

TRAINING CHURCH LEADERS



# Advanced Liturgist Training

The Art of Faithful Speech in Worship



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A)

Thank you all for being here today and for your willingness to serve in the life of the church in this way.

Before we begin talking about techniques or skills, I want to start with something more foundational—why this matters.

Every week in worship, something sacred happens. Scripture is read. Prayers are spoken. The Word is proclaimed. And in those moments, people are listening—not just with their ears, but with their hearts. They are listening for meaning. They are listening for hope. They are listening, whether they realize it or not, for God.

And one of the primary ways they experience that moment... is through you.

Through your voice.

Through your pacing.

Through your presence.

That may feel like a lot of responsibility—and in some ways, it is. But it is also a gift.

Because you have the opportunity to help people hear in a way that is clear, engaging, and meaningful.

Now, most of us were never really taught how to do this. We were handed a bulletin or a passage of scripture, invited to come forward, and simply told, 'Read this.' And so we do our best. We read the words. We try not to make mistakes. We get through it. But what if there is more?

What if the way we read and speak could actually help people listen more deeply?  
What if small changes in how we use our voice could make scripture more accessible, more understandable, more alive?

What if we could move from simply reading words... to helping others truly hear them?  
That is what this training is about.

This is not about turning you into performers. It is not about adding pressure or expecting perfection. In fact, we're going to move in the opposite direction of performance.

This is about becoming more intentional.

More aware.

More present.

# Course Contents



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Moving from a performance mindset to connection



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It's about learning a few simple practices—how to use your voice, how to pace your speech, how to use silence, how to prepare a text—so that what you offer in worship is not just accurate, but meaningful.

Because the truth is, the same words can be heard very differently depending on how they are delivered.

And when those words are the words of scripture...  
when they are prayers offered on behalf of the people...  
when they are spoken in the context of worship...  
then how they are heard matters.

So today, we're going to explore how to use your voice as an instrument, how to slow down and use pauses, how to prepare a text, and how to engage those who are listening.

And along the way, I hope you begin to see this not just as a task you are asked to do, but as a form of ministry you are invited to offer.

Because when you stand to read or speak in worship, you are not just filling a role. You are helping create a moment where people can hear the Word of God. And that is something worth doing well.

# The Goal is Connection

- ▶ It is not about performance!
- ▶ It's not: "Did I sound good?"
- ▶ It is all about connection!
- ▶ It's: "Did they understand it?"
- ▶ People are not evaluating you!
- ▶ Focus on the people listening and making a connection!
- ▶ People are listening for meaning, clarity, and understanding!
- ▶ Speak like what you are saying matters!

## THE GOAL IS NOT PERFORMANCE—IT'S CONNECTION

Let's begin with something that may feel both freeing and a little unsettling: this is not about performance. When you step up to read scripture, lead liturgy, or preach, your goal is not to impress anyone. You are not here to sound polished, dramatic, or professional. You are here to connect. And that shift—from performance to connection—changes everything.

Because people in the pews are not evaluating you the way an audience evaluates a performer. They are listening for meaning. They are listening for clarity. They are listening for something that helps them understand, receive, and experience what is being said. And whether they realize it or not, they are depending on you to help them do that.

So the real question is not, 'Did I sound good?' The real question is, 'Did they hear it? Did they understand it? Did it reach them?'

When we focus on performance, we tend to tighten up. We rush. We overthink. We try to get it exactly right. But when we focus on connection, something different happens. We begin to pay attention to the people in front of us. We slow down. We become more intentional. We begin to speak as if what we are saying actually matters—and as if it matters for them.

And in worship, that is especially important. Because you are not simply delivering information. You are helping people encounter the Word of God. You are giving voice to prayer. You are shaping a moment that can either invite people in or leave them at a distance.

# The Goal is Connection

**The exact same passage can be read two different ways:**

▶ One way leaves people struggling to follow along, waiting for it to be over.

▶ The other way draws them in, helps them see what's happening, and allows the words to settle into their hearts.

▶ The difference is not the text; it is the connection! Connection begins with clarity!

▶ If people cannot easily follow what you are saying, they will stop trying!

