Event Description
Using a play, short story, or other published work, students perform a selection of one or more portions of a piece up to ten minutes in length. With a spotlight on character development and depth, Dramatic Interpretation focuses on a student’s ability to convey emotion through the use of a dramatic text. Competitors may portray one or multiple characters. No props or costumes may be used. Performances may also include an introduction written by the student to contextualize the performance and state the title and author.

Considerations for Selecting DI Literature
Students who do Dramatic Interpretation may perform selections on topics of serious social subject matter such as coping with terminal illness; significant historical situations, events, and figures; as well as racial and gender discrimination, suppression, and oppression. Students should select pieces that are appropriate for them. Considerations for selecting a DI topic should include the student’s age, maturity, and school standards.

Traits of Successful DI Performers
When considering what event you should choose, or in which direction to point a student when selecting an event, below are some general traits of successful DIers to keep in mind:

- Insightful character analysis
- Mature demeanor
- Controlled performance
- Depth/breadth of emotion
- Makes motivated choices
- Expressive

Examples of Past DI Titles
- 13 Things About Ed Carpolotti by Jeffrey Hatcher
- Fences by August Wilson
- Marilyn: Her Life in Her Own Words by George Barris
- Life of Pi by Yann Martel
- Master Class by Terrence McNally
- Misery by Steven King
- My Left Breast by Susan Miller
- Spoonface Steinberg by Lee Hall
- The Bald and the Beautiful by J J Jonas
- The Women of Lockerbie by Deborah Revoort

Learn More!
The National Speech & Debate Association is the leading provider of competitive and educational resources to aid students and coaches as they explore our competitive events. For Dramatic Interpretation, we provide a number of helpful resources—including live and recorded webinars designed to introduce foundational and advanced concepts in Interp; access to DI final round videos; an interpretation textbook for Resource Package subscribers; videos from champion coaches; and much more more! Take advantage of the amazing benefits of being a member by using our resources to help you advance yourself in competitive speech and debate activities. Visit www.speechanddebate.org for more information.

Find Your Voice
DI helped me develop a better understanding of the world in which I live. To be able to create a narrative that portrays a person you have never known or a situation you’ve never been in so others can learn from it is worth everything.”

— Jamaque Newberry, Association Alum


**Basic Understandings**

Dramatic Interpretation, contrary to its name, is not all about drama. While dramatic elements are key aspects of the event, melodramatic, or overly-sad selections are not ideal choices for performance. DI lacks props, costuming, sets, and other luxuries seen in various forms of performance art. There is a set time limit of ten minutes, with a thirty second grace period. Students who choose to compete in Dramatic Interpretation should focus on suspending the disbelief of the audience by portraying a realistic, emotional journey of a character(s). The performance should connect to the audience.

**Research**

When looking for a Dramatic Interpretation, it’s important to know your limitations, and your strengths. Technical skills, vocal flexibility, physicality, and gender can be factors in your choice. Additionally, it’s important to think of the performance itself when searching for a script. Does the literature lend itself to performance, or is the language too flowery? Is the plot complicated or is it a simple story told in a simple way? Think about what you are capable of, and how you would like to be challenged throughout the season when making a selection. Remember to consult your state’s rules in regards what is acceptable literature.

Ask yourself, what kind of character am I comfortable playing? What kind of story am I comfortable telling? What story do I want to tell? Narrow your search from there. Remember to keep an open mind. Sometimes, you can create an ideal of the piece you’d like to perform, and reject other suggestions that come along the way. Sometimes it’s better to try something different that will stretch you as a performer.

When searching for a script, it’s important that the language sounds natural when read aloud. For instance, Shakespeare and Hemingway may be be less effective choices for DI because the language is archaic and less conversational. Find a script that when read aloud, feels natural, or comfortable to speak and hear.

Tense is also an important factor of selecting a dramatic interpretation. Because the majority of DI’s take place within one scene, or have an anchor reality, the tense should reflect the reality the character is telling the story from. An anchor reality is the imagined-space from which the character is speaking. For instance, a house-wife’s anchor reality may be her kitchen. Throughout the story, she may move to other realities that exist in a different space and time, but she will return to tell her story from her anchor reality. Also, consider how the tense will influence blocking, or movement in the performance space, before deciding on a selection.

