

# The Art of **Puppet Manipulation**

## **Manual Includes**

The 5 Principles of Manipulation  
Use of Rod Arms, Human Hands  
Scenery, Props, Pre Recording and Sound Effects  
Developing Puppet Personality  
Audience Participation  
Script Writing and Puppet Theatres  
Ventriloquism

## **DVD Includes**

1 hour step by step instructions on making puppets  
1 hour interactive training on bringing puppets to life.

## **CD Includes**

This manipulation training manual  
Medium size puppet patterns & detailed Instructions  
Large puppet patterns and instructions.  
Five different Theatre plans and designs.



Published 2007  
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# Barbie Dolls Action Men and Tin Soldiers

As a child, when you played with models and gave them realistic qualities, you were developing your imagination.

Puppetry is a progression of this desire but allows an audience to interact with the “actors”. This is what makes this medium different from TV or movies, there is an interaction and even a relationship which develops between the viewers and the characters in a play.

A performance can fit the needs and reactions of the audience, relative to their age, culture, beliefs and abilities. The puppeteer can change direction, alter the performance and develop the interplay to suit.

There's a three dimensional reality with puppets as they adopt the characteristics of familiar personalities, in relevant situations. We can identify with them easier than real people because there is no threat, and we don't have to compete.

Puppets have versatility that even actors don't, as they achieve anything imaginable, merely by “suggesting” what is going on behind the scenes, or in the theater with the use of a few well timed sound or visual effects.

Undivided attention is commanded from an otherwise lifeless dummy as it is transformed into an entertaining personality. This is why puppetry is such a successful way of reaching an audience.

With puppets you can take your audience to the limits of your imagination. Ordinary household items can be transformed into an adventure playground when shared with imaginary friends.



# ***Puppets can accomplish ANYTHING!***

By manipulating circumstances, experimenting with relationships, examining situation ethics, ***without suffering the consequences***. Sound like a dream come true? We normally “learn by our mistakes”, but with this medium you can help your audience learn at the expense of a small piece of fur and fabric.

Education, encouragement and entertainment are all rolled into the same medium when you know how to manipulate your puppets (and your audience). And they’ll love you for it.

Things YOU couldn’t say, without offending sensibilities or cultures, your puppets can blurt out. Their irresistible magnetism sneak up on the unsuspecting and drive home principles and values that you wouldn’t otherwise consider discussing.

## ***Use them to***

- Teach facts or entertain in the classroom situation.
- Teach spiritual, social, behavioural, racial or relational values.
- Educate the emotional, social or physically challenged.
- Examine behavioural or, social interactions,

## ***Experience and experiment with***

- Drama - bringing the play to life
- Therapy - Hand eye co-ordination
- Art and craft - making puppets, scenery, props and theaters
- Diction/pronunciation - speaking the parts clearly
- Journalism - writing plays and scripts
- Team work / co operation - working together to perform
- Planning and preparation - as you organise a production.
- Creativity - as you make an entire fantasy world come to life.
- Sound and Video as you add mood to your production
- Self Esteem - as you develop personality in your puppet
- Psycho Drama - as you live through a circumstance.

# Five Principles That Bring Puppets To Life



## LIP SYNCRONISATION Speaking through Your Hand

You must first put the puppet on your hand so that the thumb is in the bottom jaw. The fingers that go in the head often have to fit under a built-in flap in the top jaw. This gives better control of the head. Remember that the puppets need to look like they are doing the talking. Pretend that your thumb is your bottom jaw and that it is speaking. It must drop as your jaw does. Let it drop for every syllable where possible. Sometimes it is impossible to open the jaw for every syllable - they are just too quick. In that case, make sure that the mouth opens with the first syllable of the word/phrase. To simulate the movement of the mouth in as realistic a way as possible, look in the mirror. Remember that the mouth closes completely for the letters M, B, P ONLY, for other letters - our mouths are slightly open E, O, A, C, D, etc. The only reason to open the mouth very wide is for a yawn, a shout, an expression of surprise or fight.

## Common Faults

- Placing hands in head incorrectly
  - small hands may need extra padding in the top of the head, or behind the wrists.
- Flipping the lid - i.e. raising the head rather than dropping the bottom jaw (thumb) which destroys eye contact.
- Biting the words - i.e. closing the mouth instead of opening it.
- Opening the mouth too wide for normal speech.
- Standing with mouth open when not speaking.
- Forgetting to open and shut the mouth when speaking.
- Remember, mouth movement identifies which puppet is speaking

Extra Foam in  
head if needed

Fingers under flap  
and thumb in jaw

Hand



## Practice Exercises

- Practice with and without a puppet on your hand in front of a mirror.
- Hold your hand under a table/shelf and practice dropping the thumb.
- Put a book on your hand to practice talking without dropping it.
- Lip-sync the alphabet and count to 20 enunciating each syllable.



- Put the radio or a tape on and lip-sync along with familiar songs.
- Move your hand forward at the wrist and the thumb will automatically drop. This is especially important for small puppets or new ones that are a little stiff.



## **EYE CONTACT** *"Look at me when I talk to you"*

Much of our communication is through the expression in our eyes. Eye contact is vital and although we can't show expression through the puppet's eyes, we can direct eye contact. That's the reason it's so important to DROP THE THUMB rather than "flip the lid" to maintain that eye contact with the audience.

Make sure your puppet is looking at the person or group it is addressing.

This may mean using the other hand. A good rule of thumb is: use your left hand if your are performing on the left side, right hand if you are performing on the right side of the theatre.

## **Common Faults**

- Staring at the ceiling with the mouth wide open.
- Head drooping and looking at the floor.
- Flipping the lid and losing eye contact.
- Puppet on the wrong hand i.e. standing face-to-back or back to back.

