

# TEN TIPS FOR LEARNING A SCRIPT

Steve Harper

## Overview

Memorizing anything can be a challenging, but it's an essential part of a performance or presentation. But how do you get the words to stick in your brain? For professionals and non-professionals, these rules are always helpful. It's important to work incrementally and to celebrate each success in the process. Then it's important to let go. Here are ten great steps for the journey.

### TIP ONE: WRITE ON YOUR SCRIPT: SEPARATE THE SECTIONS

Draw a line at the end of each paragraph or after each completed thought (we call these "beats" in drama.) Seeing the separation can be a great psychological reminder of each new turn - each new idea. It can help you navigate the story and tell it step by step.

### TIP TWO: WRITE ON YOUR SCRIPT: CIRCLE THE VERBS

Every sentence is about verbs and the words that support that verb. Draw a circle around each verb so you can become aware of what each sentence says (and where you might place your emphasis). For example: "The dish **RAN AWAY** with the spoon." The dish is **DOING** something. Leaning into that action word will bring the sentence to life.

### TIP THREE: WHEN MEMORIZING - START SMALL

Commit to learning a bit at a time. Depending on how much time you have, try two paragraphs a day. Sit with it – speaking slowly word by word. Let it soak

into your brain and your heart. Simply string it together mechanically (at first). Once you've gotten one section verbatim - move to the next. Celebrate your progress.

#### TIP FOUR: REHEARSE OFTEN

Bring other people into your process as soon as possible. Rehearse in person with others watching or rehearse on the phone. Be willing to show up knowing that you're a work in progress. You'll make mistakes - they're necessary – they allow you to learn. Bless yourself each time you rehearse. Keep going.

#### TIP FIVE: KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING

As you learn each section, be sure you know what each section means. If the words confuse you or you don't understand it, you're likely to forget it later on. Get clear about why each section leads to the next section. Follow the argument.

#### TIP SIX: MOVE AROUND

If you learn your script sitting in one spot, when you start to walk or stand or do the dishes it will fly out of your head. That's OK. The next level is about remembering the words while you're doing stuff. It will settle in deeper if you do this. Add movement and keep the words flowing.

#### TIP SEVEN: LISTEN TO MUSIC

Play music WHILE you rehearse out loud. Again - at first the piece will fly out of your head. Let it. Then get it back. Keep going. If you can remember your text with the distractions of Mozart in the background you can remember it in a room full of strangers while a storm is raging or while people are talking at the back of the room. Rehearse with music. Rehearse with the TV on. Then with the music and the TV on...

## TIP EIGHT: REHEARSE IN YOUR HEAD IN PUBLIC

Rehearse in your head on the bus or subway. Then try it at the gym. Move through the visual and auditory distractions. Keep going. Bless yourself.

## TIP NINE: FOCUS ON BEING OF SERVICE

Presenting your piece is providing SERVICE. You're communicating something. It's not about YOU (and how "good" you are - how well you perform). It's about THEM (and how much they get from what you offer). Let it be an offering. Look at your audience. Tell your story. Take the focus off yourself. Be of service to the audience. Be of service to the person who wrote the piece. Be of service to the universe.

## TIP TEN: CLAIM YOUR SPACE

Try this: prior to your speech or performance, look around the room. Make contact (in your head) with each person in your audience. Claim the process. In your head, say "Mine!" to each face, claiming the space. As you claim it, affirm that it's your process (with the piece). You can perform it as you want: perfectly or imperfectly. You can own it. You can live it. It's YOURS. It's not about the audience evaluating or judging you. The process is yours. Take your power back so that you can take the space. Then offer the words to your audience as a gift. Release your ego. Be a vessel for the telling of your story.

## RESOURCES

The Actors Voice by Patsy Rodenburg

The Training and Use of the Human Voice by Arthur Lessac

## ABOUT STEVE HARPER

Steve is a professional actor and writer with a passion and commitment for coaching artists who want to pursue their creative work while keeping a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives. A graduate of Yale, The

A.R.T. Institute at Harvard and The Juilliard Playwriting program, he's appeared at The Guthrie and The Kennedy Center, and his writing has appeared on stages across the country and in publications like The Juilliard Journal, Creativity Calling and The Kenyon Review. Find him at [www.yourcreativelife.com](http://www.yourcreativelife.com)