Go to your local library, visit the biographies section of a bookstore, or visit Play Scripts, Dramatists, or Samuel French online. These are just a few of the places you may find material for your performance.

**Structural Components**

Structure of an Interp (taken from *Interpretation of Literature, Bringing Words to Life*).

- **TEASER** • 0:00 – 1:30
  Previews the topic and mood of the selection

- **INTRO** • 1:30 – 3:00
  Explains the purpose of the performance

- **EXPOSITION** • 3:00 – 3:30
  Introduces characters and setting

- **INCITING INCIDENT** • 3:30 – 4:00
  Sends the conflict into motion

- **RISING ACTION** • 4:00 – 7:30
  Complicates the conflict

- **CLIMAX** • 7:30 – 8:30
  Emotional peak of the performance

- **FALLING ACTION** • 8:30 – 9:30
  Resolves the conflict
There are a few key structural components of every DI:

**Cutting.** Your cutting is the 10 minute portion of your selection you chose to perform. This is how you’ve arranged the literature, and what aspects of the story you’ve decided to tell. It will directly influence the other two aspects of your performance.

**Characterization** is informed decisions you’ve made on how the character(s) will think, act, move and sound. The choices you make about your character should be informed by the script itself.

**Blocking,** or tech, is how the character(s) moves in the space you’ve created for him/her/them. Sometimes blocking is expressive in nature, symbolizing how that character is feeling emotionally, while at other times, denotes events that are occurring in the imagined space i.e. opening up a soda or sweeping the floor.

**Introduction.** An introduction explains the purpose of the performance. Typically, after the teaser, a performer will give a brief explanation of the piece’s relevance, then give the title and author before returning to the performance.

**Organizing**

Before memorizing the material, take the time to “beat” out your script. This means reading the script aloud and making notes as you go. As you read aloud, use symbols to indicate shorter pauses “/” or longer pauses “//.” Consider the emotionality behind each line. Ask yourself what the motivation for the characters’ actions are. Use this to influence blocking choices.

Indicate rough blocking in the margins of your script. Choose gestures that reflect the emotional state of the character, or blocking that enhances or creates the illusion of the imagined space of the character. (i.e. resting a hand on a counter or leaning on the back of a chair.) Think in terms of symbolic gestures and psychological gestures. A symbolic gestures is a gesture that is not commonly used in day to day communication. Example: if you were to show me what “freedom” looked like, you may outstretch your arms like Maria Von Trapp singing “The Hills Are Alive” on the side of a mountain. This isn’t a common gesture found in conversation. However, it communicates without words the idea of freedom. Conversely, a psychological gesture is one that is found in conversation. Examples include, scratching your nose, or shaking your head yes or no. For more information on these techniques, check out *Interpretation of Literature: Bringing Words to Life* by Travis Kiger and Ganer Newman.

Read your script aloud. Eliminate any excess language that sounds awkward or is unnecessarily redundant. A DI script should be no more than 1,200 words, which requires continuous cutting of superfluous language.

**Standing it Up/Practicing**

Often, you’ll find that if you’ve spent the appropriate amount of time reading, cutting, and analyzing a script, memorization will be an easier process. Here are some things to keep in mind, to help simplify the process:

First, our brains are a muscle. The more time you practice memorizing, or simply memorize things, the better you become. Often, performers take more time in the beginning of a season to commit a script to memory than they do at the end of the competitive season. Memorizing is a process.
Next, memorization is physical. Sitting down staring at a script, re-reading the lines in your head will not be beneficial. Memorize the script with the intent to perform it. Type up a clean version with only your finalized text and blocking. Then, tape it to the wall and actively memorize. Read the lines aloud moving with them as indicated by your cutting. Sometimes, it’s helpful to do this in front of a mirror, so you can evaluate the effectiveness of your movements. It is helpful to memorize a paragraph at a time, building off of the paragraph that came before. This will significantly decrease the time it takes to memorize your performance.

Once memorized, you and your coach can then build off of the choices you’ve made for your character. Adjustments to blocking, characterization, and line delivery can be made.

Performance Tips

It may sound cliche, but confidence is key! If you’ve put the legwork in, you should feel confident in the product you’ve created. Walk into that round with your head held high, ready to show the world what you’ve got! Trust what you and your coach created. Do what you practiced, and if you feel compelled to “try something new;” review it with your coach beforehand. Consistency is key. It’s hard to evaluate what to change in practice if your performance in the round is completely different than what you’ve been working on.

