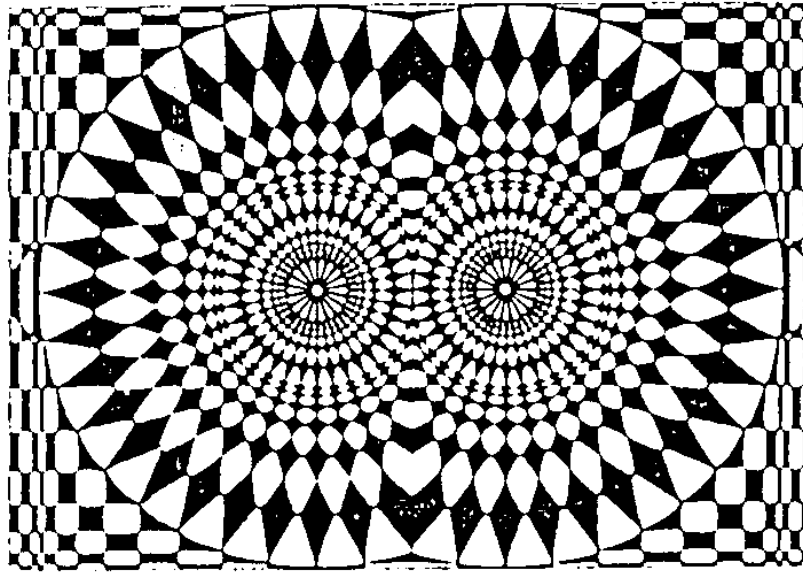


Grade Theory



a concise guide to
Irish Board
Grade theory



Irish Board of
Speech & Drama
www.irishboard.ie

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this concise guide is to give teachers and candidates an outline of the theory required for the Irish Board of Speech and Drama Grade examinations. While the contents provide a reasonable guide to the theory requirements, fuller and more comprehensive explanations are contained in the following publications available from the Irish Board:

Theory Can Be Fun by Audrey Meredith

Theory Notes for Speech and Drama Book 1 (for advanced and Associate Diploma students) by Deirdre Galassi and Imelda Byrne

Theory Notes for Speech and Drama Book 2 (for advanced and Licentiate Diploma students) by Deirdre Galassi and Imelda Byrne

The reason for learning theory is to gain an understanding of how things work in speech and drama. That is why we encourage teachers to teach theory in a way that helps their students to understand it.

The theory for each grade is therefore specially chosen to be consistent with the practical requirements of the grade.

We would prefer not to have to listen to candidates rattle off text book definitions of speech and drama theory. That is why we would like candidates to answer questions about theory by using examples from the pieces they have performed in the examination.

In the examinations, the theory will be asked in a straightforward manner and, if not answered correctly, the examiner might suggest an answer and move on to something else. The Candidate will never be made to feel foolish or inadequate.

We wish you the best of luck with your examinations and assure you of a sympathetic ear and an understanding of the sensibilities of each candidate.

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PRELIMINARY GRADES ONE and TWO

Answer simple questions about the poem and the meaning of the words

At the heart of communication is understanding and interpretation. The questions will be simple and, while we understand that Preliminary Grade candidates will be too young to have developed significant interpretive skills, the examiner will want to find out that the candidate knows what the poem is about and understands the meaning of the words.

GRADE ONE

- a. **Answer simple questions about the poem and the meaning of the words**
- b. **Give a one minute informal (not memorised) talk to the examiner about yourself**

a. Simple questions

Simple questions will be asked about the poem and also about the meaning of any unusual words contained in it. This is to make sure that the Candidate understands what he/ she is saying and has not just learnt the poem off by rote.

b. Informal talk

The purpose of the talk is to develop the idea of communication. The talk might be about the candidate's family, school, teacher, friends, hobbies, what he/she does in drama class, his/ her last holiday, favourite film, TV show and so on. We would like this to be a free-flowing talk, not a memorised speech.

In the 2008-09 syllabus we added an option for the candidate to bring a toy or a book into the examination room and make this the focus of the presentation.

