



Grade and Proficiency Theory Guidelines

for

Irish Board of Speech & Drama Examinations

from September 2026

Originally compiled by
Deirdre Galassi FTCL and Finola Ryan FIBSD

INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been compiled to give some guidance to teachers and candidates on the theory requirements of the Irish Board of Speech & Drama Grade Syllabus

It doesn't claim to be a complete or exhaustive theory book. In any case, students will always benefit from looking at other sources for the items covered in this booklet, and from deepening their knowledge of the theoretical background to the art that they practice.

None of this book is meant to be learned off by heart. The theory requirements in the syllabus have been carefully paired with performance elements so that candidates are encouraged to understand the techniques that they have been taught to put into practice in their performance. Examiners will expect that candidates will display this understanding in their responses and, where appropriate, will explain the theory with reference to the pieces that they have performed.

Good luck in your exams.

Published by
Irish Board of Speech & Drama
www.irishboard.ie
www.dramabooks.ie

© Deirdre Galassi and Finola Ryan 2014, 2017, 2022

PRELIMINARY GRADE ONE

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short poem
2. Answer simple questions about the poem, and the meaning of the words.

PRELIMINARY GRADE TWO

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short poem
2. Tell the examiner the story of the poem in your own words.

From the earliest age, we expect candidates to understand that poems are stories, descriptions or reflections. In this Grade, we want the candidate to tell us the story of the poem she/he performed in a few sentences.

GRADE ONE

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short poem.
2. Tell the examiner the story of the poem in your own words.
3. Give a one-minute informal talk about yourself OR a toy/book that you have brought to the examination (the talk should not be memorised)

The **Informal Talk** about oneself should be conversational, and not just a list of likes and dislikes. Speaking about family, school and leisure activities should sustain the talk for the required time, but the examiner will prompt the candidate if necessary if he/she gets stuck.

GRADE TWO

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short poem.
2. Give a short (about one minute) presentation on the poem performed using an illustration (drawing, painting, model or collage) made by you on the story, characters and/or on the theme of the poem, and be prepared to discuss the poem and illustration with the examiner.
3. Theory: List the organs of speech, identify their locations and be able to identify the organs of speech used to make common sounds (such as M, P, B, K, L and Th)

For **requirement 2**, we expect the candidate to hold the illustration so that the examiner can see it, and to speak about it, pointing out elements that correspond with parts of the poem. This is less about the illustration (although we expect that it has been executed carefully and with imagination) than about the presentation. The presentation should be structured and should be delivered clearly and expressively.

The examiner will expect the candidate to be able to list the **Organs of Speech**, describe accurately their locations and to know which ones are used to make common sounds.

The **Organs of Speech** are used in the formation of sounds and the list we use comprises:

- the *Tongue*
- the *Teeth*
- the *Lips*
- the *Hard Palate* (the roof of the mouth)
- the *Soft Palate* (if you touch the tip of your tongue to the Hard Palate, then slide it as far back as it will go, you will touch the Soft Palate)
- the *Alveolar Ridge* (behind the top front teeth)

GRADE THREE

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short poem.
2. Announce and read a short (approximately 10-12 lines) prepared extract from a book of your choice, and be able to carry on a short conversation about the book with the examiner.
3. Theory:
 - a. Give a simple definition of a Vowel and a Consonant.
 - b. Define a Pause, and demonstrate your understanding of the breath pause and the sense pause by explaining where and why you took these pauses in either your poem or prose performance.

A **vowel** is an element of speech having a free passage through the mouth, and is shaped by the varying positions of the Tongue and Lips.

A – E – I – O – U are the Five Vowel signs. (There are about eighteen vowel *sounds*.)

A **Consonant** is an element of speech which is stopped or interrupted.

B, P, D are examples of consonants. These do not have free passage through the mouth. The candidate should be able to identify **how** simple consonant sounds are stopped or interrupted.

Pause: The examiner will expect the candidate to be able to show where, in either her poem or reading, she took a breath pause and a sense pause, and to explain why.

A pause is a stop. We pause to take a *breath*. And we pause to make *sense* at punctuation marks, for example, commas and full stops, to make the meaning clear and to add atmosphere to what we are saying.

Example of a **Breath Pause** in *The Furry Home* by J Westrup

*If I were a mouse
And wanted a house, (Breath pause)*

And a **Sense Pause:**

*I think I would choose
my new Red shoes.'*

(**Sense pause after 'shoes'**, because the next line '*Furry edges ...*' goes on to talk about the inside of the shoes.)

Example of a **Breath** and **Sense Pause** in prose (Extract from the fable '*The Mouse and the Lion*' (moral of the Fable – 'One good turn deserves another')

'At first, the Mouse did not realise she had run on to a Lion. (Breath pause) But, as she ran over his wet nose, (Sense pause, because the next part is about the lion rather than the mouse) the Lion woke up, lifted his paw and clamped it down on her tail'.

Further notes on vowels and consonants

The following is extra information and not required for the examination:

Vowels give roundness, firmness and carrying power to our voice.

Consonants make our speech crisp and give clarity to our sounds.

Labials are formed by the Lips: P, B, M, W, WH.

Labio-Dentals are formed by the contact of the Upper Teeth with the Lower Lip: F.V.

Lingua-Dentals are formed by the contact of the Tip of the Tongue with the Gums of the Upper Teeth: T, D, TH, DH.

Lingua-Palatals are formed by the contact of the Tongue and the Hard or Soft Palate: CH, J, K, G (Gun), R (smooth as in Are), L, S, Z, SH (as in Shy), N and NG (Nasal sounds formed by the Soft Palate).

