the argumentative anchor because it usually serves as the backbone of the program, a way of guiding the listener from one moment of the program to the next. Think of all the creative ways you can use various literature to explain your argument. You may use news headlines to provide current context, or a selection that provides a historical overview of the theme. Perhaps you will find a spoken word poem that covers many of the logical aspects of your theme or argument.

Once you've found some literature that explains your theme or argument, you may consider finding literature that **exemplifies** or demonstrates your theme or argument. Audiences do not simply want to be lectured

in a POI round. They wish to understand by seeing, feeling, and experiencing the impacts of the theme. Therefore, it is also helpful to find literature that *exemplifies* the argument or reveals the impact of the theme. This type of literature provides an on-the-ground level look at the problem, or theme, and how it impacts the lives of real people.

One type of exemplifying literature we think is essential to any successful program is the **Affected Character.** We suggest locating a script, prose, or poem (typically written in first-person) that reveals the experience of someone closely impacted by the issue you are exploring. We refer to this selection as the "affected character" because the piece provides an example of how the issues discussed in the program emotionally impact individuals in the real world. In other words, if a student is talking about a policy that hurts rural farmers, it may be helpful to not only explain the policies and resulting impacts through literature, but to *reveal* the emotional impacts through the literature, as well. Perhaps the student can find a powerful memoir detailing one rural farmer's painful experience. Perhaps a rural farmer wrote an opinion piece in *The New York Times* describing their family's hardships. Maybe a former farmer spoken word poet wrote an exceptional poem about the beauty and challenges of life on the ranch.

Poems sometimes chronicle histories of issues while also offering emotional witness. Of course, dramatic soliloquies do a fine job

at directly revealing emotional impacts to an audience, as well. One of you may find what you need in a memoir while someone else will find a terrific parody or comedic sketch to illustrate their argument. The goal should be to have some balance of explaining literature and exemplifying literature when compiling the selections for your program.

Last Few Things Regarding Lit Search: Thread Pieces, Popcorn Pieces, and Artsy Fartsy Stuff

Now that we've outlined the utility of literature that both explains and exemplifies your argument, we would like to offer a few final concepts to inform your literature search. When you read or otherwise discover a selection that communicates your thesis, ask yourself whether the piece will recur periodically throughout the program or whether the selection will stand alone. We call recurring selections **Thread Pieces** as these selections are typically creatively "threaded" or "woven" throughout the program. Many of the most competitive programs feature at least three thread pieces.

You may also wish to include selections that only appear once in the program to drive home the message. We refer to these selections as **Popcorn Pieces**, because, while the recurring Thread Pieces are the "meal" of the program, Popcorn Pieces are a fun (or powerful, dynamic, or otherwise interesting) snack in the program. As we've described in other sections of this

textbook, humor can help performers cover greater emotional ground. Students in POI frequently use satire to drive home their message in a humorous way. However, featuring humor in an otherwise dramatic program climax might not sit well with the audience. For this reason, you might only feature the humorous literature once or twice in the program. Another frequently used example of Popcorn Pieces is the use of news headlines. You may wish to quickly feature one or two different news headlines to bring additional exigence to the program. Popcorn Pieces usually do not need to be resolved (as in the case of news headlines) or can resolve themselves in one or two pages (as in the case of humorous selections).

The final consideration regarding the literature search is what we professionally refer to as **Artsy Fartsy Stuff.** At its core, POI is about artistically relaying a theme or argument to the audience. Therefore, it is helpful to consider the artistic hook of the performance. For example, the 2021 POI national champion's program thesis was about the lack of support for Black female victims of police violence. She chose to explore this thesis through the theme of magic, stating, "Amid all the rallying and protesting, Black women's names, like a magic trick, ultimately disappear." To elevate the program, the student brought in the theme of magic with literature from the 2013 film *Now You See Me*. That movie has absolutely nothing to do with police violence against Black women, but the language used in the film helped the student generate a powerful thematic motif. While you are collecting literature, consider the ways in which you can add artistic or literary parallels to drive home the message.

SCRIPT COMPOSITION FOR POI

Once you have collected all of the necessary ingredients for your POI, the programming can begin. As we move through the organizational process, we'd like to reiterate that composing a POI, like any forensic endeavor, is more of an art than a science. We will offer some best practices and advice gifted to us from our shared experience, but there is more than one way to approach a POI program. You could compose an absolutely breathtaking program following all or none of these steps. We hope all of you remember that you are the director of your short documentary or one-person show. You decide the emotional beats. You decide the way you build your argument or communicate your theme. You decide if you will use humor, and you'll need to decide the best way to create a gut busting reaction from the audience. You decide if and when you will use your singing voice, or your newscaster voice, or your backflip, or your childhood ballet training to communicate what you want to communicate in this special activity.

The first step in the programming process is to reread all of the literature you've collected. Determine if you have enough literature to communicate the message you want

to communicate. If not, return to the literature search. Do you have superfluous selections that theoretically communicate the theme or argument, but you have no interest in performing them? Perhaps that piece will not make the final cut. As you are reading, start making decisions about how each selection would look and sound in the ultimate performance.

Once you've reread all of the material, we encourage you to break down the dramatic arc of each selection, one at a time. Try to locate the exposition, rising action, climax, and falling action in each individual selection.

> **SELECTION A** (Article, Explanatory): Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action
>
> **SELECTION B** (Poetry, Explanatory): Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action
>
> **SELECTION C** (Drama, Exemplifying): Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action
>
> **SELECTION D** (Prose, Exemplifying): Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action

Once you've broken down each selection, you can begin chunking your POI. Remember, you are essentially weaving together a script with the materials you've collected. One could, theoretically, just start by laying out the exposition of each selection, then lay out the rising action of each selection, followed by the climax of each, concluding with the falling action of each. In this theoretical example, the program would look something like this:

PAGE 1 – Selection A (Article, Explanatory): Exposition

PAGE 2 – Selection B (Poetry, Explanatory): Exposition

PAGE 3 – Selection C (Drama, Exemplifying): Exposition

PAGE 4 – Selection D (Prose, Exemplifying): Exposition

(INTRODUCTION)

PAGE 5 – Selection A (Article, Explanatory): Rising Action

PAGE 6 – Selection B (Poetry, Explanatory): Rising Action

PAGE 7 – Selection C (Drama, Exemplifying): Rising Action

PAGE 8 – Selection D (Prose, Exemplifying): Rising Action

PAGE 9 – Selection A (Article, Explanatory): Climax

PAGE 10 – Selection B (Poetry, Explanatory): Climax

PAGE 11 – Selection C (Drama, Exemplifying): Climax

PAGE 12 – Selection D (Prose, Exemplifying): Climax

PAGE 13 – Selection A (Article, Explanatory): Falling Action

PAGE 14 – Selection B (Poetry, Explanatory): Falling Action

PAGE 15 – Selection C (Drama, Exemplifying): Falling Action

PAGE 16 – Selection D (Prose, Exemplifying): Falling Action

This, of course, is a purely conceptual approach to composing a program. Once you begin placing the different works in a pattern that resembles a dramatic arc, you may notice that not every selection needs to return for the falling action. Perhaps a selection is a Popcorn Piece that may only appear once. In other words, your program may not need to have four pages devoted to the falling action. Perhaps your program will feature seven total selections instead of four. In that case, it seems unlikely that each of the seven selections will have a page devoted to its exposition, rising action, climax, and falling action. Instead, you may artfully decide when the various selections will appear and how many times the selection will appear in the program.

The 2021 national championship POI featured four selections of poetry ("Rekia Boyd" by Portia O, "Say Her Name" by Aja Money, "Dear White America" by Danez Smith, "If Gentrification was a Broom" by Crystal

Valentine), two selections of drama (*The Interrogation of Sandra Bland* by Mojisola Adebayo, *Now You See Me* by Ed Solomon, Boaz Yakin, and Edward Ricourt), one selection of prose (*Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* by Andrea Ritchie), and four articles (sourced as "Teen Vogue," "ACLU," "Huffington Post," "The Daily Mail"). Below, we have identified, labeled, and colored code each of these selections to gain additional insights on the programming process.

THREAD PIECES (Recurring Selections)

SELECTION A: "If Gentrification was a Broom" (Poem, Explaining)

SELECTION B: "*Now You See Me*" (Drama, Exemplifying)

SELECTION C: "*Interrogation of Sandra Bland*" (Drama, Exemplifying)

SELECTION D: "Rekia Boyd" (Poem, Explaining)

SELECTION E: "Invisible No More" (Prose, Explaining)

SELECTION F: Unknown title (Exemplifying)

POPCORN PIECES (Single Use Selections)

POPCORN 1: News Headline About Breonna Taylor (Article, Explaining)

POPCORN 2: News article about Aiyana Stanley-Jones (Article, Explaining)

POPCORN 3: "Dear White America" by Danez Smith (Poem, Explaining)

POPCORN 4: "Say Her Name" (Poem, Explaining)

Composing a Teaser: Framing your Theme

Since the teaser of a POI lays the groundwork for a POI, you will want to devote particular attention to this area of the program. While there will be many new and exciting elements to explore throughout the performance, the teaser should leave the audience with a decent sense of the key theme or argument of the program and create intrigue for the rest of the performance.

Let's break down the teaser of the 2021 national champion in POI to get an excellent example of the concepts we've outlined so far. The student begins the performance with a selection of poetry referencing supernatural forces and death. On the second page, the student performs a piece about a magician preparing the audience for their act. The page concludes with the lines, "Pay very close attention, for I am about to show you my next greatest

trick!" The third page is an exemplifying selection featuring a police officer (representing her program's antagonist) conducting a traffic stop. He fumbles with his justifications for stopping the woman. Page 3 concludes with the woman being stopped questioning the officers behavior. Page 3 ends with, "Didn't I just give you my license?" The emotion of this page is very intense and still. Then, demonstrating great emotional contrast, the performer quickly flips to Page 4, returning to the magician selection established on Page 2. The magician excitedly exclaims, "ABRACADABRA! And now I'll wave this magic wand around for no reason and then…" At this point in the program, the audience does yet know exactly where the program is going to go next. However, the performer has laid the foundation of the theme. The audience is starting to piece together that the program will connect stage magic with police interactions. On Page 5, the student performs a selection of explanatory literature that helps the audience understand the exigence of the program: "On March 13, EMT and aspiring nurse Breonna Taylor was shot to death by Louisville police. Over six months after Taylor was killed, just one officer involved in the shooting was indicted and the charges were reportedly not even related to Taylor's death." On Page 6 of the teaser, the performer returns to the poetry selection featured in the opening of the program, generating additional emotional context. The last page of the teaser features a great demonstration of exploratory literature. The student says, "So what is magic? Our argument. Nothing but targeted deception. So I want you to look. Look as closely as possible. For the tricks you are about to see may not seem connected but we assure you, they are." Like an exceptional magic act, the final page of the teaser ties many of the thematic elements together. At the conclusion of the teaser, the student closes the manuscript and provides her introduction, articulating the thesis of the program. The argument the student raises in the introduction is that there seems to be less support for Black female victims of police violence than their male counterparts. They state, "Amid all the rallying and protesting, Black women's names, like a magic trick, ultimately disappear."

Once the audience has gained a sense of the core themes of the program and been introduced to several main characters that will appear in the performance in the teaser, and once you've provided your introduction to the core concepts of the program, you can move on with composing the rest of the dramatic arc of the program. Let's examine how the 2021 national champion in POI arranged the various selections of their program.