## **Practice Exercises (also for "Focus of Attention")**

- Sit and look at your puppet and talk to it or talk to it in a mirror.
- Have a 3 way conversation - you, another person & puppet.
- Focus the attention of the puppet on the one who is speaking.
- Sit opposite another puppeteer, hold the puppets at face level and have them talk to each other.

## **FOCUS OF ATTENTION    *Avoid Distraction***

When we have two or more puppets on the stage, it must be obvious to the audience who is speaking. The ACTION must identify the speaker.

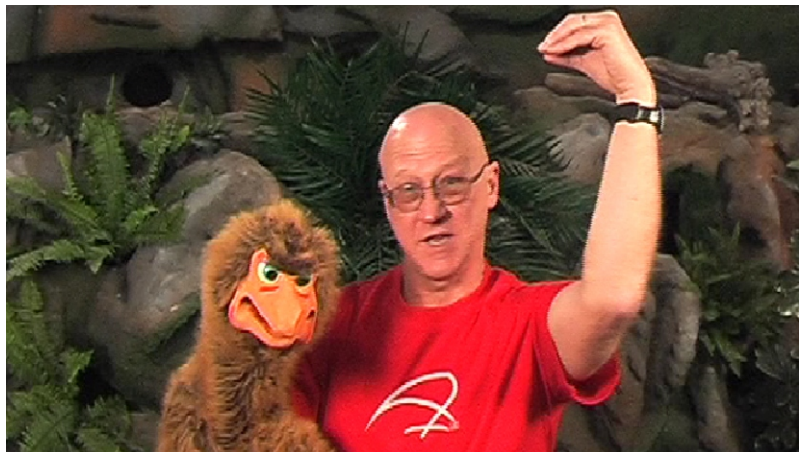
A magician perfects the ability to direct the audience's attention wherever he wants them to look. To a degree, this is what we are doing with puppetry, especially when using ventriloquism.

All the puppets in the theatre must look at, and focus their attention on, the puppet that is speaking. If you are trying to convey a powerful principle, don't distract the audience, or detract from your purpose by allowing too much action on stage on stage.

### **Common Faults**

- One or more of the supporting puppets - dancing, or humming.
- Sagging, or staring as if totally bored.
- Puppets on the wrong hand - looking away from the one speaking.
- Too many distractions





## **GOOD POSTURE**    **Head Up, Chest out**

It takes a while to develop a new activity or muscle tone, but maintaining good posture in your puppet is essential.

It is best to try holding your forearm bent back slightly, and an exaggerated bend at the wrist so that the puppet is leaning slightly back, rather than sagging over the puppet theatre.

Hold the puppet up high enough so that the chest and upper arms are on top of the stage.

### **Common Faults**

- Leaning on the stage to rest your arm (puppet looks asleep).
- Gazing, mouth open, at the sky, looking bored.
- Too low - so that the chin is resting on the theatre.
- Too high - so that your arm is visible.

### **Practice Exercises**

- In the theatre, practice holding the puppet at the right level
- Lift weights to develop the muscle tone.
- Pretend that you are the puppet and in your imagination, picture what it would be like to droop on stage, or stand tilted over.



## ENTRY AND EXIT

*Enter stage Right.... Exit stage Left....*

Puppets should appear to "walk" on and off the stage to simulate reality. This is done by "bouncing" the puppet up and down - simulating a walk. The audience has to "imagine" that the puppet actually has legs.

Movement comes from the shoulder and elbow - not the wrist. Make the "walk" fit the "talk", ie in keeping with the character of the puppet. For a casual personality - a saunter is appropriate. A proud personality may march. Also remember that the pace portrays the mood of the character. When in a hurry the "walk" should be fast, when determined; thoughtful - slow and when sneaky - jilted and looking around.

Another technique is to nod the wrist so that the head "bobs" to enhance the personality. When a puppet reaches its destination - it stops and faces whoever it is addressing - whether the audience or another puppet. Walk around the stage as well. The puppet is not on roller skates. Bend this rule, however, to use slapstick effects - the shock reaction, the sneak up behind, or the flight off the stage in a panic.

### **Common Faults**

- Moving the mouth (like chewing) instead of the wrist like walking.
- "Nodding" on and off the stage - moving from the wrist, not the shoulder/elbow.
- The "elevator" or "escalator" effect - shooting straight onto the stage
- "Roller Skating" around the theatre.

### **Practice Exercises**

- Sit in front of the mirror and walk the puppet around.
- Try different "walks" for different personalities

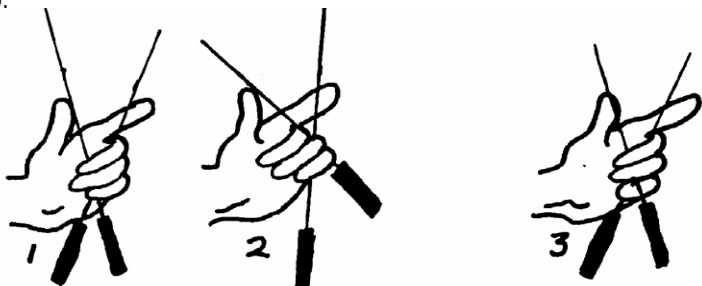


# Rods & Hands

We often use our hands to help us enhance what we are saying. When puppets move their hands/arms, it adds to their impact. Use movements in keeping with the personality of the puppet and with expression being made.

## ROD ARMS

You can use one or two rod arms. They may be connected with Velcro, or with electrical wire ties. Rods should be painted black and made of wire as thin as possible, yet stiff enough to allow quick movement. It is suggested that you start with just one rod and as you become familiar with it, try using two.



When walking on and off the theatre - put hands across the chest/stomach and keep them together. When running - hold the arms out front of the body. When not in use - sit the hands on top of the theatre (arm down the inside of the theatre).