H and Y are called the Orals because they are neither fully Vowel nor Consonant.

GRADE FOUR

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short poem.
2. Announce and perform a one-minute story mime of your choice
3. Theory:
 - a. Explain to the examiner, using examples from your poem, what it means to speak expressively
 - b. Define mime
 - c. Be able to explain character mime and story mime

Speaking Expressively means varying your tone, pitch, volume and pace in order to enhance the meaning of the words you are speaking.

This is important because it helps you to interpret the words of poems, prose, plays, and text generally, in order to convey the author's meaning, and the mood/atmosphere of the selection, and to entertain your audience.

Speaking expressively does not come automatically to most people. They need to work at it through study, exercises and practice.

Mime is presenting a story, character, activity or emotion, using movement, gesture and facial expression. (There are different, equally valid, definitions of mime.)

Character Mime: presenting a convincing character in mime, for example an old woman or a beggar

Story Mime: telling a complete story through mime, for example a burglary, a tightrope performance, being stood up, Red Riding Hood, the Stages of Life, and so on

Further notes on Mime

The following will not be examined but are useful for the candidate to know both for the preparation of the candidate's performance and for general background.

Other types of mime are Traditional Mime (based on the traditions of the Commedia dell'Arte), clowning, and pantomime.

A convincing mime performance requires research, practice, concentration and the exercise of control over one's movement, gestures and facial expression. Clarity and simplicity are important.

When miming a character, the candidate must be aware of his/her age, social position, body shape and movement characteristics.

ALWAYS announce the title of your mime. (The examiner will want to give her full concentration to the performance of the mime and not be distracted by trying to guess what it's about.)

A story mime must have a plot and dramatic shape; in other words, a beginning, middle and end. The plot must be clear and easy to follow. If your audience doesn't understand or can't follow it, then your mime will not have been successful.

When manipulating objects, the candidate should remember that all objects occupy space, have weight and, often, resistance. For example, if you are opening a door towards you, remember the door may be locked (in which case you'll have to turn a key), that the handle (which may be stiff) has a shape, that the door may be heavy or may offer resistance, and that you'll have to represent the arc of the door opening and probably stand back to give it space. When you bounce a ball, remember that it takes time to reach the floor, more time to get back up to your hand and that when you catch it, you'll need to represent its size (is it a tennis ball or a basketball?) and weight. The more accurately you can represent these elements, the more convincing your mime will be.

As with all dramatic activities, pace and pause are important. Take your time and articulate your movements clearly. Pause between each section or scene of the mime, and to add punctuation, dramatic tension and emphasis.

Remember that you do not have your voice to convey emotion and therefore your audience must see the emotion in your body and, especially, on your face. Remember to make sure that your face is visible to the audience for the maximum period of time during your performance.

At the conclusion of the mime, freeze for a second or two, then turn your back to the examiner for another couple of seconds. NEVER say 'That's it!'

GRADE FIVE

Requirements:

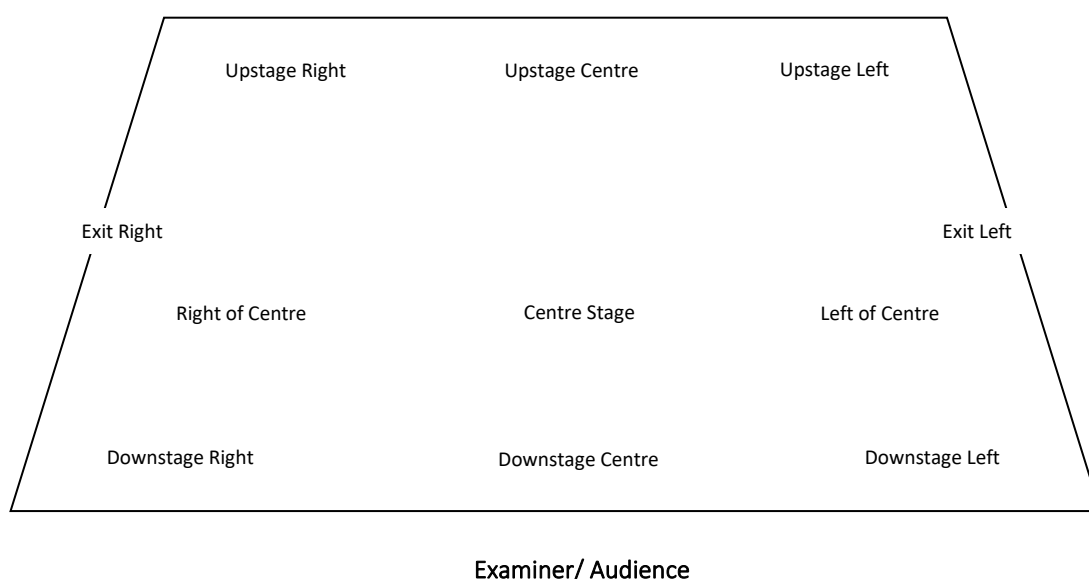
1. Speak from memory a short poem.
2. Announce and perform a solo dramatic selection using appropriate characterisation and movement (maximum time permitted: two minutes)
3. Theory:
 - a. Bring to the exam a character chart or similar and, using it, describe and discuss the character you performed in your dramatic solo
 - b. Follow simple stage directions.

