

Performance Skills *by Janell Lovelace*

- 1. Face the audience whenever you are talking.** It doesn't matter if in the script you are supposedly talking to someone behind you, you should never face more than 45 degrees away from the audience when you are speaking. *Exercise: Come before the throne.*
- 2. Hold your head up.** Even if you are bowing to royalty or afraid of someone, you need to point your mouth at the audience to be understood - or at least to give them a chance to lipread.
- 3. Slow down and speak clearly.** This is true for everyone, but particularly true if you have a strong accent. You may well be excited and nervous and shy, but you still need to try to speak clearly. *Exercise: Pick a partner and introduce yourself.*
- 4. Speak loudly enough that the people in the back row can hear you.** Practice talking to people right in front of you, five feet away, and ten feet away. How do you need to change your voice? Can you get louder without yelling? What's a stage whisper?
- 5. Think about your voice and your inflection.** While still being loud enough to be heard, you can vary the way your voice sounds and the emotions you project. The same line can be said many different ways. *Exercise: "I can't believe you just said that to me!"*
- 6. Don't forget non-verbal communication.** Express feelings/emotions/ideas through simple motions & blocking. Practice balance and body awareness; actions enhance language. 90% of communication is non-verbal. *Exercise: What's your job / task?*
- 7. Movement on stage.** Yes, you're always facing the audience (/judges) while talking, but you still need to make the onstage movement interesting. *Exercise: Sit, stand, lean*
- 8. Characterization and character motivation.** Develop your character and think about what motivates them throughout the skit. *Exercise: be a tree / turtle / beetle, then freeze!*
- 9. You might want to sing.** Original compositions can greatly enhance performance. Be aware of time and copyright issues. Think about abilities, accompaniment and balance.
- 10. What happens when things go wrong?** How to feed someone a line. Always react in character - or don't react at all. Just keep going ... the show must go on!
- 11. Consider warm-up exercises.** You may not want to make time for these every time your group gets together, but when you're doing final rehearsals or preparing to perform, some body and voice warm-ups can help set the mood and relieve tense nerves. *Exercise: Everybody up!*
- 12. Memorize your lines as soon as you can.** As soon as you have a script, work on memorizing what you're supposed to say. Say lines to your brother, Mom, dog, mirror, etc.
- 13. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!** Just learning your lines isn't the same as practicing your interactions. The more times you go over it the more you'll be able to develop characters.
- 14. Use space safely and appropriately.** Review guidelines if you have questions.

Recommended reading: [Break a Leg!](#) by Lise Friedman, source for some of these exercises.

Performance Skills Tips

1. Sit at the “throne” facing the audience. Each team member should come up beside the throne and bow - only facing about 45 degrees towards the “monarch”.
2. Ask the team members to come up to the “throne” and say “Your highness, I was unable to find the treasure, please forgive me.” Their mouth needs to point to the audience even as they bow and perhaps show fear. Eyes should look over, but face should stay towards audience.
3. Ask team members to say “Hello, my name is ____, I have ____ brothers and sisters. My favorite color is ____.” Say it slowly and clearly.
4. Ask team members to come to the front of the room across from the rest of the team members. Ask them to each point and loudly say “Rubber baby buggy bumpers” loudly. Ask them to say “I saw the baby buggy” in a stage whisper.
5. Make up a deck of index cards with surprising situations (You’ve just been told you get to go to Disneyland!, You’ve just been told your grandmother is very sick., etc.) As each team member comes to the front, hand them a card. They are to say “I can’t believe you just said that to me” in an expressive way. This is fun and should go on for a while! Talk about the inflections and different ways things can be said. Try it emphasizing each word and see how the meaning changes.
6. Have team members show activities/tasks/feelings without talking. Charades. Show emotions like: happy, glad, calm, content, sad, despondent, surprised, embarrassed, excited, hurt feelings, uneasy, worried, careful.
7. Move across and around without turning your back to the audience. Sometimes you have to circle around. Always turn toward the audience, never away. Layout a series of points and have team members go from point to point.
8. Make a series of index cards with different characters listed. Call out “You are a tree” – have team members get into that character. Call out “Freeze”. Ask them a series of questions to help develop their characters: “Do you have branches? (Pause) How do your roots feel? What kind of bark do you have? Are there animals living within your branches or in your roots? Call out “You are a dog”. Let them get in character. Ask questions. Are you happy? Do you have a family? Etc. Let them develop. Do several more. Talk about having a character with history, an outlook, maybe an old injury, etc. Do this again when their solution is more developed. Try: tree, frog, firefighter, turtle, robot, teacher, minister, turtle, nurse, president, grandfather or grandmother, son or daughter, friend w me, surgeon, elephant, monkey, moon, husband or wife.
9. Explore the team’s talents, skill and interest in music.
10. Give a card with two lines. Have two characters on stage. Give the card to the first player. The first player reads their line, and then covers when the second player doesn’t say anything. Lines like: Actor 1: “I sure am glad we got to go to the party last night” Actor 2: I didn’t want to go, but I’m glad we got to see your brother” The first actor has to work the second player’s line in. (Cover for the second player) Try: “Actor 1: I was so upset yesterday when we got lost in the mall!” – Actor 2: Me too. But I was glad we got to buy some chocolate!”
11. Warm up! (This item should be moved earlier). Get everyone up and loosened up. Do some stretches, some twists, some jumps, some tongue twisters. “Talking is done with the tip of the tongue and the teeth”
12. Memorize by repeating the lines out loud. Look at the line. Look away and say it. Look back to check. Look away and say it. You have to hear yourself say it!