Pay attention to other performers. Smile, be a warm, inviting audience member. There is nothing worse than getting up to perform and having an audience that either stone faces you or won’t look you in the eye. Think of it this way: each round is about 60 minutes. Ten of those involve you performing, the other 50 are for you to listen, learn, and support your competitors.

Keep a notebook for between rounds. Sometimes, another person’s performance will inspire you, and it’s a good idea to have a notebook handy to write down new ideas. It’s also nice to know who you competed against in each round. This way, you have a better understanding of who your competition is. When you review your ballots after the tournament, you can go back through your notebook and compare your ballots to your notes.

Between rounds, figure out what room you will be performing in next. Congratulate your competitors on a good performance after the round ends, and make friends during downtime. Be gracious, and keep criticisms of other performers to yourself, even if someone else tries to start a negative conversation.

Resources

A great source is Interpretation of Literature—Bringing Words to Life by Travis Kiger and Ganer Newman. They cover cutting, characterization, blocking, and the structure of a story. Additionally, if this is your first time doing Dramatic Interpretation, go watch a final round of DI! Observe the rounds not only as entertainment, but keep your eyes peeled for effective cutting, characterization, and blocking. Ask yourself, how can I apply similar techniques to my performance? How can I build off of what this performer is doing? The best way to learn DI, outside of actively doing it, is by watching and learning from other performers.

The textbook, final rounds, and more can be found on www.speechanddebate.org.
Event Description

Two competitors team up to deliver a ten-minute performance of a published play or story. Using off-stage focus, Duo Interpretation competitors convey emotion and environment through a variety of performance techniques focusing on the relationships and interactions between the characters. No props or costumes are used. Performances may also include an introduction written by the students to contextualize the performance and state the title and author.

Considerations for Selecting Duo Literature

When looking at literature, a Duo entry must consider how the literature would work for both members of the team. Duo Interpretation strives for a balanced performance with both partners being integral to the development of the piece’s characters, relationships, plot, and more. Duo Interpretation allows for students to do humorous, dramatic, or pieces that combine both into the performance. Considerations for selecting a topic for a Duo Interpretation should include age, maturity, and school standards.

Traits of Successful Duo Performers

When considering what event you should choose, or which direction to point a student when selecting an event, below are some general traits of successful Duo students to keep in mind:

- Combination of comedic and dramatic skills
- Enthusiasm for choreography
- Strong listening skills
- Willingness to co-create
- Flexibility

Examples of Past Duo Titles

- 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee by Rachel Sheinkin
- Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged by Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield
- Expecting Isabel by Lisa Loomer
- I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change by Joe DiPietro and Jimmy Roberts
- Little Shop of Horrors by Howard Ashman
- Peter Pan by J.M. Barrie
- Regina Flector Wins the Science Fair by Marco Ramirez
- Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me by Frank McGuinness
- The Crayon Map by Oliver Leslie and Christopher Marianetti
- Year One by Harold Ramis, Gene Stupnitsky, and Lee Eisenberg

Learn More!

The National Speech & Debate Association is the leading provider of competitive and educational resources to aid students and coaches as they explore our competitive events. For Duo Interpretation, we provide a number of helpful resources—including live and recorded webinars designed to introduce foundational and advanced concepts in Interp; access to Duo final round videos; an interpretation textbook for Resource Package subscribers; videos from champion coaches; and much more! Take advantage of the amazing benefits of being a member by using our resources to help you advance yourself in competitive speech and debate activities. Visit www.speechanddebate.org for more information.

Find Your Voice

Duo Interpretation is an excellent crash course on creativity. The process of cutting, blocking, and refining a script really encourages young artists to think differently and create form and empty space. I think the best part of Duo was the opportunity to meet so many talented, creative people who turn words on a page into phenomenal showcases of artistry, and to have the ability to do it all with my best friend.”

— Zach Snow, Association Alum
Basic Understandings

Duo. The event everyone wants to do with a best friend. In truth, while the appeal of duo might be performing with a friend, this approach may not be best. Duo is about balance. Partners need to compliment one another stylistically, have a similar skill set and work ethic. Chemistry is an important element of duo, but chemistry outside of a practice/performance setting does not always translate to chemistry when practicing or performing at a tournament. Be sure to share your goals with your coach as they help you through the process of getting started in duo.