In order to be able to describe the **Character**, the candidate will need to be familiar with the story, book or play from which the character is taken, the position of the character in the story and the relationship of the candidate's character to others. If the selection is a stand-alone piece, then the nature of the character, if not immediately obvious from the text, should be discussed between teacher and student.

The candidate is required to bring into the examination room a **character chart** or similar item. This should include name, age, social position, family and other relationships, period, clothing, movement style, any manners and so on.

It should also identify elements of the character that need to be conveyed to the audience. For example, Toad (from *Wind in the Willows*) is selfish, boastful and adventurous. Anne (from *Anne of Green Gables*) is dramatic, loyal and warm-hearted. Joan of Arc in George Bernard Shaw's *St Joan* is heroically courageous and deeply spiritual. Sometimes these characteristics are not immediately obvious from the selection to be performed and therefore some background research (or imagination) is required.

Stage Directions



GRADE SIX

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short poem by an Irish poet.
2. Announce and perform a solo dramatic selection, using appropriate characterisation and movement (maximum time permitted: two minutes)
3. Read at sight a poem chosen by the examiner (one minute will be given for preparation).
4. Theory:
 - a. Discuss the meaning and mood of the poem with the examiner.
 - b. Define and demonstrate pitch and vocal projection.
 - c. Explain to the examiner how you used the minute given to you to prepare your sight reading exercise, and how to sight read so that your audience can best appreciate the poem you read.

Meaning and Mood of the Poem: The examiner will need to know that the candidate understands what his/her poem is about and how that might be discerned from the poet's words. In studying the poem, it is useful to know something about the poet, his/her life and other work, and any favourite themes or topics that he/she tended to concentrate on. Often some very simple research will throw light on why the poet wrote a particular poem at a particular time, or will provide some background of the subject of the poem or the mood of the poet.

To take an example, WB Yeats's '*An Irish Airman Foresees His Death*', although written in the first person, was actually written about Lady Gregory's only child, Major Robert Gregory, who was a pilot, and who was killed in the final year of the First World War. Like many aviators at that time, when flying was a pioneering activity and a lot more dangerous and risky than it is now, Major Gregory loved to fly, and this love of flying transcended his desire to serve a political cause. Knowing that the poem is about a real person known to Yeats makes the poem and its subject more real and is useful in interpreting this poem for public performance.

Pitch refers to where one's voice falls on the musical scale. We all have a natural pitch, the note of which depends principally on the length and thickness of our vocal chords. (To find your middle pitch you can say a sustained '*ahhh*' in your natural conversational tone and try to find the corresponding note on a piano.)

Pitch tends to be categorised as middle, high and low.

- *Middle* is used for general conversation, prose and verse speaking.
- *High* to convey excitement, some anger, emotional stress, terror and so on.
- *Low* for deep anger, sorrow, despair or conspiracy.

Vocal Projection refers to the technique involved in achieving audibility by controlling particularly the volume and clarity of your voice. In simple terms, this means the way you use your voice in order to be heard clearly from any part of the theatre or auditorium in which you are speaking or acting. To use an analogy, in a cinema the film is projected from the back of the auditorium and appears clear and bright on the screen at the front. In the

same way, a properly projected voice should appear clear and bright at the back of the theatre.

Projection involves the use of both mental and physical processes. Mentally you need to be aware of your audience – you are speaking to all of them. Direct your speech particularly to the person furthest away from you. Mentally project your voice UP and OUT. Physically, projection is achieved through a combination of proper breathing, appropriate posture or stance and the use of forward tone – where the voice is not constricted by your throat and is allowed to resonate in the various cavities in your neck and head.

Projection is never achieved through shouting. Shouting distorts the voice and narrows its range. Rather, projection is about ensuring that the words that you speak can be heard clearly.

Sight Reading in General

Use the time given for preparation to glance over the text before starting. Try to take in the overall mood and content. Pay particular attention to the opening and closing paragraphs. Do you have to turn a page? Are there any difficult words or dialogue?

When you're ready to start, adopt a balanced posture/stance. Hold the book page so that it doesn't hide your face. A little lower than your face and slightly to the side is best, as it allows you to face the audience and still read the text with minimal head movement.

Announce clearly the title of the Book and Author (try to do this directly to the audience, without reading it). Start slowly, and let your eye run ahead of your voice.

Don't read too quickly. Remember that the audience will not be as familiar with the story or characters as you are and you need to give them the opportunity to follow the story.

Try to reflect the mood(s) of the text in your voice, vary your pace and don't forget to use the pause. Try to use characterisation in your voice for any dialogue.

Try to make audience contact – each member of the audience should feel that you are speaking to them. However, fluency is more important than eye contact with the audience and darting your eyes up to the audience and straight back to the page is distracting.

If you come across a difficult word, attempt it and go on – never stop or apologise - just keep going.

Try and keep your voice strong to the final word.

To summarise:

- Glance over the piece
- Announce the title of the Book or Poem and Author. (Do not read it)
- Watch your posture.
- Vary the rate – but, overall, speak slowly.
- Look up and make audience contact – hold the book away from your face.
- Use characterisation, if required, e.g. the voice of the Giant in 'The Selfish Giant'.
- Tell the story clearly and with vocal and facial expression.
- Be natural and sincere
- Give it your best shot – don't stop

When **Sight Reading a Poem**, try to let it flow and tell the story of the poem to your audience. Watch out for the suspensive pause or enjambment, that is, when the sense of one line is carried, without a break, but with a slight upward inflection to the next line.