GRADE TWO

- a. To bring an illustration and to discuss it.
- b. To know what the Organs of Speech are, be able to point them out to the examiner and understand their functions in forming sounds

a. The illustration

The purpose in asking for an illustration is to provide a 'focal point' for discussion. The Examiner will be looking for a natural explanation of the various aspects of the illustration and a real sense of communication. Although candidates are not marked on artistic ability, the illustration should be of a reasonable standard (not a scrap of paper which took two minutes on the day of the examination). Very beautiful illustrations executed by parents are also frowned upon! Thirty minutes to an hour - a decent piece of paper and a reasonable interpretation of the poem chosen will be required. Effective colouring adds interest to the work for all concerned.

b. The Organs of Speech

The organs of Speech are - the lips, the teeth, the tongue, the alveolar ridge, the hard palate, the soft palate. Good articulation is the correct formation of all the sounds which occur in speech. Accurate and crisp articulation is essential for good speech, especially of the consonant sounds. In order to articulate correctly it is necessary for a candidate to know what the Organs of Speech are, where they are situated, and their functions.

We would suggest that candidates practice different sounds in class and identify which organs of speech are being used. For example, in the word "elf", the tongue touches the alveolar ridge, and the teeth touch the lower lip.

GRADE THREE

Simple Pause – explain to the examiner where you took a sense pause, and where you took a breath pause in your poem.

Simple Pause

A pause is a short stop. When we stop to look into a shop window for a moment, and then walk on, we are pausing. In speech, we pause for several reasons. The main reasons for pausing are to **take a breath** and to **make the meaning clear**. We do not speak in a continual flow, but we divide our sentences up into phrases, by the use of pause.

We would like candidates to be able to explain this with reference to the poem that they have performed.

GRADE FOUR

- a. Give a simple definition of mime and explain to the examiner how you prepared your mime for the examination
- b. Explain to the examiner the importance of posture/ stance

a. Mime

Mime is telling a story or expressing an emotion with bodily movement and facial expression. Mime is a complete art form in itself and is not simply acting without words. Mime requires concentration, imagination, observation and application. A mime should be performed simply and accurately and each movement must be articulated so as to be clearly understood by the audience.

The main types of Mime are Occupational - Recreational - Story - Abstract - Pantomime Blanche - Classic Mime Gestures. Extensive rehearsal and preparation are needed.

(Candidates should be advised to keep their mimes simple, and to concentrate on technique and movement. Try not to give the Examiner too much to imagine. Unsuitable subjects are 'In the Supermarket', 'Mending a car'; 'Baking a Cake', 'Window Cleaning', 'Answering the Phone'.)

b. Posture/ stance

You should stand with your hands lightly to your side, the fingers slightly curled, one foot slightly ahead of the other and the weight evenly distributed between both feet. Your shoulders should not be raised, and your head should not be stretched forward. Correct posture/ stance is important for the following reasons:

- * it enables the candidate/ performer to relax
- * it assists in enabling the candidate/ performer to concentrate on the piece being performed
- * the adoption of an appropriate posture/ stance ensures that the candidate/ performer is discouraged from moving and causing a distraction
- * it ensures maximum visibility

GRADE FIVE

- a. **Tell the Examiner about the character in your solo and explain how your understanding of the character influenced your solo performance**
- b. **Using a few lines from the poem you recited, explain what it means to speak clearly, naturally and with good diction.**

a. The character in your solo

If possible, the Candidate should read the play or story from which their drama is taken.

In preparing for his/ her performance, the candidate should make out a chart listing relevant details about the character. e.g. fact or fiction, age, comedy or tragedy, type of person, period or modern setting. He/ she should pick out three main characteristics of the character and concentrate on these in his/ her acting.

Movement and facial expression should be in keeping with the character and should appear as part of the scene and not just be tacked on from the outside. This is called motivation. Gestures should be added for emphasis. The part should be thoroughly learned and rehearsed many times. The Candidate should concentrate on 'getting inside her part'.

The scene should have shape. Pace variation is necessary and is often overlooked.

b. Speaking clearly, naturally and with good diction

This requirement is meant as a simple introduction to the elements of good speech. We would like the candidate to have a basic understanding of the formation of vowel and consonant sounds, pronunciation, projection and enunciation, and to be able to give examples.