**“Clarity creates connection,  
and connection creates transformation.”**

Think about it this way: the exact same passage of scripture can be read two different ways. One way leaves people struggling to follow along, waiting for it to be over. The other way draws them in, helps them see what's happening, and allows the words to settle into their hearts. The difference is not the text. The difference is the connection.

And connection begins with clarity. If people cannot easily follow what you are saying, they will stop trying. Not because they don't care, but because it takes too much effort. But when your speech is clear—when your pacing allows them to keep up, when your emphasis helps them understand what matters, when your voice carries intention—they can relax into listening. And when they relax into listening, they are far more open to receiving.

So I want to give you a simple phrase to hold onto throughout this training: clarity creates connection, and connection creates transformation.

If people can clearly hear and understand what is being said, they are far more likely to be moved by it, shaped by it, even changed by it.

And that means your role is deeply important. Not because you need to perform well, but because you are serving the congregation by helping them hear. You are removing obstacles. You are making space. You are opening a door.

So as we move through this training, I want you to let go of any pressure to perform. You do not need to be someone else. You do not need to sound like a professional speaker. You do not need

to impress anyone.

What you are called to do is much simpler—and much more meaningful.

Be clear.

Be present.

And speak in a way that helps people hear.

# Your Voice is an Instrument



## Pace

How fast or slow you speak. Most people speak too quickly and people can't keep up.



## Pitch

Your tone, the rise and fall of your voice, the emphasis you place on words changes meaning.



## Volume

It's about projecting your voice, being supported and clear, strong enough to be heard.



## Energy

Are you engaged with what you are saying? It's not about excitement, but about being attentive and grounded.

## YOUR VOICE IS AN INSTRUMENT

“Now that we've grounded ourselves in the idea that our goal is connection, we can begin to talk about how we create that connection. And it begins with a simple but powerful shift in thinking: your voice is an instrument.

Most of us don't think about our voice this way. We think of it as something we either have or don't have—like it's fixed, unchangeable. But that's not true. Just like a musical instrument, your voice has range, variation, texture, and tone. And when you learn how to use it with intention, it becomes one of the most powerful tools you have in helping people listen and engage.

Think about listening to a piece of music played on a single note, at the same volume, with no variation. Even if it's technically correct, it becomes almost impossible to stay engaged. But when music has variation—when it rises and falls, speeds up and slows down, softens and swells—it draws you in. It carries meaning. It moves you. Your voice works the same way.

There are four primary ways we can begin to use our voice more intentionally: pace, volume, pitch, and energy. And together, these form the basic 'controls' of your instrument.

Let's begin with pace—how fast or slow you speak. One of the most common habits, especially when people are nervous, is to speak too quickly. When that happens, people cannot keep up. They may catch a few words here and there, but they lose the thread of meaning. On the other

hand, if we speak too slowly, without variation, people begin to drift because there is no sense of movement. What we are aiming for is not a rigid speed, but a conversational pace—the way you would naturally speak to someone you care about, when you want them to understand you. Not rushed, not dragging, but clear and steady.

Next is volume. And here's an important distinction: effective volume is not about being louder—it's about being supported and clear. Especially when using a microphone, shouting actually works against you. What matters is that your voice is strong enough to be heard, consistent enough to be followed, and directed outward so that it reaches the room. Think of it less as pushing your voice and more as offering it—projecting it so that even the person in the back feels included in what you are saying.

The third element is pitch—your tone, the rise and fall of your voice. A completely flat, unchanging tone—what we call monotone—makes it very difficult for listeners to stay engaged, because the voice is not signaling what matters. But when your pitch varies naturally, it helps people track meaning. It tells them where emphasis lies. It highlights what is important. For example, the phrase 'Jesus said, follow me' can carry very different meaning depending on which word is emphasized. When you allow your voice to rise, fall, and shift with the meaning of the text, you are guiding your listeners through it.

Finally, there is energy. And this is often misunderstood. Energy does not mean excitement, and it certainly does not mean exaggeration. It means presence. It means that you are engaged with what you are saying. If you sound disconnected or uninterested, people will feel that immediately and mirror it. But if you are attentive, grounded, and present, your voice carries that, and people lean in. Energy is less about volume or intensity and more about whether you are truly there in the moment.

When these four elements—pace, volume, pitch, and energy—begin to work together, something changes. Your voice becomes more than a vehicle for words. It becomes a guide. It helps people know where to listen, how to listen, and what matters within what is being said.