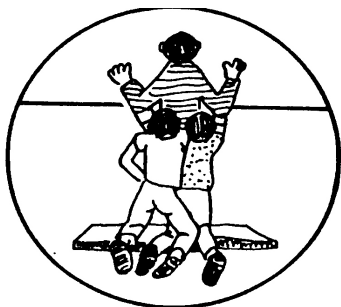
## HOW TO PICK UP AND DROP OBJECTS WITH ROD ARMS

- Velcro on the palms of the puppet and on the object.
- Magnets in the palms (and chest if prop is heavy) and on props.
- Small plastic curtain rings attached to the palms, chest, shoulder, etc. with invisible thread connected to the object. Pull string as the puppet approaches till the puppet reaches the object, then take up all slack.



## HUMAN HANDS

**One puppeteer**, can put one hand in the head and the other hand in the left or right glove of the puppet, depending on which side of the theatre you need to operate from. Just let the other arm hang down, or sit it on the front of the theatre, or fix it to the chest or stomach.



**Two puppeteers** - one of you (the tallest) will operate the head and mouth, the other will operate the two hands. This way the hands can co-ordinate activities. The head operator should be behind the hand operator. It will, of course, take some practice to get this right.

## COMMON FAULTS

- Standing as if crucified, or with hands in unnatural positions.
- Unused hand twisted over shoulder or behind back.
- Human hands too far spread, or too close looking unnatural.

## EXPRESSIONS WITH THE HANDS

Surprise	-	hand over mouth
Tired	-	hand covering yawn
Nervous	-	biting hands - chewing nails
Welcome	-	waving (leaving the same)
OH NO!	-	hands over eyes, or slap head
Everyone	-	sweeping hands side to side
Thinking	-	scratching head or rubbing chin
Bored	-	drumming fingers on theatre
Yelling	-	hands beside mouth
Come	-	waving - palm in
Dunno	-	hands spread to the sides
Sleeping	-	head on hands - palms together
Indicate Direction	-	Pointing where to go in any direction
Show Size	-	Holding arms out, up down
Fear	-	arms in front of face



## PRE-RECORDING AND SOUND EFFECTS

If your team has limited experience, it is often wise to start by performing to recorded music, or to pre-record your play so that good dialogue can be emphasized. That way, during the performance, attention can be given to the actions. Of course when experience levels increase, live dialogue is better as the puppets need to interact with the audience where possible. It's handy to have a tape recorder and a few sound effects to increase the effectiveness of the performance.

You don't need a lot of technical equipment to pre-record, just a small home entertainment system or with a good microphone you can record directly to your home computer. Get the performers to read their parts, putting emotion and feeling into them, onto a sound track through the microphone. You can add music backing and sound effects where possible to increase the effect. Then practice "lip-sync" with the puppets, to the recorded message. Keep a copy of the script in front of you of course so that you can follow and maintain lip -sync in time with the sound.

If you do not want to learn ventriloquism, a tape recorder can be a good substitute. Write a script for yourself and a puppet. Read the puppet's lines onto the tape, leaving a silent space for you to fill in your lines when you are in front of your audience. Alternatively, read the puppet's lines in succession, leaving a very small gap between them and use the pause button on the tape recorder to stop the tape so you can say your lines. This allows for a little more spontaneity. Ventriloquism, of course allows for total adaptability to any audience and any situation.

Sound effects can be purchased on CD to be used as background or special effects. You can also make your own sound effects by going out to the environment you need with a small mp3 recorder. They can be dropped into a pre-recorded play, or set up to use for a show. Some sounds can be made on stage directly into a microphone. Explosions and crashes, by blowing in the mike, sirens, by squealing in the mike at close quarters using the natural distortion of the amplifier. With practice to get lots of sounds.

Sound and music add a great deal to your performance taking it to the next level of professionalism.

# Scenery & Props

## SCENERY AND PROPS

**Scenery** - the background that goes behind the puppets in a theatre gives depth and transports the imagination. It is not totally necessary, as description, or a sound effect can accomplish much the same, but if you choose to use scenery, three basic backgrounds give full versatility.

- An outdoor scene, with mountains in the distance and maybe a tree.
- Inside a room - with perspective lines to give it depth.
- Seaside - with sky and water coming together on the horizon.

Or download and print something off the internet.

To these scenes you can be add props and various backgrounds which will complete the scenes you need to accomplish the necessary effects.



**Props** \_can be made from cardboard, Styrofoam, foam rubber, or fabric. If they are flat, they store and transport more easily. They can be made three dimensional as well, but take more to pack, move and store. Use whatever skill, creativity, ingenuity and materials you have available.

Props also be made from tools and household appliances. You can use real items (e.g. Telephones), buy or find toy imitations of everyday things, or make your own from paper mache', foam, plaster etc. It is best to make them light but durable as they may get knocked around in a theatre.

To use the props in a Theatre, fix a shelf just under the inside of the stage to sit the props on, or fix them to stands that sit on the floor. Alternatively they can be fixed to the theatre - depending on what kind you are using. If you have a 'top' on your stage - they can be suspended from it, to leave the lower stage free for the puppets to move unhindered..

# Developing Puppet Personality



## Maintain a Consistent Personality

The saying "It is so unlike him/her" expresses the importance of keeping a consistency about your puppet's personality. We come to trust someone because we know what to expect from them. We know what to expect from a personality, even though circumstances may change around them. Little children need that consistency to feel safe.

The puppet's personality makes it a teacher by example of either how to, or how not to behave. Be careful here, as children will imitate.

Believe in what you are doing. Through this personality - which is an extension of your own, you are making an important point. Teach acceptable behaviour, consequences, spiritual truths etc. But do it convincingly. (By the way - the Latin word, from which we get the word "personality", means, "mask"!)

It's advisable to maintain consistency in all areas - voice, mannerisms, and attitudes. Scriptwriters need to remember this. It is suggested therefore, that the same person operates the puppet all the time. If you want to change the personality - change everything - wig, eyes, clothes and any identifying characteristics. In the same way, you can use any identifying characteristics and the voice to make a puppet "turn into something else". If it turns from a boy, with a particular hat, scarf, jumper - into a monster (because it misbehaves) put the same hat, scarf, jumper - onto the monster, and maintain the voice.