Duo is an event that can be dramatic, comedic, or a combination of the two. With a ten minute time cap, and a requirement of an off-stage focus, Duo is one of the most unique forms of performance. The main objective is to maintain a sense of balance between performers that focuses on the relationship(s) between the characters they create.

Complex plots are hard to follow, especially if there are more than two characters in the selection. Remember: you have ten minutes to tell a story. Don’t pick anything too abstract or complicated.

Keep in mind that each partner should be assigned to a specific character(s), and that you should not switch between characters throughout the performance.

Know the strengths and weaknesses of the team. If the piece requires a lot of physical tech, or vocal variance, and a partner struggles with this, it might not be the best idea to choose that selection.

Finally, it’s always a good idea to watch the latest duo rounds. Duo is an incredibly diverse event. Watch a final round to get a feel for the stylistic differences that are found throughout the event.

Structural Components

Structure of an Interp (taken from Interpretation of Literature, Bringing Words to Life).

**TEASER** • 0:00 – 1:30
Previews the topic and mood of the selection

**INTRO** • 1:30 – 3:00
Explains the purpose of the performance

**EXPOSITION** • 3:00 – 3:30
Introduces characters and setting

**INCITING INCIDENT** • 3:30 – 4:00
Sends the conflict into motion

**RISING ACTION** • 4:00 – 7:30
Complicates the conflict

**CLIMAX** • 7:30 – 8:30
Emotional peak of the performance

**FALLING ACTION** • 8:30 – 9:30
Resolves the conflict

Cutting. This is the parts of the selection you’ve chosen to perform. Having a solid cutting is incredibly important because it influences every performative choice you make. It should dictate characterization, motivation, blocking, and relational tensions.

Research

There are two ways to go about finding a script: You can either let the choice of partner influence the material you want to perform, or let the selection determine the ideal partner.

Go to your local library, visit the bookstore, check out children’s stories, or search for plays with two or more characters. Look for a simple story told in a simple way.
**Characterization.** All interpretation events require that strong character choices are made. Distinct physical, vocal, and emotional choices should be made for each character.

**Relationship.** This is probably the biggest component of an effective duo. The duo should focus on the relationship between the characters. There should be a constant push and pull as the characters fight for power in the relationship. The approach can be humorous or dramatic in nature, but there should be defined goals for the performance, and each scene within that performance. Discuss the motivation for each character and set objectives for the message to convey in each scene and how the audience should feel.

**Blocking.** Duo can be the most visually stunning of interpretation events because when you've got double the performers, there is double the potential for creative blocking choices. Blocking is how the characters move within the imagined space you've created for them. Make sure the blocking creates the imagined space the characters exist in (i.e. a spaceship, or an office), and the emotional state of the characters (i.e. standing farther apart to symbolize emotional distance, or turning inward during an intimate conversation).

**Intro.** An introduction explains the purpose of the performance. Typically, each duo partner takes a turn explaining the justification for the performance. Competitors usually close the intro by giving the title and author before continuing with the performance.

**Organizing**

When you cut a duo, make sure partners agree on the objective of the story. Establish what the climax should be, and from there, construct the story leading up to it. Make sure that the lines are balanced, and remove redundant lines, or chunks of the story that are not integral to the plot of the cutting. Consider what the visual representation of the piece will look like, taking into account that duo is meant to be performed with an off stage focus. Denote in the cutting changes in pace, where to take beats (pauses), and important blocking moments. Partners need to discuss why the characters are doing what they're doing.

**Standing it Up/Practicing**

Often, if the appropriate amount of time was spent reading, cutting, and analyzing a script, memorization will be easier. However, it can still be a challenge. Here are things to keep in mind:

First, brains are a muscle. The more time a person practices memorizing, or simply memorize things, the better s/he become. Memorizing is a process.

Next, memorization is physical. Sitting down staring at a script, re-reading the lines will not be beneficial. Memorize the script with the intent to perform it. Type up a clean version with only finalized text and blocking. Then, tape it to the wall to actively memorize. Read the lines aloud moving with them as indicated by the cutting. Partners should be in front of a mirror, so they can evaluate the effectiveness of their movements. This is particularly important in duo because “clean” blocking, or blocking that is defined, motivated, and executed with precision, will factor into the rank in the round. It is helpful to memorize a scene at a time, building off of the previous scene. Partners need to remember that a character is responding to what a character said before. Conceptualize the lines as a conversation to help memorization.

