

# Giving the Sense

How to Read Aloud With Meaning

*Nedra Newkirk Lamar*  
and the  
*Institute of Analytical Reading*



Including material from  
**How to Speak the Written Word**  
by  
*Nedra Newkirk Lamar*

INSTITUTE OF



ANALYTICAL READING

INCORPORATED



## PREFACE

# About This Handbook

Early in her professional life, Nedra Newkirk Lamar, the inspiration for this handbook, was asked to judge a speaking contest. One of the contest rules was that the contestants were not to memorize their presentation but simply to speak from their knowledge of the assigned subject. Others may have been fooled, but Lamar could tell that some speakers had memorized their talk, and she knew the exact sections they had scripted.

Nedra Lamar, a student of Latin and Greek who also trained for the theater, a teacher in expression, and a pioneer in the American standard of diction, had observed that “everything we say or read or write is just a procession of little grammatical constructions, and without realizing it we phrase and emphasize each one in the same way every time we use it.” Lamar could tell that those contestants who had memorized their talk did not follow these natural patterns. They were not speaking conversationally, but were saying words they had written down and memorized.

As she coached actors and speakers and listened to others talking conversationally, she discovered and identified basic principles of phrasing and emphasis. Some of these principles had been known to educators in these fields for years. The principle of emphasizing new and subduing old ideas, for example, had been found even in books teaching English to the non-English speaker. But she began to see more speech patterns, such

as how we connect ideas that logically belong together and separate ideas that don't belong together. To her knowledge, these principles and patterns had never been set down together in any kind of systematic order for people to apply.

Her classes in the new "American" standard of diction (as opposed to the "Continental" standard) were so popular that some people kept coming for the second and third years. The fourth year she decided she should have an advanced class for the fourth-year people, a class in reading aloud conversationally, although she had never heard of such a thing previously.

This class was to change the direction of her work. At first Lamar thought she would teach actors to read lines as if they were just talking, but the demand for her coaching expanded to helping public speakers and readers of published works, including the Bible. In 1949 she wrote out these principles of conversational reading in her book, *How to Speak the Written Word; A Guide to Effective Public Reading*. It was the first to identify conversational patterns and has remained a leader in this subject even today. The book has been purchased every year since 1949 by students who read the written word aloud, and has been reprinted multiple times to meet this demand.

No subject is static, and as Lamar continued to discover new patterns of conversational speech, she identified how these principles could be applied to reading aloud. She revised *How to Speak the Written Word* in 1967. Later she published new principles in papers for her students, the most significant of which is her discovery of a principle of emphasis she came to call "Common Denominator."

By 1967, Lamar's private student load had increased to the point where she had to train others to teach from her text. In 1973 she formed the Institute of Analytical Reading to further the teaching of the principles of reading aloud and to ensure

that her high ethical standard of teaching would be maintained.

Which brings us to the reason for this handbook. After 67 years since the publication of *How to Speak the Written Word* and 49 years since the last revision, and many years more of discovery and teaching, it is time to pull together all the work of Nedra Newkirk Lamar into one new updated and easy to read handbook.

The title, *Giving the Sense* was how Lamar described the value of her system of reading aloud. She wanted her students to read the authors' words using the principles and conversational patterns that bring out the ideas the authors were conscious of as they were writing. The listeners then would get the sense the author intended and not a personal interpretation—or misrepresentation—of the reader.

In the following pages, whenever you see personal pronouns indicating first person voice, you are reading Lamar's own words.



**PART ONE**

**Getting Started**



# 1

## What is Analytical Reading?

If someone asked you, “What are the essentials of good oral reading?” would you say, “A good reader must have a beautiful voice. He or she must read with great conviction, and must never make a mistake?” Though these characteristics may be admirable, I feel that you could have them all and still lack the essentials. What might be missing from such reading? **The meaning.**

In my opinion, there are three indispensable requirements for good reading:

1. Audible voice. After all, why bring out the meaning if no one behind the fifth row can hear you?
2. Intelligible diction. What’s the good of being heard, if your listeners can’t figure out the words?
3. **The meaning. The MEANING!** What’s the point of a reading if your audience doesn’t understand the ideas behind the words?

Whose meaning? The writer’s. Not what the reader wishes the writer had meant. Not what the writer **did** mean somewhere **else**, but what the writer means **right here**.

So how do we determine the meaning? Imagine the writer is speaking to you. Because of his or her inflection, emphasis and phrasing you naturally understand the meaning. That’s because

of the common patterns and principles of conversational speech that indicate the ideas the words are intended to convey. Once the writer sets these words to paper (or to a computer), these patterns and principles now exist in the writing but need to be discovered by the reader.

You may not be conscious of these principles and patterns today, but once you begin to recognize them, you will see them embedded in the text. You will then read ideas instead of words. You will hear the writer speaking.

We call the study and application of these conversational patterns, and principles based on logic and simple grammar, Analytical Reading. By applying these principles to the material you are reading, you will discover the ideas—the meaning—presented by the writer. Many people, who have no intention of ever reading before an audience, congregation, or microphone, study Analytical Reading in order to see for themselves the meaning of deeply philosophical writings. An editor who did such a study told me, “A page of print will never look the same to me again. Now I see ideas, not just words.”

Once the meaning is clear to you, the reader, the principles of Analytical Reading will show you how to make this clear to your audience. Analytical Reading draws the hearer’s attention from the reader and his style to the writer and to what the writer is saying.

In this book you will learn how to ask yourself simple questions, such as, “What is the new idea here?” or “Is the writer implying a contrast?” “Is this phrase connected with the one that comes before or after it?” The analysis is not complicated or onerous; it does not require a PhD. As you master these principles, you will find that even complex passages will unravel and you can read them intelligently and naturally. You will see meanings that you have never noticed before and will be able to bring them out for your listeners.