Example:

*'The night was creeping on the ground.
She crept and did not make a sound
until she reached the tree; and
then –'
(‘Check’ by James Stephens)*

- Pause between the Verses or Stanzas.
- Never put emphasis on a conjunctive or unimportant word.
- Try to paint word-pictures.
- Make audience contact (i.e. look up from the book occasionally) and speak at a suitable pace.

Further notes on clear speaking:

Any performance will be enhanced by Crisp Diction, Projection, Fluency, Sincerity, Correct Pronunciation and Breath Control. We must speak clearly so that we can be heard and understood.

Diction: Do Lip and Tongue exercises daily.

Fluency is to verbalize your thoughts without hesitation.

Sincerity - To mean what you say. It is important to be natural and sincere, as well as having technique and artistry.

Breath Control: Breath is the motive power of speech. If breath is weak – the sound will be weak. Do Breathing exercises daily, e.g. stretch to the ceiling and yawn. You will feel the Diaphragm rising.

Correct Pronunciation is most desirable. If in doubt, consult a Dictionary. For example:

Any is pronounced *Enny*

Many is pronounced *Menny*

Been is pronounced *Bin*

Often is pronounced *Of - en* ('T' is silent)

Sacrifice is pronounced *Sak – rih – fysse*

Father rhymes with *Rather*

GRADE SEVEN

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a poem of your own choice.
2. Announce and perform a solo dramatic selection taken, adapted or compiled from a play or book, using appropriate characterisation and movement. (Maximum time permitted two minutes.)
3. Announce and perform a two-minute mime, prepared by you OR a short piece of movement to music choreographed by you (you are responsible for supplying any equipment you require for your performance).
4. Theory:
 - a. Describe in detail your understanding of the character you performed and how your chosen character fits into the plot of the play or book.
 - b. Define inflection and explain the meaning and uses of a simple rising inflection and a simple falling inflection.
 - c. Define mime and be able to explain character mime, story mime, occupational mime, and pantomime blanche.

For the discussion of **Character**, see the theory guidance for **Grade Five**. In Grade Seven, however, we also want the candidate to understand that her/his character exists in a context (period, time, relationships with other characters, atmosphere) and to be able to explain what that context is and how it affects the character and the candidate's performance.

Inflection is the upward and downward glide or slide of the voice. 'Glide' or 'slide' is the important word here. Inflection is not simply a change in pitch, although it involves a change in pitch. It is the glide that conveys meaning. Inflection is a key aspect of vocal modulation.

Try saying 'What have you done?', gliding your voice, first upwards and then say it again, but this time glide your voice downwards in pitch. You will hear that the two glides convey very different meanings.

A **simple rising inflection** is used when we ask a question (e.g. What? or How do you feel?). In verse speaking, it is used on the first word of a stanza or any new thought within the stanza. Also, when we have a suspensive pause or enjambment, the sense of one line is carried to the next line with a slight upward inflection.

A **simple falling inflection** denotes completeness, conclusion, assurance, assertion and command. Try saying 'No' with a downward glide and see what it conveys. Now try 'I want you to go now' with a falling inflection. Remember that, although many people now end sentences with an American style upward inflection, it is the downward inflection that denotes completeness and conclusion.

Mime is presenting a story, character, activity or emotion, using movement, gesture and facial expression. (There are different, equally valid, definitions of mime.)

Character Mime: presenting a convincing character in mime, for example an old woman or a beggar

Occupational Mime: presenting an activity or occupation, for example fixing a car, performing surgery, bathing a dog

Story Mime: telling a complete story through mime, for example a burglary, a tightrope performance, being stood up, Red Riding Hood, the Stages of Life, and so on

Abstract Mime: representing a feeling, emotion, force or other abstract thing (for example a colour) through mime

Pantomime Blanche: drawing an object in space and then using it, for example a hat or a mirror.

GRADE EIGHT

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short lyric.
2. Announce and perform a solo dramatic selection taken, adapted or compiled from a Play of literary merit, using appropriate characterisation, interpretation and movement (maximum time permitted: two minutes)
3. Announce and perform a one-minute unprepared Improvisation chosen from a list provided by the examiner in the examination room (one minute will be given for preparation)
4. Theory:
 - a. Define the lyric and discuss the mood and meaning of the lyric you performed.
 - b. Define rate and pace and demonstrate, with reference to your solo dramatic selection, how you used pace and pace variation to enhance your performance.
 - c. Define and demonstrate, using examples, the use of the following pauses: the suspensive pause, the emphatic pause and the Caesural pause.

A **Lyric** is a short subjective poem expressing the emotion or inner feeling of a poet. Often the musicality of the words is more important than the actual meaning of the poem. Lyrics often have simple themes and a unity of emotion. The lyric derives its name from the musical instrument, the *Lyre*, which was a bit like a small harp. Lyrics were originally accompanied by music played on this instrument and, of course, we still use the term 'lyrics' to describe the words of a song.

To speak a lyric you must try to interpret the poet's thoughts with delicacy, restraint and quiet intensity. You must fully understand the thoughts and emotions in the poem, before you attempt to speak it, and then convey the poet's thoughts in your voice, without letting your own personality intrude in your interpretation. *That doesn't mean speaking a lyric in a monotone or without expression.* A delicate variety of tone colour and inflection should be used.

Rate is the overall speed of your speech – usually measured in words per minute. Generally, a good rate to aim for is somewhere between 140 to 180 words per minute, on average. This is a rate at which your listeners will be able to understand easily what you are saying. The actual rate you use will depend on your subject matter, the language used in the piece, the mood, the size of the auditorium and your articulative ability.