Because Duo is a dialogue heavy, relationship focused performance, it's important for the characters to listen and react to each other. Notice how friends engage with each other when they talk. Facial reactions, gestures, and other nonverbal response are a huge part of...
communication. Make sure that each character is engaged in the performance, even when they aren’t speaking. Having well thought out, motivated reactions can bring a Duo to the next level.

Once memorized, the duo students and their coach can then build off of the choices that’ve been made for characters. Adjustments to blocking, characterization, and line delivery can be made.

**Performance Tips**

It may sound cliche, but confidence is key! If the legwork has been put in, confidence is a natural product. Competitors should walk into that round with heads held high, ready to show the world what they’ve got! Trust what has been created. Do what was practiced, and if feeling compelled to “try something new,” the coach should be consulted. Consistency is key. It’s hard to evaluate what to change in practice if the performance in the round is completely different than what was worked on for the past few weeks.

Pay attention to other performers. Smile, and be a warm, inviting audience member. Partners should not conspire with each other during the round! If there’s something they need to tell each other, it can be said after the round in private. There is nothing worse than getting up to perform and having an audience that either stone faces you, won’t look you in the eye, or is clearly more concerned about talking to their partner than paying attention to the performance. Think of it this way: each round is about 60 minutes. Ten of those involve a duo performing, the other 50 are for your duo to listen, learn, and support your fellow competitors.

Keep a notebook for between rounds. Sometimes, another person’s performance will be inspirational, and it’s a good idea to have a notebook handy to write down new ideas. It’s also nice to know who your duo competed against in each round. A duo should review their ballots after the tournament, and then they can go back through their notebook and compare their ballots to their notes.

Between rounds, duo students should figure out what room they will be performing in next. They should congratulate competitors on a good performance after the round ends, and make friends during downtime. They should be gracious, and keep criticisms of other performers to themselves, even if someone else tries to start a negative conversation.

**Resources**

A great source is *Interpretation of Literature—Bringing Words to Life* by Travis Kiger and Ganer Newman. They cover cutting, characterization, blocking, and the structure of a story. Additionally, if this is your first time doing Duo Interpretation, go watch a final round of Duo! Observe the rounds not only as entertainment, but keep your eyes peeled for effective cutting, characterization, and blocking. Ask yourself, how can I apply similar techniques to my performance? How can I build off of what this duo is doing? The best way to learn Duo, outside of actively doing it, is by watching and learning from other performers. The textbook, final rounds, and more can be found on [www.speechanddebate.org](http://www.speechanddebate.org).
Event Description
Using a play, short story, or other published work, students perform a selection of one or more portions of a piece up to ten minutes in length. Humorous Interpretation is designed to test a student’s comedic skills through script analysis, delivery, timing, and character development. Competitors may portray one or multiple characters. No props or costumes may be used. Performances can also include an introduction written by the student to contextualize the performance and state the title and author.

Considerations for Selecting HI Literature
When searching for literature, a student should look for more than one-liner jokes. Humor can be created through strategic choreography, creative characterization, and dynamic non-verbal reactions. Typical selection topics range from light-hearted material including interpretations of comics, children’s literature, plays, short stories, and more. Considerations for selecting an HI topic should include the student’s age, maturity, and school standards.

Traits of Successful HI Performers
When considering what event you should choose, or which direction to point a student when selecting an event, here are some traits of successful HIers to keep in mind:

• Creative
• Physical control
• Bold/high energy
• Ability to think outside the box
• Dynamic physical and vocal techniques
• Risk taker

Examples of Past HI Titles
• Avenue Q by Robert Lopez
• Batboy by Keythe Farley and Brian Flemming
• Bobby Wilson Can Eat His Own Face by Don Zolidis
• Disney Mom Group Therapy by Mo Gaffney
• Drugs are Bad by Jonathan Rand
• Junie B. Jones is (Almost) a Flower Girl by Barbara Parks
• Law & Order - Fairy Tale Unit by Jonathan Rand
• Legally Blonde the Musical by Laurence O’Keefe
• Ruthless by Joel Paley
• The Hunger Pains: A Parody by The Harvard Lampoon