- * **A vowel** is an element of speech having free passage through the mouth and shaped by the tongue and lips.
- * **A consonant** is an element of speech made by the approximation or meeting of two organs of speech.
- * Good **pronunciation** means stressing the correct syllable(s) in a word, in accordance with common usage. If in doubt, use a good dictionary.
- * **Projection** is where you throw your voice to the back of the hall or room. You must think your voice UP AND OUT, thus using the mouth and the resonators at the back of the nose. to give you tone.
- * **Diction/Enunciation** is to use your organs of speech properly and to form all the sounds correctly. Saying 'dis' instead of 'this' is an example of faulty diction.
- * **Speaking naturally** simply means not distorting vowel sounds, not putting on an accent (unless required by the part), and not over-enunciating.

We expect candidates to be able to explain these concepts with reference to an extract of the poem they have recited.

GRADE SIX

- a. Explain how the term 'lyric' came about, and explain how lyric poetry differs from narrative poetry.
- b. Referring to your performance of the pieces above, describe the importance of diction, projection, fluency, sincerity, pronunciation, and breath control.
- c. Explain the technique used for sight reading

a. The Lyric

A lyric is a musical poem, which was originally (long ago) spoken to the accompaniment of the lyre. That is why, even now, the words of any song are called lyrics.

The lyric is a short, subjective poem which expresses the poet's feelings on a particular subject or emotion. We do not want this explanation to be trotted out at an examination. We would encourage Candidates to read lyrics by famous poets such as Yeats, Wordsworth etc. Then they might give their own definition.

In most lyrics, the arrangement of sounds provides the musicality and often the sound is more important than the sense. This is the key difference between a lyric and a narrative poem which, of course, tells a story.

In all lyric speaking, the speaker must put him/herself in the role of the 'instrument interpreting the thoughts of the poet' rather than imposing his/ her personality on the piece. The musicality of the words and delicacy of thought must be observed. No lyric should be dramatised vocally – the lyric flow and restraint must be maintained. Avoid the use of breathy tone.

b. The importance of diction, projection, fluency, sincerity, pronunciation, and breath control

This requirement is designed to develop the candidate's knowledge of the elements of 'good speech' which were introduced in Grade 5.

- * **Diction** (enunciation) and **pronunciation** have been dealt with in Grade 5
- * **Projection** is simply thinking the voice up and out and making sure that it can be heard by all of your audience.
- * **Fluency** is being able to speak without hesitating or using thinking sounds ('eh', 'em', 'like', 'you know', and so on).
- * **Sincerity** is to speak in such a way as to mean what you are saying. In dramatic terms, you will need to act as if you mean what you are saying!
- * **Breath control** is critical for effective speaking. The breathing method used for voice production is explained later on. However, here we want candidates to understand that breath is the motive power of speech, and that correct breathing and breath control has a significant effect on the clarity and fluency of speech. Candidates should be aware of where in a piece they should breathe, and why, and should be able to explain this to the examiner.

c. Sight Reading technique

When you receive the piece you will usually be given a minute or so to look at it. Glance down the entire passage, not reading every word, but taking in the overall mood and content. Pay particular attention to the opening paragraph, the closing paragraph, whether or not you have to turn a page, the content, if there are any difficult words, if there is dialogue.

Hold the piece to one side of you, and about six inches below your shoulder line (so as not to obscure your face).

Now, starting more slowly than you would like, you must see that your eye is always at least half a line ahead of your voice. You should announce the name of the book, or the heading of the passage, and the author, if any.

After this you may look down for a second to assimilate the first half line. Then, taking a deep breath, start. Make sure that your voice is carrying to the back of the room or hall, and speak slowly and distinctly, and in the overall mood of the piece.

If you are in any way fussed, do not bother to look up at this stage,. Now, two things to remember not to do. First, DON'T count to yourself at commas and full stops. This is unnecessary as the mood of the piece will dictate your pace and pausing. And it may be completely different from sentence to sentence. Secondly, DON'T dart little fleeting glances at the audience and then bury your nose in the book once more. When you look up, you should do so for sufficient time to establish contact with your audience. If you are looking half-a-line ahead, you should be able to look up for the last half line in a sentence or paragraph. Then look down in silence, and when you have assimilated half a line, continue.

If you speak slowly, you will not be surprised by an unfamiliar word, but if you are – just attempt it and go on. Don't stammer over it and try it again.

