



CLAIM YOUR VOICE
Speak with Power and Presence
THE DYNAMIC SPEAKER

January 10th: Scoring Talks Workshop

Purpose

No matter what kind of talk or presentation you're doing, or how long or short it is, it needs variation. You've been learning two vocabularies for this in the previous 2 months: vocal dynamics and speaking styles. However, you need to know both *how* and *when* to use them!

Your next step is learning how to "score" a talk so that it has plenty of variation, and takes your audience on a journey - whether you're speaking Improvisationally (no planning), extemporaneously (e.g., with an outline or bullet points) or are fully scripted.

Remember to work with a script to practice integrating these – and then also use them improvisationally when speaking as well.

Consider two aspects of scoring: 1) variation, and 2) taking them on a journey.

On the most fundamental level, your goal is to add in variation, using the tools you've learned so far. Beyond that, you want to craft the *journey* of a talk, so that it takes them somewhere.

Every journey has a beginning, middle and end. And each needs a different energy to move it along. We can address this through "macro scoring."

Macro Scoring

"Macro" means creating "beats," as actors refer to demarcating sections a monologue or play. Theatrically, the beat changes when the actor's action or focus changes. Here, your goal is to find a logic to your talk's structure so that you can separate it into different sections. Each becomes a "beat."

Macro Scoring means you utilize a different overarching speaking style or dynamic(s) for each beat/section.

For example, if you're doing a fairly standard talk with an introduction, three points and a conclusion (5 parts in total), you could consider it having 5 macro sections – and each one will have its own distinct feel.

Let's name some possibilities of how you might score each part of your talk.



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1. The Introduction

The beginning needs to be dynamic enough that it compels the audience to listen. This usually means being pretty direct, unless you are acting out a character or a story that has reason to be indirect. Here are two specific points:

- A) The *attention grabber* – the first thing you say in a talk (which might be a quotation, a story, statistic or a current event – should grab attention not only because of the content, but because of how you say it. It could be fast or slow, pressing or dabbing – but the way you *express* it pulls us in.
- B) *If you're previewing your main points for your talk*: generally you want to slow down a bit and even be stronger, to give emphasis and make sure that the audience knows what you're covering in your talk (and to make them care).

2. Your Main (3?) Points

Not every talk (especially short ones) will have 3 points, and workshops may be longer. This number often works, but regardless, it's important to organize your talk into a short number of points so that it's easy for you to organize and for your audience to follow.

One structure I often recommend (that long-time students have frequently heard) is "Problem-Cause-Solution." No matter what structure you use, make sure that each point has its own overarching flavor – particular dynamics or a speaking style.

- A) *A note on the middle of your talk*: don't let this plod along! It's easy to lose the audience half to two-thirds in. Keep your scoring dynamic.
- B) *A note on the "solution"*: if you're offering a solution of sorts – offering your perspective, tools or expertise – this often wants to be a bit slower. Don't rush past your expertise!

3. The Conclusion (or Call to Action)

Here's one suggestion of how to sum up a talk you can try: start the conclusion a bit faster (unless you were fast in the previous section, in which case add appropriate variation).

And then, as you draw to a close, you generally want to finish the very last couple of sentences a little more slowly, so that it has a distinct ending. So there's a tempo "trajectory" often present in the end of strong talks.

Overall note on macro scoring: Make sure that your talk's beats feel fairly different from each other, so that you grab the attention back when you change to a new section.



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Micro Scoring

Once you have found the macro scoring for a talk... that's only the first step!

Micro scoring means that you continue to add in more nuances. For example, you might have chosen to be dabbing for one beat. But will you go fast the entire time? Probably not. While a dabbing beat would be fast, light, and direct overall, it may slow down at times, or find strong moments. Doing so will truly make your talk *dynamic*.

That is, while each beat has an overall distinct feel, you'll also want a lot of variation, that scales down from large to small.

- A) *Paragraphs (or, main bullet points or outline sections)*. Within each beat, go to each paragraph and assign it a shift in dynamics or speaking style. (Do this at a minimum; you can also play with the next two more loosely if you like.)
- B) *Sentences*. In each paragraph, you may have sentences utilize other dynamics as well.
- C) *Words/phrases*. Every few words or so in each sentence, there's a "key word" or sometimes a phrase that would benefit from emphasis. You could use a speaking style or dynamic for this word alone. Some examples:
 - a. *Action verbs* that move the energy along
 - b. *Nouns/key terms* that you want to emphasize or the audience to remember
 - c. *Adjectives and adverbs* that give nuance to your message

Remember that *micro scoring adheres to your bigger choices*: for example, if your macro beat is fast, even if you slow down for a paragraph or sentence, it will probably be a little fast overall. In other words, micro scoring is usually *relative* to the bigger choice you've made.