"SAY HER Name" by Sophia Williams

OPENS BOOK

PAGE 1 – Selection A: "If Gentrification was a Broom" (Poem, Explaining)

PAGE 2 – Selection B: *Now You See Me* (Drama, Exemplifying)

PAGE 3 – Selection C: *Interrogation of Sandra Bland* (Drama, Exemplifying)

PAGE 4 – Selection B: *Now You See Me* (Drama, Exemplifying, 2nd Appearance)

PAGE 5 – Popcorn 1: News Headline About Breonna Taylor (Article, Explaining)

PAGE 5 – Selection A: "If Gentrification was a Broom" (Poem, Explaining, 2nd Appearance)

PAGE 6 – Selection B: *Now You See Me* (Drama, Exemplifying, 3nd Appearance)

CLOSES BOOK

INTRODUCTION

OPENS BOOK

PAGE 7 – Selection B: *Now You See Me* (Drama, Exemplifying, 4th Appearance)

PAGE 8 – Selection F: Unknown title (Exemplifying)

PAGE 9 – Selection C: *Interrogation of Sandra Bland* (Drama, Exemplifying, 2nd Appearance)

PAGE 10 – Selection F: Unknown title (2nd appearance)

PAGE 11 – Selection B: *Now You See Me* (Drama, Exemplifying, 5th Appearance)

PAGE 12 – Selection D: "Rekia Boyd" (Poem, Explaining, 1st Appearance)

PAGE 13 – Selection B: *Now You See Me* (Drama, Exemplifying, 6th Appearance)

PAGE 14 – Selection E: "Invisible No More" (Prose, Explaining, 1st Appearance

PAGE 15 – Selection C: *Interrogation of Sandra Bland* (Drama, Exemplifying, 3rd Appearance)

PAGE 16 – Selection F: Unknown title (Exemplifying, Thread, 3rd appearance)

PAGE 17 – Selection A: "If Gentrification was a Broom" (Poem, Explaining, 3rd Appearance)

PAGE 18 – Popcorn 2: News article about Aiyana Stanley-Jones (Article, Explaining)

PAGE 19 – Popcorn 3: "Dear White America" (Poem, Explaining)

PAGE 20 – Selection A: "If Gentrification was a Broom" (Poem, Explaining, 4th Appearance)

PAGE 21 – Selection E: "Invisible No More" (Prose, Explaining, 2nd Appearance

PAGE 22 – Selection C: *Interrogation of Sandra Bland* (Drama, Exemplifying, 4th Appearance)

PAGE 23 – Selection D: "Rekia Boyd" (Poem, Explaining, 2nd Appearance)

Observe how frequently each color reappears in the program. The selection that appears most frequently in the program (highlighted in green) is *Now You See Me*, a selection of drama that exemplifies the thematic motif of magic. Since this selection serves as the student's primary thematic anchor in the POI, it appears six times. The student then uses the Popcorn selection of "Dear White America" by Danez Smith to overtly link the thematic motif of magic to the murder of Black women, stating powerfully in the climax, "Watch the master magic trick, America. Now she's breathing, now she don't. Abra-cadaver. Black girl go POOF! Missing without a whisper." This approach helps reiterate the theme of the performance and draws thematic linkages between the different works. Two selections appear four times in the program, *The Interrogation of Sandra Bland* and "If Gentrification was a Broom." The dramatic selection *The Interrogation of Sandra Bland* chronicles the fateful police stop of Sandra Bland. This selection serves as the program's Affected Character as it reveals the experience of someone closely impacted by the issue she discusses. Notice how the four recurring pages of this selection provide the exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution of the Affected Character.

As you generate your first chunking, you will make your own choices about how you will arrange and order your selections. Perhaps your program will feature more or fewer thematic elements. Perhaps your program will feature more humor. At any rate, your first chunking of the program should be roughly 3,000 words. The final cutting of the program with the introduction will hover between 900 to 1,250 words. So in the chunking phase of the program construction process, we begin to craft the way the various selections will work together to build a coherent dramatic arc. It is difficult to tell a coherent story in a Dramatic or Humorous Interpretation in under 1,200 words. Students in POI are tasked with weaving multiple stories together under the same constraints.

In the whittling process, eliminate any unnecessary language, while keeping the MOST interesting, the MOST diverse, and the MOST intense language that communicates your theme or message. As you cut, you should also think about performance transitions and how you will get from one selection to the next. As you are whittling down your cutting and

arranging the various selections, continually remind yourself of the thesis statement. Ask yourself, "Do these words help me express the ideas I want to communicate in my program?" If the words do communicate the ideas of your argument and you think they will look interesting in the performance, keep those words. If the words don't help build your theme or argument, or if those words distract from your theme or argument, consider cutting those words.

Try to pay particular attention to the ways in which the various works "speak" to one another. Analyze the way your first page ends and the way your second page begins. Excellent programs seem as though the pages are having a conversation with each other, or, at the very least, each subsequent page responds to the preceding page in some way.

At times, these connections are textual, where the first line on a new page seems to respond textually to the concluding thought of the previous page. The end of one page (drama) may mention mirrors, and then the beginning of the next page (poetry) may begin with the image of a mirror.

At other times, you may choose to create stark transitions, highlighting emotional contrast to create moments of surprise in the performance. For example, in the teaser of the 2021 national championship POI, the student flips from an intense confrontation between Sandra Bland and the officer who pulled her over on Page 3 to an excited magician exclaiming "ABRACADABRA" at the beginning of Page

4. The performer's use of emotional contrast provides a moment of humor/ levity in the teaser and helps generate suspense in the audience. Contrasting emotional choices remind the audience that they are on an emotional roller coaster. Better buckle up!

OR, you don't have to do any of that. This is, after all, *your* one-person show. This is *your* documentary. This is *your* program.

BUILDING A COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE FOR PROGRAM ORAL INTERPRETATION

Your tools of interpretation for POI are similar to that of the other Interp events. The unit on Performance Composition intimately discusses these tools in entirety. The key novelty of POI regarding the physical performance, of course, is that students are required to perform using a manuscript, typically contained in a black binder. For this reason, you will only have full control of your gestures with one of your arms (typically your dominant hand) and hold the manuscript in the other hand. This will take some getting used to, but once you are comfortable holding the binder, you will find that you still have a tremendous opportunity to create a physically dynamic performance, even while holding the manuscript.

When performing multiple works, as in the case of POI, a performer will typically assign a character (voice, body mold, and/or other physical choices) to each selection. The important thing to remember is: **you are using your body to create images**. The images you create with your body, combined with the vocal choices you'll make, can help you differentiate the genres in the program. In other words, it is helpful if your poetry selection looks and sounds like poetry (perhaps using more stylized movement), your dramatic selection looks and sounds like drama (perhaps with more attention to realistic detail), and your prose selections look and sound like prose (perhaps accenting the literary elements with your voice). Consider reviewing the performance section in the Dramatic Interpretation unit to understand how to create images that highlight the dramatic elements of your drama selections in the program. Ask yourself if you wish to create an environment for your Affected Character. Perhaps you will design images that suggest your character's level of comfort, involving more Psychological Gestures than other areas of the program.

Example	
RULE FOR POEM #1	Each of the shapes will be more rounded, the tempo will be slower, and the vocal choices will be smooth.
RULE FOR POEM #2	Each of the shapes will be angular, the tempo will be quick, and the vocal choices will be sharp and feature staccato.

Consider varying Tempo, using deliberately curvaceous or particularly angular Shapes, and including Expressive Gestures to highlight the language of the poetic selections. In the prose selections, consider the ways in which you can physically highlight the story-telling aspects. Making deliberate, genre specific choices, will accentuate the differences between the various works in the program, reminding the audience which of the myriad characters in the program are speaking at any given moment.

We suggest writing down the physical or vocal "rules" of each of the selections. If you are performing two different poems in your POI, try making deliberate contrasting choices to make the distinctions more apparent to the audience.

These loose "rules" can help inform your physical choices as you design the Flipbook of the program.

Ultimately, if you take the process one step at a time, and you never forget about your audience, and if you approach building your POI performance with the same tools discussed earlier in this text, you will deliver a powerful performance in which you can take great pride.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do two performers co-create a performance that is competitive in the event of Duo Interpretation?*

CONCEPTS: *Suggested Interaction, Strong Conflict, Balance, Precise Interaction, Creative Interplay, Trialogue, Forward Facing, "I" Formation, Turned In, Turned Out, Auditory Choreography*

UNIT 8

Duo Interpretation

E Perhaps the most exciting performance Sam saw at the team showcase was an event involving two performers, a team. The performers took turns addressing the audience, but they also spoke in unison at times. They developed rhythmic patterns with their vocal delivery, and they composed pictures with their bodies. The performance looked like an acting scene, but the performers didn't look at each other. Still, at times, it seemed like they were each wrapped up in the most intimate conversation. "That's Duo," the Interp team captain whispered to Sam. "It's my favorite."

Each year, six individuals in Dramatic Interpretation and six individuals in Humorous Interpretation present wonderfully imaginative expressions of art on the NSDA National Tournament final round stage. However, the final round of Duo Interpretation often boasts some of the most innovative demonstrations of human artistry. Duo is the communication of ideas drawn from a text to create the effect of cooperative interplay and dramatic interaction.

The purpose of Duo is to explore an author's work in order to uncover some truth in the human condition through the interaction of characters and/or ideas. The ideas that best present this truth will be what you interpret by creating a physical and interactive performance.

> ## The key to the event is to select fragments of text that allows for the greatest expression of truth through the tension or interplay of two or more characters.

Duo, like DI and HI, is a presentational mode of performance. However, what distinguishes Duo from other interpretation events is that in Duo, there are two performers who must suggest interaction between at least two characters. Note the key phasing of **suggested interaction** as both performers must use an off stage focus, meaning they may not look at one another apart from during the introduction. Also, only the suggestion of touching is permitted. This unit will build off of skills described in previous units on DI and HI, as well as explain the traits and skills unique to the event of Duo interpretation.

The key to the event is to select fragments of text that allow for the greatest expression of truth through the tension or interplay of two or more characters. Two performers use these fragments to compose complete ideas.

Typically, these ideas will elicit emotional responses from the audience. The performance that covers the most emotional ground will usually win the round. So how do we do all of that? We will learn the steps for composing a competitive Duo performance from start to finish. As with the other interpretation events, those steps include: script selection, script cutting, cooperative performance composition, and presentation.

ANATOMY OF A DUO

Since a Duo can be either humorous or dramatic in nature, and pairings can be composed of any two students from the team, it is extremely rare that any two will look exactly alike. In general, the basic comprising characteristic of most Duo performances are:

- Teaser
- Intro
- Exposition
- Inciting incident
- Rising action
- Climax
- Falling action

The structure is very similar to that of any other performance in interpretation. A major difference, though, is that the conflict may be between the two main characters, or the two main characters may share a common conflict with secondary characters. The teaser previews the topic, mood, or style of the selection and generally introduces the audience to at least the

main characters that each performer will play. The introduction occurs at around the 1:30 to 3:00 minute mark and explains the purpose of the performance. The introduction is followed by the exposition, which introduces secondary characters (if there are any) and setting. The characters encounter conflict, either between one another, or between secondary characters. This is known as the inciting incident. The rising action refers to the mounting tension between characters or some other complication of the conflict for the two protagonists. These complications lead to the climax, or the emotional peak of the performance. Finally, the falling action resolves the conflict either between the

two characters, or, if there are two protagonists, between the protagonists and their obstacle(s).

SCRIPT SELECTION FOR DUO INTERPRETATION

Duo Interpretation performances can be drawn from a published play, novel, memoir, short story, or other printed-published work. Performances can also be derived from material gathered from digital sources. Generally, most material that is publicly available for the duration of the tournament and not written by the competitors performing it is fair game.

However, we do strongly encourage you to closely examine the rules found in the NSDA Unified Manual (found on the NSDA website) before committing an exorbitant amount of time to creating a performance from your chosen material.

Given that the event uses two performers, there are endless possibilities for the creation of interesting imagery and vocal dynamism. Students have sung, salsa danced, rapped, fist-fought, fenced, beat-boxed, and tapped.

