

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

**THTR 216: Movement for Actors**  
**Fall 2015 Tues/Thurs 8:30-9:50am**  
**Location: MCC 107**

**Instructor: Debbie McMahon**  
**Office:** MCC Adjunct Faculty Office, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
**Office Hours:** By appointment. Email instructor to arrange.  
**Contact Info:** [debbiem@usc.edu](mailto:debbiem@usc.edu) 818.554.9554

## **Course Description and Overview**

*Body of a gymnast, Heart of a Poet, Mind of an Actor*

The goal of this course is to bring awareness to the body as an essential part of the actor's training. This awareness begins to create an actor who is easeful and empowered in their body; an actor who can recognize and make choices about the information their body brings on stage. Students will develop individual skills while building ensemble. The course will introduce students to range of popular movement techniques and practitioners.

## **Movement for Actors training**

The course begins with an introductory section on Poetic Dynamics to build a movement vocabulary and introduce basic movements principles. Three subsequent sections will explore the application of movement: Physical Storytelling, Scene Work, and the Physical Embodiment of Character. Daily warm-ups and exercises will draw from a range of techniques and practitioners such as Yoga, Pilates, breath work, Viewpoints, Grotowski, Lecoq, Delsarte, corporeal mime, Contact Improv, and Laban. Students will engage in composition of solo and group movement pieces. Physical contact will be made between the instructor and students and amongst students. This contact will be made with respect, mutual consent, and self-awareness.

## **Learning Objectives**

- To develop total body awareness, connecting impulse between body, mind and breath.
- To release unnecessary tension and create strength and mobility.
- To develop an easy, present relationship to their acting partners and the surrounding environment while having an ability to work from an active center.
- To empower the actor to be receptive to the immediate moment, to listen with the whole body, to make a spontaneous offer with confidence, to reconnect to imagination and to identify emotional states in self and others.
- To attain competency in the Laban Efforts vocabulary and its application to text.
- To analyze the use of body-based acting choices used by contemporary actors on-camera for transformation and characterization.

**Prerequisite(s):** None

**Co-Requisite (s):** N/A

**Concurrent Enrollment:** N/A

**Recommended Preparation:** Acting Technique, Scene Study, Script Analysis, and Voice & Speech

## **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

- Movement for Actors Edited by Nicole Potter

- This book is currently available on Amazon.com for under \$15. It is also available as an ebook at <http://bit.ly/zQmgEV> on Google Books for \$10.
- A scene from a contemporary play. You will need to read the play in its entirety.
- Materials to create a character image: clothing, make-up, etc.

## Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

### 1. Performance Assignments:

**a) Text Scene** **10 points**  
 Students will work with a partner and memorize a scene from a contemporary text. Students must read the entire play the scene is from in order to fully grasp the character arc, entire plot, world of the play, etc. This 8 -10 minute scene will be used in a variety of movement exercises. Students will be graded on memorization, partner work, and the application of tools learned to the scene.

**b) Physical Storytelling Scene** **5 points**  
 In groups, students will devise and present a scene through physicality. Points will be earned for full engagement in the exercise, contribution to the group, and the assimilation of notes and feedback.

**c) Character Final Project** **10 points**  
 Through a series of written assignments and exercises, students will create a character based on a historical photograph. Students will be graded on the physical image created, the accuracy of simulating the photograph, and the attention to detail in crafting the character. Points will be deducted for lack of engagement during in-class exercises and failure to submit an additional copy of the photo to the instructor on the date assigned.

### 2. Written Assignments:

**a) Article Analyses** (4 x 5pts each) **20 points**  
 Students will submit 1-2 page (350 words minimum) written analyses of four assigned articles from Movement for Actors and post it on the class site on Blackboard by 10pm on the dates listed below. **Students must also submit a hard copy in class on the listed dates and be prepared to engage in a class discussion.** Points will be deducted for failing to submit an electronic copy on Blackboard and a hard copy in class. Students will be graded on analytical engagement and expository writing. Please proofread.

<u>Due date</u>	<u>Article</u>
Sept. 15	"Movement Training: Dell'Arte International" by Joan Schirle p. 187
Sept. 29	"Theatrical Stillness" by Mary Fleischer p. 27
Oct. 27	"Mask and Ritual" by Shelley Wyant and "The Smallest Mask: The Red Nose" by Jean Taylor p. 99, p. 104
Nov. 10	"Teaching Charlie Chaplin How to Walk" by Dan Kamin p. 36

**b) Written Work in Support of the Character Project** **10 points**

- **Analytical description of the character (5pts)**
- **Character Dossier/Bio (1-2 pages). (5pts)**

A detailed description of these assignments will be issued.

**c) Final Written/Oral Project/Exam** **20 points**

The final project includes an oral and written component. The written component is the class final, **Dec. 14, 4:30-6:30. Please confirm that your other Finals don't conflict.** Students will select and analyze a performance on film or TV by an actor that physically transforms through movement. Instructions and examples will be discussed in class.

- i) A written minimum 2-3 page paper about your findings. Include a bibliography for all video content sources and relevant url's. Due at the Final.
- ii) An oral presentation of the same including a 2-3 minute excerpt from the film or TV show in class.

You will be graded on the detail of your analysis, the application of principles and terminology from class, and the quality of your writing.

Performance or written assignments submitted after the due date will receive a 10% (one full letter grade) deduction.

**Grades & Attendance:**

This is an experiential class. Attendance and participation in class is mandatory. According to School of Dramatic Arts guidelines, no unexcused absences are allowed. Each unexcused absence will result in a **20 percent reduction** in your Participation grade average. An excused absence is due to serious illness, grave emergency or the appropriate SDA leave of absence. You are responsible for all work missed. Missing more than four classes could result in failure. Please consult the instructor if this situation arises.

