



## COURSE CONTENT DOCUMENT

### TITLE: Reading Scripture and Liturgy in Public

*Designation: Core Requirement for All Layreaders and a resource for Lectors, and Readers*

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#### Overview

Reading scripture and liturgy in public is an honor that deserves our time and attention as it provides an opportunity for people to hear God's word. Learning how to connect with those who are listening by speaking clearly and audibly helps people understand and make sense of what you are saying.

#### Objectives

On completion of this course you should be able to

1. describe practical steps to effectively read scripture and liturgy in public
2. identify the differences between 'reading' to yourself and 'speaking' in public
3. read effectively in public

#### Reading Assignment (Included in this document. As you read list key points.)

1. Read "Scripture Engagement through the Public Reading of Scripture"
2. Read " How to Read Aloud in Public"
3. The Ministry of Scripture Reading During Public Worship
4. How a Reference Works
5. Read "Practical Tips for Effective Scripture Reading"

#### 1. "Scripture Engagement through the Public Reading of Scripture"

The Bible was meant to be read, but it was also meant to be heard. While printed copies of God's Word are easily accessible to most in free, literate cultures today, for the majority of history, because of their rarity and expense, to own a personal copy of the Scriptures was practically unheard of. So we see Ezra standing before the people of Israel reading the law of Moses aloud in Nehemiah. Paul's Epistles would have been read out loud to the gatherings of believers as well. In fact, during these ancient times, it was common even for those who did have opportunities for personal reading to read aloud to themselves. The silent reading that many are so used to today was virtually non-existent throughout history.

To hear someone read the Word is a different experience than to simply read silently to oneself. A well-prepared and gifted reader can bring out meaning in a text through voice inflection, rhythm, and intonation. A talented reader can present the Word of God to a group or congregation so that the listeners may experience the Bible in a rich and powerful manner.

So why is Scripture reading often treated as something of an afterthought? Writers and pastors are asking this question and many suggest that we give the public reading of Scripture a more prominent role in our ministries. What would happen if readers were encouraged to really study a passage, seeking the background and meaning of the text that they could then bring out in their voice and body language when reading? What if the reading of Scripture was treated as more than just the precursor or set up for the sermon? How powerful it is when a congregation or small group has the regular opportunity to audibly experience together significant portions of God's Word. As God tells us in Isaiah 55:11

"So is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

God's Word has great power according to his will. In addition, we read in Timothy 4:13 Paul's instruction to "...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture" (NIV). The biblical basis for public Scripture reading among believers is strong! Who knows what God will do through an emphasis on the public reading of Scripture in your church or small group?

Reference: *Phil Collins, Ph.D., 2014.* <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/public-reading-scripture/practice>

## **2. "How to Read Aloud in Public"**

Reading aloud in public is a distinct skill. It's part of most religious ceremonies, can be needed in court, or in an educational setting – in class or Assembly. We have all seen it being done badly. Someone muttering inaudibly behind a lectern is not doing any good for anyone – especially their audience. So how to do it right?

First let's dispel the idea that the existence of a script means most of the work is done. It isn't. If you have to read aloud in public you should prepare and rehearse exactly as you would for a speech you wrote yourself. All the normal rules for public speaking apply: you need to connect to your audience, speak clearly and audibly, be interesting to listen to and speak well enough for your audience to understand and assimilate what you are saying. The most common error is that the speaker talks to the page, not to the people listening. We don't see the reader's eyes and their voice is flat and monotonous. Zzzzz, we are gone.

To read aloud properly, you should look at the page briefly and scan ahead, then raise your eyes and look at the audience as you speak the words you just saw. The idea is that you're *telling* the audience something, not proving that you can read. Eye contact matters. Sweep through different parts of the audience. Look front, rear and at each side during the course of your reading – note down directions in the script to remind yourself to do this.

Make the most of the difference between reading and speaking: animate your voice and use variety in expression and tone, pitch and volume to bring your reading to life. A person reading silently to themselves cannot do this. Take time to prepare what you have to read. Underline

the keywords. Notice where you can vary the pace or the volume, and mark it in. Are there important words to emphasize? How will you do this – make them stronger? softer? slower? faster? Note that down. Where will you breathe? A well written script makes that easy for you, but you should know where the breaks in the phrases and the sentences are. Refill your lungs to speak confidently to the end of each section. Especially plan where you will pause. This creates dramatic effect, and lets the words sink in.

If you're reading a text that your listeners are following it's one of the few occasions when the audience will know when you make a mistake. So go through it a few times in advance and get your voice, lips, teeth and tongue used to what they have to do. Rehearse aloud so you are accustomed to pronouncing everything correctly. Check any unusual words in advance.

A lectern can be a protective barrier for a speaker, making them feel secure and safe. It's also good for holding your notes, your water and your glasses. It adds dignity to a formal or religious occasion, so can be a great prop. But, like a suit jacket, it won't look good if it doesn't fit right. Don't let the furniture compromise your work. Most lecterns have a pre-set microphone on them. If you are tall or short it won't be at the right height – so adjust it.