Of course, it's important that you don't speak at a constant rate all the time. That's where **Pace** comes in.

Pace refers to the various speeds at which you speak within the overall rate, and is used to add variety and interest, and to convey mood and momentum.

It is usual to start speaking at a slightly slower pace to enable the listeners to become attuned to the speaker's voice and personality. It also gives you time to conquer your own initial nerves.

Pace variation is an essential part of the speaker's toolkit and is one of the most effective ways in which we can generate mood and atmosphere in a piece of verse, prose or drama. In general, use a slower pace for solemnity, reflection, sadness or seriousness. Use a faster pace for excitement, danger, happiness and so on.

The **Suspensive Pause**: When the sense of a line of poetry runs on to the next line, it is called *enjambment*. The way this is dealt with is as follows: At the end of the first line we take a slight upward inflection, linger on or elongate the last word of the line (this is the suspensive pause) and then, without taking a breath, commence the next line. This is a very important technique, not difficult to master, but one that makes a significant difference in conveying the sense and meaning of poems.

*To be dead is to stop believing in
the masterpieces we will begin tomorrow
(‘To be Dead’, Patrick Kavanagh)*

The **Emphatic pause** is when we emphasise a word, phrase or sentence by pausing just before or just after the word(s).

The **Caesural pause** is a rhythmical sense pause that occurs *within* a line of verse, often (but not always) indicated by a punctuation mark. (Eminem frequently uses the caesural pause in his songs.) Here's a slightly older example. The // marks the caesura.

*The mud and leaves in the mauled lane
smelled sweet, like blood. // Birds had died or flown...
(‘Walking Wounded’, Vernon Scannell)*

We expect that candidates will use different examples in their exam presentation.

Some other pauses

End-of-line pause: this is normally indicated by the punctuation.

‘Shall I compare thee to a Summer’s day?’ (Sonnet XVIII, William Shakespeare)

The **Rhetorical** (or Sense) pause: *‘Yes // They told me you were fools // and that I was not to listen to your fine words // nor trust to your charity.’ (‘St. Joan’, George Bernard Shaw)*

Also, the Rhetorical pause is used in Public Speaking, when a question is asked by the Speaker for effect, and not to evoke an answer, e.g. *‘Shall we all be damned?’*

The **Dramatic** pause: *‘I saw a // figure // in the Distance, // a mirage.’* (This is a pause of emotion or intense feeling).

GRADE NINE

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short selection of prose taken from a novel or short story, written by an Irish author (maximum time permitted: two minutes)
2. Announce and perform a solo dramatic selection taken, adapted or compiled from a play of literary merit, using appropriate characterisation, interpretation and movement. (maximum time permitted: two minutes)
3. Announce and perform a two-minute character or abstract mime.
4. Theory:
 - a. Explain why it is important for performers to have breath control and describe an exercise to enhance breath control.
 - b. Discuss your interpretation of your solo dramatic selection, including your use of movement, gesture and voice.
 - c. Define and demonstrate your understanding of tone colour.

Breath control

Breath is the fuel on which our voices run, the motive power of speech, the sustaining medium of the voice. Having control of your breath enables you, as a performer, to project your voice; to vary pace, power and intensity; to enhance your tone and phrasing; and to be comfortable finishing lines and sentences. As an actor, also, having control over your breathing enhances stamina and facilitates relaxation and physical control.

We assume that all teachers use breathing exercises in their classes. Students will therefore be familiar with these and should be able to describe, in the examination room, an exercise designed to enhance breath control.

How to Study a Dramatic Selection

Read the Book, or Play.

Find out how others in the story relate to or think about your character, and answer the following questions:

- Your character's name
- Age
- Education
- Social Standing
- Marital status
- When was the Play written?
- In what period is it set?
- What type of Costume, Manners, Movement and Style is required?
- Take three elements of your character which you would like to convey to the audience, and this will help you to 'get inside' the character. (For example: Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte is Intelligent, Courageous and Passionate. Heathcliff' from 'Wuthering Heights' by Emily Bronte is Brooding, Melodramatic and Vengeful.

When *performing a solo*, announce the name of your selection, then turn your back and get into character. When you turn around and face the examiner, pause for a moment in order to establish your character.

The candidate's style of **movement and gesture** must be consistent with the period in which the play is set. **Movement** will be influenced by a number of factors, for example, clothing, manners, social position, age and so on. In order to move appropriately and convincingly for the style and period of the play, the candidate must conduct appropriate research. Movement and gesture are also influenced by mood and emotion. Emotions must also be reflected in the actor's face, posture, bodily tension and movement characteristics. Remember also never to move on a significant line as the audience will be watching you as you move, and not listening to what you are saying.

Gesture must come from within. It must never be superimposed, otherwise it will look stilted and artificial. It should be wide, with the fingers slightly apart – this is because of the visual effect. However, gesture can be made by any part of the body: a shrug of the shoulders, a turn of the head, a quick foot movement.

Gestures should be made with as much definition and clarity as possible. Each part of the gesture must have a beginning, and an end, and should appear spontaneous. A gesture always precedes, or accompanies, the spoken word.

Modern plays call for far less gesture than period plays.

In prose, and poetry speaking, use gesture very sparingly, if at all.

Gesture is the body speaking. The tension, speed and power of gesture must be linked with the tension, speed and power of the words: the words 'ride' on the Gesture. The golden rule for the use of gesture is: 'If in doubt, don't'.