And here's the encouraging part: you do not need to master all of this at once. This is not about becoming perfect. It is about becoming aware. Even small adjustments—slowing down just a bit, allowing your tone to rise and fall, being intentional about your presence—can make a significant difference in how people receive what you are offering.

So as you step forward to read or to speak, remember this: you already have an instrument. The question is not whether you have one. The question is how you will use it.

And when you begin to use your voice with intention, you are not just speaking more effectively—you are helping people listen more deeply.”



# The Power of the Pause



**“Silence is not the absence of communication. Silence is communication.”**

**“A pause, used intentionally, tells the listener that what was just said matters.”**

**“Without pauses, even the most meaningful words can blur together.”**

**“You are creating room for people to process what they’ve heard. You are creating space for people to listen for God.”**

## THE POWER OF THE PAUSE

“Now we come to what may be the most underused—and most powerful—tool you have when you speak: the pause.

Silence is not the absence of communication.  
Silence is communication.

And yet, for many of us, silence feels uncomfortable. When we are speaking in front of others, we feel pressure to keep going, to fill every moment, to avoid any gap where nothing is being said. We worry that if we pause, people will think we’ve forgotten what comes next, or that we’ve made a mistake.

But the opposite is true.

When used intentionally, a pause does not signal weakness—it signals confidence. It tells the listener that what was just said matters enough to give it space. It gives people time to process, to absorb, and to receive what they have heard.

Without pauses, even the most meaningful words can blur together. People may hear the sound of your voice, but they won’t retain the meaning. It becomes like trying to drink from a firehose—there is simply too much, too quickly, with no time to take it in.

But when you pause—when you allow a moment of silence—you create room. Room for understanding. Room for reflection. Room for people to process what they've heard. Room for the Spirit to work in the hearts of those listening.

There are three simple kinds of pauses that can transform the way you read and speak. The first is the breathing pause. This is the most natural kind of pause. It follows the rhythm of the sentence, often where punctuation occurs. It allows both you and the listener to breathe. It prevents your speech from becoming rushed or overwhelming. When you honor these natural breaks, your delivery becomes easier to follow and more grounded.

The second is the emphasis pause. This is a deliberate pause placed before or after an important word or phrase. It draws attention. It signals to the listener, 'This matters. Don't miss this.' For example, when we say, 'Be still... and know that I am God,' the pause between 'still' and 'and know' allows the weight of the words to settle. It gives the listener a moment to feel the invitation before moving on.

The third is the transition pause. This occurs when there is a shift in thought, tone, or direction. It helps listeners recognize that something new is beginning. Without it, ideas can run together and become confusing. With it, the structure of what you are saying becomes clearer, and people can follow the movement more easily.

Now, here is something important to understand: pauses often feel longer to you than they do to everyone else. What may feel like an uncomfortable silence to you often feels like a meaningful moment to the listener. So part of learning to use pauses well is trusting them—allowing them to be just a bit longer than feels natural at first.

And this is especially important in worship. When you are reading scripture or leading prayer, you are not simply conveying information. You are creating space for people to listen for God. And sometimes, what people need most is not more words—but a moment to receive the words that have already been spoken.

So rather than rushing to the next line, allow the words to land. Let them settle. Give them time to breathe.

Because if you do not pause, people cannot absorb.

And when you begin to trust silence—when you begin to use it with intention—you will discover that it does something words alone cannot do. It deepens the moment. It draws people in. It creates space for meaning to take root.

So as you speak, remember this: you are not just responsible for the words you say. You are also

shaping the space between them.

And sometimes, that space is where the most important work happens.

# Reading Scripture vs Reciting Words



Everyone can read words on a page, but not everyone helps those words come alive.



Our role is not simply to pronounce the text correctly, but to communicate its meaning.



You cannot express what you do not understand.



Read thought-by-thought, not word-by-word. All words should not be treated equally.



## READING SCRIPTURE VS. RECITING WORDS

“Now we turn to a shift that is essential for anyone leading in worship: the difference between reading scripture and simply reciting words.

Because there is a real difference.

