

MARKETING

GIVE A GOOD READING

BE PREPARED

Two minutes into my first reading at the crowded Looking Glass Bookstore in Portland, Ore., my mouth was parched, and my nose ran so much I had to ask the audience if anyone had a tissue. I stood there, my lips welded to my teeth, until someone handed me a cocktail napkin and a cup of water. The rest of the reading was an out-of-body experience like a scene from my death, with my disembodied soul watching from above.

The next day I vowed: never again. I'll never do a reading unprepared. Until then, I thought I could just show up and read loud. I didn't realize that what I'd done was akin to running the Boston Marathon without having jogged even one mile in training.

Since then, I've done many readings and even performed my monologues in theaters. I've learned that to read well, you must train like a pro. This how-to guide, from my notes in the field, shows you how.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE

Rehearse in front of at least one friend. Warning: You may resist this. I hate how vulnerable I feel at this first rehearsal, but now I know that I'd rather be embarrassed in front of one person than a roomful. The more you rehearse, the more relaxed you'll be. If you do nothing else, rehearse once.

Give thought as to which friend you invite to the rehearsal. You want to rehearse with someone who inspires confidence.

Before your rehearsal, warm up your body and voice. (See "Facial and Vocal Workout," on pg. 86.)

If possible, rehearse in the space where you'll be reading. If you'll be using a microphone, practice with one. At your rehearsal, have your friend read your introduction, time your reading and practice the Q&A with you. If you plan on standing, stand with your weight evenly distributed on both feet. If you're reading at a lectern, practice with one.

The more familiar you are with your text, the more you can look at the audience during your reading.

Ask your friend: "Am I reading too fast? Can you hear me?"

Your reading voice may drone. This is common when anyone reads. If you notice this, stop reading. Have your friend ask you a question about anything,

as simple as what you did this morning. Answer the question. Notice how different your voice and intonation sound when you speak in conversation. Go back to reading. Every time you notice a monotone voice, converse with your friend and notice the difference. The more you practice this, the more natural your voice will sound.

THE WEEK BEFORE

Warm up your body and voice every day. If you exercise regularly, do your routine. If you never exercise, take a walk. While walking, feel your feet hit the ground; notice your breath coming into your nostrils. Observe sights, sounds and smells. After your exercise, do the facial and vocal workout.

Confirm with your host that you'll be arriving 45 minutes to an hour before the reading. This allows time to check out the room. Find out who will introduce you, how long you'll read and answer questions, and where you'll sign books. A performer (which is what you are now) needs to know his choreography—what happens when and where. Figuring out logistics ahead of time allows you to enjoy the limelight.

THE DAY OF

When you arrive at the reading, get comfortable at the front of the room. Practice with the microphone, if necessary. Place your water nearby and put tissues in your pocket. Sit in the audience. Walk around the room. You may feel nauseous, sweaty and/or shaky. This is normal. You may want to run for the hills. Again, this is normal. Stretch and breathe. If you brought a supportive friend (which always helps), talk to her. She'll remind you that you're prepared and gorgeous and that this is no big deal—just a rehearsal for the next reading.

DURING THE READING

Invite the audience in as if they were friends at your house for dinner. (This is why you've checked out the room in advance. Now you can own the room.) Ask the audience: "Can you hear me?" If you lose focus, look at your audience and remember your story. That's why you're here—to tell them this story.

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BE PREPARED *continued from previous page*

Drink water when you need to. The more relaxed you are about taking a drink, the less the audience will notice it. When in doubt, read slower and louder.

What if you spill your water, or worse, lose your place? Ask for more water if you need it. Acknowledge you've lost your place. The calmer you are, the quicker you'll find your place again. Your audience takes cues from you: The more relaxed you are, the more relaxed they'll be.

If people arrive late, it can be distracting. If so, stop reading. Invite them to take a seat. If they slip in quietly, keep reading. If you acknowledge mishaps, the audience can forget them and focus on your story.

After the reading, thank people for coming, invite them to buy your book or take a business card. Thank your hosts.

THE DAY AFTER

Make notes: What worked? What could've gone better? Write without analysis, as fast as you can: List problems and possible solutions. Let it rip. Put this list away. The month before your next reading, take it out and follow your advice.

GIGI ROSENBERG (gigirosenberg.com) is a writer and teacher. This piece is based on "The Art of Presentation" workshop she leads. Her essays have appeared in *The Oregonian*, *Jewish Review* and *Metro Parent*. She's performed her dramatic monologues at On The Boards in Seattle, the CoHo Theater and Lewis & Clark College. Her radio commentary, "The Hanukkah Bush," was featured on Oregon Public Broadcasting.

What to Bring

- **READING GLASSES**
- **COPY OF THE BOOK YOU'RE READING FROM** or a copy of the text printed in 14-point type
- **TISSUES** (put a couple in your pocket)
- **WATER** (in an easy-to-drink-from container)
- **THROAT COAT TEA** (made by Traditional Medicinals with slippery elm bark—lubricates a dry mouth)
- **BUSINESS CARDS**
- **COPIES OF YOUR BOOKS** or other items to sell (unless your host is providing these)
- **YOUR RABBIT'S FOOT** or other lucky charm
- **A WATCH OR SMALL CLOCK** to place in front of you
- **YOUR INTRODUCTION** (even if you already sent it to your host) —GR

[FACIAL AND VOCAL WORKOUT]

- Hum. This warms up your voice without strain.
- Sing. Don't push, just sing, to the radio, in the shower, in the car.
- Yawn to open your throat.
- Massage your face. Put your palms on your cheeks and make circles. Rub your jaw joint—right in front of your ears. Massage your temples.
- Recite the alphabet. Overly enunciate each of the letters.
- Practice tongue twisters. ("Peter Piper picked a pound of peppers.")
- Open your mouth and eyes as wide as you can.
- Squeeze your face tight as if you'd just bitten a very sour lemon.
- Breathe without panting or taking super-deep breaths. Breathe normally. —GR