Some theorists classify **facial expression** as a form of gesture. From the earliest age, candidates need to appreciate the importance of developing their use of facial expression in verse speaking, prose and drama. Of all body parts, the face is the one that most conveys our emotions. Furthermore, when an actor is speaking, the audience is more than likely focused on his/her face. Therefore, practicing facial expression in order to convey a variety of emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, contempt, fear, surprise, pain, disgust, doubt, excitement, boredom, pity, interest, concentration, worry, determination, embarrassment and (yes!) stupidity) is worthwhile, to enhance sincerity, conviction and believability. Use a mirror or video yourself to get instant feedback.

Tone colour

Tone is the quality of the voice and is a product of physiology (see Grade 12 guidance).

Tone colour is the adjustment of tonal quality to convey emotion (*ref: Luck G, A Guide to Practical Speech Training, 1975*). According to Luck, *'this has to be done mentally ... If you are sincere in your emotion, it will be transmitted through your voice as tone colour...'* (p. 112)

There is no magic formula for being able to do this. As with all aspects of speech and drama, it requires application and practice.

A very simple exercise (*but we will expect you to have researched others for your exam*) is to take a word, such as 'Yeah' and say the word, in turn, neutrally, with disappointment, as a question, enthusiastically, excitedly, uncertainly, with surprise, and disinterestedly. If you do this in pairs or in a group, you will hear the difference and will be able to identify the emotion behind the word. This can be done with 'No' (adding forceful and authoritative emotions), 'Okay' (adding irrational and insecure emotions), 'Right', 'Hey', 'Maybe' and

'Please'. You may then move onto phrases such as *'Why did you come here?'*, *'I can't help it'*, and *'Give it to me'*.

Additional tips on stagecraft:

Do not mask other actors and try not to turn your back on the audience (especially when speaking).

Be careful how you sit. Feel the chair with the back of your leg, and sit as your character.

Never look, or speak, at the audience. Speak to the character you are addressing on the stage. If you are speaking a Soliloquy the same rule applies.

GRADE TEN

Requirements:

1. Announce and perform a ten-minute recital incorporating an introduction, verse, prose, drama, a script that links the selections and a conclusion, all to be chosen, and compiled, by the candidate. The recital may be on a theme or represent the works of one author. It should be presented as a continuous performance. (In order to help you to observe the time limit, you may perform suitable lines from poems rather than entire poems.)
2. Announce and present a one-minute informal talk on a subject chosen from a selection to be provided by the examiner, in the examination room.
3. Theory:
 - a. Discuss your recital with the examiner, including the theme/author, choice of pieces, interpretation and techniques used.
 - b. Define and demonstrate resonance and identify the main resonators.
 - c. Discuss with the examiner techniques you could use to sustain an audience's interest in a talk.

What is a Recital?

A **recital** is an exploration of a theme or the works of an author. The most important part of the recital is the script that introduces the theme/author, links the extracts together and neatly concludes the performance. The extracts (verse, prose, drama) exist to illustrate the theme.

Set your stage before announcing the title of the recital. Consider delivering different elements from different parts of the stage. Perhaps use furniture and props to create an atmosphere: maybe a small pile of books, a fan, an ornament, and/or a vase of flowers.

Consider carefully what to wear: your clothes/costume too can contribute to the atmosphere you are trying to create.

The simple announcement and performance of a piece of verse, prose and drama does not constitute a recital.

'*Recitals and Prose*', a book available from dramabooks.ie, contains several recitals that can serve as a guide for this Grade.

Resonance is the enlargement of the basic tone in the resonators (or hollow cavities) in the neck and head. Sound waves that have been generated in the larynx are collected in the frontal cavities so that the original tone is given fullness and quality. The note produced by the vibrations of the vocal chords is modified the principal resonators which are the pharynx (throat), the mouth, the nose, the sinuses and the thorax (chest).

When you are in control of your voice, relaxing and breathing correctly, you will improve the tone of your voice, giving it volume, quality and resonance.

It is most important to realise that shouting is not resonance. Resonance comes from learning how to drive your own sound waves through your nose, mouth and throat.

Speaking in Public

The process leading up to the making of a speech in public has three stages.

- basic questions about the topic and venue
- considering the structure, purpose and content of the presentation
- looking at issues relating the delivery of the presentation

The first stage concerns finding out about the topic, context, duration, audience, location and technical details.

The second stage concerns working out what your speech is for: is it to persuade and challenge, inform and educate or encourage and incite to action? The speech should have a beginning, middle and end and its structure can be summed up in the old cliché: tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you've told them. Research, simplify, refine to three key points. Make statistics understandable and use straightforward language. Start with something to grab your audience's attention and to establish your credibility. Finish with a summary and a climax.

The third stage is **what keeps your audience's attention**. Here are some key pointers:

