

Memorization Tips by Jill Anna Ponasik

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Hi! Thank you so much for sharing your work at the Diversity Generals. I can't wait to meet you - or to see you again if we've already met!

Here are a few strategies for memorization that I have found helpful in my own work:

#1: Don't freak out. You can do this. If you're looking at a long monologue or song, begin by breaking it down into small pieces. Or, try breaking it down into increments of time. For instance, you could create a schedule for yourself, where you work on something for 20 minutes, one time each day, for 6 days in a row. I call work like this "pulsing," and it's remarkable how effective it can be.

#2: Get physical. I have memorized one woman shows by getting outside to take a walk while reciting my lines, or while listening to myself read my lines on headphones. Something about the physical activity, and the rhythm of walking seems to get the text deeper into my bones.

#3: Begin with the end. This is one of my favorite fail-safe tools! Here's how it works: If you're working on a monologue, let's say it's this bit from the play MEDEA by Euripides.

"Yes, yes, I am hemmed in on every side.
But don't imagine all my battles lost.
I can deal trouble too.
Trouble is looming for this young bride,
And for the bridegroom, a whole sea of it."

Start by teaching yourself the last line, "And for the bridegroom, a whole sea of it." When that feels comfortable, add the previous phrase, "Trouble is looking for this young bride." When that is memorized, put them together, so you now have, "Trouble is looking for this young bride, And for the bridegroom, a whole sea of it." Work through the whole monologue using this process. The miracle here is that your mind is always moving toward more familiar material as you work, and this opens up confidence and mastery.

#4: As you work, reflect on your process with curiosity rather than judgement. When you feel like getting angry with yourself because you keep messing up the same part, step back, take a look at that section, and try playing with it like a cat might play with a toy. Like, literally, mess around with that moment. Speed through it, slow it waaayyy down, say it in a funky rhythm, sing it at the top of your lungs, whisper it, say it backwards. Often tinkering around with the parts of something helps our brains make sense of it.

#5: Review your material before bed. This is another favorite of mine. Especially if something is feeling close, but not quite rock solid, reading it out loud just before you fall asleep can help tie up those loose ends.

#6: Trust that you've got this, and that we need to hear you.

- Jill Anna Ponasik, Artistic Director - Milwaukee Opera Theatre