Anyone can read words on a page. But not everyone helps those words come alive. And in worship, we are not just asked to read—we are entrusted with giving voice to the living Word. That means our role is not simply to pronounce the text correctly, but to communicate its meaning in a way that people can actually hear, understand, and receive. If we approach scripture like a script—something to get through, something to complete—we tend to read in a flat, disconnected way. We focus on getting the words right, but we lose the meaning behind them. And when that happens, the congregation may hear the sounds, but they miss the substance.

But when we approach scripture as something we are sharing—as something we understand and want others to understand—everything begins to change. So how do we make that shift?

It begins with understanding. Before you ever step up to read, you need to spend time with the text. Ask yourself simple questions: What is happening here? Who is speaking? What is the tone? Is this joyful? Is it urgent? Is it comforting? Is it challenging? Where does the movement of the

passage change?

Because you cannot express what you do not understand.

When you take time to understand the text, your voice will naturally begin to reflect its meaning. You won't need to force it. The tone, the pacing, the emphasis—they will begin to flow out of your comprehension.

The second step is to mark the text. This is a practical, simple way to prepare, but it makes a significant difference. As you read through the passage, underline or circle the words that carry the most weight. These are the words that need emphasis. Then, mark natural pauses—places where the thought completes or shifts. You might use a slash or a small space to remind yourself to slow down or stop briefly.

This is not about overcomplicating the text. It is about helping your eyes and your voice work together. When you mark the text, you are creating a roadmap that guides your delivery.

The third step is to read thought-by-thought, not word-by-word. One of the most common habits, especially when reading in front of others, is to treat each word as equal, giving each one the same weight and spacing. But language does not work that way. Meaning is carried in phrases and ideas, not in isolated words.

So instead of reading in a choppy, segmented way—breaking after every few words—allow the phrases to flow. Let complete thoughts stay together. This helps listeners follow the meaning more naturally, because you are speaking in the way people actually process language.

When you combine these three practices—understanding the text, marking it for emphasis and pauses, and reading in complete thoughts—you move from simply reciting words to actually communicating scripture.

And that is the goal.

Because when scripture is read well, something remarkable happens. People are not straining to follow along. They are not trying to piece together meaning on their own. Instead, they are able to listen. They are able to receive. They are able to be present to what God may be saying through the text.

So as you prepare to read, remember this: your responsibility is not just to say the words correctly. Your responsibility is to help people hear them.

To give them shape.

To give them clarity.

To give them life.

And when you do that, you are not adding to scripture—you are serving it.  
You are allowing it to be heard as it was meant to be heard.

# Engaging the Listener

## Invite

Speak in a way that draws people in.

## First Sentence

The first sentence sets the tone for everything that follows.

## Speak To

Speak to people and not at them.

## ENGAGING THE LISTENER

Now that we've talked about your voice, your pacing, and how to read scripture with understanding, we need to turn to one more essential piece: engaging the listener. Because here is the reality—people are not automatically listening.

Even in worship.  
Even when scripture is being read.

People are distracted. They are carrying concerns from the week. Their minds wander. And unless something invites their attention, they can very easily drift.

So part of your role, as a liturgist or preacher, is to gently but intentionally invite people into listening. Not by demanding attention, not by performing, but by speaking in a way that draws them in.

Engagement is not about charisma. It is about awareness. It is about recognizing that there are real people in front of you, and that the way you speak either opens a door for them—or makes it harder to walk through.

One of the simplest and most effective ways to engage people is through eye contact, when appropriate. Now, this does not mean you need to stare at individuals or make anyone uncomfortable. But occasionally lifting your eyes from the page and allowing your gaze to meet

the congregation reminds people that you are speaking to them, not just reading at them. It creates a sense of connection, even in a brief moment.

Another key moment of engagement is the beginning. The first sentence you speak sets the tone for everything that follows. And one of the most common habits is to rush that first line—almost as if we are trying to get it over with. But if you rush the beginning, people will still be settling in, and they will miss it.

So instead, take a breath. Let there be a moment. Begin with intention. When you do, people instinctively sense that something is about to happen, and they are more likely to lean in.

Engagement also comes from emphasis—knowing which words matter most and allowing them to stand out. Not every word carries equal weight. When everything is emphasized, nothing is emphasized. But when you allow key words or phrases to rise slightly—to be spoken with a bit more intention—you guide your listeners toward the meaning. You help them know what to hold onto.