- Arrive in plenty of time
- Dress appropriately. Try not to let your clothes or accessories distract the audience's attention away from what you will be saying.
- Remember to smile at your audience, if appropriate, and to make significant eye contact throughout, in order to engage and draw your listeners in to your presentation.
- Adopt an appropriate stance or posture that allows you to be seen clearly, that conveys authority and sincerity, and that minimises the strain on your shoulders, neck and head.
- Introduce yourself clearly and confidently
- Use appropriate speech and vocal techniques, including proper breathing and good breath control, forward tone, resonance, good pacing (aim for 150-160 words per minute), variety of pitch, tone, inflection and pace, clear diction
- Mentally and physically project your voice so that you can be heard clearly
- If you are using a microphone, make sure that you understand how to use one.
- Use oratorical techniques to enhance your delivery. Such techniques include using the pause and silence appropriately, varying your intensity, varying your pace to convey immediacy or authority, and to allow your listeners to take in what you are saying, using tone colour to reflect emotion, using stress and emphasis on key words and phrases, using rhetorical questions, or actual questions and answers, repeating key phrases or statements to reinforce their significance
- Sometimes, you can use gestures for emphasis. However, take care to use them sparingly: they can distract if overused.
- Moving around the podium can also serve to engage your audience and lend emphasis to your words. Again, take care not to overuse movement and avoid pacing from side to side like a caged animal.
- Above all, your delivery should be natural, sincere and convincing.
- Never read your presentation or speech, and don't memorise it word for word. Speeches that are memorised or read often sound stilted and flat. If you need to use aides memoires, use small word cards discreetly. They should contain only key words to keep you on track.
- If you are using visual aids, use them carefully and only for emphasis. Face your audience at all times.

- Finally, never underestimate the importance of good preparation and rehearsal. The more time you spend on preparation, the more effective your presentation is likely to be. Rehearse your presentation several times. If you can, ask someone to video a rehearsal so that you can critique your own performance and iron out any problems, or become aware of any distracting habits you might have, or intrusive thinking sounds.

GRADE ELEVEN (Senior Advanced)

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a sonnet.
2. Announce and perform a solo dramatic selection taken or adapted from a play written before 1800, with suitable interpretation, characterisation and movement. (Maximum time permitted – three minutes)
3. Announce and perform a short piece of movement to music choreographed by the candidate.
4. Theory:
 - a. Discuss the form and structure of the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet with the examiner, and the mood, meaning, and your interpretation of the sonnet you performed.
 - b. Understand and be able to discuss the use of visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile imagery in literature.
 - c. Be able to discuss how you prepared for performance your solo dramatic selection with particular reference to your use of movement and gesture.

The **Sonnet** is a fourteen-line poem that follows a strict rhyming scheme and was traditionally written in iambic pentameter. The sonnet originated in Italy in the 13th Century.

The most famous early sonneteer was Petrarch, a scholar and poet who lived in Italy in the 14th Century and after whom early Italian sonnets were named. The typical structure of the Petrarchan sonnet was two quatrains (groups of four lines: two groups of four lines form an octave) that formed a proposition, question or problem, followed by two tercets (groups of three lines: two groups of three lines is called a sestet) that suggest a resolution. The ninth line of the sonnet (beginning of the first tercet) marks a definite change in tone or mood.

The rhyming scheme of the typical Petrarchan sonnet is

a-b-b-a
a-b-b-a
c-d-e
d-c-d

In English literature, the sonnet was made popular in the Elizabethan Age, most notably by Shakespeare who wrote many of them, over 150 of which survive. While the fourteen line form was retained, the structure and rhyming scheme were altered and the mood change (or 'volta') comes in the last couplet. The typical rhyming scheme for a Shakespearean sonnet is

a-b-a-b
c-d-c-d
e-f-e-f
g-g

Having been considered old-fashioned for a long time, the sonnet has been revived in the last century or so. Seamus Heaney wrote several sonnets, including 'Requiem for the Croppies' and 'The Skylight'. Love sonnets written by Pablo Neruda are worth exploring for their passion and intensity!

In preparation for this grade, candidates need to understand and be able to explain how the sonnet they are performing conforms (or how it doesn't conform) with the structures outlined above, how its theme is developed over the fourteen lines, and its mood and meaning.

Interesting fact!

The 1999 film *'Ten Things I hate about You'*, starring Julia Stiles and Heath Ledger, is based on Shakespeare's play *'The Taming of the Shrew'*. In the film, Julia Stiles, playing Kat, reads a poem (a sonnet) which is actually a modern version of Shakespeare's Sonnet 141. Here's the film version:

*I hate the way you talk to me,
And the way you cut your hair.
I hate the way you drive my car.
I hate it when you stare.
I hate your big dumb combat boots,
And the way you read my mind.
I hate you so much it makes me sick.
(It even makes me rhyme.)
I hate the way you're always right.
I hate it when you lie.
I hate it when you make me laugh—
Even worse when you make me cry.
I hate it when you're not around, and the fact that you didn't call.
But mostly I hate the way I don't hate you—not even close, not even a little bit, not even at all.*

Imagery is a literary device that writers use to create pictures, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile feelings in your imagination.

To do this, authors use figurative language and suggestive adjectives that appeals to one, some or all of our five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch).

Figurative language may include: simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, idiom and personification (*candidates should understand what these are and how they contribute to imagery*).

Visual imagery appeals to our sense of sight and helps us to see a scene in our mind.

*'For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.
At first, just one, **a glossy purple clot**
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.'*

*'We trekked and picked until the cans were full,
Until the tinkling bottom had been covered
With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned
Like a plate of eyes.'*

(Blackberry Picking, Seamus Heaney)

Auditory or Sound imagery helps us to hear sounds from a scene.

'... the tinkling bottom ...' (Blackberry Picking, Seamus Heaney)

*'Under my window, **a clean rasping sound**
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging.'*

(Digging, Seamus Heaney)

*'Inside, the hammered anvil's **short-pitched ring**,
The unpredictable fantail of sparks
Or **hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.**'*

(The Forge, Seamus Heaney)

Olfactory imagery is about smell. The author uses words to bring familiar smells to our mind.