The work may be humorous in nature, dramatic in nature, or a combination of the two. Most cuttings consist of a scene or multiple scenes of dialogue between two or more characters. However, some successful Duos, such as the 2002 national championship Duo team (Whitney Schaefer and Bret Hemmerlin) performing "A Light in the Attic" by Shel Silverstein, have utilized plays with split monologues in which characters do not verbally interact (as in directly speak to one another) but emotionally interact (with emotionally corresponding monologues) to establish the narrative or conflict of the work. This innovative Duo team used a collection of poems as their source text and used Duo performance strategies to interpret meaning for the audience.

All of the same principles we have covered so far in the DI and HI units apply to Duo. However, we are not limited to one body in order to express the scene, as the interaction between two performers is the distinguishing essence of Duo Interpretation. The interaction between the performers reveals the conflicting objectives of characters in a selection.

Recall the unit on Finding Literature as well as the previous units on DI and HI. Now that we know that interaction between two performers is the key distinguishing factor of Duo, we should consider the importance of balance. Each performer should be given a relatively equal or balanced amount of "work" to do in the Duo. The script that has the greatest potential for success in Duo is the one that gives both performers opportunities to demonstrate their abilities.

Since Duo scripts may be humorous in nature, dramatic in nature, or a combination of the two, it can be a challenge determining the genre of the script you are holding. Many scripts that are appropriate for HI may also be appropriate for Duo. In general, comedies with two protagonists may work well in Duo. However, when you are reviewing a comedy with only one protagonist and determining if it is right for Duo or not, consider the balance of interaction. If the protagonist is always interacting with more than one other character in the scene, it may be more suitable for HI. For example, if the script you are reading is a **trialogue**, or a constant interaction of three

characters, it is more difficult to have a balanced performance in Duo.

Moreover, many dialogue-driven DI scripts could possibly function as potential scripts for Duo. In general, dramatic Duo scripts involve characters who have equally powerful objectives. Therefore, both main characters drive the conflict forward. If one character simply stands and listens while the other waxes poetic about their problems, it may not be the most competitive choice for Duo. While reading scripts, if you are sure to keep in mind the importance of balance, it becomes easier to determine whether or not a selection is more appropriate for DI, HI, or Duo.

There have been a wide variety of genres performed on the national Duo stage. Teams have performed classic literature, children's literature, two character plays, multi-character musicals—the list goes on and on. What matters most is what the two performers bring to the material, how they both breathe creative life into the work.

A relatively equivalent amount of humorous and dramatic Duo performances have graced the final round stage. Most successful Duos include the following characteristics:

- **Strong Conflict**
- **Balance**
- **Precise Interaction**
- **Creative Interplay**

Given that the event uses two performers, there are endless possibilities for the creation of interesting imagery and vocal dynamism.

Students have sung, salsa danced, rapped, fist-fought, fenced, beat-boxed, and tapped. Every Duo has its strengths. Some exhibit masterfully creative imagery and highly synchronized blocking. Others succeed on the strengths of the performers' ability to craft realistic characters engaging in powerful conflict. It is impossible to label any particular winning characteristic in this event because every great Duo is unique. What makes Duo such a special event is that, in general, the team with the greatest demonstration of teamwork wins.

CUTTING A SELECTION FOR DUO INTERPRETATION

In many ways, the foundation for cutting a Duo is the same as every other interpretation event. Cutting a Duo involves reading the material, determining whether or not it is a Spark Notes or Cameo cutting, choosing a climax, chunking, whittling down, and "making it cool." However, in Duo, we have to consider that the cutting will be performed by two people. Remember that, like all interpretation events, the performance begins with the cutting. Well, in Duo, we are shaping a two-person performance.

Similar to cutting for other events, you are (above all) looking for a story. When reading for Duo, you should think about things that make Duo work: Strong Conflict, Balance, Precise Interaction, Creative Interplay. While bracketing chunks of material while you read,

make special marks around potential climaxes. Locate the point(s) where the two main characters' competing objectives threaten to destroy their relationship. In some pieces, the two struggling protagonists achieve a singular goal together. You will want to remove text that disrupts the balance between the characters. For example, if one character has a three-minute monologue, it may be a good idea to cut nonessential language so that the other character is not simply out of sight or standing silently for a while. Perhaps the other character also has a monologue that you could juxtapose (maybe by interspersing the lines) to give the performance more balance.

After you have chosen what kind of cutting you will pursue, choose the best climax to serve that kind of cutting. Choose one of the potential climaxes that you have already marked. Now you are ready to chunk. Remember to think about the performance the entire time you are cutting. When cutting a larger work with multiple characters, determine which characters are necessary and which characters are expendable. Keep in mind the challenge of having three characters engaging in a simultaneous trialogue. This means that one of the performers will have to play two people in the same room, so you need to consider the

logistics of the performance while you are chunking.

Now whittle your chunking down to around 1,200 words. Again, you will want to remove text that disrupts the balance between the characters. Also, as you cut, you should consider potential performance transitions and how you will get from one scene to another, or from one character to another.

Finally, you need to make it cool. It is critical to consider creative interplay. What opportunities does the script offer for interesting physical and vocal compositions? If the script has a hilarious moment of physical comedy, find a way to include it in the cutting. Sometimes a line can be said by both performers to give the line greater resonance. What will be the grand finale of the Duo? Imagine the performance from the audience's eyes and include moments that will make them want to cheer with amazement.

When two students cut a Duo together, they are beginning a creative partnership. Successful Duo pairings have fun making decisions about what the composition will eventually look like. Great Duos begin with BIG ideas. "Maybe we can do a funny Mambo dance here!" "It would look awesome if we blocked out a fight scene!" Partners should be encouraged to add stage direction while they cut. Decide where the characters are and what they are doing. More often than not, creative interplay can give the audience clues about the relationship or conflict more effectively than having it

expressly stated in the text. Considering the performance while you cut while incorporating potential stage directions can encourage the scene or moment to be more humorous in nature or more dramatic in nature. Ultimately, open yourself up to creative possibilities, and you will find joy in the cooperative process.

BUILDING A COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE FOR DUO INTERPRETATION

Our interactions with one another are governed by goals. Whether we are speaking with a store clerk or a friend in the hallway, there is usually some end goal, or objective, to each interaction. An objective is the goal of a character and it is the tension of competing objectives that creates conflict between two or more characters. In a scene, characters engage in actions as tactics to achieve their objective. Recall that **conflicts** are actions that elicit an emotional response from an audience. Well, when two characters have competing objectives, the result is conflict. The drama and the comedy of a scene emerges from competing objectives.

Sometimes small conflicts of competing objectives can become a life changing dispute. Consider the short story "The Necklace" by Guy De Maupassant. In it, Mathilde and Charles are a poor couple who want to attend an extravagant party. When Mathilde borrows what she believes to be an expensive necklace

from a friend and loses it, they spend 10 years struggling to replace it. Their lives are forever changed by a series of incrementally worsening actions. Conflicts often grow this way, and the tension that conflicts induce raises the stakes for characters.

> The key to truthful interaction in Duo is that the characters give the appearance that they are listening and responding to one another.

Composing Precise Interaction

Now that the team has a cutting and has brainstormed creative possibilities, we can begin building our performance. Remember that, in Duo, we can only suggest interaction. Therefore, the performers must use an off stage focus and give the impression that the characters are interacting with one another. The essential question we must ask here is: How do we give the appearance of interaction without actually interacting? Recall our discussion on focal points. In DI and HI, focal points give the impression that two characters are speaking to one another. Imagine a face-to-face conversation between two individuals. Now imagine a line forming between the two that cuts the conversation in half and turns the individuals 90 degrees facing the audience as the two characters repeat the exact conversation

exactly the same way. That is precisely how we give the impression of interaction.

As performers, it can at times be difficult to determine how to best demonstrate interaction that appears truthful when it may only be suggested. Considering this, one way of determining the appearance of interaction is to rehearse the performance and create performance images face to face. The teachings of Sanford Meisner, also called the Meisner technique, are particularly useful in designing responses and reactions that give the appearance of interaction. For Meisner, listening and responding was critical to genuine interaction of actors on stage. He encouraged actors to train using repetition exercises.

Meisner would begin with actors standing about 10 feet apart facing one another. The actors look at each other, taking each other in. When one actor is spontaneously compelled to do so, they may comment on the behavior of their partner. The observation is repeated back and forth until a new observation strikes one of the partners and is repeated back and forth. The goal of Meisner's exercise is for two actors to live as truthfully as possible. Therefore, we have adapted Meisner's repetition exercise to optimize its effectiveness in creating competitive interpretation performances.

When creating performance decisions in Duo, students begin by facing one another. Consider the spatial relationship when determining how far apart your characters should stand. If your characters in the scene are great

friends, let that inform your decision regarding spatial relationship. Take a moment to observe each other's behavior. Partner A and Partner B rehearse the first few lines of their cutting face to face. If Partner B is not satisfied with the physical and vocal delivery of Partner A's line, Partner B repeats the line. Partner A then performs the line with a different physical and vocal delivery. If Partner B is satisfied, then partner B says their next line. During this process, also consider kinesthetic response. What is the immediate uncensored reaction to your partner's physical decision? After a few successful line deliveries, both performers should stop and write down notes on their delivery.

During this time, the partners should also write in beats and score their script.

To be clear, Meisner would likely be extremely critical of this adaptation of his approach. Meisner, like many observers of Stanislavsky's method, did not believe in rehearsed vocal and physical choices as it increases the likelihood that a performer will miss a "real" moment. However, for the purposes of Duo, where actual face-to-face interaction is prohibited, complete acquiescence to Meisner's technique is not possible. Meisner's approach is most helpful in informing decisions that performers can replicate and perfect. Additionally, repetition and rehearsal are essential ingredients in

preparing for a tournament where performers must perform consistently round after round (after round after round).

After they have galvanized their decisions, the performers should perform the moment over again using an off stage focal point, repeating the successful physical and vocal deliveries of each line. Again, remember to consider the spatial relationship when determining how far apart characters should stand. A key to truthful interaction in Duo is that the characters give the appearance that they are listening and responding to one another.

Once the team has composed a vocal and physical performance that suggests truthful interaction, they must complete the physical composition of the Duo.

Creative Interplay

Once the team has composed a vocal and physical performance that suggests truthful interaction, they must complete the physical composition of the Duo. The event has grown a great deal in the last three decades. While it is certainly not impossible for a Duo to achieve competitive success when the two performers simply stand in one place and speak to one another, the event generally calls for physical representations of the interpretation—pictures

created using two performing bodies. We do not mean that you should move without reason. Of course, physicality should add to the story, not distract from it. However, teams should explore the possibilities in their script for creative interplay, or opportunities for the team to create stylistic, dynamic, striking, physical imagery and auditory choreography.

Physical Imagery

In Duo, all relevant skills and approaches for DI and HI are used in the construction of each performer's character/characters. If the Duo is humorous, the performers should construct physical characters using the strategies described in the HI unit. If it is a dramatic selection, performers should construct characters using those concepts detailed in the DI section. However, in Duo, there are added possibilities for compelling imagery through the coordinated movement of the two performers.

Let us first discuss some basic physical positions that are frequently used in Duo. The most commonly used physical position in Duo is the **Forward Facing** position. In this position, both performers are side-by-side, facing straight out. This position is most commonly utilized because it allows the audience to see both of the performers facial expressions most clearly. Another position is the **"I" Formation**. In this position, one of the partners is in front of the other. This essentially hides one of the performers, so it is a great choice when one character is addressing the audience in a monologue or

to suggest that one of the characters has left the scene. The third common positioning is **Turned In** position where both partners turn 90 degrees toward each other. This positioning can serve to suggest intimacy, like two lovers speaking romantically, or urgency, such as two friends having an argument they do not want others to hear. The final basic position is **Turned Out**. This positioning is the exact opposite of Turned In. Here, both performers are turned out 90 degrees.

