

USC School of Dramatic Arts

Improvisation and Theatre Games
THTR-122 (2 units)
Section 62638
Fall 2017
Thursdays 12-1:50pm
Location: MCC 112

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Course Description and Overview

*“In the long history of humankind (and animalkind, too)
those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively
have prevailed.” – Charles Darwin*

In this experiential workshop course, we will learn and build upon the tenets and rules of theatrical improvisation, with ultimate emphasis on applying these to one's own life. Through theatre games/exercises, and improvised experiences and performance, students will work toward freeing themselves physically, vocally, and emotionally, to stimulate creativity, imagination, self-expression, and the collaborative spirit.

This course has no prerequisite(s), and may be taken for credit twice.

Learning Objectives

Through theatrical games and improvisational experiences,

We will learn and participate in effective storytelling, relationship-building and presentation,
We will strive to be present, and open to both our own and others' creative impulses,
We will bravely respect our own innate ability to imagine deeply and create new details,
We will work to be confident, and yet exploratory, in our physicality, voice, emotions and words,
We will explore human nature through character work, both written and performed,
We will collaborate with our fellow actors, inviting their own sensibilities and additions,
We will consistently perform in front of an audience, and evaluate our own work, and
We will discuss how to frame our classwork to apply to a positive life perspective.

Supplementary Materials

Required Viewing:

You will be required to attend at least one live improv show of your choice, and turn in a written evaluation of the show.

On-campus, there are several student groups that perform regularly. Off-campus, notable improv theaters include UCB, The Groundlings, Impro Theatre, iOWest, The Second City, among others. I will email you early in the semester with links to suggested theaters and shows, and you are welcome to do your own research as well. The show you choose to attend must be over the course of the semester, not something you have seen previously in your life.

Required Reading:

You may be given handouts and/or web links throughout the semester which you are expected to read and retain for discussion as needed.

Recommended Reading:

- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *Improvisation for the Theatre* by Viola Spolin
- *Impro* by Keith Johnstone
- *Steal Like An Artist: 10 Things Nobody Told You About Being Creative* by Austin Kleon

Recommended Viewing/Watching/Listening:

- *Whose Line Is It Anyway* episodes (available on cwseed.com)
- Improvised movies and television, such as Christopher Guest-directed movies, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Reno 911*, among others
- Improvised podcasts such as *Comedy Bang Bang*, *Spontaneanation*, *With Special Guest Lauren Lapkus*

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Class attendance and participation is the most important part of your success in this class. Weekly attendance and punctuality is crucial for building an ensemble, understanding games and exercises, and respecting your fellow actor.

There may be no unexcused absences. No student may miss more than one class. This scheduling **MUST** be coordinated with the instructor, via email. **Failure to attend, being late, or leaving early will be reflected in your grade.** Penalty for unexcused absence is a full letter grade. Penalty for three (3) unexcused tardies (or leaving early) is a full letter grade.

The only acceptable excuses for missing class or an assignment deadline are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Please refer to the USC Grades Handbook for information on taking an Incomplete.

There will be written assignments over the course of the semester. Unless specified otherwise, written assignments should be emailed to me (kqegggers@usc.edu) **as a PDF attachment** before the specified date and time. **Late assignments will not be accepted** unless previously arranged due to extenuating circumstances. Written assignments should be in MLA format.

Additional Policies

No cell phone or electronic devices of any kind may be used in class, unless specifically instructed. This is to encourage your focus, mindfulness, and respect to your peers. You must leave phone/device in your bag, silenced. Bags and backpacks may be quarantined in a designated classroom corner. Unauthorized use of devices will affect your grade.

Please wear clothing and shoes in which you can move freely and comfortably. Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way, whether by unwanted exposure or physical limitations. You will get sweaty, be prepared. Shoes should be closed-toed and stay on your feet – **NO** flip-flops. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. If you must wear a hat, it must not impede your face in any way.

No food or drink is allowed in SDA classrooms, water excepted. Absolutely no gum.

USC SDA GRADING CRITERIA:

The final course grade is articulated as a Letter Grade. Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Below Average</u>	<u>Inadequate</u>
A = 95-100 pts	B+ = 87-89 pts	C+ = 77-79 pts	D+ = 67-69 pts	F = 59 or below
A- = 90-94 pts	B = 83-86 pts	C = 73-76 pts	D = 63-66 pts	
	B- = 80-82 pts	C- = 70-72 pts	D- = 60-62 pts	

- When the GPA falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students with excellent/good attendance & class participation, and toward the negative end of the scale for those with average/poor attendance & participation.
- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W (November 10).
- I am happy to discuss your work at any time.

