

THTR 105
Introduction to Screen Acting
2 Units
Location: Shrine 105
Instructor: Paul Lazarus

Spring 2019
Wednesdays: 8:00 am - 10:50 am

Office Hours: by appointment on Wednesday after class
Contact Info: assistant@whitedwarfprods.com / 323-227-9691

This workshop-style class introduces students to the fundamentals of screen acting through exploration of the distinctions between acting for the stage and acting on-camera in any form of digital media whether it be Film, Television or the Internet. Exercises, discussion and on-camera work identify the technical and creative implications of these differences. Exposure to on-camera performance dynamics in both comedic and dramatic scenes as well as all major TV forms (sit-coms, half-hour comedies, one-hour drama/dramedies) prompts students to define and master techniques for dealing with the unique parameters of acting for the camera.

Objectives and Methods

The philosophy of SDA maintains that the art and craft of acting is best learned on the stage. However, in today's increasingly digital world, with distribution outlets like Netflix and Hulu, countless television channels and web series, it is important for the young actor to have exposure to the technical adjustments that need to be made in order to be effective when a camera is involved.

The object of this class is to compliment students' initial explorations of stage acting, with an introduction to the contrasting technical dynamics of screen acting. It is, further, to explore the similarities between stage and screen acting while identifying technical solutions to their differences. Among the numerous challenges - many of which are a result of the camera's ability to bring the audience very close to the performer (to put the audience in the "best seat in the house") - are the camera's ability to perceive a character's thoughts and desires; the emphasis on circumstance and subtext rather than dialogue to inform the essence of a given scene; vocal projection; the adjustment of the "size" of the actor's movements and gestures to the size of the shot; etc. Technical aspects of on-camera work such as eyelines, marks, continuity and off-camera skills will be reviewed.

Classes consist of discussions, video examples; on-camera exercises; and scene work with video playback. Class work is supplemented by reading and viewing lists. Required reading will be sent via email. Students are also required to keep a weekly journal, incorporating detailed insights derived from each class experience. A mid-term acting project will involve an assigned scene from a comedy or drama. Timely submission of a final paper is required.

NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE DEPENDING ON THE SIZE OF THE CLASS AND THE PRIOR LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Supplies, Equipment and Supplementary Materials

Students Are Required: to purchase one new 32GB or 64 GB digital “SD Card” Class 10 with a speed of 94/95 (approximately \$30). This card does not have to be made by Sony. Students may also split two-packs of these SD cards. Card can be readily purchased at B&H photo or Amazon or any camera store. See link below. Students must bring this SD card to each class meeting, starting with the second class. Please mark your card so that it can be identified. On-Camera exercises and scene work will be recorded on these cards for in-class playback discussions, and as a composite record of student’s progress through the term.



https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/1372389-REG/sony_64gb_m_series_uhs_ii.html

Internet access is required. Basic editing software (i.e. iMovie, Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premier) may be useful but is not required.

Required Reading: No initial textbook is required. Reading assignments will be sent out via email or given as handouts in class.

Recommended Reading: Constantin Stanislavski – An Actor Prepares
Stella Adler – Respect for Acting
Sanford Meisner – On Acting
Tony Barr – Acting for the Camera
Patrick Tucker – Secrets of Screen Acting

Required Viewing: To Be Announced (TBA)

Course Work, Journal and Final Exam

Students will work on camera most weeks. During and following each class students will keep a *handwritten* journal. Each entry will highlight lessons garnered from that day’s on-camera work, exercises or discussion/lecture experiences. These journals will serve as learning guides in conjunction with video analysis of in-class acting work. They are intended to encourage beneficial self-appraisal skills. These journals will be reviewed by the instructor at midterm and at term’s end. You will be graded on the consistency of your journaling in this course. Please bring your journals to every class including the first.

Final Exam Paper to be announced and discussed. E-mailed papers will be accepted but typed entries are preferred.

NOTE: Due to the constant use of lighting, camera, sound and monitor equipment, all students will help with set up and strike of electronic gear employed in class. On a rotating basis, all students will participate in the operation of this equipment.