To keep the "mystery" keep the puppeteer anonymous. Often a child will identify the puppeteer, or when using ventriloquism that you haven't "fooled" them. Don't worry. Just say "yes, I help this puppet to talk - that's how we bring him to life." You will find that these "inquisitive" ones are the first to jump back into the game and interact with the puppet as a personality.

Talk to and with the puppet as a real personality. Refer to them as "little ones" or "friends'. Unless you are working with an older group, whom you are training in puppetry, avoid letting the children see the puppets "dead'. They may have other puppets they play with, but keep a few aside to use for special circumstances.



## DEVELOPING THE PERSONALITY

### The Looks

- Male, Female or Neuter
- Old or young, mature or thoughtless
- Animal, Human or Inanimate object
- Handsome or ugly - special characteristic facial features
- Clothing, including hats, scarves etc. Fashionable or tasteless

### The Background

- Create an imaginary history for your puppet to know it better
- Is it intelligent, or stupid, thoughtful or selfish?
- Well educated or ignorant - knowledgeable or questioning
- A leader or a follower

### The Attitude

- Enthusiastic and energetic or pessimistic and lazy
- Happy and cheerful or sad and discouraging
- Co-operative and helpful or rebellious and selfish
- Humble and receptive, or egotistical and opinionated

### The Purpose it is to be used for

- To teach facts or truths.
- To teach acceptable or unacceptable thinking and behaviour
- To be an example
- To learn facts, behaviours or truths with or from the children.





## PERSONALITY

- Age - stooped, shaking, stuffy voice.
- Youth - Poor co-ordination, vibrant, impetuous, middle voice.
- Haughty - Stiff, nose in the air, slow, determined, articulated voice.
- Educated - Glasses, argumentative, English accent.
- Evil - Head down, hands together, looking around, wheezy voice.
- Brash - Lots of hand and body movement - loud voice.
- Shy - Timid, restricted movements, tilted head, quiet voice with stutter.



## VOICE CHARACTERISATION

Self-consciousness lowers the effectiveness of the voice and actions, so **LET GO AND ENJOY YOURSELF!!** Record some voices and listen to them to see what sounds best. Make it so different from your own voice that it is unrecognizable. Study people's voices for ideas.

- Pitch - an octave or so higher or lower.
- Nasal - speaking through your nose.
- Stuffy - speaking without allowing air through the nose.
- Breathy - using much more air than normal.
- Wheezy - using much less air than normal (constrict the throat).
- Gravelly - throaty, growling like a bear/lion.
- Extra clear - opening the throat using the resonance chamber.
- Slurring - words together - de-emphasizing ending syllables.
- Articulating - distinct, over-emphasizing ending consonants.
- Drawl - slow delivery of vowels.
- Accents - listen to and imitate foreign accents.



# Audience Participation

Getting an audience involved is a real skill. It adds reality, helps you gauge attentiveness and enhances the involvement and learning of the group.

Reactions will be very different. While one child will feel threatened and withdraw, another will respond and interact.

The more “risk” the puppeteer is willing to take, the greater the response will be. As the puppet shares itself (and it can be far more open than one would normally be) the audience will get involved. As the audience participates, they get more out of the puppet as well, and can feel like they are involved in the direction of the whole play. It means that indirectly, they are manipulating the puppets and the situations personally. They will therefore “own” the theme and the outcome will be theirs. Discovery is the best learning tool.

So how do we get Audience participation?

- Ask open ended questions (start with how, what, where, when who, why).
- Ask closed ended questions only for reactions and commitment.
- Tell the group something that is obviously not true (they want to correct).
- Do something right, or wrong and ask for a reaction. “What do you think?”
- Make the puppeteer or puppet ignorant of something happening.
- Argue “Oh yes I will” - “Oh no you won’t” with the audience.

# Script Writing

There are many books available with puppet scripts already written out, and of course you can find lots on the internet.

These are helpful but often do not take into consideration the personalities of the puppets and puppeteers you have available. It is much better to learn to write your own.

## **SOURCES OF MATERIAL** (It's hard to work in a vacuum)

- The Bible - Stories and Bible class material can be adapted.
- Story books - The library, build on the basic plot of the story.
- Local, national, and international legends. Talk to the elders.
- Existing scripts - Adapt them to fit your available personalities.
- Songs - Make great plays when acted out
- Personal Experience - your own, or other people's stories.
- T.V. and Radio plays - Adapting the basic theme or principle.
- The internet, where hundreds of plays are available.
- Learn to adapt the play to your own puppet personalities.
- Make a table listing characters, actions, places and things, then choose a couple from each column and write a story based on them.

## IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- Adapt the vocabulary to the age and background of the audience.
- Puppets are role models - avoid violence, bad language etc.
- Length of time for a play - keep it brief for effectiveness
  - Preschool* (1-4 yrs) - very simple plot, just interaction & basic principles eg sharing, taking turns numbers and ABC's.
  - Primary* (5-8 yrs) - less than six minutes for a play.
  - Junior* (9-11 yrs) - up to eight minutes for a play.
  - Intermediate* (10-12 yrs) - up to twelve minutes.
  - Senior to adult* No more than fifteen minutes.
- When doing a assortment of items or a variety show, you can extend your time as long as the audience is interested. Combine music, magic, stories and other entertainment mediums.
- Keep individual lines brief.
- Simple plots, with simple personalities are most effective.
- Unless a musical number, have no more than 3 - 4 puppets on stage at one time.
- Make intermissions (for scenery change) as brief as possible.

