



The English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Each student must select, memorize and perform one (1) monologue from one of Shakespeare's plays. Essential Competition rules and guidelines can be found online at www.esuus.org in NSC/Rules & Eligibility section.

STEP 1: SELECTING A MONOLOGUE

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please check to see if you are required to select a monologue from a specific list provided by your local ESU Branch. You can find this information in Competition materials sent to your school by your local ESU Branch. If you are in doubt, please ask your local ESU Branch Shakespeare Coordinator.

Your Aim: To select a monologue from one of Shakespeare's plays that interests you.

Look over the Suggested Monologues List and the accompanying **Suggested Monologues Packet** (provided by your teacher and available online at www.shakespearecompetition.org). Focus on selections from plays you have already studied/will study in class this year or be adventurous and discover Shakespeare's lesser-known roles and plays. **Select at least two monologues** that interest you. You can pick any role regardless of your gender (i.e. females can play male roles and vice versa). **Explore the plays** in which these monologues appear and **research the characters**. Then **select one monologue to present** at the competition.

Can't find the perfect fit for you on these documents? No problem; Shakespeare's entire cannon is available to you (first see the note at the top of this page). As you search for another monologue, here are some general tips:

- Aim for consecutive material with a beginning, middle and end.
- Avoid cutting within speeches (unless cutting the lines of another role in a shared dialogue).
- If any cuts are made, make sure the piece still makes logical sense.

REMINDER: Your chosen monologue must not exceed twenty (20) lines (verse or prose) according to the Folger Shakespeare Library editions of the plays (Simon & Schuster, 2003-2013). The English-Speaking Union adheres strictly to this rule, and the presentation of a monologue exceeding these limits will result in disqualification. Note: All the monologues on our *Suggested Monologue List* and its accompanying packet adhere to this line limit rule.

TIP: The Folger editions of the plays are available for free online at: www.folgerdigitaltexts.org.

TASKS FOR YOU:

When selecting your monologue, you should:



- **Read the Script**
Actors research your roles; it would be a rare thing to perform a monologue convincingly without knowing the character inside and out. Thus, you should have read the play from which your selection is taken and know the plot and characters well. Free online versions are available at: <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/>. Tip: Make a chart or diagram of the action and characters.
- **Play the Casting Director**
When you pick your selection, you will need to be an actor and casting director at the same time. You should ask yourself if you would be a more convincing Viola or Olivia, Othello or Iago.



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STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING THE MONOLOGUE

Your Aim: To understand the play, your chosen character and your selected monologue.

What is a monologue? A monologue is a speech presented by a single character set within the context of a play. When students select your texts, remind you that actions (whether implied, reported or presented) have both preceded and/or will proceed from this speech.

The words spoken by your character fit within the larger framework of the play in one or more of these ways:

- Reveal the character's personality or goals.
- Used by the character to incite others into action and move the plot forward.
- Set the scene or close the action (as in prologues and epilogues).

TASKS FOR YOU:

Once you select your monologue, you should:

- **Become Your Character**
As you read the play, place yourself in the circumstances faced by your character. Note their interactions with other characters. If necessary, make a chart of your character's emotional journey over the course of the play. Highlight high and low points for them.
TIP: Pay particular attention to what happens immediately before your monologue begins.
- **Do the Research**
Shakespeare did not write in a vacuum; his work was influenced by the events around him. Depending on which character you have selected to play, you may want to research them (if they are a historical figure) and/or the time period they inhabit. Also look at Shakespeare's source material for the play and see how characters/events are incorporated and transformed.
TIP: For the "history" plays, think about how a historical role is portrayed in the play and ask yourself if this portrayal matches up with history's account of that person.
- **Be a Textual Investigator**
The text provides clues about your character (both explicitly and through inferences). Using textual evidence, answer the following questions:
 1. Who is my character?
 2. In what situation do I (the character) find myself?
 3. What decisions and discoveries am I (the character) making?
 4. What do I (the character) want to happen as a result of this speech?
 5. Given my past and my personality, how will I (the character) act to bring about the desired effect?
 6. What is my character's mood at the beginning of the speech?
 7. Has it (my character's mood) changed by the end? If so, how?





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STEP 3: PREPARING THE MONOLOGUE

Your Aim: To thoughtfully interpret your character on stage. You must understand his or her role in the play and accurately interpret the meaning of the character's actions.

Our advice to you comes from Shakespeare himself: “Suit the action to the word, the word to the action” (*Hamlet* 3.2). Students should discover which movements and gestures best fit with the words of your monologue and vice versa. Great actors are praised for your “natural” performances (i.e. for having your performance naturally fit and flow with the text and character). Actors do this by mastering the tools of vocal and physical expression so completely that you *seem* natural.

Students become “natural” actors with Shakespeare through on-your-feet trial and error. Explore the words—the character’s thoughts and feelings—with your voice and body. This helps you make your character come alive on stage, and in doing so, convinces the audience to accept you as that character and to believe in the message you are delivering. As you discover your own interpretation of Shakespeare’s works, guidance and feedback from both your teacher and fellow classmates are encouraged.

TIP: Avoid the temptation to “blow the audience away” with an excess of emotion. In acting, more is often less. An actor who “protests too much” rarely convinces.

TASKS FOR YOU:

As you work on your monologue, you should:

- Get out of your chairs and **up on your feet**.
- **Explore** the range of expressive possibilities of voice and movement.
- **Experiment** with emphasis, phrasing, volume vs. economy of gesture and facial expression.
- **Allow** your work to naturally **grow and change**.
- After experimenting with many different options, **decide** which means of expression best fits the tone and character of your monologue.

**ADDITIONAL PREPARATION
TIPS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE
AT WWW.ESUUS.ORG.**

NOTE ON JUDGING CRITERIA

You will be judged on two main categories of evaluation:

- **Understanding** (includes Meaning, Language, Character)
- **Communication & Expression** (includes Vocal, Physical and Ownership)



For more information, please review the *Monologue Scoring Rubric* and *Judging Advice for Students* (both available online at www.esuus.org in the National Shakespeare Competition/Judge Resources section).