These four basic positionings can be altered using the principles we have discussed previously in this text. For example, in the Forward Facing position, students may consider spatial relationship and have one performer in the foreground and the other slightly in the background to signify retreat or aggression. Teams may also mix and match these basic positions, having one performer in the Forward Facing position while their partner is in the Turned Out position to indicate a flashback. Students may also consider how to give the indication of touch without actually making physical contact with one another. Two partners in the Turned In position need only lean into one another to suggest closeness or to mime a kiss.

Once the Duo has created the basic positions of the scene, they can add in more physical nuance to the creative interplay in

the Duo. Take, for example, the 2007 Duo national championship team (Taron Grizell and Karen Joshi) performing "Mr. Marmalade." The performance has become a classic example of physical creative interplay. The team created a highly stylized operation sequence in which one of the performers executes a backbend to indicate lying on an operation table. As one partner pantomimes pulling levers and pushing buttons in the imaginary operation, the other performer synchronically bends their back to give the appearance of being lifted on the table. The moment was a showstopper in a way few Duo teams have accomplished.

The operation scene is a highly sophisticated example of creative interplay, where the performers create a striking moment in the Duo through choreographed flips. In fact, the performance of this elaborate looking sequence can be easily broken down into concepts we have been exposed to previously in this text. One performer's decision to do a backbend is a consideration of shape. The way their partner moves about the space, creating the imagery of the operating room, considers the second aspect of environment (things near), the floor pattern they created in their movement on the stage (topography), and the distance between the two performers (spatial relationship). Moreover,

when one performer pulls the lever, the other performer's physical reaction gives the appearance of an uncensored reaction, or kinesthetic response. Once the creative vision is in place, all the performers have to do next is break down each move step-by-step, beat-by-beat.

Auditory Choreography

Creative Interplay also suggests that teams consider how striking sounds can be composed with the voices of the two performers. An individual's voice in DI or HI can elicit tears or laughter, but in Duo, teams have more limbs and voices to create dynamic sounds. This means Duos performing at the highest level are generally expected to be particularly creative and precise with the sounds their voices and bodies produce. The 2010 national championship Duo team (Austin Groves and Darius Wilson) performing the "The Wiz" provides an excellent example of auditory choreography. In addition to excellently demonstrating physical creative interplay through choreographed dance and characterization, the team also created a captivating auditory performance. In the scene transitions, the team harmonized a vaudevillian-style melody, slapping their thighs, clapping their hands, and stomping their feet. These choreographed sounds made the performance feel larger than life.

However, the creative possibilities for dynamic auditory choreography are not limited to comedic Duo performances. The 2017 co-national champion Duo team (Claire Doty and Zakkiyah Sanders) performing "The Invention of Wings" used auditory choreography to both determine tone in the dramatic piece while establishing a stylistic motif. The performance begins with the team using vocal harmonies to create an ethereal mood. Then, the performers each perform background melodic notes while the other addresses the audience in monologue. They also perform lines together at times to amplify the intensity of moments. They continue the auditory choreography through the entire piece, syncopating musical vocal performance against foot stomps and woven with spoken text. Performer One hums the melody, then sings while stomping and clapping in rhythm. They sing, "The walls came tumbling down" while their partner pantomimes interacting with a crowd while updating the audience with plot. The piece ends with two important audible breaths from Performer One followed by several seconds of silence.

The vocal overlay gave the teaser a sense of reverence, it compelled the audience to pay attention, and it established a dramatic motif; that melody would guide us through the narrative. Still, you do not need to sing to compel an audience with auditory choreography. If two characters are fighting, consider how the argument sounds. Is the sound too loud or not loud enough? Is it layered effectively? Decide where silence is placed in the performance. The team should determine how to build sound around silence to increase its impact.

WINNING THE ROUND

Since the performance that demonstrates the greatest teamwork generally wins a given Duo round, it is imperative for teams to have a positive working relationship. One thing we have learned is that it is incredibly difficult to compete successfully in Duo without a trusting interpersonal relationship. For this reason, there are many pairings that final more than once. Strong, trusting working relationships mean that the team enjoys working with one another as such relationships foster creativity. The more time you spend in the laboratory inventing and practicing the more likely you will be to wow the audience and win the round.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: *How do we construct introductions for interpretation performances? How do Dramatic, Humorous, Program Oral Interpretation, and Duo Interpretation introductions differ?*

CONCEPTS: *Introduction, Central Argument, Lens, Tagline, Balance, Neutral Position*

UNIT 9

Writing an Introduction

Sam wiped their brow. They just learned about each event, chose an event, selected literature, cut the piece, composed the performance, and practiced with winning round strategies. Sam told the Interp captain they were ready to show off their new event at the next team meeting. "Not so fast," the team captain replied.

"You mean I'm not ready?" Sam asked. "What else is there to do?"

The team captain smirked knowingly and gently prompted, "Just one more step, Sam. You're almost there."

Forensics is an argument based activity. In debate, competitors create cases and argue their positions. In Extemporaneous Speaking, competitors are asked questions about current events, and, in 30 minutes, construct arguments to defend their answer. In Original Oratory, competitors write and perform speeches to persuade their audience to engage in some action. In interpretation, competitors shape an author's work in order to argue some truth

about the human condition. In each interpretation event, a student writes and performs an introduction to the performance. During the introduction, which generally follows the teaser, the performer drops character and speaks to the audience for about 30-45 seconds, introducing the story and communicating the title and author of the selection(s) before moving into the exposition of the performance. The introduction in interpretation events is the **central argument** of the performance or the **lens** through which you want the audience to view a performance.

Introductions are written in the student's own words. Since the purpose of an introduction is to provide a lens through which the audience should view the performance, the lens should be clear. In this way, introductions should be insightful yet digestible. In each of the interpretation events, introductions begin with a broad concept, theme, or historical explanation and then provide details more specific to the particular selection. This unit will discuss how to write and perform an introduction for each of the interpretation events based upon current national trends.

DRAMATIC INTERPRETATION

Current national trends in Dramatic Interpretation suggest that introductions should typically be three to four sentences long. The first sentence or two generally provides either a universal theme or, if the DI is a biographical piece, some general explanation

of the character's historical importance. A universal theme may be expressed through quotation, theory, or a study. The next sentence provides an explication of the universal theme and its association with the character's conflict or further explains the historical figure's importance in the student's own words. The final sentence is the most specific to the student's current selection; it provides a particular lesson or moral that the audience will take away from the student's performance of the selection. Then the performer states the title and author of the selection.

The following is an example of an introduction written and performed by Mike Dahlgren in the 2009 national final round of Dramatic Interpretation:

> *T. S. Elliot once noted, "The end of our exploring is to arrive where we first started and to know that place for the very first time." As an actor, devout mormon, husband, and father, Stephen Fales has played many roles for many people. But he reminds us all in his autobiographical one-man show that to be oneself and to love oneself is the greatest role of all.*
>
> **Confessions of a Mormon Boy by Stephen Fales**

Note how each of the three sentences fulfills the basic formula we have explained above. The T. S. Elliot quotation highlights the universal theme of self-exploration. The second sentence gives the audience some

Introductions are written in the student's own words. Since the purpose of an introduction is to provide a lens through which the audience should view the performance, the lens should be clear.

clues to the character's conflict. The final sentence provides the audience with the lesson of the performance—the importance of self-acceptance.

HUMOROUS INTERPRETATION

Similar to DI, Humorous Interpretation introductions demonstrate the lesson that the audience should take away from a student's performance. In general, Humorous Interpretation intros are humorous in nature. Often, students will begin with a joke or a funny scenario from the student's own life that captures the broad sentiments explored in the piece. Next, the particular lessons of the given selection are highlighted. Finally, the performer states the title and author of the selection.

The following is an example of an introduction written and performed by Lindsey White in the 2010 national final round of Humorous Interpretation:

INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE: *Bringing Words to Life*

> *Tonight, I would like you all to go home, look at yourself in the mirror, alone, naked. Do you like what you see? If not, that's okay, because someone, somewhere ... HAS to be uglier than you. Unfortunately, looking in the mirror and picking out things about yourself you wish you could change happens to most of us. Including me. But all it takes is one person to show you that you are who you are ... and that's a SEXY thing.*
>
> **Fat Kids on Fire by Bekah Brunstetter**

An important consideration when writing an introduction for Humorous Interpretation is that it should cater to the student's performance strengths and style of humor. For example, Lindsey's introduction indicates that she is comfortable discussing issues of weight. Lindsey's willingness to share information about overcoming her own insecurities revealed the personal significance of the selection and invited the audience to laugh at the sensitive subject of self-image.

PROGRAM ORAL INTERPRETATION

Program Oral Interpretation introductions are similar to DI and HI introductions in that they highlight the central argument of the performance. However, POI introductions have the added challenge of explaining the theme that links all of the different selections together. In this way, in POI it is essential to

remember that the introduction is the lens through which you want the audience to view a performance. In this way, the design of the introduction will change based on the type of program (Argumentative versus Thematic) and the stylistic preferences of the performer. POI introductions are structured in many different ways, but we will provide an overview of a Thematic Introduction followed by a more Argumentative Introduction.

Thematic Introductions In POI: The first sentence of a Thematic POI introduction provides a broad claim or idea about the human condition. The second sentence provides evidence, or evidentiary examples, supporting the claim. The third sentence is the specific topic sentence of the program that explains what the particular theme the various sources and ideas of the program are designed to demonstrate. Generally, this sentence is followed by a citation of the sources used in the program. The final moment of the introduction provides the title of the POI and occasionally features a cool **tagline** designed to elicit an emotional reaction from the audience.

The following introduction is an exceptional example of an introduction for a program that is more thematic.

The following is an example of a more thematic introduction written and performed by Uzo Ngwu in the 2019 national final round of Program Oral Interpretation:

*With the **poetry**, "Middle Passage" by Robert Hayden, "Riot" by Gwendolyn Brooks, "We March With You" by Sara Cress; the **prose**, Ruth and the Green Book by Calvin Alexander Ramsey and Gwen Strauss; and the **articles**, "White Woman Calls 911 by Carla Hererra, 3 Black People Checked Out of their AirBnB" by Doug Criss and Amir Vera, "Flying While Black" by Kia Morgan-Smith, the transcripts of Sandra Bland's Arrest by Ryan Grimm; "The Green Book" by Evan Andrews, and **lyrics** from "Freedom" by Beyonce: From being brought to America, to living in it, historically and presently, it has been shown that Black people are not welcome in white spaces. For Black America, this is* **Travel Advisory, A Program: Because if Black people cannot go through white spaces, then where can we go, when everywhere is a white space?**

Uzo's introduction begins by citing the sources used in the program. This is a novel approach, since literature citations are typically featured later in the introduction. However, the choice makes great sense for this particular program because Uzo is not merely citing literature, but cleverly providing an evidentiary framework for the program. Notice how each of the titles provides clues to the themes expressed in the program. From the moment the introduction begins, the audience is getting a sense of the scope of the program, learning that the program will span from the Middle Passage to contemporary examples of

Black people experiencing trauma in transit. Uzo signals that the program will cover **land** (from Sandra Bland's fateful traffic stop to racism at an AirBnB), **sea** (the Middle Passage), and **air** (flying while Black). Citing the sources at the beginning of the introduction skillfully provides evidentiary examples supporting the claim and establishes the theme for the audience that the perils of traveling while Black are ubiquitous and enduring. After the list of citations, Uzo then offers a broad claim about the human condition, Black people are not welcome in white spaces. This claim and the evidence provided in the source citations lead nicely into the title of the program, "Travel Advisory" and the tagline.