**Action** is as important as witty lines. A picture is worth a thousand words.

**Humour** - Puppets are live cartoons - Aim humour at your age group.

- *Young children* - slapstick, shallow humour
- *Junior and intermediate* - Jokes, clown humour, tricks
- *Senior and Adult* - Word plays, puns, satire and sarcasm.
- Over-emphasize character personality traits, puppets are cartoons/caricatures.

**Suspense** - and an unexpected ending give a play its flavour.

**Conflict** - The good/bad, right/wrong, weak/strong themes always work.

## WRITING A PLAY

- K-I-S-S - Keep It Super Simple. Aim at getting one point across.
- Success is 20% inspiration and 80% perspiration - Work at it, don't quit.
- Relate the circumstances to the audience you have (trouble with mum and dad, peer pressure, difficult choices, wanting the impossible.).
- Read, watch, discuss - you can't create in a vacuum.
- Just start writing, it's amazing what happens when you do.
- Set the scene by introducing the character's personalities in everyday circumstances, then build action.
- Start with the objective - know where you want to end before you start.
- "The play's the thing, wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King", (Hamlet).
- Nathan the Prophet confronted King David using a simple story and reflection. It changed his life.
- Jesus Parables were the most effective methods of transferring vital truths.

### When forming a play from an existing story:

- Choose a principle (e.g. love your neighbour, be industrious) or plot (e.g. the three little pigs, the good Samaritan).
- What are the most outstanding/contrasting personalities/principles?
- Make the circumstances fit the puppet personalities you have, OR put the same play/plot into a modern setting.
- Write a basic outline of what you intend to accomplish.
- Write your script including;
  1. *A list of the characters*
  2. *A list of props & scenery.*
  3. *An outline of the play or plot.*
  4. *Dialogue with actions and lines of description to help puppeteers.*

## When forming a play from scratch;

- Start by listing ideas (brainstorm).
- Highlight the best ones on your list, crossing out the unlikely ones.
- Outline your story. Professional writers use the following steps;
  1. *Characters- Chose a main character and a few opposing ones.*
  2. *Introduce Agent of Conflict - a character or two, or a conscience.*
  3. *Develop Conflict - two or three hurdles to overcome*
  4. *Climax - make the last hurdle a real difficult one*
  5. *Resolution - a satisfying ending. The consequence is, we don't always "live happily ever after", neither should your characters.*
- Revise your ideas taking out unnecessary and wordy bits and condensing.
- Try working with lists of your characters and everyday events. Combine a couple of each, then start writing a play based on those ideas.

Character	Place	Action	Item

An outline of ideas to get a play started.....

**Scene 1 - Establish Characters**

**Scene 2 - Introduce Agent of Conflict**

**Scene 3 - Develop Conflict**

**Scene 4 - Climax and Resolution**

***A great source of hundreds of pre-written scripts can be found on the web at***

***[www.puppetresources.com](http://www.puppetresources.com).***

***These are public domain, and if you have any scripts that you write you can send them in to go on file.***



## **Preparing to perform the play**

The best way to gain experience is to lip-synch to a music track. Then you can concentrate on the puppet performance and the use of props without having to read or remember lines. Even when you have become more proficient, it's better not to 'read' your script. That will detract from the performance. Read the script through a number of times, and then perform it from memory. If you have a very good memory, you can memorize the script, but often it is better to just adlib from memory, keeping to the plot of course.

Remember, this is a live performance, so don't be afraid to deviate from the script a little to respond to them when the audiences' comments give you the opportunity. However, remember your fellow puppeteers and remember to "cue" them for their parts.

# Ventriloquism

This is a Latin word meaning "*Venter* - belly, *Loqui* - I speak". It is the art of speaking so that the voice SEEMS to come from a source other than the speaker. Fred Nieman was the first to create a full view knee figure for stage work, but the art goes back to the pagan priests who used it when "the gods spoke". Some of the later ventriloquists include Edgar Bergen's Charlie McCarthy, and Shari Lewis with Lamb Chop. New Zealand's own John Zealando is an accomplished ventriloquist.

The illusion works because sounds are simply waves in the air of varying intensity. There is no sound until the sensitive eardrums are activated. Ears are very poor direction finders, except at extremely close range. The eyes are the direction finders, and they work in *conjunction* with the ears to locate the source of the sound. Therefore, if something we see coordinates with the sound we hear, the brain automatically interprets it as the source of the sound. Even more complete is the illusion, if the puppet has been given a personality that is very different to the ventriloquist.

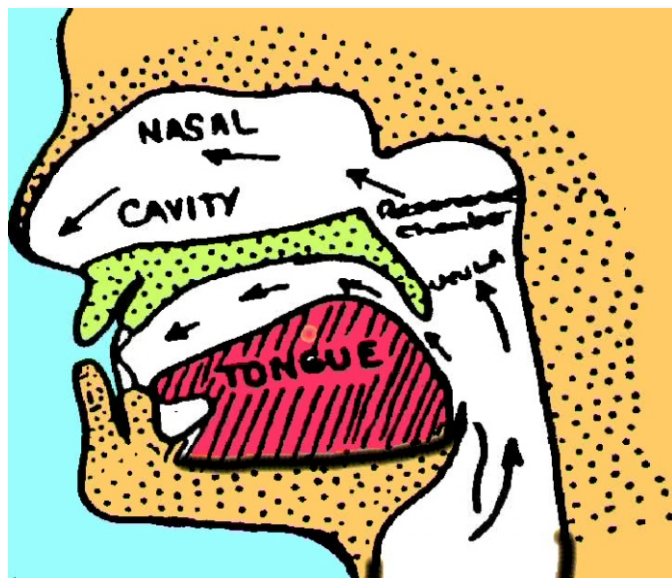
## Breathing

If your chest and shoulders move when you take a breath. A discerning audience will pick up that you are breathing for yourself and the puppet. To overcome this problem, you need to practice holding the chest and shoulders still and breathing using the stomach and diaphragm, much like opera singers do. Filling your upper lungswill also help to increase the sound quality of your voice, and the volume that you can produce. Stand relaxed and take a deep breath. Now hold the upper chest still and breath out, pushing up from the stomach. Next, using the stomach and diaphragm, draw air into the lungs without moving your chest. This exercise is aslo practiced by good for singing and public speakers.



