

"I do believe that with Shakespeare, more than any other writer, you have to speak the text out loud and feel the movement of the language before you can begin to realize its meaning — to read it on the page is just not enough. We have to feel so easy with its structure that it becomes a strength and not an impediment."

— Cicely Berry, *Voice Director, Royal Shakespeare Company*

"Our present culture has separated music and language. They were one in the same for the Elizabethans. **THIS** was their musical escape... their iPod. You went to **HEAR** a play."

— *Anonymous Internet poster*

BODY:

(Stretching out. Body mirror. "Lion face, lemon face." Face mirror. Breathing with the diaphragm.)

VOICE:

Vowel sounds are the bones on which everything else hangs. Emotional content often lives here. Feel the different emotional color and placement of vowels along the vocal tract. Long / short A-E-I-O-U. Try speaking a line with only its vowels. Use the lines you brought, or try some examples:

Look for progressions:

WT I.ii Leontes: "Inch-thick, knee-deep; o'er head and ears a fork'd one. // Go play, boy, play...."

Or consistent placements:

WT III.ii Hermione: "Since what I am to say must be but that // Which contradicts my accusation...."

Consonants are the flesh and muscles which give logical shape and meaning to those vowels.

Without muscles, the skeleton just lies there. Consonants make it move, shift, turn, fly!

Now add the consonants back into those chosen lines and see what extra "flavors" they impart.

(Story mirror)

VERSE:

Iambic pentameter: heartbeat of the line, driving action

Iamb: unstressed + stressed (da-DUM)

Pentameter: five "feet" or measures

Shakespeare plays within the confines of the poetry — and then breaks those rules.

Do not stop at ends of lines (except for "end stopping," when a mark of punctuation ends the line).

Yet let the **last** word of each line drive the journey and keep the energy up. (Kick the bucket.)

Split lines are a hidden stage direction to pick up the cue and keep the energy going.

WT I.ii Polixenes and Camillo: "By whom, Camillo? || By the king. || For what?"

Short lines: a pause for thought? Overwhelmed by emotion?

WT II.ii Paulina: "So, so: farewell; we're gone."

Caesura: a natural break in the middle of the line, after second or third foot — enjoy "a moment in the sun."

WT III.iii Antigonus "Like very sanctity, she did approach // The cabin where I lay; thrice bow'd before me...."

WT IV.iv Perdita "You'd be so lean, that blasts of January // Would blow you through and through."

Types of Poetic "Feet":

Iambic first, with firm and steady pace;
Then the trochee follows to replace it;
In comes the dactyl with energy sizzling;
The amphibrach next, with its beat in the middle;
And behind all the rest comes the quick anapest.
"Me, too!" "Who's he?" "Spondee!"

What if the rhythm doesn't seem to work?

“*Trochaic inversions*” replace one or more feet, particularly the first one. Shakespeare was only human—or sometimes he does it to inject extra energy into a line, or attract attention with a disruption.

Feminine endings add an extra, unstressed syllable. The “over-full line” breaks the beat.

Work through a thought, let it hang in the air: “uncertainty, turbulence, emotional change”

Ham III.i Hamlet “To be or not to be, that is the question.” — and much of the rest of that speech!

WT IV.iv Perdita “Sir: my gracious lord, // To chide at your extremes, it not becomes me...”

Elision runs together two syllables, like turning “I am” to “I’m” (yes, Shakespeare uses contractions!)

or all those cases in *The Winter’s Tale* of “the” becoming “th’,” “of” becoming “o’,” and so on.

WT V.i Paulina and Dion: “...You are one of those // Would have him wed again. || If you would not so...”

Historical changes in pronunciation can cause mis-scanning: check with your director

on whether to stick with the original, substitute another word, or mar the verse.

WT IV.iv Florizel “And most opportune to our need, I have // A vessel rides fast by...”

MAAN V.i Leonato: “My griefs cry louder than advertisement.”

JC V.iii Titinius: “Alas, thou hast misconstrued everything!”

Emotional extremes could distort scansion, and be a sign something’s going on. (Trochaic / spondaic)

WT II.iii Paulina: “Good queen, my lord, good queen; I say, good queen.”

