

Course Description and Overview

Students will be required to create their own performance piece through developing and rehearsing a script within fifteen weeks of an intensive self-discovery process. They will begin with reading and examining one-character plays. Then as a class we will discuss autobiographical subject matter and themes. Students will create first drafts, next re-writes, then rehearsals, and culminating with a final performance of their own work. This playwriting into performance unit will first focus on the actor finding a subject matter that motivates and sustains them. We will discuss the actor's strengths and weaknesses throughout the process. Finding the actor's unique voice through self-observance and self-discipline are key.

Learning Objectives

1. To encourage independent thinking by developing a unique and personalized play script that addresses the actor's personal strengths and challenges.
2. To establish a clear point of view, an important element to any artist, by creating an original piece of theatre.
3. To work through the process of writing through acting explorations. Beginning with improvisation from a skeletal structure, to character development, to the demands of focus, concentration, and relaxation during performance.
4. To understand dramatic structure, dramatic action, and the character's place in it.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Each student will be required to **read at least ONE solo play of your choice**, write a fact sheet about it, and be prepared to discuss it in class. Some ideas follow:

Athayde, Roberto. *Miss Margarida's Way*.

Bogosian, Eric *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee*,

Drinking in America,

Pounding Nails in

Floor with my Forehead,

Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll,

Suburbia

Cho, Margaret *I'm the One That I Want*

Crystal, Billy *700 Sundays*

Gien, Pamela *The Syringa Tree*

Goldberg, Whoopie *Back To Broadway*

Gray, Spalding, *Swimming to Cambodia*

Hare, David *Via Dolorosa*

Hoch, Danny *Some People, Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop*

Izzard, Eddie, *Dressed To Kill*

Kling, *21A*

Leary, Dennis *No Cure for Cancer*

Leguizamo, John *Mambo Mouth*

Freaks,

Sexaholic,

Ghetto Klown

McKellen, Ian *Acting Shakespeare*

Palminteri, Chazz *A Bronx Tale*

Redgrave, Lynn *Conversations with My Father,*

The Year of Magical Thinking

Reebek, Teresa *Bad Dates*

Smith, Anna Deavere, *Fires in the Mirror,*

Twilight Los Angeles

Stritch, Elaine *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*

Wagner, Jane *In Search of Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*

Woodard, Charlayne *Pretty Fire, Neat, In Real Life, The Night Watcher*

Wright, Doug *I Am My Own Wife*

Feel free to find your own choice but it must be a play performed by one actor. Many of these plays are at the Leavey Library, or online.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

15% In Class Participation (no unexcused absences, support and learn from each other during class, more than 3 absences lowers your grade.

(NO CELL PHONE USE DURING CLASSMATES WORK.)

20% Written Assignments

5 pts Solo Play Report: 2-3 pages, “Examining the Facts of Play” as a prompt

5 pts Family Member Monologue: be true to the character’s voice

5 pts Two person Dialogue: write a practical scene to be performed by one actor

5 pts “Any Three pages” begin a script – use play script format

25 % Rehearsal Preparation (Continued progress, LINES due on time.)

30% Preparation of **3 Drafts** – deadlines TBA

10% Final Presentation of your play- mandatory

Grading Breakdown

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.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

WEEK ONE

Discussion of subject matter.

Examples of solo play subject ideas ~

1. **A significant person(s) in your life.** (i.e. Amy Hill chose her mother. Lynn Redgrave, "Conversations with my Father," Danny Hoch's show "Some People" from his N.Y. neighborhood.) Add yourself as a character in relationship to the other person.
2. **A person from history or literature that you will research, a biography with you in the story.** (Hal Holbrook's "Mark Twain Tonight," Christopher Plummer's "Barrymore," Ian McKellan "Acting Shakespeare," Julie Harris in "The Belle of Amherst.") Add your P.O.V. so the work becomes comparative autobiography.
3. **Fictitious character (s) that represent human nature.** (Lily Tomlin's "In Search of Signs of Intelligent Life In the Universe," Willy Russell's "Shirley Valentine," John Leguizamo's "Mambo Mouth ... six monologues illustrating Latin Species.")
4. **A personal monologue from a subjective point of view.** (Spalding Gray's "Swimming to Cambodia" and "Gray's Anatomy.")
5. **An event (s) with a universal message, a social commentary.** (Anna Devere Smith's "Twilight of Los Angeles" Danny Hoch's "Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop".)
6. **Non-text based physical story telling.** (Bill Irwin's "In Regard of Flight.")
7. **An adaptation of a piece of literature.**
8. **Any other ideas that you are passionate about communicating to an audience.**

When considering your subject matter, ask yourself what is motivating you to explore this. If you have a strong reason to choose this topic then your passion will sustain your creativity throughout the process.

Viewing of excerpts from one-person shows. In class, and on Youtube you can find so many solo performers.

In this workshop we will rely on each other for encouragement, observation, and technical support. You will learn a great deal from your classmate's process, pay attention to all the work that goes on.

Discussion of the essentials of traditional dramatic structure.

- the subject matter must be told by a character or characters with some form of action defining them.
- strongly opposed forces, that are equally balanced.
- a series of obstacles and complications that further the dramatic action.
- the characters are revealed by the challenges presented in the play through dramatic conflict.
- the character or character(s) need clearly defined objectives, and they try to achieve them through actions.
 - character incentive and motivation.