Keep the upper chest full of Air and breath from the diaphragm to:

1. Make taking a breath less obvious (breathing for you and the puppet)
2. Provide more air - you are having to breathe for two.
3. Create a resonance chamber in the upper chest to increase volume.



## The Sounds

First we will need to look at the shape of the throat and nose. You will need to rely on your "resonance chamber" for volume of sound. It will now be your sound box, rather than your mouth. The back of your tongue and the UVULA or skin flap at the back of your tongue now take the place of your lips. You will use them for the "labials" (M, B, P, F, V, W) which the lips usually pronounce. Practice in front of the mirror, without moving the lips. Some movement of the throat will occur, this cannot be avoided.

Let's learn to pronounce the sounds using the back of the throat.

**Start with diphthongs.** For these you will need to open the back of your throat, as if you are yawning.

**AH - AY - EE - OH - OO - AI**

**The "W"** is another consonant that requires a little practice. Use the resonance chamber with a yawn again and say:

**"WALLY, WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I WANTED YOU?"**

**The "F" and "V"** are the next most difficult. They are simply pronounced using the **"TH"** sound, and varying the force of the air between the teeth and tongue.

Practice this:-

**"VERY FEW FOLKS FORGET THE VIEW"  
"THERY THEW THOLKS THORGET THE THIEW"**

**The "M" sound.** Substituting the "NG" sound - bringing the uvula and the back of the tongue together, produces the "M".

Try....

**"MICHAEL MADE NO MORE MONEY MANAGING MONKEYS  
THAN MARY MADE MASHING MELONS."**

Or spelling it phonetically:

**"NGICHAEL NGADE NO NGORE NGONEY NGANAGING  
NGONKEYS THAN NGARY NGADE NGASHING NGELONS."**

Now try

**MARTHA MET VERY FEW FELLOWS MAKING FAST MONEY**

or

**"NGARTHA NGET THERY THEW THELLOWS NGAING THAST  
NGONEY."**

The "B" is produced by bringing the back of the tongue and the uvula together, like a "G" but deeper in your throat and popping them apart.

Try...

**"BODY BUILDERS BUY BANANAS TO BUILD BETTER BODIES"**

The "P" is produced in the same way as the "B" (but more like a throaty "K"). Draw the air back just a bit. To make the "B" and "P" sounds a little more believable, muffle the sound a little.

Try.....

**"PETER PIPER PICKED A PECK OF PICKLED PEPPERS"**

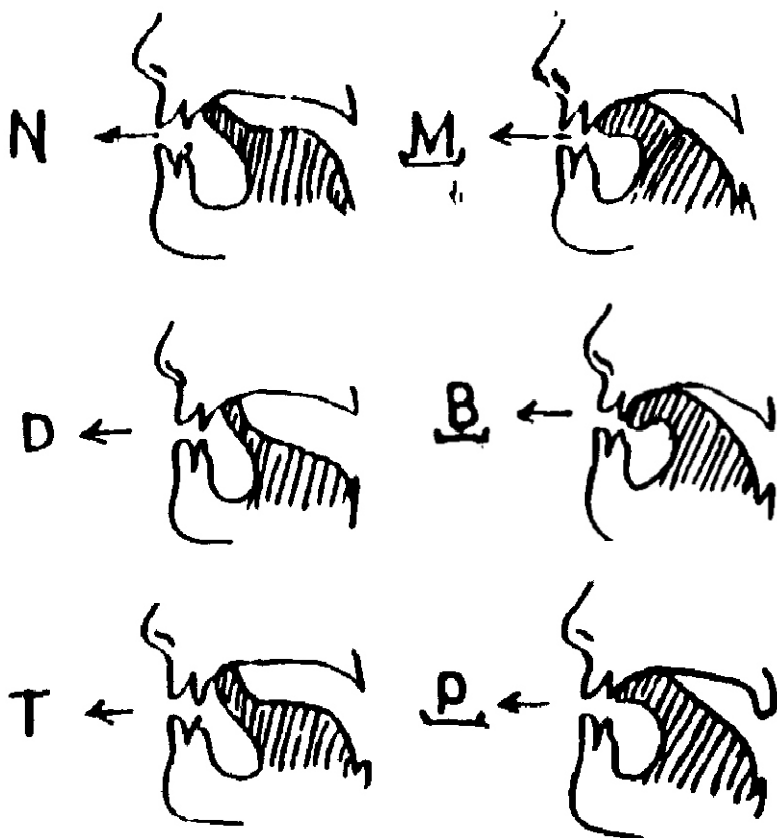
### **FOCUS ALL ATTENTION ON THE PUPPET**

Remember that the most important part of Ventriloquism is to focus attention on the puppet. Like a magician, you are "distracting" the audience away from you so that they focus on the puppet. Your FULL ATTENTION must be focussed on the puppet when it is speaking.

### **FACIAL EXPRESSION**

Probably **the** most difficult parts of ventriloquism is keeping a passive face, when the puppet is expressing some form of emotion such as anger, aggression, surprise or excitement. Or the ventriloquist maintaining a smile, while putting on an angry puppet voice. This takes some practice, but is just a part of making the whole play more effective. All drama training encourages you to show emotion on your face and even emphasize it. As a ventriloquist, you will have to reverse that philosophy and keep your facial expression totally unrelated to what the puppet is expressing.

**There is an alternative substitution principle.** The following diagram is an indication of how you may wish to substitute the labials. I find this less effective, but it may be more natural for you..