Argumentative Introductions In POI: The first sentence of an Argumentative POI introduction generally provides a specific case, scientific discovery, or article that exemplifies the specific issue the program seeks to work against. The second sentence provides a warrant linking the evidence provided in the introduction's attention getter to the claims made in the program. The next sentence, or sentences, provide the specific thesis of the program. Generally this is followed by a citation of the sources used in the program. Like their thematic counterparts, the final moment of argument introductions provide the title of the POI and occasionally features a cool tagline designed to elicit an emotional reaction from the audience.

The following is an example of a more argumentative introduction written and performed by Ella Schnake in the 2019 national final round of Program Oral Interpretation:

In a 2013 study entitled, "Men Outspeak Women: Analyzing the Gender Gap in Competitive Debate," Dr. Emma Pearson analyzed over 35,000 speaker scores to conclude a significant statistical disparity between the success of males and females in debate rounds. Overwhelmingly, it becomes clear that speaking while female has considerable disadvantages, not only in terms of competitive success, but also with higher rates of interruption and a general lack of respect for speech. As a society, our expectations for females in public speaking put women in a double bind: Either **conform** *to societal expectations of submission and lose credibility, or* **demonstrate** *intensity and be labeled "too aggressive." This unwinnable bias is so deeply ingrained in our culture that we have often become blind to its consequences—reflected in countless reports of harassment from young female debaters. I love speech and debate, and this activity thrives on calling out oppressions all over the world, but it's time to call out the ones in our own community. So through the* **prose** *Women in Debate: A Best Practices Manual by the Women's Debate Institute and Gender Disparities in Competitive High School Debate by Daniel Tartakovsky, the* **poetry** *"Drum Dream Girl" by Margarita Engle, and* **articles** *from The Huffington Post, the Politic, New York Times, The Washington Post, Women's E News, The Student Press Law Center, and the Des Moines Register.* **Debate Like a Girl: A Program. Because the speech and debate community should amplify voices, not silence them. And that's a 3-0 decision.**

Ella's introduction begins with a scientific study that reports statistical disparities between the success of female and male competitors in debate. Over the next four sentences, the introduction explains the challenges confronting women in speech and debate, from microaggressions to acts of harassment. In the lead into the titles and authors portion of the introduction, Ella provides a personal statement about their experience in the activity and encourages others to join in advocating for change in the status quo.

DUO INTERPRETATION

Many of the same theoretical concepts used in writing Dramatic and Humorous Interpretation introductions may also be employed when writing introductions for Duo Interpretation. In general, the first line establishes the broader social issue addressed in the performance with each line becoming increasingly specific to the given selection. The important thing to keep in mind when writing a Duo introduction is **balance**. Both performers should be given a relatively equal role in

conveying the lesson of the performance—unless the team makes a choice to do otherwise. Finally, the performers state the title and author of the selection.

The following is an example of an introduction written and performed by Ryan and Chris Wilkins in the 2011 national final round in Duo Interpretation:

Performer 1: *August 1, 1966*

Performer 2: *University of Texas*

Both: *16 Killed*

Performer 1: *April 20, 1999*

Performer 2: *Columbine High School*

Both: *15 Killed*

Performer 1: *April 16, 2007*

Performer 2: *Virginia Tech*

Both: *33 Killed*

Performer 1: *March 31, 2011*

Performer 2: *Worthing High School*

Both: *1 Dead*

Performer 1: *And that's one too many.*

Performer 2: *The brutal murder of today's youth has become an epidemic.*

Performer 1: *But instead of societies searching for a way to fix this problem, everyone is looking for someone to blame.*

Performer 2: *Herman Howard's a victim of bullying and a broken home becomes one of those teens lost in the shuffle.*

Performer 1: *Making him another statistic.*

Both: **Hello Herman**

Performer 1: **by John Buffalo Mailer**

While this intro is unique as most introductions do not involve so much back-and-forth vocal interaction, this intro demonstrates balance extremely well. Observe how each of the performers is

given a relatively equivalent number of lines. In this way, the intro not only communicates the lens through which the performers wish the audience to view the performance, but also conveys teamwork balanced textual craftsmanship and thorough auditory choreography of the vocal performance.

PERFORMING AN INTRODUCTION

In all interpretation events, the performer communicates the introduction through their own persona—rather than through that of a character. Given that the introduction is written in the student's own voice, it is typically also performed in the student's own voice. At the end of the teaser, the performer will generally morph out of the character and into the **neutral (or natural) position**. The performer stands upright in a relaxed, though confident and poised, position with arms resting at their sides. You should rehearse to sound conversational while also emphasizing key moments in the message. It is not enough for students to simply recite the introduction. This is a critical time for you to gain the audience's support and demonstrate your credibility as a performer. Therefore, it is important to give as much thought and specificity to the vocal

and physical performance of the introduction as you would with other aspects of the performance. Consider all of your performance tools—even well-placed silence. Once you have stated the title and author of the selection, you morph (or mold or pop) into the character and resume the performance.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What do we do to prepare for and compete at tournaments in interpretation?*

CONCEPTS: *Speaker Code, Tab Room, Preliminary rounds, Sign In, Cross-Entered, Rank, Speaker Points, Break, Out-Rounds, Postings, Warm-Ups*

UNIT 10

Competing at Tournaments

Sam has been practicing with their coaches and teammates for months. They know their performance like the back of their hand—in fact, by now, they probably know their performance better than the back of their hand. But they can't seem to shake this feeling of uncertainty. The first tournament is two weeks away, and they have no idea what it's going to be like.

No matter how prepared we are for a performance, it is difficult to imagine what the tournament competition will be like until we experience it. We've reiterated that both rules, such as requiring the presence of a manuscript to compete in Program Oral Interpretation, and conventions, like the convention that the "manuscript" be housed in a 9" x 7" black binder, help shape the competitive experience in speech and debate. The tournament is where rules and conventions collide. Parents who may have little to no experience in the activity judge alongside seasoned coaches. Some judges tend to reinforce a strict adherence to conventions,

while others are either unaware of or disagree with those unwritten protocols.

No matter how prepared we are for a performance, it is difficult to imagine what the tournament competition will be like until we experience it.

Additionally, a student may experience communication apprehension, or feelings of fear and/or anxiety associated with public speaking, prior to their first tournament. Confusing or unknown conventions blend with rules and a variable judging dynamic to exacerbate the sense of uncertainty for students participating in the activity for the first time. But it is important to remember a performance truism: almost everyone experiences some level of communication apprehension, whether they are newcomers or seasoned veterans of the activity. However, generally, greater knowledge of the tournament experience can help to calm these natural feelings. This unit will break down the process of competition. Our goal here is not to reinforce conventions, but to provide some guidance on general expectations during the tournament experience. After a brief overview of the tournament experience, we will share some helpful tips to consider before beginning a tournament all the way through the awards ceremony.

OVERVIEW OF THE TOURNAMENT EXPERIENCE

With names like The Winter Forensics Frolic and the Crabtree Classic, tournaments typically have a unique sense of personality. It's fun to learn the cute quirks and particular hallmarks of each tournament experience. One tournament may feature legendary food in the judges' lounge while another may be known for their fun experimental events, and still another may hand out epic trophies. There is even a tournament that distributes boogie boards to event champions. Most tournaments, though, large or small, are generally *structured* the same way.

Arrival

A typical in-person tournament experience begins with the team arriving at the tournament site. The team coach then registers their students for the tournament. During this time, students typically gather in a specified team meeting location to share pertinent information and begin warming up their voices for the upcoming day of competition.

Registration

At registration, each team or student is given a **Speaker Code**. The speaker code is intended to anonymize competitors and prevent judges' affiliation bias and helps keep track of rankings in the **Tab Room**, or the area where tournament tabulation occurs. The Tab Room is im-

portant because if a student experiences any problems at the tournament, they and their coach should report to the Tab Room.

Warm-up

After receiving their speaker codes and sufficiently warming up their voices, the students find the location of their rounds to begin the first round.

Prelims

The first rounds are **preliminary rounds**, or "prelims." There will be six or so competitors in each competition room, and, with the excep-

tion of larger national tournaments, one judge will be assigned to each preliminary round. When a student first walks into the round, they will **sign in**, which in general involves writing their speaker code and the title and author of their selection. If a student is entered in more than one event at the tournament, they should indicate that with an "XE," which stands for **cross-entered**. This lets the judge know that they will either show up later to the round after performing their other event or that they need to perform early in the round and excuse themselves to the next. Cross-entered students typically ask the judge, "May I please be excused to my next round?" after they

have performed and before the next speaker is called. If a student is not cross-entered, it is expected they will attentively watch all of their fellow competitors perform.

> **As a competitor in speech and debate, you will likely spend tremendous time and energy preparing for your performance, but it is also important to prepare yourself to watch performances of fellow competitors.**

In the preliminary rounds, each student performs one after the other. Present cross-entered competitors perform first, regardless of their allotted speaking order. The judge then takes notes and writes down criticisms on the ballot. Once all of the performers have performed, the judge then ranks each competitor in descending order. For example, the judge will assign the **rank** of "1st" to the performer they deemed "best" in the round. The second "best" performer will be given a rank of 2, and so on. The judge will also assign a corresponding number of **speaker points** out of either 25 or 100, depending upon the tournament. The speaker points assess the quality of the performance. For example, if a judge adjudicates a round in which each competitor forgets their piece, that judge may assign the students low speaker points. Conversely, a judge may assign universally high speaker points in a round with

six exceptional speakers. Speaker points also help in tournament tabulation to break ties.

The number of entries in a given event at a given tournament determines the number of preliminary rounds that will take place. After the preliminary rounds, scores are tabulated and the higher-ranking individuals **break** or advance to **out-rounds**. The size of the tournament also dictates whether the first out-round will be an octafinal (meaning eight sections of rounds), quarterfinal (four sections), semifinal (two sections), or if the tournament will break directly to a final round. Out-rounds generally have more than one judge adjudicating, and the top-ranking performers are advanced to the next set of out-rounds.

The tournament staff will typically post breaks, also called **postings**, at a common area on the tournament site. If the student was awarded high enough ranks to break, their code will be on the posting. The posting will also indicate where the student will perform and their speaker order. Postings are typically an exciting time as every competitor, judge, and coach gathers to watch the posting drop. Different teams and different individuals have different ways of celebrating successes or accepting losses at this moment. Some students and coaches will cheer ecstatically, or even scream and shout. Others express the accompanying feelings of joy or disappointment in more subtle ways. People will hug each other and cry, and you don't always know if the context is happy or sad.

We won't tell you how to think or behave. However, when the day comes that you find your name on the final round poster, we hope you consider those around you who worked equally hard but did not achieve the same positive result. For every six competitors celebrating a placement in the final round, there is a small sea of disappointed competitors who did not break.

On the other hand, if your hard work does not manifest in a final round appearance, we hope you consider the possibility that you are still absolutely capable of deriving a profoundly important educational experience out of the momentary loss. We recommend students who do not advance to final rounds watch their fellow competitors in break rounds, especially final rounds. Watching final rounds helps to learn strategies to improve your performance, shows respect for fellow competitors and their messages, and enhances the friendliness of the tournament, district, and league environment.

BEING A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER

Speaking of creating a positive tournament environment, let's talk a bit about being an audience member. As a competitor in speech and debate, you will likely spend tremendous time and energy preparing for your performance, but it is also important to prepare yourself to watch performances of fellow competitors. Think about the last time you told a friend a story about your day. If your friend looked away, stared at the floor, played on their phone, or, worst of all, fell asleep while you told the story, you'd understandably take offense. Over the years, we have seen our share of less-than-optimal audience members who engage in all sorts of antics in the hopes of sabotaging the performances of the other competitors in the room. As a judge, we've seen students make angry or confused faces, yawn loudly or stretch, and yes, we've seen students fall asleep. These tactics will injure your own performance in the tournament, as well as injure a healthy competitive community. In the short term, most judges will notice and many will penalize students who do not seem engaged. Even if they are not caught in the middle of catching ZZZs, students who do not stay engaged throughout the duration of the round lose access to physical cues provided by the audience that may enhance future performances. In other words, you are unable to gauge your performance in the context of the round if you are not actively listening to your fellow competitors. Paying attention to your fellow competitors maximizes the experiential and interpersonal aspects of the competition.

