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FORTITUDO STUDIOS DRAMA

The Eisteddfod Preparation Checklist

Everything I look for from the adjudicator's table — in the order you should work through it.

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01 Choosing the piece

SIX WEEKS OUT

More marks are lost here than anywhere else. A well-performed wrong piece will always place below a well-performed right one.

- ☐ **Check this year's syllabus, not last year's.** Sections, age bands and time limits change. Entrants are disqualified for this every single season.
- ☐ **Confirm the time limit and time the piece out loud** at performance pace. Reading pace is roughly 20% faster than performance pace.
- ☐ **Choose a piece the learner understands.** If they cannot tell you in their own words what it is about and who is speaking, they cannot perform it.
- ☐ **Match the emotional range to the child, not the ambition.** A nine-year-old performing adult grief reads as imitation, and imitation does not score.
- ☐ **Avoid the obvious choice.** An adjudicator hearing the same popular poem eleven times will mark the eleventh against the memory of the best one.
- ☐ **Record the title, author and section number** exactly as printed in the syllabus. Announcing them wrongly on stage costs presentation marks.

Adjudicator's note. If you are choosing between a safe piece performed excellently and an ambitious piece performed adequately, take the safe one. Every time. Marks reward execution far more than they reward difficulty.

02 Building the performance

FOUR TO TWO WEEKS OUT

This is the work. Learning the words is the beginning of preparation, not the end of it.

- ☐ **Mark where the thought changes** — not where the sentence ends. Punctuation is a printing convention; thought is what the audience follows.
- ☐ **Decide who is being spoken to** and what the speaker wants from them. A piece delivered to nobody in particular lands nowhere in particular.

- ☐ **Find the turn.** Almost every competition piece has one moment where something shifts. Locate it and build towards it.
- ☐ **Vary pace deliberately.** Three speeds, chosen on purpose. Unvaried pace is the single most common reason a technically correct performance scores in the sixties.
- ☐ **Rehearse standing up, every time.** The body learns the piece alongside the voice, and a piece learned seated will not survive standing.
- ☐ **Work on the first ten seconds** until they are calm and controlled. The adjudicator forms an impression before the first sentence finishes.
- ☐ **Work on the last three seconds too.** Most entrants relax a beat too early and lose the ending they had earned.
- ☐ **Practise articulation separately** from the piece. Final consonants, especially — they are what carries to the back of a hall.

03 The five things that most often cost marks

FROM THE TABLE

1. **Rushing.** Nerves speed everyone up. What feels painfully slow to the performer reads as controlled to the audience.
2. **Dropping the ends of lines.** The voice falls away on the last three words and the meaning goes with it.
3. **An unprepared entrance and exit.** Marks are being awarded from the moment the learner is visible, and most entrants have not rehearsed walking on.
4. **Gesture that decorates rather than means.** Hands moving because the learner does not know what else to do with them. Stillness scores better than decoration.
5. **No stakes.** Technically accurate, emotionally uncommitted. The learner is reciting rather than speaking, and every adjudicator can hear the difference.

04 The week before

SEVEN DAYS OUT

- ☐ **Stop making changes.** New choices introduced in the final week rarely embed and usually destabilise what was working.
- ☐ **Run it fully three times, not thirty.** Over-rehearsal flattens a piece into recitation. Freshness is a scoring quality.
- ☐ **Perform it to an unfamiliar adult** — a neighbour, a grandparent. Performing to someone who has not heard it is the closest simulation of the real thing.
- ☐ **Confirm the venue, date, section and reporting time** in writing. Do not rely on memory or on another parent.
- ☐ **Choose the outfit and rehearse in it.** Neat, comfortable, nothing that rustles, clicks or needs adjusting. Shoes the learner can walk confidently in.
- ☐ **Practise the announcement** — name, title, author — out loud, slowly, at least ten times.
- ☐ **Rehearse recovering from a mistake.** Deliberately go wrong in rehearsal and practise carrying on in character. This is the single most valuable thing you can do in the final week.

05 On the day

THE PERFORMANCE ITSELF

- ☐ **Arrive early enough to settle.** Rushing in is a performance disadvantage that begins before the stage.
- ☐ **Eat something light.** Not sugary, not nothing.
- ☐ **Warm the voice up quietly** — humming and articulation, not full volume.
- ☐ **In the waiting room, rehearse only the first line.** Running the whole piece raises anxiety and changes nothing.
- ☐ **Walk on slower than feels natural.** Rushing on reads as fear before a word is said.
- ☐ **Stand still. Find a point on the back wall. Take one breath.** Then begin.
- ☐ **Project to the back wall without shouting.** Volume comes from breath support, not from the throat.
- ☐ **Hold the final moment** for a count of two before relaxing, then leave with the same composure you arrived with.

If something goes wrong. Stay in character and keep going. Adjudicators mark the whole performance, and a composed recovery frequently scores higher than a flawless run that never tested the performer. Stopping to apologise is what costs the marks — not the mistake.

06 For parents

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

- ☐ **Ask for a performance once a week, not once a night.** Your enthusiasm can quietly become pressure.
- ☐ **Praise a specific choice** — "the pause before that line was excellent" — rather than the whole performance. Specific praise teaches; general praise only reassures.
- ☐ **Do not discuss other entrants' results in front of your child.** Not before, not after.
- ☐ **Read the adjudication sheet together a day later,** not in the car park. Emotion on the day makes every comment land harder than it was meant to.
- ☐ **Treat the comment that stings as the useful one.** It usually is. Adjudicators write far more carefully than they are given credit for.
- ☐ **Separate the result from the child.** They performed a piece; they were not themselves being judged. Say so out loud.

When a checklist is not enough

This covers the preparation any entrant can do alone. What it cannot give you is a second pair of eyes on the piece itself — which is where most of the remaining marks live.

I coach learners online across South Africa, live on Microsoft Teams. Private sessions are R420 an hour, and the first twenty-minute assessment is free.

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