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Robin Williams said, ‘You’re only given a little spark of madness. You mustn’t lose it.’ HI was my way of keeping and exercising my madness muscle, because we all need a little madness to keep the insanity away. HI, and speech in general, helped to cultivate a sense of fearlessness, not only in my performances, but also in my life.”
— Dan Johnson, Association Alum

Find Your Voice
Basic Understandings
Humorous Interpretation, as its name indicates, is humorous. Competitors often use multi-character selections to tell relatable stories using humor as a device to connect with the audience. Think about your favorite comedian’s latest stand up routine, or something funny that recently happened. Ask yourself why it’s funny. Then ask yourself if that joke would be funny to, say, your mom, or great-great Uncle Joe. Humor is a complex human quirk. Each individual’s sense of humor is unique. However, other aspects of humor are more universal in nature. So, when choosing an HI, it is imperative to consider not only the humorous elements of the selection, but also to keep in mind how the story itself will appeal to the audience. Not everyone will laugh at the same joke, but if a character’s plight is relatable, the audience will identify with him or her. Humor in a Humorous Interpretation should be tasteful and motivated.

Research
Finding an HI that’s right for you may seem a little daunting. Go to your local library, visit the biographies section of a bookstore, or visit Play Scripts, Dramatists, or Samuel French online. These are just a few of the places you may find material. There are a few things to keep in mind when questing for a script.

Strengths and limitations. HI often requires a performer to manipulate their voice, move quickly in and out of different characters, and have a strong sense of comedic timing. Think about your vocal register when looking at a cutting. Would you be required to play characters with voices in your upper register? What characters would be played using your lower register? How many ways can you manipulate your voice? How well can you manipulate your body and facial expression to create distinct, unique characters? If you have limited physical or vocal control, it might be beneficial to chose a selection with fewer characters. Think about your abilities outside of acting: can you sing, dance, stand on your head? Could those skills be utilized in your performance? Be aware of how you can showcase your unique skill set.

What makes you laugh? This is your piece, your performance, and your interpretation. Find writing you think is hilarious. If it makes you laugh, and you enjoy performing it, then your audience will enjoy it, too.

Is it honest? Is it relatable? Pick a piece with meaning. No, you don’t need to be performing Tolstoy’s “Family Happiness” (and honestly, that’s probably a bad idea); however, you should choose literature that speaks to a universal truth. As performers, we not only look to entertain our audience, but to engage them in meaningful communication through performance.

Structural Components
Structure of an Interp (taken from Interpretation of Literature, Bringing Words to Life).

TEASER • 0:00 – 1:30
Previews the topic and mood of the selection

INTRO • 1:30 – 3:00
Explains the purpose of the performance

EXPOSITION • 3:00 – 3:30
Introduces characters and setting

INCITING INCIDENT • 3:30 – 4:00
Sends the conflict into motion

RISING ACTION • 4:00 – 7:30
Complicates the conflict

CLIMAX • 7:30 – 8:30
Emotional peak of the performance

FALLING ACTION • 8:30 – 9:30
Resolves the conflict
Cutting. As with any interp, it’s important to cut for performance. Read the dialogue aloud, and remove excessive language that does not build toward the story you are trying to tell. Play with comedic elements, like three part jokes, or reviving jokes from earlier in the cutting. Think about how you will physically depict the story. The visual element of HI lends itself to great, creative jokes. Think about how you will use the imagined environment of your HI to tell a joke.

Blocking. The technical aspect of HI requires complete physical control. Transitioning, or “popping” between characters should be practiced. These transitions are fast paced, and require strong physical stamina. Consider how you can tell the story physically. Get in front of a mirror and break down the movements. Increase speed as you build muscle memory. Play with levels and focal points.

Characters. Each character should be uniquely distinct with vocal, physical, and emotional choices carefully thought out. Characters in HI tend to stretch the limits of reality. However, be careful to craft characters to which the audience can relate. One of the great challenges with HI is the ability to craft a performance with different levels. Remember that in all good comedy, there is the well-adjusted character who stands in stark contrast to the humorous characters. Find the balance in your selection. Think about the proximity characters would stand in relation to each other, and illustrate the difference by using various physical levels. Bend your knees slightly for a shorter character, or have a taller character look down when addressing someone shorter.