In order to communicate your attentiveness, we suggest you silence any electronic communication devices and put them away prior to the start of the round. But silencing your phones is just a start. In the spirit of a supportive competitive community, we encourage you to go beyond simple respectful attentiveness. It is helpful to react to your fellow competitors.

Smile encouragingly when they take the stage to show off their hard work. If the performer says something funny, react in kind with a laugh or smile. If they say something sad, communicate empathy. Imagine the face *you* would want to see in the back of the room and be that friendly face to the other competitors in the round. And after the round is over and everyone has exited the competitive space, it is perfectly acceptable (and encouraged) to compliment fellow competitors who've struck you as performing particularly well.

MAINTAINING PERSONAL HEALTH AT A TOURNAMENT

Competition is hard. Repetition of performance is hard. Beginning the day at 8:00 a.m. and ending the day deep into the night is hard.

The tournament experience can be physically and emotionally tiring. Students will often go hours without any formal obligation to do anything and then experience great surges of adrenaline during rounds and when postings drop. During the tournament experience, students may use more daily calories than normal in a school day as they travel to different classrooms and buildings, sometimes climbing stairs or traversing long distances. Moreover, the act of speaking burns through more calories than sitting, reading, or writing. Tournaments typically begin earlier in the morning, which can shock the system and create a sense of fatigue. For these reasons, and many more, it is

really important to take care of your health and well-being during the tournament experience. You NEED sleep, water, and food to be alive. As obvious as this is, you'd be surprised how many students attempt to endure a tournament experience without addressing these basic needs. Let's cover the basics.

Sleep is essential to your everyday functioning. It is generally recommended that high school students get anywhere from 8-10 hours of sleep per night under typical conditions. Nervousness the night before a tournament can make it difficult to get the appropriate amount of sleep, and tournaments commonly start hours before students are expected to be awake for school. As such, we highly encourage students to normalize their sleeping routine at least one week before a tournament. For example, imagine that your tournament plan is to wake up at 6:00 a.m. to get dressed and meet your team at the designated location at 7:00 a.m. to warm up prior to an 8:00 a.m. round. In this scenario, we suggest setting a 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. bedtime and a 6:00 a.m. wake up time the week beforehand. As a bonus, try practicing your speech at the times you'll be expected to perform each morning. In this way, you will prepare your mind and body for the upcoming tournament experience. You may have been told this before, but putting your phone away and limiting screen time a couple hours before bed, getting daily exercise, and limiting caffeine intake will help you get the appropriate amount of rest.

Staying hydrated and eating food may seem like no brainers, but you would be surprised how easy it can be to overlook these essential activities when caught up in the excitement or anxiety of the tournament experience. Speaking involves atypical breathing patterns and your body perspires more than usual. This is compounded by the added stress of wearing tournament attire and dashing from round to round across a high school or college campus and takes a toll on your body. You lose tons of water during the competition day, so it is absolutely critical to rehydrate. On average, competitors should drink three liters of water, or roughly five 20-ounce water bottles, during the tournament day. It is also critical for students to eat balanced meals during the tournament. The nervousness that accompanies performance anxiety can curb a student's appetite. However, food is necessary for the body to produce energy. Students will often supplement this energy with caffeine. We do not recommend this as coffee and other caffeine inducing beverages can make a performer jittery, which obviously diminishes physical control and can make it difficult to get appropriate rest at the tournament.

The next way to maintain stamina is to **wake up your body** before the competition begins. Every competitor should begin the tournament

with physical and vocal **warm-ups**. The entirety of a team's warm up should last no longer than 20 minutes. In this way, the warm-up should be long enough to wake up the body, voice, and articulatory tools, but not too long where students overexert themselves and tire out. A proper warm-up exercise should stretch the muscles of the mouth, body, and tongue and serve to loosen the vocal cords. Warm-ups also reinforce physical discipline through mimicry, encourage proper breathing, and improves sensory awareness and listening skills.

Creating a unique warm-up routine also helps build and strengthen the culture of a team. Each team performs warm-ups in a different way. These unique differences enhance team camaraderie. A great way to end a team warm-up is with a song that is unique to that particular team. Rallying around the school's fight song is a great way to finish a team warm-up! After the team has warmed up, we suggest finding a completely secluded space to go over your performance one final time before the first preliminary round. We often remind our students that the first round is not a practice round, it is the first round. The first round should not be the first time you open your mouth to speak in public for the day. Find some ideas for warmups at www.speechand-debate.org/speech-warm-ups.

ATTIRE

The National Speech & Debate Association does not overtly endorse any dress code for competing at tournaments. The only prohibition the Association places on clothing is that students are not allowed to wear clothing that "endorses violence, guns, drugs/alcohol, etc." Students are also discouraged from clothing that distracts from their performance. Sneakers that light up as you walk may distract from your performance. It is a good idea to let that distraction caution inform other style choices. For another example, it is helpful to have your hair out of your face, since humans perceive much of our emotions based upon facial expressions. Your face is a valuable tool of interpretation, and you'll want full use of that tool when competing.

Instead of providing a strict dress code, the NSDA reminds us that "the way you dress presents who you are" and that "you should dress in a way that authentically represents yourself." Students are encouraged to "look their personal best" and to wear clothing that is comfortable and weather appropriate.

If you rummage through the photo album of any speech and debate team that's existed for a long time, you would very likely find some fairly consistent patterns. Male presenting competitors typically dressed in pants/slacks, a button-down shirt, a tie, a suit jacket or sport coat, dress shoes, belt or suspenders. Female presenting competitors usually in a dress, pantsuit or skirt suit, business flats, or heeled shoes. For example, some universities have archival photos of students competing in oratorical and debate contests wearing such outfits as far back as 1898. At the same time, just because something has been around a long time does not mean we must continue the same approach in perpetuity. Fortunately, we do not live in 1898 when life was in black and white (though it must have been much easier to match outfits back then). As the Association highlights, "some elements of dress codes may also be rooted in and reinforce problematic societal norms in race, class, ability, etc. Additionally, common dress codes enforce a standard of dress that might not be feasible for all students." But it may still be helpful to be aware of the conventions in your own competitive community. Feel free to discuss competitive attire with your coach and the coaching community. And if you determine that some competitive conventions of the community are problematic,speak up. Put the advocacy skills you've learned through preparing for competition to good use.

Regardless of attire, it is a good idea to consider bringing a bag to hold items you may need during the duration of the tournament. In your tournament bag, you may consider storing a notepad and pen to write down pertinent tournament information, a reusable water bottle, a timer, throat lozenges, or any other medication you may find useful during the day.

COMMUNITY BEFORE COMPETITION

Above all else mentioned in this chapter, we hope you remember to have fun. And that the motivation is education. And that community is key. This activity is a wildly addictive and enjoyable way to learn to develop into more capable and confident speakers, writers, advocates, influencers, entertainers, problem solvers, students, teachers, policy makers, conflict resolvers, adjudicators, legislators, content creators, streamers, dreamers, and community leaders. Yes, competition can be scary, but be brave as you venture into it. If we put community first, then we'll never have to go it alone.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do we grow competitively from tournament to tournament, season to season?*

CONCEPTS: *Peer Coaching, A Relationship of Co-Creation, Start/Stop Session, Ballot Analysis, Code of Conduct, Communication Model*

UNIT 11

Fostering a Team Culture of Success

After competing at their first tournament, Sam finally felt like a real interper. While they did not break into elimination rounds at the first competition, Sam had fun, learned a lot, and met some really cool people along the way. Even though Sam enjoyed competing, they still wanted to try to do better at their next tournament. The competitors in the final round looked like they were having so much fun, and Sam wanted to know what that was like. Thankfully, Sam's team had a culture that fostered success. The team had tools that helped Sam figure out which skills needed the most improvement. Sam realized they were not alone in this journey, and they even had enough confidence to help some new people on the team. After all, Sam was now a veteran.

Forensics is a competitive activity. The judge determines the winner of any given round based on a vast array of potential criteria informed by their own understanding of rules and conventions and experiences. Hopefully, the student who best demonstrates the truth is given the

highest rank in the round. The competitor with the highest ranks wins the tournament. The winner is given a trophy. Winning matters—but it certainly isn't everything. Nor can it be the only

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Success in forensics is not measured by hardware, but by the personal growth that accompanies serious investment in the activity. Success is measured by the skill set that students develop and the relationships they form.

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barometer by which we measure our success in forensics. We often tell our students, there's no professional forensic league. Success in forensics is not measured by hardware, but by the personal growth that accompanies serious investment in the activity. Success is measured by the skill set that students develop and the relationships they form. The person you become when you leave forensics is the true measure of success, not the heaps of metal and plastic you've won. We have had the opportunity to work with some of the most successful forensic programs in the nation. These programs have helped to educate great competitors, excellent students, and responsible citizens. This chapter seeks to explicate some of the defining characteristics of these teams in order to help facilitate fostering a culture of success for your own team.

COACHING STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES

Practice is important to any competitive endeavor. Therefore, strong practices yield strong results. The most successful teams in the country have some requirement that students practice in front of a coach before they are allowed to compete at tournaments. At one particular school, students are required to have one hour of practice every week, regardless of whether or not a student is competing in a tournament that week. Having regularly scheduled time to work with an event encourages students to habitually think of ways to improve their performances. Other schools have requirements regarding an amount of **peer coaching**, or a coaching session with a fellow teammate, where students regularly perform for each other and offer constructive criticism. In addition to doing wonders for team camaraderie, peer coaching sessions help students become more aware of audience perspectives. Pointing our performance issues in others helps us better recognize our own performance issues.

Coaches (both adult coaches and peer coaches) should encourage a **relationship of co-creation** on their team. All too often, coaches will unknowingly foster a parent-child relationship with students, where all information is transmitted hierarchically from the coach to the student. We have known coaches who simply give students a cutting of a script,

who do not allow the students to make any preliminary performance decisions, who dictate all creative choices. In addition to being highly inefficient, such practices limit student growth. Instead, we recommend that coaches co-create performances with their students. If you teach a student how to cut a script, they will be able to teach novices and newcomers. Allow the student to make their own creative decisions first, then provide additional direction and guidance. Not only does this yield better individual results and stronger team culture - but co-creating is also a lot more fun.

Before every coaching session begins, make sure the coach has a timer and a pen and notepad. The student should also have a pen, a notebook that is used exclusively for forensics, and a copy of their cutting with them. The coach should start the timer when the performer begins.

In an hour long session, we typically have the student perform their piece in its entirety. Write down critiques on the notepad. What are some lines that could have been delivered more effectively? What are some moments that lack physical specificity? At the conclusion of the performance, we will commence a **Start/Stop Session** work where problematic moments of the performance are addressed.

When you are coaching an event for the first time, it is important to begin your critique by highlighting broad themes before funneling into more specific elements. For example, you may notice the broad theme that the character

> If you teach a student how to cut a script, they will be able to team novices and newcomers. Allow the student to make their own creative decisions first, *then* provide additional direction and guidance.

does not seem believable. However, telling a student something as nonspecific as "you aren't believable" will likely not result in improved performance outcomes. Instead, determine what specific changes the student could make to resolve this concern. As former competitors, we would find it bewildering to receive vague criticism like "be more natural" or "be more personable." Break down the criticism for the students. Give them a list of specific performance alterations and have them write them down in their notebooks. Consider using the specific language detailed in this text or create your own. What matters is that every member on the team is equipped with a vocabulary that is clear and consistent.