Characteristics of the genre of one- person shows:

1. dramatic compression and focus.
2. limited time and space.
3. set the tone of the play in the first few minutes.
4. narrative flexibility (going from one character to another, physicalization, voice inflection, changing places, times, and situations.)
5. economy of production and portability.

There is a certain elegance in this genre if you succeed.

Assignments and Exercises Include:

Writing exercise. “Childhood Memory” “Character Monologue” “A Dialogue”

Reading Assignment. Each student will read a short one-person play (to get a look at a script and not have it be a mystery) and write a report to share with the class. (Due at the end of week two.) Hand out “Examine the Facts of a Play” to serve as a guide. Look at reasons the playwright selected: The title, length, time span of action and time period, place, atmosphere, conflict, obstacles, events, tone of the play, point of view, and plot.

WEEK TWO

Discussion about ideas. Your idea or ideas.

This play is about . . . The conflict is . . .

Now, why do you want to write this piece? . . . find a personal reason - self-expression or you need to tell a story - or you want to achieve a level of theatrical skill and style - or to save money- or the artistic challenge of the enterprise - or to respond to the evolving contemporary aesthetic values, i.e. audience shrinking attention span.

What propels these plays? How do they succeed?

- ~ The originality of the material and how it is treated.
- ~ The abilities of the performers.
- ~ The style, form, and the pacing.
- ~ Curiosity and danger.
- ~ Universal themes

Various ways of structuring your play:

- a monologue
- a series of scenes
- a piece of poetry
- a text that includes singing, dancing, and acting
- a stand-up comedy routine
- a combination of several forms

Writing exercise. What is the skeletal structure of your play? Briefly a beginning, middle, and end.

Acting Improvisations. Improvise the skeletal structure.

Investigate the theme of your play . . . this is a play about . . . and a description of your character/characters.

Students share One Person Play Reports

WEEK THREE

Set deadlines for drafts due.

Theme - an idea, point of view, or perception embodied and expanded upon in a work of art. What your play is about . . . not the plot.

Students share themes. What is the (working) title of your play? Why? What is the setting(s)? Character names and description.

Discussion of plot or outline. Make decisions about stage areas to be used. Draw a floor plan. Walk through basic staging. Play script format handout.

WEEK FOUR First rough draft due. See play script sample.

Table read or walk-through of first drafts.

Students put play on its feet. Is your theme going to be clear? What rewrites are needed?

Discussion of the “Physicalization of a Role.” Exercises in personalizing your role/roles. Handout of the elements that effect aspects of physicality.

Exercises in characterization. Is this character a reflection of you? Is it derived from sitcom land? Is this the best you can do? Go far, get deep. If your play is about superficial characters, go far with your theme or message by creating a style of acting or dialogue that is striking.

Second draft due. Typed. Review format. Begin memorization.

WEEK FIVE

Rehearsal of the Second draft, script and acting notes, revisions.
Begin blocking.

Discussion of design elements of your production. Set or settings, lighting, properties, costumes, sound. The simpler the better. Concentrate on telling the story, communicating to the audience with your acting ability.

WEEK SIX

Third draft due. Must be typed. Memorize script. Classmates will be assigned to technically assist each other, running sound, costumes changes, moving scenery or props, etc. Remember . . . keep it simple so you can focus on acting. Bring all costumes and props to next rehearsal.

WEEKS SEVEN - TEN

Make final script changes and rehearse solo performance pieces. **LINES MEMORIZED!!**
Staging of the final draft. Techniques in sensory awareness to maintain focus and concentration will be learned. Are your character’s objectives clear through the actions you are taking? Is there a definitive spine or through-line serving your character? You have no scene partners on stage with you in this workshop. What do you need at this point to propel you, in your one-person show, to totally own the stage?

WEEKS ELEVEN – FOURTEEN

Technical and dress rehearsals. Discussion of consistent presence during performance. Concentration, focus, and relaxation techniques will be re-visited.

WEEK FIFTEEN – PERFORMANCE and PROCESS DISCUSSION

Performances may be videotaped. Discussion to be scheduled on final exam date. The performance and screening of the playback are your final exam and are mandatory.

Final Examination Date:

Friday December 13th 11:00 am- 1:00 pm – we will watch and evaluate the playback of the solo plays.

*Congratulations. You are now a playwright
who has performed their own work!*

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” 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>.

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 for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

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. 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. 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.
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: 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

Aug. 23	Last day to register and settle without late fee for Session 001
Aug. 26	Fall semester classes begin in Session 001
Aug. 26-30	Late registration and change of schedule
Sept. 2	Labor Day, university holiday
Sept. 13	Deadline for purchasing or showing proof of health insurance
Sept. 13	Last day to register and add classes for Session 001
Sept. 13	Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001
Sept. 13	Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001
Sept. 13	Last day to purchase or waive tuition refund insurance for fall
Sept. 17	Last day to add or drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund or change to Pass/No Pass or Audit for Session 001
Oct. 11	Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript only.
Oct. 11	Last day to change a Pass/No Pass course to letter grade
Oct. 17-18	Fall recess
Nov. 7 at noon	Thesis/dissertation manuscript submission deadline
Nov. 15	Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001
Nov. 27-Dec. 1	Thanksgiving recess
Dec. 6	Fall semester classes end
Dec. 7-10	Study days
Dec. 11-18	Final examinations