R&J III.v Capulet: “An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die i’ the streets.”

R&J II.i Mercutio: “Romeo! Humors! Madman! Passion! Lover!”

Lear V.iii King Lear: “Never, never, never, never, never.”

An extra-metrical interjection, a self-interruption, stands outside the usual line:

MAAN I.i Benedick: “What! My dear Lady Disdain, are you yet living?”

Or? It could be an “alexandrine” (12 beats), a scribe’s corrupt line, or just Shakespeare having a bad day.

EXTRA TIPS:

Avoid generalizing the emotion in a speech: instead, follow the **THOUGHT**. If you don’t, the speech becomes fuzzy and uninteresting.

Beware, particularly in emotional speeches, getting “stuck” at one end of your vocal range (particularly sopranos): emotion and diction will both suffer.

Baker Commons requires **EXTRA DICTION!**

Monosyllables are often a cue to **SLOW DOWN**: think about and bring attention to the words.

H5: “O, for a muse of fire!” *JC*: “Lend me your ears!”

Mac: “I go, and it is done.” or “The queen, my lord, is dead.”

MND “It is not night when I do see your face.”

R&J: “Thou canst not speak of what thou dost not feel.”

Ham “Brief let me be.” or “The time is out of joint.”

Ham “I do not know // Why yet I live to say ‘This thing’s to do,’ // Since I have cause and will and strength and means // To do’t.”

Sonnet 147: “For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright, // Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.”

THINGS TO MARK IN YOUR TEXT:

Scan lines: examine variations from “iambicness.”

Grok grammatical structure: subject, verb, object, prepositional phrases, subordinate clauses.

Bracket complete thought groups.

Write paraphrases for tough / pivotal words (mythology, character words).

Underline parallel words / structures and antitheses (opposites / comparisons).

Circle repeated words, or alliteration.

Mark crescendo / decrescendo, or changes in tempo, to match sense and verse.

Indicate places for breathing!

WHERE TO FIND MORE?

John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* (the book is great; the video series in Fondren Library is even better)

Cicely Berry, *The Actor and the Text*

Adrian Brine & Michael York, *A Shakespearean Actor Prepares*

Peter Hall, *Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players*

Kristin Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice* and *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*

Operative word(s): the word or words upon which an image phrase depends for its meaning; the word or words without which there would be no image; the words you can't do without; the words from which the listener can guess the rest.

1. **Articles** (“a,” “an,” “the”), **prepositions** (“to,” “from,” “in,” “on,” “with,” etc.) and **conjunctions** (“and,” “but,” etc.) are **usually not operatives**. They contain no images, but serve to show the relationship between images.
2. **Stress not the negative**. “No” and “not” are almost never operative. They contain no images, but serve instead to negate other images. The operative word is therefore the word that is being negated. “I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.” “Do not say so.”
3. **Verbs of being** (“am,” “is,” “was,” “shall”) are **rarely operative**. The operative words are instead the words that explain the kind of quality or being. “I am king.” “Thou shalt be king.” “I am happy.” “I am in love.” “He is my brother.”
4. **Adjectives and adverbs** should be treated as **part of the noun or verb** they modify and incorporated in the image. The key operative word is the noun or verb, with the adjective or adverb incorporated into the image as a modifier that qualifies the meaning of the noun or verb. “She's a nice girl.” “Let's have a good time.” “He's a tired old fool.”
5. The same guideline applies to **possessive nouns**. “My father's house.”
6. **Avoid stressing pronouns** (“he,” “she,” “it,” etc.) whenever it is possible to do so. Whenever there is an alternative that makes sense, use it. This includes possessive pronouns (“his,” “her,” “my,” etc.). Pronouns are used in speech usually as a substitute form for a noun which is has become unnecessary to stress. “I saw Helena. She told me she didn't love me.”
7. Repetitive contrast: **an image that is repeated is not operative**. What is operative is any new quality that is added in the repetition: “I wanted a red shirt. I got a blue shirt.”
8. Generally speaking, **nouns are more operative than verbs** — think about trying to communicate with someone who doesn't speak English: the first thing they must understand is the subject of the image, then what the image is doing.