GRADE SEVEN

- a. Discuss the play from which the performed extract was chosen and its author with the examiner.
- b. Discuss with the examiner the history and uses of improvisation.
- c. Explain emphasis, giving examples of emphasis techniques used in the pieces performed

a. Discuss the play and author

To have read a play by an Irish author does not mean getting out a DVD of the film of the play. It will be essential for the Candidate to have read a play in script form. The objective is to encourage young people to read more widely. Reading a play gives one insights into how one might portray a character from words on a page, instead of doing a poor imitation of someone you have seen on the screen or on video. It also opens up another branch of Irish literature. The examiner is likely to want to know what the candidate liked about the play and why, rather than hear a précis of the plot, so make sure you discuss the play in class.

b. Improvisation

Towards the end of the 16th century and in the 17th century, groups of strolling players traversed Italy and France in the guise of Harlequin, Pantaloon, Columbine and other characters. These groups were known as the Commedia Dell'Arte, and they improvised each performance to a theme given just before the show. These themes followed a familiar pattern - Columbine loves Harlequin, but poor Pierrot loves Columbine. Comics were introduced into the action at given places, and they performed their special acts - just as nowadays we have speciality acts in our pantomimes. At the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, the Moscow Art Theatre, under the direction of Stanislavski, introduced improvised situations into rehearsal in order to come to a closer and more comprehensive understanding of the character to be played.

IMPROVISATION consists of being given a situation and then acting out what might happen, using one's imagination, vocabulary, command of language and acting ability to flesh out the scene. Improvisations can be solo or group. Improvisation or Creative Drama can be used also to come to a better understanding of a character one is studying.

You can improvise a scene leading up to the script and so gain insights into what makes the character 'tick'. Improvisational exercises are often given at auditions and should form an important part of training for any Speech and Drama student. Plays may be made up from improvisations and indeed many plays started out as simple improvisations. Group improvisations help imagination, team work, quickness of thought and reaction.

c. Emphasis

Emphasis means giving a word or phrase extra importance. We do this by:

- * stressing the word or phrase with tone or volume
- * pausing before and/ or after a word or phrase
- * using gesture (not in poetry speaking)

The examiner will want to hear/ see examples of how emphasis was used in the candidate's performance.

GRADE EIGHT

- a. Explain pitch, pace, pause and tone with reference to their use in the poem and drama selection performed
- b. Explain the mechanics and importance of projection

a. Pitch, pace, pause and tone

This is a question about some of the elements of 'modulation'. Modulation is the pleasing arrangement of the voice by means of various technical devices. Modulation adds interest and variety to the spoken word. Modulation consists of pause, emphasis, change of pace, change of pitch, inflection, tone colour, power and intensity. The secret of good modulation is to conceal its use. All should appear natural but the above aids must be brought into play in a subtle way to enhance the piece.

- * **Pitch** is where your voice falls on the musical scale and is usually described as being high, middle or low. It is important to vary your pitch in order to sustain an audience's interest. Varying your pitch means changing the note on which you speak. You would do this to reflect different moods or voices in a passage and to ensure that you do not speak in a monotone or that you do not begin each sentence at the same pitch. You should practice pitch variation in order to increase your vocal range, and make your speaking more versatile.
- * **Pace** refers to the speed at which a piece is spoken. If you speak too fast, your audience won't be able to absorb or understand what you are saying. If you speak too slowly, they'll get bored. So you need to ensure that you speak at an appropriate pace for the piece being performed. A key concept in speech and drama is **pace variation**, where you may speak some phrases, passages or dialogue at a faster or slower pace to reflect its mood and to add dramatic interest.
- * A **pause** is a short stop. In speech the main reasons for pausing are to **take a breath** and to **make the meaning clear**. However, there are other reasons for pausing. If we pause slightly before a word, this is called a **dramatic pause**. e.g. But he was / dead! If the meaning of a line of poetry spills over to the next line, we use a **suspensive pause**. We do not inhale during a suspensive pause. In Church, when we are asked 'Have you sinned to-day?', we are not expected to jump up and say 'Yes' or 'No'. This is called a rhetorical question, and the priest pauses for us to examine our souls. This is called a **rhetorical pause**. In speeches sometimes we use **oratorical pauses** to emphasise phrases or words (see Emphasis, Grade 7).
- * **Tone** results from the resonance we obtain by thinking our voices up and out, using the resonators - the pharynx, the mouth, and the nasal cavities. When we say CHANGE OF TONE, we really mean **TONE COLOUR**. Tone colour is achieved by thinking of the emotion or mood of the passage, concentrating upon it and then getting it into the voice.