Introduction. An introduction explains the purpose of the performance. Typically, in HI, the introduction will start off with a joke relevant to the theme of the piece. The performer will then relate the joke back to the theme, and why the piece is relevant to the audience before returning to the performance.

Organizing
You only have ten minutes in an HI to tell a story and make an audience laugh. Pick your moments accordingly. Decide what jokes you want to play up, and what parts of your story will contrast the humorous moments. As you finalize your cutting, read it aloud to help make informed decisions about characterization and blocking.

Beat out your script. This means reading the script aloud and making notes as you go. As you read aloud, use symbols to indicate shorter pauses “/” or longer pauses “//”. Consider the emotionality behind each line. Ask yourself what the motivation for the characters’ actions are. Use this to influence blocking choices. Make sure your choices are not just funny for the sake of funny, but make sense contextually in your script. Make sure you are listening for the reactions of the characters to the lines that came before. If you are doing a multi-character performance, remember that this is a dialogue, and should be treated as such.

Standing it Up/Practicing
Often, you’ll find that if you’ve spent the appropriate amount of time reading, cutting, and analyzing a script, memorization will be an easier process. Here are some things to keep in mind, to help simplify the process:

First, our brains are a muscle. The more time you practice memorizing, or simply memorize things, the better you become. Often, performers, take more time in the beginning of a season to commit a script to memory than they do at the end of the competitive season. Memorizing is a process.

Next, memorization is physical. Sitting down staring at a script, re-reading the lines in your head will not be beneficial. Memorize the script with the intent to perform it. Type up a clean version with only your finalized text and blocking. Then, tape it to the wall and actively memorize. Read the lines aloud moving with them as
indicated by your cutting. It is helpful to memorize a scene at a time, building off of the scene that came before. Remember that dialogue is motivated by the line that came before it. Everything is a response, or reaction. Conceptualize your script this way to decrease the time it takes to memorize your performance.

As you develop a physical sense of the piece, consider how you will express ideas without words. Much of communication is nonverbal; therefore, it makes sense that some of the funniest aspects of an HI are the non-verbal reactions of characters to the events happening in the performance.

Once memorized, you and your coach can then build off of the choices you’ve made for your characters. Adjustments to blocking, characterization, and line delivery can be made. Often, standing up in front of a coach will help determine whether or not your jokes are landing, or getting a reaction from the audience. Practicing in front of a mirror or videotaping your performance is also a great way to ‘see’ what the audience sees when you perform. Play with characters. HI is all about experimenting with what makes your audience laugh. Don’t be afraid to act ridiculous to get a laugh. Try something new until you get the desired reaction, and then solidify the joke through practice.

**Performance Tips**

It may sound cliche, but confidence is key! If you’ve put the legwork in, you should feel confident in the product you’ve created. Walk into that round with your head held high, ready to show the world what you’ve got! Trust what you and your coach created. Do what you practiced, and if you feel compelled to “try something new;” review it with your coach beforehand. Consistency is also vital.

It’s hard to evaluate what to change in practice if your performance in the round is completely different than what you’ve been working on for the past few weeks.

Pay attention to other performers. Smile, and be a warm, inviting audience member. There is nothing worse than getting up to perform and having an audience that either stone faces you or won’t look you in the eye. Each round is 60 minutes. Ten of those involve you performing, the other 50 are for you to listen and learn.

Keep a notebook for between rounds. Sometimes, another person’s performance will inspire you, and it’s a good idea to have a notebook handy to write down new ideas. When you review your ballots after the tournament, you can go back through your notebook and compare your ballots to your notes.

Between rounds, figure out what room you will be performing in next. Congratulate your competitors on a good performance after the round ends, and make friends during downtime. Be gracious, and keep criticisms of other performers to yourself, even if someone else tries to start a negative conversation.

**Resources**

A great source is *Interpretation of Literature—Bringing Words to Life* by Travis Kiger and Ganer Newman. They cover cutting, characterization, blocking, and the structure of a story. Additionally, if this is your first time doing Humorous Interpretation, go watch a final round of HI! Observe the rounds not only as entertainment, but keep your eyes peeled for effective cutting, characterization, and blocking. Ask yourself, how can I apply similar techniques to my performance? How can I build off of what this performer is doing? The best way to learn HI, outside of actively doing it, is by watching and learning from other performers.

The textbook, final rounds, and more can be found on www.speechanddebate.org.