BALLOT ANALYSIS

At the conclusion of every tournament, the coach for each participating school has access to each students' ballots. The ballots are data, the results of the forensic experiment. If a student does not "break" at a tournament, the

answer to why the student did not break can often be deduced by performing ballot analysis. **Ballot analysis** is the in-depth examination of the ballots a student receives for a given performance at a given tournament to determine strategies for improving subsequent competitive outcomes. Most successful programs dedicate some time the week after a tournament to conduct ballot analysis with their students. We suggest doing this at a structured meeting, either individually or as a group, shortly after the tournament. We do not suggest letting students read ballots during the ride home. Often these van-readings of ballots incite emotional responses from the students about the

comments. This can sometimes feed a culture of negativity surrounding the end-of-tournament ritual. Reading the ballots so soon after the end of the tournament can lead to some students saying some insensitive things about the judges or tournament, perhaps negatively impacting some of their teammates (who may have fared better in the tournament).

Ballot analysis seeks to understand why a given judge gave the student a given rank in a given round. The student and the coach should read ballots carefully and identify any recurring themes. For example, if multiple judges say they had trouble hearing the performer, then low volume is a theme that must be addressed

before the next tournament. To best problem solve solutions, though, we must consider the mind of the judge. Of course, the variation of the judges' experience is vast, so not every judge will have the correct proposed solution. Additionally, most judges are writing their responses while the students are performing. The ticking clock can create stress within the judge, as they scramble to receive, analyze, critique, and prescribe while also justifying their rank all in a fairly limited timeframe. For this reason, when performing ballot analysis, we must be detectives in a way.

To identify themes, discuss all information available to determine clues. What was the student's rank in the round? What kinds of selections were fellow competitors performing in the round? What area of the state was the judge from? Use every possible clue at your disposal to inform potential adjustments to the performance for the next time around.

Some ballots are seemingly more helpful than others. Students will often get frustrated if the judge simply writes "Good job!" on the ballot and gives the student a rank of 6th place for the round. However, allowing frustration to get the better of us and getting angry at the judge does so much more harm than good. Some judges are volunteers (if not most) who know little about the intricacies of each event in competitive forensics. While we certainly appreciate robust critiques, we should not expect them. When we get defensive of the comments on the ballot, we are less motivated to make proactive changes to our performances. Also, such behavior often leads to an antagonizing perspective of judges. This attitude poisons students into responding coldly toward judges, which disrupts competitive outcomes. Instead, be detectives and strive to locate clues to improve future performances.

Many successful programs have a team handbook that details a full list of team-member responsibilities as well as consequences that will occur should a student fail to meet their responsibilities.

TEAM POLICIES

Teams function best when there is a clear structure and set of standards to ensure students' safety. Therefore, it is critical that the coach, with the assistance of students, design rules and policies that govern all members. Many successful programs have a team handbook that details a full list of team-member responsibilities as well as consequences that will occur should a student fail to meet their responsibilities. To create your team policies, generate a list of behaviors that you would like students to perform at tournaments and a list of behaviors that you would like the students to perform at school. Then create a

list of those behaviors that you want students to avoid at tournaments and at school. Next, write down the potential rewards and consequences of each. Consider including an **online code of conduct**, as well. Many students can damage their reputation and the reputation of the team by writing negative or unsportsmanlike comments on online forums. You may also consider creating these policies as a team, gathering student input so they may have more inherent ownership of the team's culture. Every season, you can perhaps revisit the team policies as a group, amending as needed.

Print out or otherwise distribute enough copies of the team policies for the students and their parents to have a copy. A parent copy is critical, especially regarding cases of student violations and to better inform parent volunteerism. Read the team policies at the first team meeting of the year. Students should be fully aware of what the expectations are for being on the team as well as the consequences of engaging in behaviors that damage the team. Have the students sign a sheet of paper that acknowledges that they have read and agree to the teams' code of conduct. This contracting also facilitates ownership in the team culture.

Lastly, an important hallmark of successful teams is a **communication model**. Have a plan on how information gets delivered to your

team members. Often, team officers are left with this duty, but also consider event captains in addition to team officers. Knowing how to communicate on a team is important to managing team stress, conflict, and preparedness. This is an often overlooked tenet of team success, as the coach may intuit that they are the best source of team-relevant information, conflict arbitration, and cheerleading. However, we've found that a more decentralized communication model better facilitates success as each team member is trusted with increased ownership in the process.

Some teams meet with all of its members once a week. For larger teams, meeting once a week may not be possible, so each event meets on a specific day. An online team message board and an active team website are also important tools to consider with your team communication model. Obviously, video conferencing is also helpful. The biggest thing to keep in mind is to be specific. Define what kind of information will travel through which channel. It is impractical to send an email for every issue that arises on the team. Reserve email notifications for important messages; so, in your communication model, define which kinds of messages are important enough to warrant an email notification or query vs. which messages will be communicated through texting or instant messaging. A good communication model is often a huge difference maker in teams looking to climb to the next competitive level. If you construct one

in the beginning, then you can focus on other challenges of more glaring immediacy—like winning Interp rounds.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Fostering a *winning* team culture is not always the same as fostering a *successful* team culture. A toxic team culture can rot any organization from the inside out, even competitive juggernauts. A successful team culture prioritizes students' personal health and educational enrichment, recognizing the power of the activity in enhancing both. Teams with successful cultures focus on meeting every student where they are, gradually developing skills to reach their potential. These teams facilitate positive peer coaching and cooperation over intra-team competition. While any season will have painful moments, a successful team culture facilitates compassion, healthy coping behaviors, and positive interpersonal communication practices. Whether you are a part of a large team, a hit crew of five or so students, or even if you are an army of one, a successful team culture begins with you.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *How do we create Prose and Poetry performances that are competitive in the event of Oral Interpretation?*

CONCEPTS: *Coin Flip, Binder, Page turn, Poetry Program, Talk Poems, Splicing, Threaded, Bit Poems, Stationary Position, Hand Journey*

APPENDIX A

Oral Interpretation

Oral Interpretation as an event is distinct though interrelated to Oral Interpretation as a performance concept. As a performance concept, Oral Interpretation, as defined by Paul Campbell in his book *The Speaking and Speakers of Literature* is defined as "the oralization of literature." As such defined, all performance in which literature is orally communicated, including but not limited to each of the forensic events, can be classified as Oral Interpretation. Whether or not you are watching an author read their work at a coffee shop, a spoken-word poet on stage, or a debater speaking five hundred words per minute in a classroom, you are witnessing an act of Oral Interpretation. However, the Oral Interpretation (OI) we will discuss in this unit is a very particular event with very nuanced rules that shift from tournament to tournament, from league to league. The NSDA does not recognize Oral Interpretation as one event but as two of its supplemental and complementary events of Prose and Poetry. However, many state leagues recognize Oral

Interpretation as a ten-minute event. Given the wide variety of rules and conventions, in this unit we will explicate the most common iteration of the event.

In general, OI is not one event, but two. In OI, students perform two selections, one ten-minute selection of Prose and one ten-minute selection of Poetry. At most tournaments, students alternate performing a selection of Prose in one round and a selection of Poetry in the next. A **coin flip** determines which selection the students must perform first. For example, if a student is competing at a tournament that has four rounds (two preliminary rounds, one semifinal round, and a final round) and the coin flip determines that Prose will be performed in the first round, then Poetry will be performed in the next, Prose in the semifinal, and Poetry in the final round. This organizational practice makes OI very challenging because the selection of poetry and the selection of prose must be of equal competitive strength in order for the student to consistently perform well.

Another unique aspect of Oral Interpretation is that the event requires students to present selections while holding the manuscript, or a copy of the performance cutting usually contained within a **binder**. Many leagues have some sort of rule about the amount of time a student should "acknowledge" or look down at the manuscript. Some states discourage movement, others embrace it. The convention of the binder has also encouraged other conventions. For example, you would never have guessed that there are conventions for how to open the book—but there are. Other conventions include the use of **page turns** as transitions, the use of the manuscript as an interpretive tool, and the sometimes awkward thing of closing the binder. We will cover all of the essential territory.

ANATOMY OF A PROSE PERFORMANCE

Performances of Prose can be drawn from any work of fiction (short stories, novels) or nonfiction (articles, journals, essays, autobiographies) that is not a dramatic work. There is usually a bit of confusion about the last part of that description. The distinction between a "dramatic work" and prose is that prose works are written to be read, not performed. For example, in competition, you may perform Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity* in Prose, but not the stage or screen adaptations of the book. The NSDA stipulates that you may not use the same source used in Duo, DI, or HI—meaning, if you performed Martin Lawrence's autobiography in Dramatic Interpretation, you may not use it again in Prose competition, even though it is a prosaic work. Prose selections typically involve first-person narration, but may also be second- or third-person narration. Cuttings of Prose may involve one voice or multiple voices.

Thus, the elements of Prose include research, composition, and performance.

As we did with previous events, we will guide you through the steps of composing a competitive Prose performance from start to finish. As with the other interpretation events, those steps include: script selection, script cutting, performance composition, and presentation. Prose is similar to DI in that it follows Freytag's model of dramatic structure. However, what distinguishes Prose from DI is that Prose emphasizes story more than character. The purpose of Prose is to uncover some truth about the human condition through the interpretation and presentation of a story.

Selecting a Story for Prose

Prose may come from fiction or nonfiction, first-, second-, or third-person view, and any style in between. Memoirs, young adult fiction, short stories, even science fiction have been performed at the highest levels in Prose competitions. It really does not matter what style of story you choose, so long as there is a story. Remember, in Prose, you are looking for a great story.

What makes a great story? Great stories usually involve a protagonist with a clear, relatable, and interesting goal. In great stories, we know personal information about the protagonist. We feel for them, or at the very least can understand why they think the way they think. A great story involves an antagonist or some

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What matters most is the story.

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other obstacle that stands in the way of the protagonists achieving their goals. Great stories have a great confrontation or climax. Whether the protagonist achieves their goal or not, they are changed forever after the climax.

I once had a student who brought in a short story that she loved very, very much and asked if she could please, please perform it as her Prose. I read the short story. The language was simultaneously dense and abstract, very dreamlike, very confusing. It was a second-person work about a girl whose mother was a magician. The girl would often go to see her mother perform in magic shows. The girl's mother did not know she was her mother. Wait. I'm now hopelessly confused. The narrator never explains this. The girl then volunteers in her "mother's" magic show, is placed in a box and disappears forever.

Let's go over the elements of a great story once more. A protagonist should have a clear, relatable, and interesting goal. The protagonist

in the story was interesting; however, her goal was not even a little bit clear or relatable. There was no real antagonist or definite obstacles. The climax was strange, to say the least. While I assume being caught in a netherworld or some deserted magical dimension would be quite a change for the main character, the ending left me more bewildered than compelled. This was not a good story for Prose competition.

The elements that make up a strong story are likely why first-person style pieces are so successful. We get to hear the protagonist's inner feelings, so their goals are generally very clear. We feel for the protagonist as they grapple with their obstacles or the antagonist. Another bonus of using first-person style works is that the audience can also watch a character. However, students have performed second-person and third-person style works quite successfully. What matters most is the story.

Selections of Prose can be found just about anywhere. Look through the short fiction anthologies at your local bookstore or library. If you come across an anthology that reads "Best Young Adult Nonfiction," you can safely guess that there is a good story or two contained within it. Read the first few pages of each short story. Does the style, character, or situation intrigue you? Read on. If not, then put it down. Then take a look at literary magazines, like *The Atlantic Review* or *The New Yorker*. Once you have found a few stories you're interested in, check out the memoir section. Do any of the

titles grab your attention? Read the synopsis on the back of the book, then read the first few pages to get a sense of the voice of the work and the conflict of the story. Is the language too difficult to immediately process? If you find yourself constantly rereading lines to discern their meaning, then it may not work for competition. Consider this: the audience will only hear you tell the story once.