b. Projection

PROJECTION is simply thinking the voice up and out and making sure that it can be heard by all of your audience. Projection requires good breath control, clear articulation, appropriate pacing and an awareness of the space and the people furthest from you. It is not achieved by forcing your voice or shouting. Practice speaking in different size rooms with somebody else listening and giving you feedback.

GRADE NINE

- a. Describe the method of breathing used for voice production and demonstrate it to the examiner
- b. Explain how to prepare a dramatic selection for performance, with reference to the scene performed during the examination

a. Breathing

INTERCOSTAL DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING is the method of breathing used for Voice Production. Between the ribs are the intercostal muscles. The diaphragm is a double-domed muscle which forms the floor of the thorax or chest and the roof of the abdomen. We inhale through the mouth and nose. The air passes down the trachea or wind-pipe. The wind pipe divides into the bronchial tubes which enter the lungs about a third of the way down. The tubes subdivide into the bronchioles and then into the alveoli, or small air passages, which give the lungs their sponge-like texture. The air rushes in to equalise the pressure and the intercostal muscles expand, thus forcing the rib cage up and out. The diaphragm, which is attached to the breastbone, flattens and moves down, thus we have maximum room for the air to fill the lungs.

In order to control exhalation we gradually relax the intercostals muscles. Remember, there is always some residual breath in the lungs but we should never try to speak when the lungs are almost empty. When we breathe out, the air passes up into the larynx or voice box and vibrates the vocal cords, thus forming sound. This is shaped by the organs of speech.

b. Preparing a dramatic selection for performance

Effectively this is a repeat of the requirement for Grade 5. However, examiners will expect a more detailed and comprehensive description and discussion of how the candidate prepared for his/ her exam performance, with particular emphasis on how the character was established and developed, and using examples from the script.

Remember acting usually involves pretending that the audience is eavesdropping on something that is actually happening, so the actor should pretend that she/ he cannot see the audience. At the same time she/ he must be aware of the pulse of the audience. His/ her timing will depend on this, and also on their reactions. Some modern drama encourages direct confrontation with the audience.

GRADE TEN

- a. **Discuss your recital with the examiner, including the reasons why you chose your pieces, what the theme or author means to you, and how you prepared the pieces for performance**
- b. **Explain the mechanics and importance of resonance in speech**
- c. **Discuss with the examiner the techniques you might use to sustain an audience's interest in a talk**

a. Recital

A recital gives a candidate the opportunity to explore, through the medium of verse, prose and drama, a theme or the works of an author. The glue which holds the pieces together is the introduction and linking script. *The introduction is vitally important.* It must make it very clear to the audience the topic, theme or author chosen, and why the choice has been made. At the end of each piece, (which of course may be shortened or edited to fit the time limit) the candidate should pause and speak a sentence or two which develops the theme and serves to place the next piece in context. A sentence or two of conclusion, with perhaps an apposite quotation would help to round off the piece.

b. Resonance

Resonance refers to the enlargement of the basic vocal tone in the resonators – the hollow cavities – in the neck and head. The note produced by the vibration of the vocal chords is modified by the resonators, particularly the pharynx (throat), mouth, nose and sinuses. The importance of resonance is that it enhances the quality and fullness of vocal tone, and makes the voice more pleasing to listen to. In the examination, the candidate will be expected to demonstrate how resonance affects vocal tone.

c. Sustaining an audience's interest in a talk

The key to sustaining an audience's interest in a talk is to create a connection between you and the audience. This is created through clarity, rapport and the use of speech and vocal technique.

- * **Clarity:** be clear on the topic being addressed and enable the audience to follow the sequence of your talk with a clear introduction, a middle section in which the talk is developed, and a conclusion which draws the talk to a satisfactory close.
- * **Creating a rapport:** stand straight, relax, make eye contact with your listeners. Don't distract with fussy dress, overuse of hand gestures, or by pacing up and down. Don't read your talk. If you must use aides memoire, use them sparingly
- * **Speech and vocal technique:** speak fluently, confidently, naturally and at a pace at which your audience can follow and absorb what you are saying. Vary your volume, pace and tone to create interest. Use rhetorical, dramatic and oratorical pausing. Emphasise key words and phrases. Don't learn your talk off by heart.