Grading Breakdown

Class Participation — Attendance, focus, attitude, willingness to participate	15 points
Ensemble Work — Contribution to a supportive environment	7 points
Live Improv Show Response, written and turned in	6 points
Character Monologues — written and performed (6 points each)	12 points
Self-evaluations — written and turned in (6 points each)	12 points
Midterm — Comprehension, willingness, application of learned techniques	20 points
Personal growth and improvement — personal and teacher assessment	8 points
Final “Jam” — Skill level, growth, willingness, application of learned techniques	20 points

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Please note: due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure may change to accommodate the needs of individuals and the ensemble. You will be informed of any changes as much as possible.

Every class will begin with group warm-ups.

Week 1 — August 24 — Welcome/Introductions

Get out of our minds & bodies with extensive warm-up and theatre exercises. Begin ensemble work. Syllabus review.

Homework: read handout from *Bossypants*.

Week 2 — August 31 — Tenets/Basics of Improv

The Only Lecture. Please bring materials for taking notes. Followed by exercises focused on “YES, AND” — agreeing and adding information.

Week 3 — September 7 — Storytelling, Status, Space Work, Relationship

Exercises focused on space work (using the space/stage and “pantomime”), telling individual and group stories, beginning character work through Status, and learning to quickly establish relationship.

Homework: write Self-Evaluation, observing yourself in Weeks 1-3. Prompts given in class.

Week 4 — September 14 — Physicality/Voice Exploration

Assignment Due: Written Self-Evaluation, emailed by noon

Beginning character work with voice and physicality, including gibberish and over-the-top work.

Homework: Write a 1-2 minute monologue of a family member you know VERY WELL. Think of their catchphrases, physical or vocal tics, how they carry themselves — how they walk, sit, stand, move. Your monologue should be very specific. Challenge yourself to be big and yet truthful. You will be performing this next week.

Week 5 — September 21 — Specific Character Work

Assignment Due: Family Member Monologue

Presentation of family member monologues. Further character work, within scenes.

Homework: Observe a stranger for at least 10 minutes (set your timer!). Get close and far. Observe their physicality, listen to their voice. Write a 1-2 minute monologue playing that stranger — what is happening to them that day? Be specific.

Week 6 — September 28 — Character Work in Scenes

Assignment Due: Observation of Stranger Monologue

Perform Stranger Monologues. Practice open scenes, filling in the details of character, location, story, etc. Continuation of character work in scenes.

Week 7 — October 5 — Review and Practice Improv Basics

Week 8 — October 12 — Midterm Exam Performance

In-class performance of to-be-determined improv format, with ensemble as a whole.

Week 9 — October 19 — Games: Character/Experts/Styles

Learn and rehearse more “games” for performance, with emphasis on character, expert, and style games.

Week 10 — October 26 — Games: Guessing/Timed/Energy

Learn and rehearse more “games” for performance, with emphasis on guessing, timed and energy-driven games.

Homework: Last chance to attend a live improv show of your choice. You will evaluate and respond, prompts given in class.

Week 11 — November 2 — Rehearse for Final Improv Jam

Assignment Due: Written Response of Live Improv Show, emailed by noon.

Discuss shows we attended. Discuss format for Final Improv Jam. Learn and practice “calling” a show. Rehearse in small groups.

Week 12 — November 9 — Rehearse for Final Improv Jam

Rehearse in both small groups and large group.

Week 13 — November 16 — Final Rehearsal for Final Improv Jam

Together, determine final Improv Jam format. Final rehearsal.

Homework: Invite people to our Improv Jam and eat cranberry jam.

Week 14 — November 23 — Thanksgiving — NO CLASS

Week 15 — November 30 — Final Improv Jam!

Perform improv for our invited guests in a casual, yet professional environment. Jam will be filmed to watch and evaluate during our assigned Final time.

FINAL — Tuesday December 12 — 11am-1pm (per university-assigned final exam schedule)

Assignment Due: Final Written Evaluation, written in class.

Watch playback of our Improv Jam, with the caveat that improv is never as good filmed as it was live. Discuss, evaluate. Post-mortem. Write Final Self-Evaluation, prompts given in class.

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>.

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>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>