

A Common Sense Guide to Acting Shakespeare

1. You want to know your cue lines. They are the lines that come right before yours.
2. Highlight your lines so you can find them easily.
3. Look up words you don't understand in a dictionary. Published editions of the play will have footnotes that explain the meanings of old words. If you're still not sure what your speech means, ask your teacher for help.
4. Say your lines out loud as you learn them so you can say them naturally. It works really well to write them out and say them aloud as you do; you can really 'chew on' the words, and you will learn them more easily.
5. Don't stop at the end of each line. Carry the thoughts through so that it sounds like a real person talking rather than like a poem being recited.
6. Upper class characters who are reasonably calm speak in a verse called iambic pentameter. All you need to know about this is that it usually means every second syllable is slightly emphasized. For instance, in the Prince's speech, he says:

**On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
Throw your mis-temper'd weapons to the ground**

If you emphasize the bold parts (but not so much that it sounds weird), it will help the audience to understand that the Prince is extremely angry and appalled at the public brawl, and will punish them severely (on pain of torture) if they do not desist.

Sometimes Shakespeare changes the stress. If a word sounds really strange when you stress every second syllable, say it the normal way. When characters get upset, as they often do in this play, their rhythm breaks down, sometimes completely.

Lower class characters, like Samson and Gregory, don't usually speak in verse.

7. Please do not use an English accent unless you have come from England. Just talk to other characters as naturally as you can, using your own accent.

(In fact, the Canadian accent sounds more like Shakespeare's accent than the standard British one because colonists who came from Britain to North America brought the old accents with them, while the standard British accent developed more recently.)

8. Please bring your script and a pencil to rehearsal on the morning of the performance so you can write down the directions we give you.