GRADE ELEVEN

- a. Explain the techniques of period movement in acting
- b. Discuss your vocal development technique with the examiner, concentrating on vowel sounds, consonant sounds, and breath control
- c. Discuss the importance of gesture in mime or movement to music

a. Period Movement

A close study of period movement is advised in preparation for this requirement, and outline guidance only can be provided here. The movement required for acting any period piece must be worked out with reference to the setting/ environment of the play, the clothes worn at the time, the social standing of the character. Your study should include - gesture, posture, manners, use of the fan or other accessories, bows/ curtsies and other formalities observed, the shape and weight of costume/ restriction of undergarments, and so on.

b. Vocal Development Technique

Vocal development techniques involve breathing correctly, learning/ practicing the skills of modulation and of speaking clearly. You should be able to explain the correct method of breathing for voice production (see Grade 9). You should also be familiar with the elements of modulation (see Grade 8), and be able to explain how each element can be practised and developed. In addition, you should have a good knowledge of the formation of vowel and consonant sounds, and understand and be able to explain with examples their importance to clear speech.

c. Gesture

In any form of dramatic activity, gesture is important because it enhances a performance and adds emphasis to its content. In mime or movement to music, where the spoken word is absent, gesture (made with any part of your body) takes on a special importance. In effect, gesture provides the way in which meaning is communicated to the audience.

Technically, gesture needs clarity and articulation – in other words, it must be unambiguous, and have a beginning, middle and end. Because you are communicating with an audience which generally is some distance away, your gestures need to be larger than normal.

Artistically, gesture will convey your interpretation of the content of the piece you are performing. It must reflect your feelings, your pace, the mood you are trying to convey. In order to achieve this, your gesture must be motivated from within, otherwise it will appear stilted and unnatural.

FINAL GRADE

- a. **Explain to the examiner how to prepare a poem or prose selection for performance with particular reference to the poem or prose selection performed during the examination**
- b. **Explain how to choreograph a piece of movement to music**
- c. **The examiner will initiate a discussion on any aspect(s) of the theory requirements outlined in the Grade Syllabus**

a. Preparing a poem or prose selection for performance

The key to interpreting a poem or prose selection for performance is to create an understanding of the piece. Read it carefully. If it is an extract, read the whole story or poem. Find out about the author and read other literature written by him/ her. Look for imagery, symbolism and figures of speech and the piece.

Consider the structure. For poetry, look at its line structure, its metre, rhyme scheme and punctuation. For prose, look at sentence construction, word patterns, phrasing and dialogue.

Develop a feel for the mood of the piece and work out how that mood can be conveyed to your audience, through tone, inflection, pace, pause, breathing, emphasis and facial expression.

Try out different ways of speaking the piece in class or at home. Ask your teacher or family members to listen to you. Use a tape recorder and listen to yourself.

Your aim in poetry speaking should be to enhance the poet's intention and not impose your own personality. Modulation and a sense of speaking rhythmically should be observed. Communicate with your audience.

Prose speaking should hold the audience enthralled. You must bring them into the story by using plenty of tone colour, pace variation, pause and eye contact.

b. Choreographing a piece of movement to music

Choose a piece of music with a story or a very strong mood. Listen to some of the words and evolve a loose structure for the whole ensuring that there is a beginning, middle and end. Choose movement and steps which will evoke the mood or theme and develop them in the context of the whole. Enhance your movement with gesture and facial expression. Ask your teacher or other members of your class to look at it at this stage, concentrating on the patterns and pictures created by your movement and the clarity of your communication of the story or theme. Ask for suggestions. Refine the piece. Rehearse well, devise costumes, make-up etc.

If working with a junior group, you will need to choreograph the piece fully in private - setting down the steps and patterns on paper with the beat and words clearly marked on one side and the patterns on the other. If working with an experienced group, choreograph it collaboratively. Take turns to step outside the performance and evaluate how it is shaping up.