And closely connected to that is your use of space—your willingness to let silence do its work. When you finish a sentence or a phrase that carries weight, resist the urge to immediately move on. Let it sit. Let it land. That brief space gives people time to receive what you've just said, rather than having it immediately replaced by the next line.

Perhaps the most important shift, though, is this: speak to people, not at them.

Even when you are reading from a page, you are still in relationship with those who are listening. You are not delivering content into a void. You are participating in a shared moment. And when you begin to think of it that way, your tone changes. Your pace changes. Your presence changes.

You begin to sound less like someone completing a task and more like someone inviting others into something meaningful.

And people can feel that difference immediately.

So as you lead, keep this in mind: engagement is not something extra you add on. It is woven into how you speak, how you begin, how you pause, how you emphasize, and how you carry yourself in the moment.

You are not just saying words.

You are inviting attention.

You are guiding listening.

You are opening space for people to hear.

And when that happens—when people are truly engaged—they are far more likely to not only listen, but to understand, to reflect, and to be shaped by what they hear.

# Embodying the Word



**People are not just listening to you, they are also watching you.**

## **Posture**

Stand upright, grounded, balanced, and open.

## **Movement**


Let your movement be intentional. Move with purpose or be still with purpose.

## **Facial Expressions**

Your face communicates before your words do.

## **Alignment**

Your voice, body, and attention all working together to serve the moment and help people hear.



## EMBODYING THE WORD – PRESENCE, POSTURE, AND PHYSICAL DELIVERY

Up to this point, we've focused primarily on your voice—how you sound, how you pace, how you use silence and emphasis. But there is another dimension of communication that is just as important, and often just as overlooked: your physical presence.

Because people are not only listening to you—they are also watching you.

And whether you realize it or not, your posture, your movement, your facial expression, and even your stillness are all communicating something. They can reinforce what you are saying, or they can quietly work against it.

So this final section is about embodying the Word—allowing your physical presence to align with your voice in a way that supports clarity, connection, and engagement.

Let's begin with posture.

When you stand to read or speak, how you carry yourself matters. If you are slouched, tense, or closed off, it can signal uncertainty or discomfort, and that can subtly affect how people receive what you are saying. But when you stand upright—grounded, balanced, and open—it communicates confidence and readiness. Not arrogance, but stability.

Think of it this way: your posture should say, 'I am here. I am present. And I am ready to share

this with you.’

Now, this does not mean rigid or stiff. In fact, stiffness can be just as distracting as slouching. What we’re aiming for is a natural, relaxed posture—feet planted, shoulders at ease, head lifted, and body aligned.

Next is movement.

One of the most common questions is, ‘Should I move or stay still?’ And the answer is: move with purpose, or be still with purpose.

Unnecessary movement—shifting back and forth, swaying, fidgeting, adjusting papers repeatedly—can be distracting. It draws attention away from what you are saying. But intentional movement, even something as simple as lifting your head, taking a step, or turning slightly, can reinforce a transition or emphasize a moment.

And sometimes, the most powerful choice is stillness.

When you are completely still, especially at a meaningful moment, people notice. It creates focus. It signals that something important is being said.

Stillness, like silence, is powerful when used intentionally.

Now let’s talk about your face—your expression.

Your face often communicates before your words do. If your expression is disconnected, tense, or neutral regardless of the content, it can create a mismatch between what is being said and how it is being received. But when your expression reflects the tone of the text—gentle in moments of comfort, attentive in moments of seriousness, warm in moments of invitation—it helps people connect more fully.

This does not mean acting or exaggerating. It simply means allowing your face to reflect your engagement with the words.

Another important element is how you use your eyes.

We mentioned earlier the importance of eye contact, and it applies here as well. When appropriate, lifting your gaze from the page and looking at the congregation creates connection. It reminds people that this is not just a reading—it is a shared moment.

Even brief moments of eye contact can make a significant difference. It helps people feel seen,

included, and addressed.

Finally, there is the overall sense of presence.

Presence is difficult to define, but you know it when you see it. It is the difference between someone who is simply going through the motions and someone who is fully there—attentive, grounded, and engaged in the moment.

Presence comes from slowing down, from breathing, from being aware of where you are and what you are doing. It comes from recognizing that this moment matters—not in a pressured way, but in a purposeful way.