Cutting a Selection for Prose

The process of cutting a Prose is very similar to the process of cutting other events. Despite the fact that OI involves the use of a binder, one must still cut a Prose with the performance in mind. The first step is to locate the story. In larger works like memoirs and novels, you will need to decide whether you are going to use a Spark Notes or Cameo Cutting. Remember, you do not have to tell the story of the entire work. You may only want to tell one of the stories. With short stories, you will usually be working with a Spark Notes cutting, trimming down unnecessary story details.

Unlike DI and HI, however, transitions through time and space can be easily indicated in Prose through the use of page turns. In general, page turns occur when there is a major shift in the work. This shift may be a shift in time. For example, the story may read: "I thought to myself, 'I just need to get some sleep, everything will be better in the morning.' The next morning things were much, much worse." There is a shift in time that occurs.

Time passes from evening to morning. Shifts in time that also involve space are also common in stories. For example, "My head felt like a brick on my pillow. I thought to myself, 'I just need to get some sleep, everything will be better in the morning.' The next morning in the lab things were much, much worse." Here there is a change in time and space. Since you are cutting with the performance in mind, determine where the page turns occur in your cutting. You may also incorporate a page turn on certain emotional shifts. For example, "She gave me a soft kiss on the cheek, squeezed my hand, and walked up her steps. *[page turn]* BEST DATE EVER!"

ANATOMY OF A POETRY PERFORMANCE

T .S. Elliot wrote, "Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood." The goal of Poetry as an event in forensics is to explore some truth about the human condition through poetry. Essentially, we communicate through poetry to understand the world. But what is poetry? The National Speech & Debate Association has a compelling definition of what constitutes poetry. "Poetry is writing which expresses ideas, experience, or emotion

> **Another performer could look at the same literature and see a different pattern while another might not see any pattern at all. That is the beauty of poetry. The interpretive possibilities are endless.**

through the creative arrangement of words according to their sound, their rhythm, their meaning." Poetry performance can be drawn from any work other than plays or dramatic material that meets this definition, so long as it meets the NSDA's publication requirements.

Script Selection/Program Construction

Unlike other events, Poetry can be a long, single work by a single author (like Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven") or a collection of works by a single author ("A Light in the Attic" by Shel

Silverstein). Poetry can also be a collection of poems by different authors that demonstrate an argument or theme. This final type, known as a **Poetry program**, has become increasingly ubiquitous in high school forensics.

The process of finding an interesting single work or collections of work by the same author is the same as finding literature for any other interpretation event. Comb through the poetry anthologies section at your local library or bookstore. Look through their literary journals. Determine if any poem or author speaks to you and seems performatively interesting. When searching for a long single poem, you want to find something that is dynamic. Does the work have some semblance of a story arch? Most of the time, longer poems have some sort of narrative. These are often called **talk poems** because they have prosaic story elements. Look for emotional levels and opportunities for striking creative choices. You need to read with the performance in mind, or else you'll wind up with a script that is static and dull. If you are planning on performing a single work by a single author, you need to make sure that the work is long enough. Remember, a final cutting of an Interp performance is around 1,200 words. If the work you've selected is nowhere near that, then the work is likely too short for this approach. If this is the case, consider finding other works by that author or using the work in a program.

If you are looking to perform a collection of poems by a single author and no particular

author "speaks to you," then go online. There are excellent websites and podcasts that feature new artists weekly. Once you find an artist you like, research them further. More often than not, poets publish collections of their works in small poetry collections or chapbooks. If you cannot find a poet's chapbook in the library or online, write an email to the author explaining who you are and what you do. Poets LOVE forensicators! You will be surprised how many poets were former competitors themselves and recognize that forensics is free promotion. Just ask if there is any way that you can read a published version of their work.

If, as you are reading poetry by various authors, you begin noticing recurring themes that speak to you, you may be inclined to construct a Poetry program. Programs are collections of work by various authors (anywhere between three and seven) that address a central argument or theme. For example, when I was a senior in high school, I read four works about individuals who experienced adversity, either by other individuals or by the nature of their circumstances. Mattie J. T. Stepanek was a young boy who suffered from a rare form of muscular dystrophy. John Townsend Trowbridge's work "The Vagabonds" is about a destitute man drowning his sorrows in a bar. Taylor Mali's, now heavily overdone, "What Learning Leaves" is about a teacher who is embarrassed by a lawyer's cocky confrontation at a dinner table when he is asked, "What teachers make?" The final poem,

also now heavily overdone, "The Wussy Boy Manifesto" by Big Poppa E, was about a young man bullied for being a geek. I noticed each of the characters had, or discovered, a great deal of pride in spite of their difficult circumstances. Stepanek spoke with a great deal of pride about "letting your heart sing." The Vagabond was extremely proud of his dog's ability to perform tricks. The teacher discovers a great deal of pride in his oft under-appreciated profession and simultaneously sticks it to the lawyer by saying, "You want to know what I make? I make a difference." The Wussy Boy discovers that, though he

INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE: *Bringing Words to Life*

may be physically weaker than his attackers, he takes pride in his wit and intelligence.

That's what the literature said to me. Another performer could look at the same literature and discover a different pattern while another might not find any pattern at all. That is the beauty of

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There is no one particular formula or structure to construct a program of poetry. What matters most is that there *is* structure.

Poetry. The interpretive possibilities are endless. When I read those poems, I got the sense that pride was all these characters had left. Growing up, I'd learned that pride was a bad thing, but through these works, I determined that pride could be a source of redemption. The theme of my program became "Redefining Pride."

Constructing a program can be a daunting challenge. Poetry is everywhere, so finding the right poems to suit your argument or theme can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. There are a number of ways to begin your search. I started by reading poems and then discovered my argument. Others begin with an argument and find works that address that argument. This can sometimes be extremely difficult. For example, if you learn about something on the news that bothers you and you want to construct a program about that issue, there may not be literature on that subject.

The easiest way is to start by reading poetry. If a poem reminds you of something you think about, something that makes you passionate, then use that poem as the foundation and build the program around it.

When you are compiling poems for a program, try to balance specificity and diversity. Each poem needs to address your particular topic in some way. If it does not, then the audience will be confused as to why it's there. However, there must also be levels to your program, so try to find a diversity of viewpoints on the theme or subject. You may, for example, want to include a character or poem that reflects the antithesis of your program's argument. Collect anywhere from three to seven poems that represent your argument. Now you're ready to cut.

Script Composition in Poetry Interpretation

Cutting a long poem by a single author is generally a simple process. Chunk the parts of the poem that are necessary to the arc of the work. This usually will not be difficult as most long poems (aside from epics) rarely exceed 3,000 words. Next, you whittle down the work. Remove the language that may be too difficult to understand. Remember, the audience will only hear the performance once. It is also be a good idea to remove vulgarity or hyper-sexual language from the work. Finally, make it cool. Keep the interesting moments that allow for creative performance decisions. Write where the page turns will take place. Is there a cool

moment where you can incorporate a more dynamic page turn or where the sound of the page turn can enhance the emotion of the text? Indicate that in your cutting.

Collections of work by a single author and programs are tricky. Think of a Poetry program like a documentary film. Consider how documentaries are put together. A documentarian collects interviews from different individuals speaking on the same subject. The documentarian then edits the interviews together, letting them build into the climax of the film. This editing process in program construction is known as **splicing** the work. In a documentary, each interviewee generally speaks on camera more than once. Their viewpoints build in relationship to the viewpoints of other interviewees. Your Poetry program can do the same thing by breaking up each work into two or three parts and splicing them together or having one work introduce a concept that is exemplified by the next. Consider the following example of a potential Poetry program format:

> **TEASER**
>
> *Poem #1 (15 seconds)*
>
> *Poem #2 (45 seconds)*
>
> *Poem #3 (20 seconds)*
>
> *Poem #1 (15 seconds)*
>
> **INTRODUCTION** *(30-45 seconds)*
>
> *Poem #4 (1 minute)*
>
> *Poem #3 (1 minute)*

> *Poem #1 (1 minute)*
>
> *Poem #2 (1 minute)*
>
> *Poem #4 (30 seconds)*
>
> **RISING ACTION**
>
> *Poem #3 [rising action] (30 seconds)*
>
> **CLIMAX**
>
> *Poem #1 [climax] (1 minute)*
>
> **FALLING ACTION**
>
> *Poem # 2 [falling action] (1 minute)*

Notice how each of the poems comes back more than once. That way, the different perspectives can speak or respond to one another. The program builds and builds until it reaches a climax. There is no one particular formula or structure to construct a program of Poetry. What matters most is that there is structure.

In general, the teaser will introduce the basic concept of the program and should introduce most of your central characters. These central characters will be **threaded** throughout the program, building the argument. Thread poems have a beginning, middle, and end. You may find a few short poems that perfectly exemplify the argument. We sometimes call these poems **bit poems** because they only show up once or twice. Bit poems are great for adding humor or an interesting technical moment to your program. Arrange the works so that they "speak" to each other. If the poems you have selected really exemplify your central theme, then chances are they will share certain

linguistic choices. Arrange the works so that each poem communicates with the previous. This can be a response, a reaction, or an addendum to their predecessors' argument.

Finally, consider the performance arc of your piece. Just because you are performing poetry doesn't mean that you get to ignore all of the things discussed in this book that make great performances. Humor is necessary, especially in the beginning. Sometimes, programs become too technical or too heavy, and this can be exhausting to listen to for ten minutes. Additionally, there should still be a type of performance arc similar to the energy of a dramatic arc. Many programs introduce some mechanism of frustration early in the performance, and have the theme "solve" the frustration by the end of the performance. The program should end with a sense of closure, a sense of resolution.

COMPOSING A PERFORMANCE FOR OI

One rule that frequently dictates the competition in a Prose round is that the performer

must maintain a **stationary position**. This means that the performer may not move about the room. The limits of this rule vary. Some rules limit movement to a small radius, and some rules dictate that one foot must remain in place. We advise that you read the tournament rules carefully before competing. Typically, the tool with which you will compose your performance is your upper body. Once again, the rules determining the lower body as a tool for interpretation vary; but, in the event that bending your knees is fair game, cross apply the strategies used for the upper body.

Your tools of interpretation for OI are very much the same as the other Interp events. The unit on performance composition intimately discusses these tools in entirety. The important thing to remember is, you are using your body to create images. Audience members and judges remember images. Considering this, do not be too quick to "put away" a gesture, psychological or expressive, literal or figurative, once you have made it. Hold the gesture. Hold the image. Then, rather than returning to a neutral position before the next gesture, move straight to it from the previous gesture position. I like to link these gestures together and, in succession, I call this a **hand journey**. Hand journeys can help the audience hang on your word, only move on with their attention when you command that of them. There is this instinct for young performers to put a gesture away after making it; however, every time you put your gesture away, you are releasing

the audience's attention. Be cognizant of the energy that a gesture can hold, and manipulate this energy with focus and purpose.

Hand journeys are a great addition to the Flip-Book system. Hand journeys are also especially effective when trying to communicate Poetry. Poetry is often written in a language that is not meant for conversation or oration. In deciphering the images of poems and applying expressive figurative gestures to them, we can communicate the emotion of a poem. Resist the urge to naturalize poetic language. Hand journeys can also be helpful in creating gesture motifs to represent rhythm, rhyme, and tempo.

Another distinction of OI performances is the use of voices and/or sound effects. In Prose, performances with these tools mirror DI and HI quite obediently, but in Poetry, voices can be manipulated in different ways. In delivering a long poem, a character must be created to deliver the poem, and the character should remain consistent. When performing multiple works, however, a performer will typically assign a character (voice and body mold) to each poem. You may also manipulate your voice within single poems in order to communicate different ideas. Ultimately, if you take the process one step at a time, and you never forget about your audience, and if you approach building your OI performance with the same tools discussed earlier in this text, you will find success as an Oral Interp competitor.