Tips for the Coach

Here are some skills that are best rehearsed during those times when a reader is lucky enough to have a coach to help. This is because a person practicing these skills needs perspective, a voice outside of their own head to weigh in on the effect of their effort.

As the coach, your job is to offer gentle feedback on what works best.

Pauses

Skilled presenters use moments of silence to add to the effectiveness and polish of a reading. The pauses that give a text punch and add to the listener’s understanding come in a great variety. Here are three of the most obvious and important ones:

- **Short.** The shortest pauses, which last anywhere from one-half to two seconds, are for the simple purpose of separating your thoughts. All you have to remember is to slow down. Give the listener a chance to absorb what you are saying. Change your voice inflection slightly at the end of each thought to cue the listener that the next thought is coming. Also, use a short pause before and after any phrase or word you want to emphasize.

- **Spontaneous.** Another effective pause is known as a spontaneous pause. This is a planned “unplanned” pause used so that the reader doesn’t look too rehearsed. You might apply this pause when you want to pretend to search for a word or phrase that you already know. It gives the reading as sense of immediacy that can slip away when things run too smoothly and appear too rehearsed.

- **Long.** Long pauses of more than three seconds are very powerful. They command the audience to think about what you just said, that is if what you just said was worth thinking about.

Silence is the auditory equivalent to white space on a printed page, providing a place for rest and reflection. It keeps the listener from feeling bullied, overwhelmed, or lectured to. It would be a mistake to confuse silence for emptiness. The briefly silent reader doesn’t relinquish her hold on the listeners’ attention rather she holds it in a different way.
**Emphasis or Vocal Force**

Unfortunately, the written English language has adapted but one typographical way to indicate emphasis – *italics*. There are two problems with italics: the writer doesn’t always supply them and where supplied they only connote a single register of emphasis. If we could have a system of notation that showed four or five degrees or word emphasis that would be closer to the possibilities for communication between the text, the oral reader and the listener.

- Experiment with emphasis to find out how putting vocal emphasis on a syllable, word, or phrase brings the reader’s understanding of the text and listener’s understanding reader into the best harmony.

- Emphasis is called for where important thoughts are introduced the first time into a sentence’s flow of a meaning.

**Finally**

*R*ead*ing* is not *acting*. Whether the reader’s manner is lively and imaginative or calm and restrained his essential relationship with his listeners is one of communicative participation, not exhibitionism.

The text and not the reader is the star. In acting, the text and the actor may merge. In reading the reader, like the listener, is primarily concerned with the text rather than the reader’s virtuosity as a performer. The reader may be lively, sympathetic or impressive but the idea is to help the listener make a connection to the text, not to the reader.

*Advis*e the reader --- be yourself; be sincere; be imaginative in interpretation; be communicative of emotion; be a reader but not and actor.

Adapted from John Dolman’s *The Art of Reading Aloud* (1956)