When your voice and your physical presence align—when your posture is grounded, your movement is intentional, your expression is engaged, and your attention is focused—something shifts. Your communication becomes more than words. It becomes an experience.

And that is what we are aiming for.

Not performance.

Not perfection.

But alignment.

Your voice, your body, your attention—all working together to serve the moment and help people hear.

So as you step forward to lead, remember this: you are not just using your voice. You are offering your whole presence.


And when you do that with intention, you help create space for something meaningful to happen—not just in what people hear, but in how they receive it.

# Marking the Text

When you mark a text, you are preparing yourself to communicate it clearly, training your eyes to see meaning, and your voice to follow that meaning.

## Identify Natural Pauses



Wherever you see a comma, place a '/'. At the end of a sentence use a '//'.  


## Identify Key Words



Identify and underline key words; words you want to emphasize slightly.

## Bracket Phrases



[Group words into complete thoughts] [by bracketing phrases.]

## Other options



It's not about cluttering the page. It's about clarity. Use what works for you.

## MARKING THE TEXT – PREPARING SCRIPTURE FOR PUBLIC READING

Before we ever speak a word out loud, much of the work of good public reading happens quietly, with a pen in hand and the text in front of us.

Because one of the simplest and most effective ways to improve how you read is to mark the text in advance.

When you mark a text, you are not changing it—you are preparing yourself to communicate it clearly. You are training your eyes to see meaning, and your voice to follow that meaning.

Without marking the text, your eyes are trying to process words, punctuation, meaning, and delivery all at the same time. And that is a lot to manage in the moment. But when you take time beforehand to make a few simple markings, you create a kind of roadmap that guides your reading.

So let me walk you through a simple system you can use. You do not have to use every symbol, and you may adapt this over time, but this will give you a strong starting point.

First, begin by identifying natural pauses. Wherever you see a comma, you might place a small slash—just a simple mark like this: '/'. This reminds you to take a brief pause, just enough to separate phrases. At the end of a sentence, you might use a double slash—'//'—to indicate a slightly longer pause. This helps prevent rushing and allows each thought to land before moving on.

Next, look for key words or phrases—the words that carry the meaning of the sentence. These are the words you want to emphasize slightly with your voice. You can underline them or circle them. The goal is not to emphasize everything, but to highlight what matters most.

For example, in the phrase, ‘The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,’ you might underline ‘Lord,’ ‘shepherd,’ and ‘not want.’ These are the words that carry the weight of the sentence.

Another helpful marking is for phrasing—grouping words into complete thoughts. Instead of reading word-by-word, you want your eyes to see the sentence in meaningful chunks. You can do this by lightly bracketing phrases or simply spacing them in a way that helps you see the flow of the thought.

You may also want to mark shifts in tone or direction. If a passage moves from narrative to dialogue, or from instruction to promise, you might write a small note in the margin—something like ‘gentle,’ ‘urgent,’ ‘question,’ or ‘comfort.’ This reminds you to let your voice reflect the change in tone.

Breathing is another important consideration. If you notice a long sentence or a place where you may run out of breath, mark a place to breathe. This might look like a small ‘B’ or a vertical line. Planning your breaths helps you maintain a steady, supported voice rather than fading at the end of a sentence.

You can also mark places where you want to slow down. Sometimes a phrase carries particular weight, and you want to give it more space. You might draw a small line or write ‘slow’ in the margin as a reminder to ease your pace.

Now, as you begin to use these markings, it’s important to keep one thing in mind: this is not about cluttering the page. It’s about clarity. You are not trying to mark everything—only what will help guide your reading.

Over time, you will develop your own system. The exact symbols matter less than the purpose behind them. What matters is that when you look at the text, you can immediately see where to pause, what to emphasize, how the thought flows, and where the tone shifts.

And here’s what happens when you do this work ahead of time: when you step up to read, you are no longer figuring it out as you go. You are following a path you have already prepared. Your eyes recognize the cues, your voice follows them, and your delivery becomes more natural, more clear, and more engaging.

So instead of approaching the text cold, take a few minutes to prepare it. Read it slowly. Mark it thoughtfully. Practice it once or twice out loud.

Because when you mark the text, you are not just preparing to read—you are preparing to help others hear.

And that small act of preparation can make a profound difference in how the Word is received.