Grading Policy

Grades are not dictated by the success of acting presentations or the instructor's subjective opinion of talent or artistic preference. Grades are dictated by:

Attentiveness / Focus / Concentration in class
Participation in in-class exercises
Performance of On-camera exercises
Active in-class student analysis
Constructive feedback of classmate's presentations
Meeting all assignment deadlines: reading, viewing, writing, acting
Memorization of lines and preparation of scene work
Availability to fellow classmates for collaboration

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

Grade Categories (Total = 100%)

1. Scene Work, On-camera exercises, In-Class Discussion	45%
2. Personal Journal	20%
3. Final Exam Paper	25%
4. Growth and Effort	10%

NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS, PROJECTS, PAPERS OR EXERCISES WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Grading Scale:

Excellent: A = 100-96; **A-** = 95-90 (clear understanding of class material coupled with original and creative insight)

Good: B+ = 89-86; **B** = 85-84; **B-** = 83-80 (class material has been understood clearly)

Average: C+ = 79-76; **C** = 75-74; **C-** = 73-70 (class material has been generally understood, but gaps in understanding remain)

Poor: D = 60's (identifiable gaps in the understanding of class material)

Fail: F = 59 and below (gaps in completion of work and poor understanding of class material.)

Further Grading Notes:

- *If 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. I will be happy to discuss your work at any time.*

Participation: Attendance is required and will be taken. **NO ABSENCES OR LATE ARRIVALS ARE ALLOWED.** Large emphasis on class participation. Viewing and critiquing of other students' work is a critical component of the class. Absences and tardiness will result in point reductions as noted on the grading system. Participation is weighted at no more than 15% as per University Guidelines.

Assignment Submission Policy

Scene work and video exercises will be presented in class. Written assignments will be either emailed or a hardcopy will be handed out in class. Video examples (scenes) will often be screened in class. When video viewing is requested, files will be uploaded and submitted through Vimeo or another file-sharing program.

LATE SUBMISSION POLICY: Assignments are to be completed **BY THE DUE DATE & TIME**. Late assignments will **NOT BE ACCEPTED**. You will be treated as professionals-in-training. Timeliness in regard to attendance and deadlines is expected. PL's professional guide: "early and prepared is on time, on time is late, late is fired."

Additional Policies

- Phones must be on silent and put away. Phones may only be used during break.
- No food or drinks are allowed in class – except for bottled water.
- All students must help with set up and strike of every class.
- Always wear closed-toe shoes that are flexible and good with movement (i.e. sneakers, dance shoes, etc.). No flip flops or boots - for both safety and comfort.
- Always wear proper rehearsal clothes - loose fitting, comfortable clothing, good for moving around in. Wear nothing revealing or distasteful.
- Safety is paramount. Physical and emotional safety is the first rule of performance.
- Be constructive in all criticism. No shaming language. Help each other be better actors.
- Avoid easy and general expressions like "hate" and "like." Find specifics that are useful.

NOTE: Depending on size of class NOT every student will work on camera each class. It is very likely that only a portion of the class will work on camera each class. The students on camera will be rotated so that everyone gets an opportunity.

Course Schedule

Note: Subject to change – All changes will be announced in class.

Class #1 thru #6

Class #1
Jan 9

Discussion:

Quote of the Day – provided by instructor
Intro and Description of Course
Fundamentals of Acting on Camera:
Stage vs. Screen: How are they the different? Same?

Video:

PL Reel
TBA: Scene from play and same scene from movie version

On-Camera Exercise:

Being on camera - Intro - Tell us about yourself
Talking to the camera/Talking to someone off-camera
Wide and Tite Shots – the difference

Assign:
Class Journal Explained, Daily Quote Explained
Reading & Viewing Assignment TBA

Class #2
Jan 16

Discussion:
Quote of the day – provided by Student
Fundamentals of Acting on Camera:
Adjusting for the size of the Shot –
Master vs. Medium vs. Close-up vs. ECU
Editing – montage, Retakes
Video:
TBA: Keaton Scene or Scene Without Dialogue
On-Camera Exercise
Non-Verbal acting on camera:
Drinking from a glass with different adjustments
Wide and Tite
Assign:
Journal
Reading and Viewing Assignment TBA

