

A glossary on how to use Shakespeare's text.

- **Audience** - Shakespeare's actors were aware of the audience and often interacted with them directly. In particular, comedic plays can make frequent use of a technique called "**clocking the audience.**" This involves looking at the audience (clocking) before, during, or after your line to communicate what you feel about the other person without them being aware of it. In this situation, the audience functions as a third character that is complicit in the joke. For Comedy of Errors, find moments where you can develop your relationship with the audience and make them feel a part of the action on stage.
- **Final lines** - Do not drop the energy and intensity of the final lines of your monologue. Always release upwards, think of an exclamation point, not a sag in energy.
- **Questions** are never rhetorical. Ask them as questions.
- **Antithesis and The Great Chain of Being** – Shakespeare loves using language to express extreme opposites. This reflects the general Elizabethan belief that everything in the universe has a hierarchical standing, and Shakespeare often incorporated two extremes for dramatic effect. You can use experiment with various vocal techniques (volume, pitch, rhythm, etc...) to vocally emphasize these moments of dramatic contrast.

Try to find out where your character lies on the "Great Chain of Being," but also how your character uses language to describe the world. The central concept of the chain of being is that everything imaginable fits into it somewhere, giving order and meaning to the universe. Everything has a category and a ranking. Here are the basic categories, with each category being further subdivided according to importance. Each category has a "supreme avatar", or most dominating figure in their category.

1. God – at the top of everything of course.
2. Angelic beings.
3. Humans – Royalty at the top, of course.
4. Animals – For Mammals; Wild at the top (Lions and elephants), "useful" animals (horses, dogs) in the middle, "tame" animals (housecats) at the bottom.
For Avian animals; Birds of prey at the top, Carrion below that, worm-eating below that, and seed-eating at the bottom.
For Aquatic animals; Whales at the top. Sharks below that. Fish at the bottom.
5. Plants – Oak tree at the top. Everything else below.
6. Minerals – Diamond at the top. Sand, soil, dirt at the bottom.

And so on. The categories and rankings are endless. The point to all this is that Shakespeare will often pair contrasting rankings in his metaphors meant to be vocally differentiated to indicate their status. He will often pair them from the same category, e.g. roses (high status) with thorns or vines (low status).

Example; Antipholus of Ephesus – Act 3 Scene 1 Line 156-159

You have prevailed, I will depart in quiet
And, in despite of mirth, mean to be merry.
I know a wench of excellent discourse,
Pretty and witty, wild and yet, gentle.

Dromio of Ephesus – Act 4 Scene 4 Line 36-37

When I am **cold**, he **heats** me with beating; when I
am **warm**, he **cools** me with beating.

- **“O” is not “oh”** – There are three reasons you say “O”

1. The experience is larger than life.
2. A surprise or memory restored.
3. A transition into furious.

Not, “oh, I forgot my keys.”

Example; Adrianna Act 2 Scene 2 Line 130-131

How comes it now, my husband, **O** how comes it
That thou art then estranged from thyself?

- **Monosyllabic lines** – Monosyllabic lines are usually a landmark embedded by Shakespeare to instruct the actor to emphasize the line. If you speed through these, they can lose their meaning or become inaudible. You have two options;

1. Slow down and dictate.

Or

2. Emphasize every word.

Example; Hamlet - **To be, or not to be, that is the question** – (with feminine ending)

Example 2; Dromio of Syracuse – Act 2 Scene 2 Line 202-203

If we obey them not, this will ensue:

They’ll suck our breath, or pinch us black and blue.

- **“Spine”** – Map the final words of the verse. This is the spine of the monologue, and without the benefit of a modern age full-time director to provide text analysis on characters, Shakespeare often left clues embedded in the text, e.g. the end-words of each lines, to allow actors to find their character motivation.

Example; Adrianna – Act 2 Scene 2 Line 120-157. This is the monologue where Adrianna pleads to Antipholus of Syracuse (the wrong husband), that sets up the comic line to follow; “Plead you

to me fair dame?” By mapping the last lines of each sentence, we get a sense of what Adrianna thinks about marriage and what she wants from Antipholus.

Frown, aspects, wife, vow, ear, eye, hand, taste, thee, it, thyself, me, incorporate, part, me, fall, gulf, again, diminishing, too, quick, licentious, thee, contaminate, me, face, brow, ring, vow, it, blot, lust, false, flesh, contagion, bed, undishonored.

This doesn't always work with every monologue or every character but it can give you a basic idea of where to start. For instance, from this list I would think that being a wife, a part of a man, incorporated into Antipholus' life, is important to Adrianna. She thinks vows are important and lust for flesh is like a disease on her marriage bed. She feels contaminated. She thinks her marriage is falling and there is a gulf between them, and it has happened too quickly for her even make “sense” of it with all her senses (eyes, ears, hand, taste).

- **ALL** – This word is a big fucking deal. When Shakespeare says all, he is referring to the Elizabethan belief in ALL things, as in the entire universe. Give it that magnitude.

Example; Dr. Pinch – Act 4 Scene 4 Line 61
I conjure thee by **all** the saints in heaven.