**Tardiness:** Lateness is disruptive and unprofessional. If you enter after attendance has been taken you are considered tardy, a **10 percent deduction** will be taken.

**Participation** **15 points**

Definition of Participation for this class: daily attendance, bringing the appropriate positive attitude that creates a safe and mutually respectful classroom environment, willingness to take physical risks and get outside of your daily comfort zone, focus, commitment, taking direction, willingness to collaborate, being fully present and ready to work. Generosity, focus, and attention while watching are considered participation.

**Grading Scale for SDA:** **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

**Grading Breakdown**

- *There shall be no unexcused absences.*
- *No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*

<b>Written responses to assigned articles</b>	20pts (5pts each)	<b>20%</b>
<b>Physical Storytelling Scene</b>	5pts	<b>5%</b>
<b>Preparation of scene with text</b>	10pts	<b>10%</b>
<b>Character Physical Analysis &amp; Dossier</b>	10pts (5pts each)	<b>10%</b>
<b>Character Final Project</b>	10pts	<b>10%</b>
<b>In-Class Improvisations and performances</b>	15pts	<b>25%</b>
<b>Participation</b>	15pts	<b>15%</b>
<b>Final Written Assignment and Oral Presentation</b>	<u>15pts</u>	<b>15%</b>
	100 points	100%

#### **Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html), (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

#### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, ([www.usc.edu/scampus](http://www.usc.edu/scampus) or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

#### **Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

#### **Assignment Submission Policy**

Performance assignments are to be submitted in person to the instructor on the designated due date in class. Written assignments may be posted to the class Blackboard site on the appropriate thread as noted. If this is not possible, please email the assignment directly to the instructor.

#### **Additional Policies**

**Attire:** Please wear layers of clothing that are comfortable and fitted to allow complete freedom of movement but still reveal the outline of the body. As we train, the temperature of the body will go up and down so bring a warm layer with you. Cold muscles and joints are more prone to injury. **NO JEANS**, short shorts, mid-riff or low cut tops. No jewelry. Hair must be pinned off your face. Sweatpants, leggings and t-shirts are recommended. Your participation grade will be affected if you come to class inappropriately dressed. Be prepared to work barefoot or in shoes with which you can move easily (i.e. athletic shoes, dance shoes).

**A word about injuries:** An actor’s body, voice, mind, and morale are crucial to their work and their longevity as a performer. Please let me know **immediately** about any injuries. If your injury restricts your ability to participate fully in class, please observe the

class and submit a written summary immediately following the class. Excessive (more than 2) observations will affect your grade.

**Phones/Electronic Devices:** must be out of sight during class unless cleared by instructor for class presentations. No texts, calls, email for the duration of the class.

**No food or drink except water is permitted in the classroom.** Please bring a filled water bottle and stay hydrated.

### **Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

The schedule is subject to change based on student progress.

#### **PART ONE Ensemble & Poetic Dynamics**

Weeks 1-4 Begin actor/creator conditioning through daily movement training to awaken the body and awareness of key principles and terminology such as physical control, energy, tempo, spatial awareness, focus, tension/relaxation and imagination drawing from various theatrical movement techniques such as: Viewpoints, Laban, Yoga, Contact Improvisation, and Grotowski.

**Due 9/15** 10pm Blackboard. **Due 9/17** Hard copy/class discussion.  
“Movement Training: Dell’Arte International” by Joan Schirle p. 187

#### **PART TWO Physical Storytelling**

Weeks 5-7 In groups, students will craft 3-5 minute scenes to physically tell a frightening or comical autobiographical moment through a variety of techniques: mime, contact improvisation, melodrama/silent film improvisations, Delsarte, working from images, etc.

**Due 9/29** 10pm on Blackboard. **Due 10/1** Hard copy/class discussion.  
“Theatrical Stillness” by Mary Fleischer, p. 27

**Due 10/8** Final scene presentation.

#### **PART THREE Scenes with Text | Laban Efforts and Status Work**

Weeks 8-10 This section explores a physical approach to action and intention in scene work to help get students ‘out of their head’ and into their body. An exploration of Laban-inspired movement work will be applied as well as additional tools such as stillness, presence, physical status and trust/flow exercises.

**Due 10/13** Submit a hard copy of scenes to the instructor.

**Due 10/20** Scenes memorized.

**Due 10/27** 10pm on Blackboard. **Due 10/29** Hard copy/class discussion.  
"Mask and Ritual by Shelley Wyant, "The Smallest Mask: The Red Nose" by Jean Taylor p.99, 104

#### **PART FOUR Character Embodied**

Weeks 11-14 This section introduces students to analytical and visceral techniques of building a character physically. The section will be with an exploration of character

through mask then students will craft a character based on historical photographs. The section will culminate in a final exercise. Students will be asked to bring in materials (clothing, hats, make-up, etc.) to create the physical image

<b>Due 11/5</b>	2 copies of your photograph (links on Blackboard) AND
<b>Due 11/10</b>	1-2 page analysis of the structure of the character's physicality. 10pm on Blackboard. <b>Due 11/12</b> Hard copy/class discussion. "Teaching Charlie Chaplin How to Walk" by Dan Kamin p. 36
<b>Due 11/12</b>	Character Dossier/Bio.
<b>Due 11/24</b>	Final Character Exercise
<b>OFF 11/26</b>	HOLIDAY

Week 15 Oral presentations of TV or film actors in physical transformation.

**Final Examination Date: Tuesday, December 15, 4:30-6:30**

### Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

#### Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/departement-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

#### Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

#### *The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

[http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.