

# SHAKESPEARE EXERCISES

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## TAPPING OUT THE VERSE

Tap out the verse with your hand as you speak each line aloud, accentuating the rhythm. Does the line fit? Note which lines are regular/ irregular. If the rhythm makes you stress a word or syllable that feels odd it's probably irregular, follow your instincts.

## WALKING THE PUNCTUATION

### You'll need:

- A copy of your speech to look at.
- Enough space to comfortably move in.

### Step one:

- Walk while you read your speech aloud.
- At the end of each sentence, stop and turn 180 degrees.

### Step two:

Repeat, this time adding individual actions for each type of punctuation:

- (,) Comma, make a slight change of direction but keep moving.
- (;) Semi colon; make big change of direction but keep moving.
- (!) Exclamation mark - use gesture of emphasis, (punching the air / stamping)
- (?) Question mark - make a gesture of appeal (reaching out hands)
- (...) Ellipsis - a gesture of continuation (circles with your finger)

### Notice:

Your longest / shortest sentences. Changes in the length of sentence or types of punctuation throughout the speech.

**Step three:** Repeat the speech without the actions but remember what you found. Allow it to colour and enhance your performance.

## LINE ENDING DESTINATIONS

**Step one:** Choose two points with a good distance between them (walls / chairs etc). You'll start each line touching one point and end it touching the other. Speak the line aloud; start moving on the first stressed syllable and reach your destination on the last stressed syllable. Challenge yourself to be specific. Experiment with different distances. Let your physical journey affect the journey of the line - keep it moving! After repeating a few times, stand still and repeat the text.

**Step two:** The same as above, but if you have a full stop in a line, you must turn and return to the point you set off from. Allow the first stressed syllable to push you into the new line.

Great for:

- Driving the line through to the end.
- Adding pace and urgency.
- Using the important stressed beats.

## LAST AND FIRST

**You'll need:**

- To know your lines off by heart
- A small ball (or something else you can throw and catch easily)

**Step one:** Throw the ball on the last stressed syllable of a line, catch it on the first stressed syllable of the next line. Challenge yourself to be really specific. Vary the height of your throws.

**Example:**

(Throw)

Once MORE un TO the BREACH dear FRIENDS once MORE

(Catch)

(Throw)

Or CLOSE the WALL up WITH our EN glish DEAD

**Step two:** Disguise the exercise. If someone walked into the room, they should think you just happen to be throwing a ball whilst doing the speech.

Great for:

- Understanding the connection and flow between one line and the next.
- Eliminating unnecessary pauses between lines.
- Shaking off a rhythm you're stuck in.
- Making the most of the important stressed beats.

## ANTITHESIS ACTION

**Step One:** As you're reading your text aloud – look out for any antithesis. Physicalise it with opposite actions (perhaps reach up as high as you can for one idea and for its antithesis (opposite), touch the ground). Allow your voice to echo what's happening in your body. Take it to an extreme. Repeat the speech without the actions but allow the memory to inform your performance.

Great for:

- Clarity
- Understanding the arguments within your text.
- Grasping the stakes of your character's situation.
- Deciding where the emphasis should fall.
- Engaging physically with the text.

## FRONT FOOT / BACK FOOT

**Version one:** Speaking/ reading your text aloud, take note of where you're standing. Take a step forward each time you think your character is 'winning' (gaining status/coming closer to understanding something/convincing someone/obtaining the thing you want) and take a step back each time you think they're 'losing' (losing status/getting further away from achieving what you want/ finding yourself in a more dangerous situation.). Notice where you end up. Have you advanced or failed back?

**Version two:** This is a great exercise to do with a scene partner. Start a little distance away from each other each take steps forward and back as you play the scene. Notice who is driving the scene, who is winning or losing status and when?

## CHOOSE YOUR AUDIENCE

**Step one:** Just as your fellow actors will inform your performance, your soliloquies will vary depending on who your audience is, it's incredibly helpful to decide who you're speaking to. Make it specific. Really picture them. What do they think of you and what do you want from them?

Are they old friends? Mortal enemies? Children? Much more intelligent than you? Bored? Very attractive? Huge fans?

Choose one, do your speech. Choose another. Repeat. Take note of what works and what doesn't.

**Step two:** Choose a variety of options and place them in the space. Someone who thinks you're hilarious on your left? A group that hates you on your right? Someone very dense in front of you? Try different combinations and notice how it changes you.

Great for:

- New discovery
- Motivation
- Variety
- Honesty