



# Puppet Training

## **Puppet Training Notes**

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## Table of Contents



Terms.....	3
Puppet Body Positioning.....	4
Manipulation of the Puppet.....	5
Puppet Personality.....	7
Practice Homework Assignment.....	9

## Terms

- **At- Home Practice** – what you do at home on your own time to develop and perfect the assignment you have been given.
- **Pre-Service Practice** – what we do as a team before ministry. Similar to practice, but it follows the practice that has been done at home and resembles the actual ministry time for the children.
- **Using the stairs** – how a puppet enters and exits a stage. It gives the impression of going up or down the stairs. (Please don't fall down the stairs when you exit, even if your hand and arm are tired!)
- **Belly Button Position** – the position the puppet is in according to the stage. Where you hold the puppet to make sure it is visible for the audience.
- **Biting your words** – closing the puppet's mouth on syllables. Practice moving your thumb down to make the puppet talk and to help avoid "biting your words".

# Puppet Body Positioning

## ➤ Entrance

- Place puppet straight out behind your head.
- Bring the puppet forward – known as using the stairs. This is usually done to a count of three.

## ➤ Positions

- **Height of puppet on stage**
  - Look at your puppet. Determine where your puppets “belly button” would be and that is how high your puppet should be when you are doing a puppet skit. The puppet’s “belly button” should be lined up with the top of the stage, but not touching the stage. It is important to stay back a few inches so that as your arm tires you are not tempted to lean on the stage.
  - Your arm WILL get tired during the skit but it is important to maintain good puppet height for the entire length of the skit or song. You should check this regularly by making sure the puppet’s “belly button” is as high as the top of the stage.
- **Position of the puppet’s face**
  - To be a good puppeteer, you must keep the puppet from looking at the ceiling.

- Keep your hand slightly forward by bending at the wrist. How you bend your wrist and where you point your fingers determines where the puppet is “looking”.
- Keeping your hand straight up = looking at the ceiling.
- Keeping your wrist bent at a right angle = staring at the audience. This is what we are striving for.
- Keeping your hand at a 45 degree angle = looking at the floor. This is sometimes necessary in the younger classrooms when the children may be sitting on the floor in front of the stage. Be aware of where your audience is so that you can think about where to point the puppet’s face.

## **Manipulation of the Puppet ( how the puppet moves)**

### **➤ Talking**

- Place your four fingers on the top part of the puppet’s mouth. There will be a “pocket” between the board of the mouth and the foam inside the head to secure your hand. OR you may find an elastic strap inside some of the puppets to secure your hand underneath.
- Place your thumb on the bottom part of the puppet’s mouth.
- Use your thumb to open the puppet’s mouth. This will ensure that you do not flip the top of the mouth up to talk (flip the lid) and will help with not “biting words” or closing your mouth on the syllables as you talk.

- It may help to drop your hand forward a bit as you open the puppet's mouth for each syllable. This will automatically help your thumb do the work of opening the puppet's mouth and help you maintain eye contact between the puppet and the audience.
- If you can, cross your middle finger over your pointer finger on the top of the mouth as you work the puppet's mouth. This can help secure your top fingers and MAKE your thumb do the work of up and down to open and close the mouth.
- You want the puppets mouth to open at the same time that your mouth opens when you say words. This is called lip synchronization. Practice talking while opening and closing your hand in rhythm with what you are saying. You will notice that you open your mouth for every syllable (or sound part) of a word. For example: the simple word "Hello" requires you to open the puppet's mouth twice. Your hand will need to work the same way to make the puppet's talking or singing look realistic.

# Puppet Personality

Once you have learned to make your puppet talk without biting the words (closing the mouth when it should be open). It is important to give your puppet personality. A puppet can have personality with movement.

## ➤ Head movement

### ○ Side to side head movement

- As the puppet is talking or singing. This is accomplished by a simple side to side motion of the wrist.
- As the puppet is looking at the children, another puppet or the teacher they should be facing whomever they are speaking to or who is speaking to them.

### ○ Forward and backward head movement

- This is used to emphasize words and is a sharp move back or forward with your wrist, keeping the angle so that the eye contact is consistent.
- This can be used to dramatically “look” at the audience or another character, just like a person would.

### ○ Up and down head movement

- Also used to emphasize words
- used to say “yes”
- not used for entrance and exit

➤ **Body Movement**

- **Left to right** to the beat of the music.
- Using the **arm rods** you can gesture for the puppet, emphasizing words or demonstrating how big or small something is.
- Keeping **in sync** with the other puppets.



## Practice Homework Assignment

- Take a book or two and hold it in your hand and practice the entrance and exit of the puppet several times. When you are ready to exit the stage turn the puppet toward your body and do a 1, 2, 3 count as the puppet “walks” down the stairs.
- To build puppet arm endurance, take a book or two and hold it in the air for three minutes. Rest for a minute and do it again. Work on this daily, or at least several times each week until you can hold them up for 10 minutes without sinking.
- Finally, practice “talking” for a puppet using your hand (if you do not have a puppet for practice). Say “I am strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” (Ephesians 6:10 in the first person). Say this ten times each day using your puppet or your hand to emphasize opening your puppet’s mouth at the right times. Note: You should be opening your hand 14 times to say this verse. Watch out for the word “power”, it takes 2 openings.