

Humorous Interpretation Guide To Pops

When a speech competitor performs a piece that has more than one character, he or she must demonstrate the shift in characters using distinct physical movements. These movements, coupled with a change in vocal interpretation, show the audience that there is a dialogue happening between two or more characters. This kind of physical illustration is often referred to as "pops" or "character pops."

One way to look at character pops is to think of it as a scene from a movie or TV show. When two or more characters are having a conversation, the camera shows you the first character when she is speaking, then cuts instantly to the second character when he responds. In film, this is called a "jump cut." In speech, the character pop is very similar. You must abruptly change your posture, speech pattern, facial expression and other physical attributes you've assigned to each character in order to show your audience which character you are currently portraying.

This is an art, not a science. Some people are not cut out to do character pops. The best way to figure out if this is right for you is to watch other people do character pops, have other people watch you perform a piece with pops, and perform your piece in front of a video camera or mirror to see what you look like when you do it. Here are a few things that must change when you do character pops:

- **Facial expression.** This is the most obvious change you need to make because people's eyes are naturally drawn to your face when you speak. Come up with a basic facial expression for each character so that you can go back to that expression each time you transition

between characters. Try to use extremes here when you can: if one character is kind and loving, smile when you are playing that character to give contrast to your villain's scowl.

- **Posture.** If you are doing two characters, one of them should be taller than the other. Illustrate this by bending at the knees and hunching your shoulders slightly, and make sure you straighten up each time you are playing the second character. In pieces with more than two characters, use a variety of postures: a tall person (raised chin, turned up nose, arched back), a person who is your height (focus on an accent and facial expressions), a person who is shorter than you (bent knees, relaxed neck), a person with a hunched back (bent knees, bent arms, dramatically hunched shoulders, extended neck), and so on. This is something that you have to practice in front of a mirror to really get right.

- **The position of your arms.** Many competitors excel at this by giving each of their characters a signature move, such as smoking a cigarette, holding a book, or keeping one hand on the hip. This helps your audience to remember the character, and it adds interest to your poses.

- **Gestures.** This goes hand in hand with arm position and posture. Gestures should represent a character's personality and illustrate their significance in the piece.

- **Your feet.** People seem to have mixed feelings about this, but many believe it truly makes a difference in the way your characters come across. Many competitors will establish a set position for each character's feet. For example: In the story "Little Red Riding Hood,"

you essentially have three characters: Red, her grandma, and the wolf. (I'm leaving out the huntsman here for brevity's sake. Sorry, fairy tale fanatics.) When you construct each character's stance, you should include a distinct position for the feet. Red's feet might be slightly apart, with the toes facing the audience. Grandma's feet should be turned in slightly, with the toes touching and the heels apart. (Think of Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz when she's clicking her heels.) The wolf's feet should be turned out, with the heels touching and the toes apart, illustrating the opposite of Grandma's feet. Little details like this separate your characters and make it easy for you – and your audience – to keep track of who's who.

- **The direction you are facing.** Turn your body slightly to the right when you are playing one character, and slightly to the left when playing another. If you only have two characters, the first should face forward while the other turns slightly to the right or left (your preference) each time he speaks. If you have three or more, you can vary your characters' positions, but make sure that your central character is always facing forward, so that your audience can rely on one constant.

In addition to character pops, most competitors use different accents or "voices" – British, Scottish, French, southern, Midwestern, Valley Girl, Surfer Dude, Old Man, and so on – to distinguish their roles. But it's OK if you don't have an extensive repertoire of accents. All you have to do is use a different vocal interpretation for each person in your piece. You can do this easily by keeping your voice at a normal/loud volume for one character and then using a hushed, shy

voice for another character. There's also pitch – you can use a high falsetto for one, and a low growl for another.

The most important thing to remember when using character pops is that you must be consistent and confident. Character pops are a great way to challenge yourself and show off your talent in competition.