How to Score

Step 1: Macro-score your main beats - and try them out. Don't let it be theoretical – see how it sounds! Try it out loud, full volume. If you're not sure if you like it, get feedback.

Step 1B: Try it another way. While you don't want to spend energy second-guessing, don't rely on your first impulse: try another choice and see how you like it. This may confirm your original choice, or may help you move away from your habits to find new exciting ways of expanding your self-expression.

Step 2: Micro-score your beats. Working with one beat alone, select a dynamic or speaking style for each paragraph or bullet point within it. Then, after you're comfortable with the paragraphs, you can drill down farther, playing with sentences as well as words and phrases.



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Alternative for micro-scoring: use reverse-scoring! Rather than making choices in advance, you can say it out loud (probably recording it so you can review it), and note the choices you're making. You can then continue with those, or try making some different choices to see how it takes you out of your habits.

Alternative scoring technique: start with emotion. Rather than beginning technically by choosing a style or dynamic, try expressing – or, even better, trying to get the audience – to feel excitement, worry, or other emotions. This changes your focus to impact and connection. From there, note what dynamics or speaking styles you're using, and continue to refine it from there.

Remember: write it out! You'll want to write in your choices so that you can practice it and get consistent. I find it easier to actually print it out, and write it in the margins. However, you're welcome to color code or create your own way to mark up your script.

Here are some suggestions for scoring vocal dynamics; you will want to create your own notations for speaking styles as well, and perhaps even body language.

Tempo. Write S (slow) or F (fast) above words or sentences.

Volume. Underline for louder, or perhaps underline *and* cross out the underline to be softer

Pitch. Write in Up or Down Arrows above words or phrases to raise or lower your pitch

Pauses. Pencil in a vertical line between words. A thicker line denotes a longer pause.

Enunciation variation. Circle words or letters for increased articulation.

Notes:

- Some words or sections may utilize multiple dynamics simultaneously, such as higher pitch and faster tempo, and will need to be marked as such.
- If you like, add parentheses around phrases to indicate when a dynamic starts and ends.

On the final two pages (after the assignments), you'll find a vocally scored version of a personal story excerpt that I (Jonathan) have used in the past, which comes from a longer talk.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. **Record yourself speaking during a regular conversation for 1-2 minutes.** Use a transcription service (like Otter.ai or Rev) if you have access. Then score it, to note the dynamics that you utilize and to get an accurate sense of your range.
2. **Score your 3-minute talk for next week, and practice it.** You may want to fully write out the script. You can share the score in the Facebook group in advance if you like.

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Scoring Sample - Jonathan Bender's Personal Story and Introduction

Slower, lighter feel, softer

I would like to tell you a story about a boy. He was a very sweet and kind boy to everyone... except of course occasionally toward his younger brother, who he was obligated to occasionally torture, because that's the contractual duty of older brothers. But he wasn't very happy. See, there was something unusual about the boy; he was invisible. But this wasn't a superpower. It was as if when he spoke, that no words came out of his mouth. And that when people looked at him, that he wasn't quite there. And he didn't have friends, because it's hard to have friends when you're invisible. Well, he did have one friend, who he'd play with after school. But when they were at school, this friend would kick him - because he didn't want any other kids to think he was the boy's friend, in case they would start to make fun of him. And the boy continued this way, with no words coming out of his mouth, and people not quite seeing he was there.

faster, louder

One day, when the boy was much older, he walked into a room. The teacher looked up, and asked the boy if he had something to say. This was shocking to the boy - he was not used to people seeing him, let alone asking him say something. He didn't even know if his voice still worked or what to say. But he was encouraged, so he tried, and at first, he found it was safer to just start using other people's words - he could say words other people had already said. And poems! He could read poetry. And people listened and amazingly, he found that he could be other people as well. The boy could get on stage, and play an old man, or an animal, and people would laugh, and cry, and pay attention. But in life, he didn't quite feel that anyone saw him.

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(S → F - build faster + louder)
So he decided that if he said more things on stage, people would finally pay attention,
and he started writing some of his own words to play on stage and he acted and spoke and
wrote speeches. And after many years of study and work and years of taking classes of how
to speak, and how to act, and performing, he wondered if people saw him. And one day
after a performance, the boy - who was no longer a boy - went offstage, and a member of
the audience approached him and said, "Thank you. Because what you just shared/changed/
my life. And he knew that he was now seen.

(F ↑) (S ↓)
But he looked around - and he began to see all the people around him who felt
invisible, and not heard. And the boy realized that all of the techniques he had learned to
find his own voice could be used to helping others find theirs - and to be seen and heard.
And he dedicated his life to helping others be seen... to be appreciated... so that we would
live in the world where everyone's message and voice was heard.