Class #3
Jan 23

Discussion:
Quote of the day – Student
Fundamentals of Acting on Camera:
Listening, Subtext, Analyzing Scenes & Roles
Finding: Want/Obstacle/Verb
Video:
TBA
On Camera Exercise:
Neutral Scene Work
Host Interview – “Lying on Camera”
Wide and Tite
Assign:
Journal & Reading and Viewing Assignment TBA

Class #4
Jan 30

Discussion
Quote of the day – Student
Intro to Hagen
More on Listening, Subtext, Analyzing Scenes & Roles
Video:
TBA
On Camera Exercise:
More Neutral Scene Work
Listening Exercise – “How to get here from my 10-year-old
bedroom”
Hagen Exercises: Entering, etc.
Assign:
Journal & Reading and Viewing Assignment TBA

Mid-Term acting project – all students will be assigned 2-character (comedy and drama) scenes to enact. Memorized scenes will be rehearsed, videotaped, possibly “edited” by students, and then discussed in class.

Class #5 – #7
Feb 6, 13, 20

Comedy

Discussion:

Quote of the Day - Student
Typical schedules for Sit-Coms and Half-Hour Series
Approaching comedic scenes: Surprise, Attitude, Stakes,
Vocal energy, Cheating out
Shot Language: Master, 50/50, Over, Single
Physicality in Comedy

Video:

TBA scenes from Sit-Com and Half-Hour Comedies

On-Camera Exercise:

2-character scenes to be assigned from situation comedy and half hour comedy – rehearsed, shot and critiqued
Working with Director on-camera

Assign:

Journal & Reading and Viewing Assignment TBA

Class #8, #9, #11.
Feb 27, Mar 6,
Mar 27

Drama

Discussion:

Quote of the Day - student
Typical Actor’s schedule for One-Hour Series
How to approach dramatic scenes:
Circumstances, Wants, Obstacles, Verbs
Honest and Interesting, Lack of rehearsal time
Working with Director & Writer
Shot Language, Stage sets, On-Location work

On-Camera Exercise:

2-character scenes to be assigned from one-hour drama/dramedy, rehearsed, shot and critiqued
Working with Director on-camera

Video:

TBA – select scenes from one-hour dramas/dramedies

Assign:

Journal & Reading and Viewing Assignment TBA

MARCH 13TH – SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

MARCH 20th (Class #10) - GUEST LECTURER – TBA

Class #12 - #15
Apr 3 to 24

General Concepts

Discussion:

Camera set-ups – Coverage
Working on set, working on location
Cold Readings, Auditioning
More on analyzing scenes and roles
Technical work on camera
Detailed explanation of Final Exam Essay with in-class analysis of scene from play versus same scene in movie version of play

Video:

TBA - scenes from films and web-series

On-Camera Exercise:

Marks, Eyelines, Continuity, Acting Off-Camera
2-character scenes to be assigned from movies and web-series, rehearsed, shot and critiqued
Working with Director on-camera

Assign:

Journal & Reading and Viewing Assignment TBA

Final Examination – Essay: Find a play that was turned into a movie. Pick a role and a scene that you would like to work on as an actor. For Example: A Streetcar Named Desire, Barefoot in the Park, The Children’s Hour, Closer, Doubt, Lion in Winter, Long Day’s Journey into Night, Rabbit Hole, Romeo and Juliet, etc. Instructor will provide a list of movies that have been based on plays. Compare and contrast the scenes as written for the play and the movie. Write a paper that discusses the author’s different approaches to writing the scene for the different media and your approach to the scene and the role as an actor. Discuss how you would alter your acting between the two different forms. 5 – 7 pages. Please print up this paper and deliver it no later than Wednesday, May 1st or email it before 10am on May 1st. Avoid choosing a scene and role that has already been selected by a fellow student.

Key Dates:

Monday, Jan 7: Spring semester classes begin

Wednesday, Jan 9: First day of Class at 8am. Please do not be late.

Wednesday, March 6: Journals turned in to Instructor at end of class

March 10 – 17, 2019: Spring Break Week, No Class

Wednesday, March 20: Journals returned to students at beginning of class

Friday, April 26, 2019: Stop Day

Wednesday, May 1: Final Exam Essay due and Journals turned in to Instructor

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, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) 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 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.

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/department-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, the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options/ 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/alj>.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

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.

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.