# Common Mistakes

- **RUSHING**
- **SPEAKING MONOTONE**
- **NOT PAYING ATTENTION TO PHRASING**
- **DROPPING VOLUME**
- **READING WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING**

Awareness is the first step toward growth. Even small changes can have a significant impact. When you slow down, vary your tone, follow the structure of the text, and speak with understanding, people will be able to listen more easily, connect, and understand.

## COMMON MISTAKES

Before we move into practicing these skills, it's helpful to name a few of the most common habits that can weaken our delivery. Not to criticize, and certainly not to shame—but to bring awareness. Because once we notice these patterns, they are often the easiest things to begin improving.

The first, and probably the most common, is rushing. When we are nervous or unsure, we tend to speed up. We want to get through the reading, finish the prayer, or move past the moment as quickly as possible. But when we rush, people cannot follow. They may hear fragments, but they lose the thread of meaning. Slowing down—even just slightly—immediately increases clarity and helps people stay with you.

Another common habit is speaking in a monotone voice. When our tone does not vary—when every word is delivered at the same pitch and energy—it becomes very difficult for listeners to stay engaged. The human ear is naturally drawn to variation. Without it, attention fades. This does not mean you need to be dramatic or exaggerated. It simply means allowing your voice to reflect the meaning of what you are saying—letting it rise, fall, and shift naturally.

A third mistake is ignoring punctuation. Punctuation is not just there for grammar; it is there to guide meaning. Periods, commas, and phrases signal where thoughts begin and end, where ideas shift, and where pauses belong. When we ignore punctuation, we often run sentences together or break them in unnatural places, making it harder for listeners to understand. Honoring punctuation helps your delivery feel more natural and easier to follow.

Another habit to be aware of is dropping your volume at the end of sentences. This often happens without us realizing it. We begin a sentence clearly, but as we reach the end, our voice trails off. The result is that the most important part of the sentence—the conclusion—is often the hardest to hear. Being intentional about finishing your sentences with the same level of clarity you began them with makes a significant difference.

And finally, there is the habit of reading without understanding. When we have not taken time to engage the text beforehand, our delivery tends to sound flat or uncertain. We may pronounce the words correctly, but the meaning does not come through. As we said earlier, you cannot express what you do not understand. Even a few minutes of preparation—reading the passage, noticing its tone, identifying key phrases—can transform how it is heard.

Now, it's important to say this clearly: these are not moral failures. These are not signs that you are not gifted or not capable. These are simply habits. And habits can be changed.

In fact, most of the growth in this area does not come from learning something entirely new. It comes from becoming aware of what we are already doing and making small, intentional adjustments.

So as you reflect on these, don't try to fix everything at once. Instead, simply begin to notice. Where do you tend to rush? Where might your voice flatten out? Are you honoring the punctuation? Are you finishing your sentences clearly? Have you taken time to understand what you are reading?

Because awareness is the first step toward growth.

And the good news is this: even small changes in these areas can have a significant impact. When you slow down, vary your tone, follow the structure of the text, and speak with understanding, people will notice. More importantly, they will be able to listen more easily, connect, and understand.

And that, ultimately, is the goal.

Not perfection.

But clarity.

Not performance.

But connection.

And every step you take in that direction makes a difference.

# Practice & Coaching

Each person will have the opportunity to read a short passage. This is a safe space. Give yourself permission to try, experiment, and make mistakes. That's how we improve.

After each person read, we're going to offer a brief moment of feedback.



## One Affirmation

Name one thing that worked well and helped us listen



## One Refinement

Name one clear, actionable idea to make it stronger.

And as you receive feedback, try to receive it with openness. You don't need to defend or explain. Simply take it in, consider it, and decide how you might apply it the next time you read.

## PRACTICE AND COACHING

Now we come to the most important part of this training: practice.

Because everything we've talked about—pace, pauses, tone, engagement—these are not things we learn simply by hearing about them. They are things we learn by doing. By trying. By listening. By adjusting.

And the goal here is not perfection. The goal is awareness and growth.

So what we're going to do is very simple. Each person will have an opportunity to read a short passage—something brief, about thirty seconds to a minute. It could be a piece of scripture, a prayer, or a portion of liturgy. And as you read, I want you to focus on just a few things: slow down your pace, allow for natural pauses, and speak with intention.