## **THE MUFFLED VOICE**

This illusion is even easier than normal speech. Direction of the audience's attention to the box or case that the puppet is in is more important than pronunciation. Listen to someone speaking through a door. The pitch will sound a little higher and the consonants will be muffled by the barrier. "Let me out" will sound more like "Le ne ou". The consonants "S, F, TH" will be lost altogether. To make the muffled sound, push plenty of air from the diaphragm, at the same time "throttling the sound" - restricting it - in the top of the chest. Place the tip of the tongue on the floor of the mouth and arch the tongue so that the middle of it touches, or nearly touches the roof of the mouth. Raise the pitch a little.

### **Practice Exercise -**

Stand with a friend on the other side of a door and speak to each other. Now sit and practice talking to a puppet in a suitcase, imitating the sound.

## **THE DISTANT VOICE**

This is nearly impossible to do in a confined place where people are all around you. The sound must be clearer than the muffled voice, but soft (there is no barrier to muffle the sound). Raise the voice an octave, and arch your tongue again so that most of the sound goes up through your nose (the way your throat is positioned for gargling).

### **Practice Exercise -**

Imagine a small child is passing you on a bicycle, humming. The sound gets louder, then fades into the distance. You ask "Where are you going?" and the reply is "To the shop to buy some food. I'll bring you back some water melon." If the sound seems to be coming out of the top of your head, you have mastered it

# Theatres

Depending on your need, there are many alternatives. From simply stringing a curtain in a doorway, or turning a table on its side, to full tube and curtain theatres for professional puppetry.

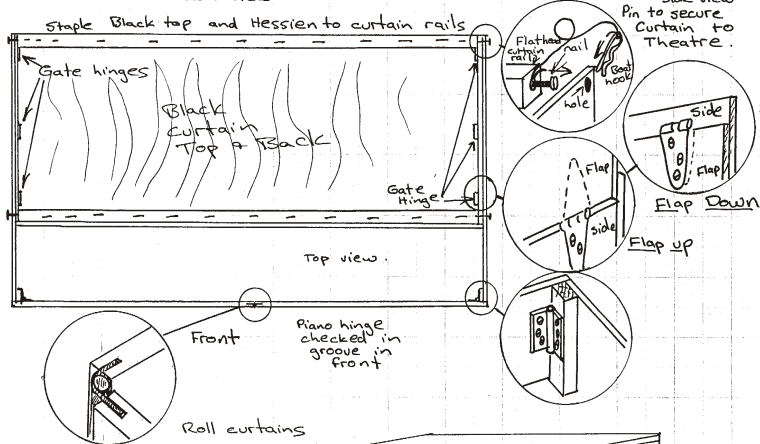
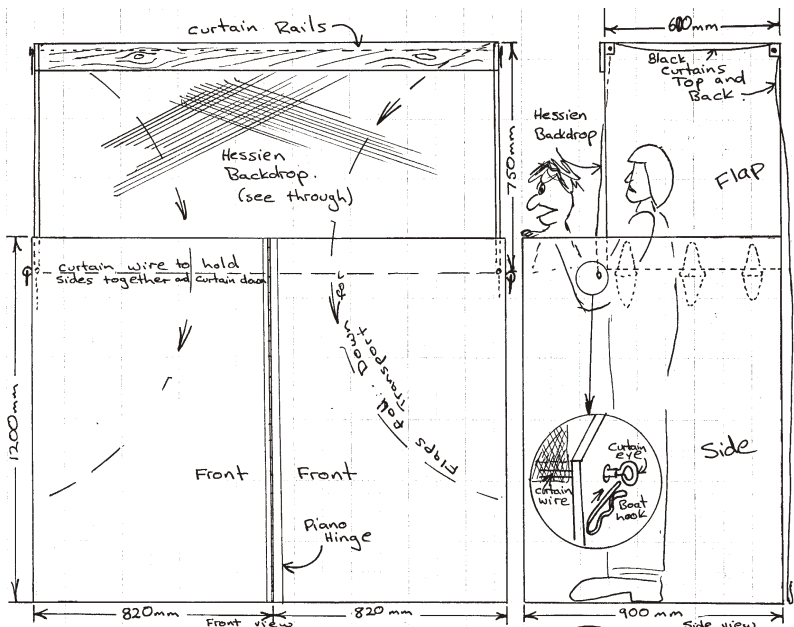
## The ICU theatre

I developed this theatre so that the puppeteer(s) could see the audience. It allows greater interaction since you can observe the audience, it also means that if you don't have amplification, you will be heard through the backdrop.

The backdrop is made of hessian, or a similar fabric that has a weave just loose enough to see through. A black curtain over the top and down the back keeps you in darkness so that you cannot be seen by the audience.

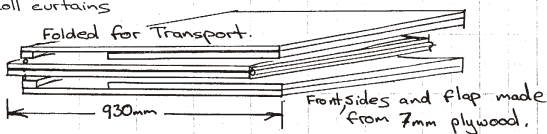
The "upper wings" fold down, and the sides fold in while the front folds in half to make a compact, easily erected theatre. The curtains are all on rods and can be rolled up in one long roll. It will also fold up and fit easily into the back seat of nearly any car for easy transportation.





Roll curtains

Folded for Transport.



## The lap top theatre.

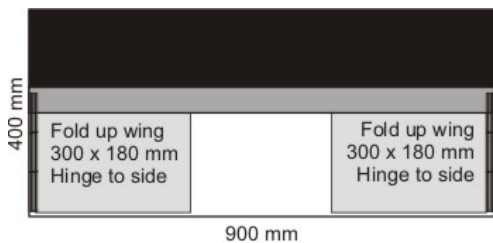
This is an easy to use, quick set up system, and incorporates storage and stage, all in one. I can carry over a dozen of the small puppets in this theatre, which allows great versatility in performing plays.

It is best for small puppets, but I use an enlarged version for larger puppets. I often use the larger one for performing alongside the ICU theatre so other puppeteers can perform, and I can be “front man” as well as interact using ventriloquism with the puppets, puppeteers and audience.