*'I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, **the smells**
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.'*

(Personal Helicon, Seamus Heaney)

Tactile imagery is to do with touch and helps us to imagine how things feel when we touch or hold them.

*'Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests: **snug as a gun.**'*

(Digging, Seamus Heaney)

Although not listed in the syllabus, there is also **Gustatory imagery** which recalls the taste of things.

*'You ate that first one and **its flesh was sweet**
Like thickened wine:'*

(Blackberry Picking, Seamus Heaney)

When speaking poetry, prose or a drama piece rich in imagery, it is important to give your audience time to create these images in their minds.

GRADE TWELVE (FINAL GRADE):

Requirements:

1. Speak from memory a short poem written after 1960.
2. Announce and perform a solo dramatic selection taken, adapted or compiled from a play of literary merit written by an Irish author, using appropriate characterisation, interpretation and movement. (maximum time permitted: two minutes).
3. Announce and speak from memory a short selection of prose taken from a novel or short story written by a non-Irish author.
4. Announce and perform a two-minute mime or a short piece of movement to music (you are responsible for supplying any equipment you require for your performance).
5. Theory:
 - a. Be able to answer questions on any aspect of your use of vocal modulation (pitch, rate and pace, pause, tone and tone colour, inflection, emphasis, power, and intensity) in your programme
 - b. Explain briefly how you compiled and prepared your mime, OR movement to music performance.
 - c. Understand and be able to discuss rhyme in verse (including rhyme schemes, assonance, eye rhyme, consonance and alliteration)

Vocal Modulation (all aspects already covered except ...)

Vocal **Tone** simply refers to the sound of the voice. Tone is influenced by breath, the vocal chords, the structure of the larynx, the resonators and the organs of speech.

Power and Intensity are achieved through the combination of tone, tone colour and emphasis and can invest strong dramatic or emotional feeling in a phrase, sentence or passage in order to convey conviction, sincerity and/or passion. Power and intensity need to be used judiciously. Overuse can become wearing for both performer and audience.

The examiner will expect the candidate to explain how she/he used the elements of modulation to enhance her/his performance of her/his exam pieces. In preparation, the candidate should select a number of lines from her/his pieces in order to demonstrate her/his understanding.

Choreographing a piece of Movement to Music

(Choose your own music but, if you're stuck, dramabooks.ie has suitable music for movement to music performances)

- ❖ Think of the mood and tempo, and changes in mood or tempo.
- ❖ Think of the shapes: they must reflect the theme of the music, e.g. 'The Seven Deadly Sins'.
- ❖ If it is a song, you can structure the movements to fit the words.
- ❖ Change levels as the music suggests.
- ❖ Change shapes as the music suggests.

You can also take a story, and put appropriate music and movement to it, e.g. *'The Pied Piper'*. (Piper bows to Mayor, and gestures that he can rid the Town of Rats, etc.)

Music can also be played, and you can move freely to it...

Think:

- What does the music say to you?
- What images does it create in your mind?
- What mood does it create?

Remember: Movement to Music

- ❖ is not Mime
- ❖ is not Dance
- ❖ it is expressing, through your body and face, the emotion and feeling you wish to convey in your performance.

Rhyme

A rhyme, generally speaking, is when the ends of two or more words sound the same, e.g., *cold* and *fold*. Rhyme is most often used in poetry where repeating patterns can create pleasing rhythmic and sometimes melodic effects. If you think of nursery rhymes, too, you'll understand that rhymes can also make things easier for small children to learn.

So, having dealt with rhyme in general, here are some other types of rhyme:

Assonance refers to the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words, for example, *'late'* and *'cake'*. In poetry assonance can be used as a form of emphasis or to help to create a mood. Consider Dylan Thomas's *'Do Not Go Gentle into the Good Night'*

*'Do not go gentle into the good night
Old age should burn and rave at close of day
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.'*

Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds, most usually in words that are close together, such as *'pitter patter'*.

Alliteration occurs when the same consonant sounds appear at the beginning of nearby words, for example, *'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers'*. In poetry, it can serve to emphasise phrases and rhythm, and enhance atmosphere. Here's an example from Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*.

*'Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.'*

Eye rhymes have similar spelling but different sounds. In other words, they look as if they should rhyme but they don't. Examples are *'food'* and *'good'*, and *'cough'* and *'bough'*.

A **rhyming scheme** is a pattern of rhymes that occur at the end of each line in poems. Some of the most common are found in

- ❖ Rhyming couplets (aa, bb, cc, ...)
- ❖ Alternate rhyme (abab, cdcd, efef, ...)
- ❖ Limericks (aabba)
- ❖ Sonnets (abba, abba, cdc, dcd – Petrarchan), (abab, cdcd, efef, gg – Shakespearean)

In the examination, candidates will be expected to give examples of rhymes other than the ones listed above.

PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

Requirements:

1. Announce and speak from memory a short poem.
 2. Announce and speak from memory a short prose selection.
 3. Announce and perform a dramatic solo selection (maximum time three minutes)
 4. Announce and perform a short piece of movement to music choreographed by the candidate or announce and perform a two-minute abstract mime (you are responsible for supplying any equipment you require for your performance).
 5. Theory:
 - a. Discuss with the examiner why you chose, and how you prepared, your pieces for the examination, placing particular emphasis on your interpretation of the pieces performed.
 - b. Be prepared to answer questions on any aspect of the theory required for Grades 1 - 12.
-

And that's the end of our theory guide. Please remember, however, that we are always on the other end of the phone if you have any queries about theory or anything else to do with your exams.
