

SPOKEN WORD TOOLKIT: *check-it!

(some exercises pulled from "Take the Mic: the Art of Performance Poetry, Slam and the Spoken Word" by Mark Smith and "How To Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC" by Paul Edwards)

MEMORIZE your *TEXT*. Like learning to dance, play a sport or sing your favorite song, it helps to memorize the movements, the next steps, the next lyrics. This will help you build more confidence and give you room to play with how you **PERFORM** your piece when you don't have to filter it from the page to brain then to voice. ** **TUNE IN** and **VISUALIZE** images when you memorize. Encode these images in your mind to draw from when you speak.

PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUES: *Practise these techniques with your work to make it a masterpiece!*

- Volume:** Did the audience hear what you said? Speak loud enough for someone at the back of the room to hear you clearly. Speak directly into a microphone. Adjust your volume to change tone, mood or intensity of the piece.
- Speed:** Alternating between different speeds can create added dimensions to your work. When and why would you want to adjust the speed? What could this suggest?
- Pause:** Dramatic pauses can really pull in the audience, to help them re-focus and ache to know what's coming next. It also helps you breathe, and re-centre yourself if you tend to get stage fright.
- Breath:** Breathing is **ESSENTIAL** to performance. Without breath, someone better call the paramedics to resuscitate you! Work with placing breath at different moments of your poem. By creating variation in line lengths, this will help you establish set points for breathing.
- Articulation:** Refers to the time value we assign to each syllable, as well as how we enunciate words. Give definition to all the details of words and how they are spoken in a clear, direct manner. From there, stretch syllables to slow down the line. This will change the inflection (pitch at which we sound out the syllables).
- Emphasis:** By simply changing what words you emphasize you can change the meaning of a piece entirely. Try articulating different words in a line: * in hip hop they usually emphasize the 1st/down beat.
I *AM* the king of Siam I am the *KING* of Siam I am the king of *SIAM*
- Exaggeration:** Explore using more than one of these techniques to exaggerate an idea. Try speaking really loud and slow, with a dramatic pause in the middle, then speed it up at the very end. Mix it up!
- **EYE CONTACT:** Try not to stare at your new sneakers when you perform. We know they're awesome, but it's better to look up at the audience or just beyond their heads. Focus on one person to add a personal effect.
- **BODY LANGUAGE and POSITIONING:** Slouching isn't going to sell your poem about ending world hunger. Stand tall, ground your feet shoulder width apart, and explore using your hands, arms, varying gestures, etc.
- PROPER HYDRATION, SLEEP, PREPARATION:** Take care of yourself before you present your work, same as you would if you were going to run a marathon!!
- REHEARSE:** I can't stress enough how important it is to rehearse, rehearse, rehearse so you can be confident and perform with ease of execution.

SONIC FORMS: Performance is about sound! Make your rant reverberate with real resonance!

Euphony: pleasant combo of sounds and sonic devices.

Cacophony: mixture of sounds and sonic devices that clash and create harsh, discordant effects.

Alliteration: repetition of initial sounds of two or more words in a line or series of lines.

Hidden Alliteration: repetition of sounds within two or more words in a line or series of lines.

“Long ago regal glory regaled at the tables set by the poor.”

Assonance: repetition of two or more identical vowel sounds within words in a line or series of lines.

“Something pinged when I dinged the tinkle bell.”

Consonance: like hidden alliteration, it is the repetition of two or more identical consonant sounds close together in a line or series of lines. *really popular in hip hop.

“The bright little British boy.” b sound alliterates and t sounds are consonantal.

Onomatopoeia: BOOM! BUZZ! GONG! Words that mimic or suggest the sounds they describe.

RHYTHMIC PATTERNS: There are more places than one to place a rhyme. Try exploring some of these different scenarios to create more dynamic sounding poetics.

End Rhyme: rhyming words that occur at the end of two or more poetic lines

Held captive 4 your politics

they wanted 2 break your *soul*

They ordered the extermination

of all minds they couldn't *control*

- from “Just a Breath of Freedom” for Nelson Mandela by Tupac Shakur

Cross Rhyme: rhymes a line-ending word with a word in the middle of a preceding or following line.

Love finds ways to *mask*

The bitter *task* when it says,

Good-bye.

Interlaced Rhyme: rhymes words in the middle of one line with words in the middle of another line.

Hapless rode the *headless* horseman

Like a *bedless* husband in the night

Internal Rhyme: rhymes the end of a line with a word in the middle of the line

Like worms in his *eyes* twisted with *lies*

Linked Rhyme: rhymes the last sound of a line with the first sound of the next lines:

Sling your sizzling muck across the room

Fume at me from afar

Tar and feather my position

I shall not alter a single word.

Slant-rhyme, Off-rhyme, near rhyme: allow sounds that aren't quite identical to masquerade as rhyme

He picked up the wrench
and went to the hedge
to find his *neighbour*
and return the *favour*

Wrenched rhyme: twists unmercifully the spelling, sense, and sound of words to the make them fit into a rhyme scheme

Poets aren't very *useful*
Because they aren't very *consuming* or very *produceful*
Even poets of great *promise*
Don't contribute much to trade and commerce.
- from "Everybody Makes Poets" by Ogden Nash

****HIP HOP Poetics! Rhyme is essential** and is most often influenced by musical beats, DJs scratching, pre-written lyrics and the intensity of improvised and freestyle forms. Often emcees/rappers are given 16 bars to spit their truth, creating different rhymes within those sixteen bars. Take a look at one of your favorite hip hop rapper's lyrics. Underline all the different forms of rhyme you can locate.

WHOLE VERSE RHYME SCHEME: Links all the bars of a verse together with the same rhyme. It can be challenging to write so many consistent rhymes without losing track of the message. (taken from Busta Rhymes's "Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Could See")

	1	2	3	4
1	it's a must that	you <i>heard of us,</i>	yo, <i>we muder-</i>	ous. A
2	lot of niggas	is wondering	and they <i>curi-</i>	ous how...

COMPOUND RHYMES: "heard of us" "murderous" and "curious" join the bars together, and the rest of the verse follows in the same way, using the same rhyme scheme for 16 bars.

Name that rhyme! (from Nas's "N.Y. State of Mind") highlight/underline the rhymes.

	1	2	3	4
1	Rappers, I	monkey flip em	with the funky	rhythm I be
2	kicking. Mu-	sician, in-	flicting compo-	sition...

HOOK: What's a hook? Something you cast into your poetry to catch audiences. It's bait. In a song form it's called a "chorus". We write hooks to make our "master statement". We can repeat it throughout a piece to bring people back in. Sometimes it is used to start a poem, sometimes it appears in the middle. *Try getting the audience to speak your hook along with you!

CALL & RESPONSE: How to get the audience involved? Try a call and response, an instant crowd pleaser.

TRY WRITING FROM A HOOK or PROMPT:

Revolution is...

Everything is bent when you're living in the city...

Words are...

Love is my motive...

We live for fatal attractions...

The human heart is the size of a fist...

The naked truth is...

NOW WRITE YOUR OWN HOOK: choose a line or statement from a poem you've written and see if you can repeat it throughout your piece. Use it to open up your piece. Begin each stanza (paragraph) with it.