Never droop down or crane your neck – it looks awkward. If you are really short you may be invisible behind a big structure like a pulpit. Plan in advance and make sure there's a stool or a stack of telephone books handy for you to stand on. Climb up gracefully!

I work a lot with young people, and am sorry that reading aloud in class is now regarded as old-fashioned. Kids who have experience at reading and speaking take an important first step in gaining confidence in oral expression. Using another's words relieves them of the need to create their own, instead they can concentrate just on presenting. Reading aloud gives you a feel for the spoken word. You become used to more formal grammar and vocabulary, and get a chance to practice vocal pace, dramatic pause, and all the dynamic variations we use to make ourselves interesting to listen to. Try it. Pick up a newspaper, magazine or novel – find someone to read a bit of it to. You'll see instantly what the challenges are, and also the rewards. And when you next have to take the podium you will be better prepared.

Reference: from *Speak for Yourself* by Claire Duffy at

<http://speak-for-yourself.com/2013/08/05/how-to-read-aloud-in-public/>

**3. The Ministry of Scripture Reading During Public Worship (Handout)** Compiled by Archdeacon Cathy Laskey Diocese of Fredericton for general use.

**4. How a Reference Works (Handout)** Compiled by Archdeacon Cathy Laskey Diocese of Fredericton for general use.

## **5. "Practical Tips for Effective Scripture Reading"**

### **1. Use of the body**

- Stand upright and with good posture.
- Take deep breaths to support reading, and breathe by expanding the diaphragm (not raising the shoulders).

- Some eye contact helps emphasize the personal nature of the act.

## 2. Mechanics of reading

- Practice aloud repeatedly.
- Enunciate clearly.
- Use sufficient volume to be heard comfortably by all hearers.
- Read slowly enough to allow attentiveness to details and time for the congregation to absorb and feel the impact of Scripture's weighty importance.
- Read quickly enough to communicate the flow of thought and/or the movement of a narrative sequence.
- Avoid stumbling, especially over words difficult to pronounce.
- Leave space for natural pauses according to punctuation (comma, periods, semi-colons, etc.)
- In one's rehearsal for the reading, over-dramatize the emotions expressed in the text, or the various possible emotional responses that the text seeks to evoke. In order to discover the emotional high points of the text.
- Emphasize what is most important with use of volume, vocal inflection, pace, and spacing. No manner of reading is neutral; rather, the manner of reading always interprets the text by what it emphasizes or highlights in different ways (or by what it fails to emphasize or highlight). Therefore, attempt to discover objective features of the text that indicate the words that are most important in the literary structure and primary theological purposes of the text. Practice the differences in meaning and impact when emphasizing different words.
- When practicing, read from a copy that allows you to mark up the text with cues for reading.

Reference: by Mike Farley *Helps for Reading Scripture in Worship* at

<http://cardiphonia.org/2010/11/25/helps-for-reading-scripture-in-worship/>

## Video Assignment

- Watch video 'Reading Scripture in Worship' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=18&v=Zoqu4Yw9jYU>

## Practical Assignment

- Choose sections of the BCP and BAS liturgy and a bible passage. Following the steps you have learned read the passages aloud to someone
- Look up words you have difficulty pronouncing and practice saying them aloud. Use the *Bible Speech* website to listen to the pronunciation of difficult words <http://www.biblespeech.com/>

## Pause and Consider

Which key points will help you read more effectively in public and why?

## Supplementary Resources

### BOOKS

- *Unleashing the Word* by Max McLean and Warren Bird
- *Devote Yourself to the Public Reading of Scripture* by Jeffry Arthurs
- *Public Reading of Scripture: A Handbook* by Clayton J. Schmit
- *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* by Miroslav Volf

#### WEBSITE RESOURCES

- *Helps for Reading Scripture in Worship* at <http://cardiphonia.org/2010/11/25/helps-for-reading-scripture-in-worship/>
- *How do I Pronounce it? A Bible Study Audio* at <http://www.biblespeech.com/>
- *Devoted to the Public Reading of Scripture* at <http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2011/03/devoted-to-the-public-reading-of-scripture/>

#### References

Collins, Phil (2014). *Scripture Engagement through the Public Reading of Scripture*.

[Online]. Available: <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/public-reading-scripture/practice>. Access Date: June 18, 2015.

Duffy, Claire (2013). *How to Read Aloud in Public from Speak for Yourself*. [Online]. Available: <http://speak-for-yourself.com/2013/08/05/how-to-read-aloud-in-public/>. Access Date: June 18, 2015.

Farley, Mike (2011). *Practical Tips for Effective Scripture Reading*. [Online]. Available: *Helps for Reading Scripture in Worship* at <http://cardiphonia.org/2010/11/25/helps-for-reading-scripture-in-worship/>. Access date: June 18, 2015.

*The Ministry of Scripture Reading During Public Worship*: Compiled by Archdeacon Cathy Laskey Diocese of Fredericton for general use.

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