That's it. Not everything at once. Just those core elements.

Now, before we begin, let me say this clearly: this is a safe space. You are not being evaluated. You are not being judged. Everyone here is learning, and everyone here is growing. So give yourself permission to try, to experiment, and even to make mistakes. That's how we improve.

After each person reads, we're going to offer a brief moment of feedback. And we're going to do that in a very specific way, so that it is helpful and encouraging.

First, we will name one thing that worked well. Something that helped us listen. Something that created clarity or connection. It might be your pacing, your tone, a well-placed pause, or the way you emphasized a particular phrase.

Then, we will offer one suggestion—just one—something to try that could make it even stronger. Not a list of corrections. Not overwhelming feedback. Just one clear, actionable idea.

This rhythm—affirmation and refinement—helps us grow without becoming discouraged. It allows us to build on what is already working while making small, meaningful improvements.

As you listen to others, I also want you to pay attention. Not just to what they are doing, but to how it affects you as a listener. When did you feel drawn in? When was it easy to follow? When did something stand out to you? Because learning to listen well is part of learning to speak well.

And as you receive feedback, try to receive it with openness. You don't need to defend or explain. Simply take it in, consider it, and decide how you might apply it the next time you read.

Because that's the key—there will always be a next time.

This is not about getting it right once. It's about growing over time. Each time you step up to read or lead, you will become a little more aware, a little more intentional, a little more confident.

So let's begin. Take a moment, choose your passage, and when you're ready, we'll start with our first reader.

And as we do, remember: we are not aiming for perfection. We are learning how to help people be ar.

# Thank You!

**You are not just speaking. You are serving.  
You are not just reading. You are helping others hear the Word of God.  
And that is a gift worth giving well.**

## Closing Prayer

Gracious and ever-speaking God, who calls your people to proclaim your Word with clarity, faithfulness, and love: grant that we who have been formed in this time together may use our voices as instruments of your grace, speaking with intention, listening with care, and serving your people with humility and confidence; that through our words and our presence, others may hear more clearly, receive more deeply, and be transformed by your living Word; through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forevermore. Amen.

## CLOSING SECTION: SENDING AND CHARGE

As we come to the end of our time together, I want to bring us back to where we began. This is not about performance.

It is about connection.

And more than that, in the life of the church, it is about something even deeper—it is about service .

Every time you stand to read scripture, to lead a prayer, or to speak in front of the congregation, you are doing more than using your voice. You are helping create a moment in which people can listen for God. You are shaping how the Word is heard. You are making it easier—or harder—for people to engage, to understand, and to receive.

And that is a sacred responsibility.  
But it is also a simple one.

You do not need to be someone else. You do not need to sound like a professional speaker. You do not need to impress anyone. The most effective, meaningful communication in worship does not come from performance—it comes from presence, clarity, and care for the people who are listening.

So as you step into these roles, I want you to remember a few simple practices.  
Slow down. Give people time to follow.

Breathe. Let your voice be steady and supported.  
Use pauses. Allow the words to land.  
Trust the text. You do not need to add to it.

And speak with intention, as if what you are saying truly matters—because it does.  
And perhaps most importantly, remember that you are not alone in this work.  
God is already at work in the hearts of those who are listening.

The Spirit is already moving, already preparing, already speaking.

Your role is not to make something happen.  
Your role is to be faithful—to offer your voice in a way that helps others hear.  
So be present.  
Be attentive.  
Be clear.

And trust that what you offer, when given with care and intention, can make a real  
difference in how the Word is received.

Because when people can truly hear—when they are not distracted or confused, but able  
to listen and receive—that is when something deeper can happen. That is when  
understanding grows. That is when hearts are opened. That is when transformation  
begins.

So as you go from here, carry this with you:  
You are not just speaking.  
You are serving.  
You are not just reading.  
You are helping others hear the Word of God.  
And that is a gift worth giving well.

Closing Prayer:

Gracious and ever-speaking God,  
who calls your people to proclaim your Word  
with clarity, faithfulness, and love:  
grant that we who have been formed in this time together  
may use our voices as instruments of your grace,  
speaking with intention, listening with care,  
and serving your people with humility and confidence;

that through our words and our presence,  
others may more clearly hear, receive, and be transformed by your living Word;  
through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forevermore. Amen.