

Recitation Tips for Students

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Starting and Finishing

Start your recitation with the title of the poem and the poet's name:

"Heat" by Archibald Lampman

« Clair de lune » de Victor Hugo

Then begin your recitation.

Once you've finished your recitation, pause to let the poem settle over the audience, then walk away.

As you practise your poem, keep the following aspects of your performance in mind:

Accuracy

A fundamental aspect of recitation (and often a deciding factor at the higher levels of the contest) is knowing every word of your poem.

Be sure to memorize your poem exactly as it appears in the Poetry In Voice/Les voix de la poésie online anthology, including any epigraph.

Making comments, such as saying your name, "thank you," or anything else before or after your recitation, will result in a lower accuracy score.

At every level of the contest, an accuracy judge will check your recitation against the version of the poem on the website and give you an accuracy score.

Physical Presence

Establish a strong stage presence by practising the following:

- + good posture
- + comfortable, steady eye contact with the audience
- + confident body language

AVOID:

- slouching
- timid eye contact
- nervous body language (fidgeting, shifting)

Evidence of Understanding

If you don't understand your poem, neither will your audience.

- + Be sure you're clear about the meaning of your poem. A great place to start is the poem's page on our website, where you'll find a list of the themes and poetic terms and forms used, as well as the poet's biography.
- + Double-check that you understand any words that are new to you.
- If you're unclear on the meaning of a poem, you can't recite it effectively. Research your poem and discuss it with your teacher. Once you understand your poem, you can craft your recitation accordingly.

Voice and Articulation

Use your voice to make the poem come alive for the audience. Make careful decisions about your volume and pacing:

- + ensure your voice reaches the whole audience
- + proceed at a natural pace and accelerate or decelerate as needed
- + let your voice rise and fall with the poem
- + decide how long a pause to use for each punctuation mark
- + play with the line breaks of the poem (N.B.: Not all line breaks call for a pause)

❗ Be sure to check your pronunciation with your teacher before you finalize your performance. When an older version of a word is used in a poem, both the modern and historic pronunciations of that word are acceptable (e.g., the word *belov'd* could be pronounced *be-loved* or *be-lov-ed*).

AVOID:

- mispronouncing words
- being too loud or too quiet
- reciting too quickly or too slowly for the poem
- reciting monotonously
- reciting in a sing-song manner (particularly if you're reciting a rhymed poem)
- singing your poem (some of the poems in our anthology are also known song lyrics; be sure that your pacing is based on your understanding of the poem and doesn't mimic the beats and measures of the song)

❗ You'll never be penalized for your natural accent; however, affected character accents are strongly discouraged.

Interpretation

When you recite, you're more like a narrator than an actor. You need to convey the meaning and enhance the audience's experience of the poem without acting it out.

- + Let the words of the poem do the emotional work during your recitation.
- + Depending on the poem, occasional gestures can be appropriate. If you're uncertain about whether or not to include them, leave them out.

AVOID:

- an overly emotional delivery style
- distracting, excessive gestures or facial expressions

Overall Performance

This category evaluates the overall success of your recitation, taking into account the above criteria, your poem choice, the poem's complexity, and how you've made the poem your own.