



Speech • Oral Interpretation • Characterization Notes

Overview

VOCAL CHARACTERIZATION refers to the devices of your voice that can be altered or changed to suggest a speaker's voice. These aspects are:

Pitch

the degree of highness or lowness in our tone of voice

PRIMARY USE – sarcasm/cynicism

RAISED PITCH – youth or immaturity

LOWERED PITCH – heaviness or sobriety

NOTE: Do **NOT** overuse pitch to suggest different genders! Most women do not sound like Minnie Mouse. Most men do not sound like Tony the Tiger.

Qualities

distinct sound created by manipulating throat muscles

THIN – weak, timid

STRIDENT – abrasive

HARSH – anger, hostility

BREATHY – sensuality, sexuality

NASAL – whiny, unpleasantness, nerdiness

DENASAL – slurred sound, like having a cold

HOARSE – smoking, strained voice

Rate

the speed at which we speak (also called pace)

NOTE: changing from a normal rate *can* be a good way to differentiate between characters

RAPID – anxiety, intelligence

SLOWER – emphasis, sometimes mental slowness?

SPEED UP – high emotional tension

SLOW DOWN – tension is easing

NOTE: Pauses **MUST** be used for a reason.

Volume

the relative loudness of our voice

NOTE: Changes in volume are not always a good way to differentiate between characters

REMEMBER: Often less is more. Loudness is **NOT** the same thing as intensity.

Dialect






common accent and/or vernacular of a specific group

USE: Often used by authors to pick up the “local color” of the setting.

DEPICTION: Can also indicate character information intelligence levels, age, region, etc.











IMPORTANT: Effective, consistent use of dialect can be difficult to master. When interpreting a text for this class, you should deal with the character first.

Physical Characterization refers to aspects of the body or face that can be altered to suggest a different speaker. You should always work from the “inside out” when creating physicalizations for specific characters. When looking for ways to make physical distinctions between characters, you should consider alterations in:

-  posture
-  weight relocation
-  gestures
-  facial expressions
-  character placement and tracking

Performance Correlates

USE THE MARKINGS in the key below to score your typed script. Be sure that your choices are justified based on your understanding of the character(s) and the scene. While there are a variety of ways a performer can score a script, please use the markings listed in this handout so that I will know what to look for in each performance.

	slight pause		phrase
	longer pause		speed up reading
	simple stress		slow down reading
	greater stress		rising inflection
	greatest stress		falling inflection

NOTE: You are allowed to write in specific gestures and/or facial expressions, but only as *reminders*. Your countenance as well as your physicalizations should appear natural. This comes with rehearsal.

Sample Script

PRACTICE SCORING performance correlates using this excerpt from *The Odd Couple* by Neil Simon.

I'll tell you exactly what it is. It's the cooking, cleaning and crying...It's the talking in your sleep, it's the moose calls that open your ears at two o'clock in the morning...I can't take it anymore, Felix. I'm crackin' up. Everything you do irritates me. And when you're not here, the things I know you're gonna do when you come in irritate me...You leave me little notes on my pillow. I told you a hundred times, I can't stand little notes on my pillow. "We're all out of Corn Flakes. F.U."...It took me three hours to figure out that F.U. was Felix Ungar...It's not your fault, Felix. It's a rotten combination.