

Workshop Title: Performance Prep

Level: Novice Writers, **Developing Writers**, Experienced Writers

Duration: **2 hrs**

Materials: Students will need to bring in previously written work to practice performance.

(15 mins) Check in:

- Answer the question “What is the greatest live performance you have seen? What was great about it and how did it make you feel?”
 - Write student answers. Use this knowledge to understand which students have what performative experience. This will be helpful in directing them through this lesson.

(15 mins) Resource Building:

- Free write/Free edit (15 mins)
 - Option 1
 - This is an opportunity for students who do NOT have previous writing to generate content. Below are suggested quick prompts. Remind students who are writing from scratch that this does NOT have to be a masterpiece and we are simply using this work for performance practice.
 - How are you different today than you were yesterday?
 - Describe your day in 10 lines.
 - What happens to your body when you dream?
 - Finish the statement “Last time I checked, I never...”
 - Option 2
 - Students who brought previously written work should use this opportunity to make any edits or additions they wish.
 - Option 3
 - Students who brought previously written work who do NOT want to make edits or additions can group up with similar students to begin practicing how they will read their work aloud.

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(20 mins) Example poem:

- Phil Kay - "Repetition"
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vqbo1FuoLQ>
 - Discussion
 - What did Kay do to build intensity while staying quiet?
 - In what ways did this poem stand out?
 - How does pacing play into the sound of the poem?
- Janae Johnson - "Black Rage"
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fqEz0caR5o&list=RDQMZ5Xpy7m0wpY&start_radio=1
 - Discussion
 - What techniques did Johnson use to manipulate tone in the reading?
 - How does Johnson's intensity compare and contrast from Kay's?
 - Would these poems still work being read in the style of the other?

(10 mins) Lecture:

- Below are the 4 components of performance. Read these aloud for your group, allowing space for questions after each. Use your expertise and the information you gathered during check in to answer specific questions. Also, don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to a question!
 - Volume - If the audience can't hear you, they can't love you.
 - Using the mic is important! The mic is a tool built to elevate your performance, not hinder it. Using the mic is highly recommended.
 - The loudest poems often win the slam. That doesn't mean the loudest poem is always the best poem. Be loud, but don't yell. Be true to who you are as a writer.
 - Inflection is the rise and fall of your voice during different parts of speech. It is important to be intentional about when you are loud, when you are soft, when you speak fast, and when you slow down.
 - Pace/articulation - We need to understand the words we are hearing.
 - It is a common mistake to go too fast when you get on the mic. When in front of a crowd, you will almost ALWAYS speak or read faster than your

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norm. Practice reading slowly - so slowly that it feels uncomfortable. This will help you naturally slow your pace in front of crowds.

- Speakers tend not to articulate because they don't open their mouth wide enough. A common exercise is 'Lemon Face Lion Face'. This exercise helps relax the face muscles and encourages opening your mouth when speaking:
 - In front of a mirror or camera
 - squeeze your face like you bit into a lemon
 - open your mouth and eyes wide like you're surprised
 - repeat this 5 - 10 times quickly
 - Like inflection, variations in speed can be a good tool to build intensity in a poem.

- Emotionality/tone - Let the audience know how it feels.
 - This is where 'performance' truly comes in. Oftentimes large expressions feel overly dramatic. It is better to start too dramatic and learn to dial back, then be too timid on stage. Go all out!
 - Performing is in part about communicating emotion, but emotions are complex. You may need to consider presenting an emotion such as anger in a generic way on stage so that it is clearly understood, even if it is different from the way you would communicate anger in everyday life.
 - You need to know what emotion each part of your poem is having and shift between those dynamically. Consider how the example poems communicated multiple emotions. Be DYNAMIC!

- Physical choreography- TAKE UP SPACE.
 - Think about how you walk on and off the stage professionally. Be confident in your walk to and from the mic, no matter what.
 - Move your body where it feels natural to do so, but move with full arm extensions and with purpose. If the motion isn't a full motion, then stand still. You always want to look like you are in full control.

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(30 Mins) Activity: Performance groups

- When entering this activity, remind students to practice as if they were on stage in front of 100 people every time. Pretend practice is the real thing.
 - Split students into groups of three.
 - Within the group:
 - One student will read the poem they brought or wrote today
 - Two students will listen, then give the following feedback
 - Their favorite part of the poem
 - How the poet did in each of the 4 categories
 - Suggestions on performance improvement
 - Rotate! Group members who are not reading are allowed to comment after each poem
 - Rotate until all participants have a chance to share and get feedback at least once.

(30 Mins) Open mic style share out

- Prepare the space open mic style to the best of your ability. This may look like the traditional rows of chairs facing a stage, or an improvised circle with the stage in the middle. If this is conducted online, be sure to have audience members mute their mics in respect to the reader, unless they are snapping or clapping mid-poem (see below).
- Encourage students to clap and shout for each poet going up like in a real venue. This goes into practicing like this is the real thing.
- Snaps, claps, and shouts in the middle of poems in response to students' favorite lines goes a long way in making the space feel like a real event - hype up the performer!
- Lastly, it is important to be encouraging and positive in the open mic space. This portion is not an opportunity for critique. Everyone has grown through this process, and the open mic style share is a tool in acknowledging everyone.

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