- **Argument propellers** - These are all words that function as propellers of an argument, pushing it forward and picking up energy. As an actor, find these words and use them to give you a boost of energy, keep it going, don't slow down until the argument is complete:

BUT/YET WHEN NOR/OR/AND UNLESS

Example; Adrianna – Act 2 Scene 1 Line 114-118
I see the jewel best enameled
Will lose his beauty. **Yet** the gold bides still
That others touch, **and** often touching will
Wear gold; **yet** no man that hath a name
By falsehood and corruption doth it shame.

- The “**gestic this**” – With the words “this”, “that”, and “you”, it can help to physically gesture to indicate the direction of the place you are referring to. Remember that Shakespearean actors often had no scenery.
- **Gestures** – Little, small gestures are the kernel of impulse. In the 21st century, it is socially acceptable to be small and inwards. In the Elizabethan era, everything was outward, aimed at expanding both the mind and body. When practicing your physicality, take your small gestures and make them big.

The unmotivated gesture is pollutant to your acting. No automation. Make it count.

A single, held gesture can be stronger and more striking than many small uncommitted ones. It is not boring.

- **Repetition** - If Shakespeare repeats a phrase or word, it gains potency, change how you say it each time.

Example; Dromio of Ephesus – Act 4 Scene 4 Line 36-37

When I am cold, he heats me with **beating**; when I am warm, he cools me with **beating**.

- The “**ladder**” – Whenever there is a list of examples, names, or ideas, carry the energy till the end. Use your vocal energy in pitch adjustment or volume to grow the intensity.

Example; Antipholus of Syracuse – Act 4 Scene 3 Line 4-6.

Some tender money to me; some invite me;

Some other give me thanks for kindnesses;

Some offer me commodities to buy.

Here the ladder is indicated by the **repetition** of the word “some” to introduce variations on what these people of Ephesus are doing to Antipholus of Syracuse. Each idea should be modified in some way so as not to appear like a laundry list, but as distinct ideas. How do your feelings differ when you receive money from strangers, are invited to their homes, and are thanked for things you never did? Play each idea distinctly, with a purpose.

- **Periods** – If a period is in the middle of the line, push the energy forward to the next idea. Power through.

- **Rhyme** – Always use the rhyme, don’t act like it’s not there.

- **Eyes** – Don’t close your eyes or look at the floor, always outward. Remember, you have license to interact with the audience, so even if you are not directly addressing the audience at the moment, give them the gift of your eyes.

- **The truth** –

21st century; small and quiet. When we are trying to be meaningful and “deep”, we get smaller. This is a product of socialization.

Elizabethan; big and loud.

As actors we need to try to be big and loud while remaining truthful.

- **Acting style** –

Truth in Shakespearean acting lies on the continuum of Operatic and Keanu Reeves. When you are practicing your monologues, try it in the style of each (put your inner Neo to good use) and then find the middle ground. Remember, everything about Shakespeare is the explosion of feeling, not the repression of it. This is not camera work. If you half-heartedly give yourself to Shakespeare’s huge language you will be melodramatic. This is the ultimate self-indulgence, give yourself permission to indulge. It is wild and scary, a lot like adolescence.

- **Diction** notes – There are some diction habits in the Northwest that can interfere with the understanding of Shakespeare’s language, here are the most common ones.

I’ll – Not “all”, pronounced like “aisle.”

What – Not “wut” (wut up?), or “whad” (whaddya mean?).

Our – Not “are”, pronounced like “hour”.

Surely – Not “Shirley,” pronounced like “purely”.

Duke – Not “dook”, pronounced with a liquid “u” like British RP.

- **Vocal play** – Shakespeare’s language lends itself easily to the melody and rhythms of music. Do practice vocal warmups that stretch and activate the highest and lowest of your vocal register and be prepared to go there. There is a connection between vocal play and emotional risk, and the more you play the easier you will find it to connect emotionally to the gargantuan language.
- **Fun and Final thoughts** –You can find every antithesis, climb every ladder, use each argument propeller and map out every spine and still fail to communicate feeling. They are there to help you discover your feelings, not replace them. These tools are just the nuts and bolts of acting Shakespeare, as such you cannot learn and memorize these techniques to be an amazing Shakespearean actor. They are, however, the difference between clean and messy acting, which can make the difference between an audience following your clever wordplay and them missing key words due to an inappropriately stressed word, a mangled pronunciation, or an aimless gesture. The most important job you have when you are acting Shakespeare is to find the fun. Fun in the wordplay, in the extravagant gestures, in the extreme vocal variety, and in the larger than life world that we seldom experience in our everyday lives. If you are having fun, the audience will too. Your job is to find the fun and give the gift of yourself to the audience. If you practice hard enough, when the time comes to perform, you can forget the technique for it will support you invisibly. Then, you can be the creative, wonderful human being that you are, boundless and spontaneous in the moment. When you surprise yourself, you will surprise everyone who watches you. Please do not hesitate to shoot me an email or pull me aside at any time if you do not understand or want further clarification on any of these terms. I left out many examples for the sake of brevity, but I have plenty to share. I am more than happy to talk about these topics in greater detail. Best, Tommy Schreiner. tschrein@uoregon.edu