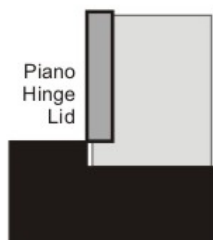
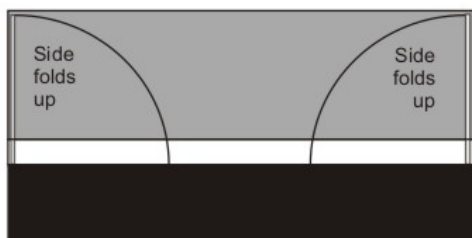
I am working on one at the moment that has a built in battery operated sound system so that you can play music or sound effects and amplify your voice all in one. If you are interested, send me your details to [dan@puppetvision.co.nz](mailto:dan@puppetvision.co.nz) and I will let you know how it works.



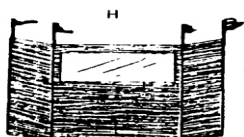
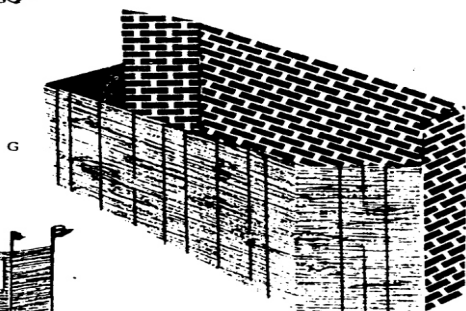
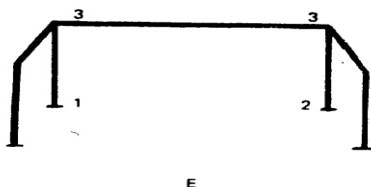
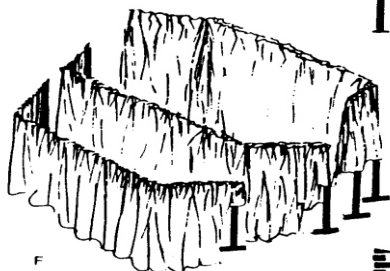




## Dimensions for the Lap top Theatre



## Curtain Theatres



## Curtain Theatres

The Curtain stage is one of the best looking portable stages. It is simply curtain fabric hung on water pipe. Use a lightweight pipe that will not sag after the curtain is hung. We recommend 1 ½ inch Schedule 80PVC (plastic pipe). This can be secured at an irrigation supply store that stocks underground water sprinkler supplies. You will need several connecting fittings. Ask for thin wall or Schedule 40 fittings for 1 ½ inch pipe. Do not cement the connectors; they will fit snugly, leaving the stage easily disassembled and highly portable. We recommend a 7' to 9' wide stage if you perform with more than four puppets at one time. Notice the following list of materials necessary to construct the curtain stage. We show an additional 2' extension on each side of the 5' pipe which is connected with elbows (illus. E). The extensions are adequate to conceal the puppets, props and puppeteers from the audience, thus giving a more professional appearance.

Example: If the total length of your stage is 9', the curtain should be approximately 15' so that it will have sufficient material to gather on the 9' pipe and hang like a curtain.

1. The height of a puppet stage varies, depending on the height of the puppeteers. If your puppeteers are younger than college age, shorten the four stand pipes so the puppeteers' elbows are three or four inches below the top of the curtain when they are standing straight on their knees with just a slight bend in the elbow. Make the curtain stand with one or two inches on the floor. Be sure to hem the curtain with the desired length and height in mind. Remember to make the top hem 6" wide to slip the pipe through. The total dimensions of a hemmed curtain are 15' x 5'. When sewing the top hem, measure 3 ½ feet from each end for the wings and leave a 5" opening in the hem so that the two middle stand pipes can fit into the plastic "T's"

2. Illustration F shows a three-tiered stage comprised of two performing levels with a backdrop. This stage makes it possible to have two-level action simultaneously, such as a narrator puppet speaking from one level, while action takes place on another level. The height of the centre level requires puppeteers to perform in a standing position; while the front level requires performance from a kneeling position. Note that the illustration shows the right wing of the front level cut off, to show leg positions of the rear frames. These side wings of the front level should extend, however, to the backdrop wings to block an audience view of the rear stage. Determine the height of the front and centre levels by the height of your tallest puppeteer. Approximate level heights are as follows: from level 4'4"; centre level 5'10"; backdrop 7'. While such a curtain stage is quite versatile indoors, we find it unsuitable outside because the slightest breeze causes the curtain to flap.
3. For indoor or outdoor use a stage made of wooden panelling is ideal (see illustration G)
4. A Plywood stage can be your most colourful stage.... (illustration H)

For professional curtain theatres go on the web to  
[www.puppetproductions.com](http://www.puppetproductions.com)

For free puppet theatre plans go to  
[www.logosdor.com/resources/downloads/theatre.pdf](http://www.logosdor.com/resources/downloads/theatre.pdf)  
Or [www.projectpuppet.com](http://www.projectpuppet.com)

**Dan Martin** shares with you 30 years of puppetry experience 15 of these as a ventriloquist, so he can help you overcome the pitfalls and help you perfect your skills in the art of Puppetry and Ventriloquism.

Dan has conducted many workshops using the principles found in this publication, and many puppeteers, (some now professional), have found the suggestions and techniques to be invaluable for public performances, in schools, church groups and for casual entertainment including birthday parties, events, fundraisers and more.

**DVD & CD** contain step-by-step instructions and exercises for you to practice and perfect your puppetry and ventriloquism. Patterns are included that you can print out to make your own puppets.

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How to give your puppets the comic characteristics that appeal.

#### ***Audience Participation***

How to draw your audience in to a live theatre situation

#### ***Script Writing***

Hints on how to write your own scripts and where to find others

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