

## Tap Ten - Count Shakespeare

Written by Terry Smith

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I can count on one hand the great things about Shakespeare.

When I began to memorize lines for my first Shakespeare part I used two hands. With the iambic pentameter (IP) employed in most of his writing, there are usually ten syllables per line. So when working to memorize a few lines, I could pause from reading, set the book down, and tap out the syllables, one for each finger on the tabletop. Adding the sense of touch, as opposed to just moving your fingers in the air, assists in memorizing. Through touch the count is clear, well defined, and final, such that going from one count to the next is easy and accurate. This works if, like me, you have ten fingers; if you don't, you probably already have your own system.

In general, if you get to the last finger and it's in sync with the last syllable in your memory, you pretty much have it. You still must verify the order and content of the words, of course. For example, if you're thinking, Then I gave her, so tutored by my art, the syllables tap out ok, but the correct order is, Then gave I her, so tutored by my art. Or, thou shalt undertake must be thou wilt undertake. And you have to allow for exceptions to the ten syllable rule. Sometimes, but surprisingly rarely, there are less than ten syllables, or you may have to fit a three-syllable word into two counts. To wit, Romeo is often a two-syllable guy, not unlike many men today.

When not sitting at a table or desk, when you may be reviewing verse you have already memorized, a variation of this two-hand method can be employed. I found that holding something, say a coffee cup from Speedway, can be used to tap out the ten. This allows an additional benefit. By holding the cup with both hands with your fingertips and alternating from one hand to the other as you count, the "IP current" predominant in Shakespeare, that energy that is carried from one beat to the next, flows more efficiently from a finger on one hand to a finger on the other. If you start reciting while tapping a finger on your left(L) hand, all syllables on your left will be unstressed while all those on the right(R) will be stressed.

A way from light steals home my heavy son.

L.R.....L.....R.....L.....R.....L....R.....L..R.....L.R..

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font-family: Calibri;">If you find yourself without a coffee cup, you can retain the value touching adds to memorizing by just using your lower ribs, or someone else's ribs for that matter.

For further discussion of text stress, content, and artistic use of text, see Cicely Berry's book, [The Actor and the Text \(Applause Acting Series\)](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1557831386/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=wwwrt82com-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399369&creativeASIN=1557831386)![border:none !important; margin:0px !important; border=](http://www.assoc-amazon.com/e/ir?t=wwwrt82com-20&l=as2&o=1&a=1557831386&camp=217145&creative=399369).

OK, so using two hands to aid memory of verse is fine, but clearly something else is needed. You may not have access to a desk or table, you may be sauntering down Euclid Avenue at lunchtime, book in hand, going over your lines, dodging fellow pedestrians and such. A means of counting must be devised for times when you are holding the script in your hand. Either you are looking at the script for the first time and need to verify it has the normal ten syllables by tapping them out, or you are looking away from the script as part of the memorization process but you don't want to keep putting the script down to tap. Thus the demand surfaces for the one-hand ten-counter.

A single hand can be used in many ways to count to ten. But I discovered a method which I find to be the most comfortable. Playing a one-handed air-piano just doesn't do it for me, I need to have that added quality touch provides. And I certainly do not want to have to reach for my ribs or even an armrest when I need a ten-count. Even though I often need both hands when reading one for main support and the other to flatten down the pages, etc. I can easily take one hand away momentarily. But I want to keep my free hand as close to the book as I can, thereby not making my difficult life of reading even more strenuous than it already is.

To make a long story short (though it's too late for that) here is the remedy to the counting problem.

**Terry's Tap Ten How to Count to Ten Clearly on One Hand**

**1.** With your free hand, put your thumb and index finger together, count = 1

**2.**

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Using your thumb, proceed down to your little finger, counting 2,3,4

3.

Reverse direction, counting ring finger as 5, middle=6, index=7

4.

Reverse direction again for final lap, ending on little finger=10

With this method the five stressed syllables conveniently land on just the middle finger or the little finger.

Sweet.

Chances are you have a method of counting that works for you.

You possibly may even use this same method.

Or you may be to the point that you don't even need devices such as this any longer.

After a quick search, I didn't see anything written on this method, so I thought I would share it with those of you that may find it useful.

It's just a tool we can use to memorize, to apply the stress in the way we think Shakespeare might have intended it, to develop understanding of ourselves and others through the joys and sorrows of Shakespeare's characters.

In any event, this is one way to count the great things about Shakespeare on one hand.