

St Werburgh's practical tips for Ministers of the Word

This guide is intended to set readers on the right track for an effective ministry, both new readers and those who have been reading for a long time. The proclamation of scripture in the assembly is a vital ministry in the life of the church. Learning how to read better will enrich the liturgy and will give the reader the opportunity to learn more about our Faith.

Preparing for reading

Preparing for this ministry is **essential**. If you don't check the rota until you arrive at church, you will not be properly prepared to read the Word of God. Preparation leads to confidence, competence and clarity, which in turn keeps the congregation engaged and attentive. Preparation will bear fruit, for both the reader and the listeners.

As a reader you ought to have a copy of the Missal at home, and also a Bible. If you don't then it is not so easy to prepare properly for your Ministry. You also need to work out which week of the liturgical cycle is 'your week' for reading. You can do this by looking at the previous week's newsletter, on-line if necessary. You can also refer to the universalis website which has all the readings for every day, and in the new Lectionary translation <https://universalis.com/europe.english.shrewsbury/20250216/mass.htm>

Prepare earlier in the week before your Sunday, by setting aside some time to research and practise the reading; perhaps 30 minutes or so should not be a huge commitment.

1. Read the passage out loud to understand it
2. Go to the Bible and read a number of the verses before and after the reading to get the larger context
3. Read the passage out loud, listening to yourself to hear if you are reproducing the author's intention. Check that your reading of the passage makes sense, shows emotion if indicated, reveals character if noted, shows parenthetical ideas, and comes alive as if you were the living author or character. (Try doing this in front of a mirror; it can be quite revealing!)
4. Read it out loud again in a relaxed way (perhaps standing as you will be in the pulpit!). Becoming familiar with WHAT the words mean to communicate. If there is someone you can ask to listen to you and provide some constructive feedback, that's even better
5. Read it out aloud one last time, focusing upon the thoughts and intentions of the passage
6. Check on pronunciation: be sure that any difficult words are sufficiently practised that you can say the words correctly and easily. Familiarity keeps you from having to think about it later! (Refer to your copy of the CTS booklet 'Readers at Mass' if needs be.)
7. Pray, both before and after your preparation, asking God to help you to be an effective proclaimer of His Word and to help you to understand the reading. What you believe about the scriptures will say more than the technique you use.

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Practical points

- Please make sure that you know which dates you are assigned on the rota. If you can't make a date plan ahead and contact another reader for your Mass and arrange a swap or substitution. (Please do not email the whole reader team.) If it is at the last minute that you cannot fulfil your duty then contact the other reader on the rota with you and ask them to do both readings. As a final fall back, phone and leave a message for Fr. David
- When you are on the rota to read:
 - Arrive early enough that you can go to the lectionary and check that it is open at the correct page for your reading. If necessary, carefully position the microphone head to suit your height. Then sit towards the front of the church
 - Make sure that you have a copy of the newsletter as a backup. You should however **normally read from the lectionary**; only use the newsletter as a back up
 - If the lectionary has a short and a long version of a reading, read what is on the newsletter, which will normally be the long version (though possibly with those very confusing markers to say what the short version would be!)
- During the Mass, at the appropriate point, move to the Altar without rushing, but rather move with dignity. As St Werburgh's is now generally using a cantor for the Sunday morning Masses, there will be usually be two readers plus the cantor; all come together at the centre of the Altar step, bow and then move to the pulpit
- Once in the pulpit, make sure you have the attention of the congregation before starting to read. Look at the whole congregation, pause, and then announce the reading.
- After the reading, pause for a moment, look at the congregation and then say
"The Word of the Lord"
- If you are the first reader:
 - If there is a cantor, then move swiftly out of the pulpit to allow the cantor to enter
 - If there is no cantor then you should read the psalm as well. In this case it is not necessary to introduce the psalm with words like "Our response is" Everyone knows that the psalm begins with an antiphon. Begin the psalm simply by reciting the antiphon, then look at the congregation thereby inviting the congregation to repeat it. You should also clearly repeat the antiphon, to lead participation which can sometimes be hesitant. Remember that when reading the psalm, you are reading poetry – it should flow. When the verse is finished, look at the assembly to invite their response and lead again
- If you are the second reader:
 - Then after the psalm, having swapped places (with cantor or first reader), you should introduce the second reading as written
 - After the sung alleluia, lead the congregation in the acclamation verse. Then leave the pulpit during the second sung alleluia, so that you are out of the pulpit and leaving

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the sanctuary as the priest is entering the pulpit. Return directly to your seat (no bow necessary this time)

Effective reading

Read slowly: reading too fast is the biggest mistake beginners make. Reading slowly is a bit of an art, it is not just about pausing between words or sentences, but rather actually delivering the words more slowly than perhaps feels normal. It won't sound abnormal to your listeners! Ask someone to judge your speed when you are preparing for the reading.

Read clearly: good diction and enunciation are important, especially word endings. Sometimes people complain about the volume of reading but the problem can actually be lack of clarity. If the words are unusual consult the CTS booklet "Readers at Mass" for a full list of pronunciations. *** see Note 1 below.

Using the microphone: If the microphone is not positioned well for you height, then feel free to adjust it a little. You can do this when you check out the readings before Mass starts. It is also important to ensure that you **face the microphone** directly as far as possible. Although there is a microphone it does not mean that you should not project your voice to the back of the church; in fact it is a good idea to pretend that there is no microphone and so project your voice more loudly than you would otherwise!

Expressive reading: be expressive with the tone and mood of the text as you have practised during your preparation. Let the text guide you for the tone. If you have prepared then you will have a sense of the tone of the text already. Monotone speaking will create boring readings. Worship should be lively and that begins with lively readings. Yet too exuberant reading can take the focus away from scripture and take it into the realms of the playhouse! Read to the punctuation and if it does not make cogent sense then use your own pausing to ensure clarity; this is particularly relevant when reading St Paul's writings.

Mistakes: we are never perfect! If you make a mistake, stop and reread the word or verse. It is NOT necessary to say "Sorry" or "Excuse me". Continue with the reading with confidence, knowing that God expects faithful worship. If you accept that it is all right to make mistakes, this will lessen any feelings of nervousness. You may well find that it is a considerable help to follow the text with a finger so that when you look up you can be sure of finding your place again