

USC School of Dramatic Arts

GESM 111 (35300R): The Actor at Work
Spring 2020 – T/TH 8:00 – 9:50 AM
Location: MCC 102

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Office Hours: By Appointment/Thursdays 1:00 to 3:00 pm.
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Course Description and Overview

Because of its close ties to playwriting and directing, acting is often considered an interpretive skill. But acting is its own independent art form utilizing techniques that differ from those of other artists. Acting is a discrete art that can be studied and evaluated on its own terms. This class investigates major theories and techniques that characterize twentieth and twenty-first century acting in the United States. Students will examine acting theories and will engage in basic studio exercises that explore the techniques of acting. The studio exercises will uncover the basic skills in meaning, subtext, behavior and imagination in order to bring the world of the play alive. The student will be introduced to the basic tools of training in the areas of voice, speech, movement and text analysis. Ultimately, students will develop respect for the complexity of acting as they learn to articulate how the actor's art and to evaluate this art form via live performances.

Learning Objectives

1. *Analysis* will be assessed through a critical paper evaluating performance/acting through the lens of explored theories and techniques from the class. This will require attending a performance of a play (TBD) in performance this semester within the USC SDA Theatre Season.
2. *Making* will be incorporated into weekly studio exercises, in-class rehearsals and scene presentations
3. The *Context* of acting as an art will be explored through lectures and class discussions on the history and theories of acting.
1. The course overall will prompt students to build life-long *Engagement* with the art of acting by becoming informed spectators.

Class Meetings

- Will involve discussions on the required readings and performances, as well as practice-based studio workshops.
- Students are required to participate fully in all studio exercises. Talent or prior experience in acting will not be necessary to succeed; however, the instructor expects from all students an honest and disciplined commitment to the studio work.
- Turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices during class sessions.
- Please do not wear flip-flops or sandals to class.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods; Richard Brestoff; Smith and Kraus; 1995
Acting in Film; Michael Caine; Applause Theatre Book Publishing 1990 (Amazon) –RECOMMENDED

Description of Assignments & Examinations

- Performance Paper Due March 9th—(15% of final grade)— 2-3 cogent, well-written pages analyzing the acting work of one actor in *ONE SDA Mainstage Show*, within the School of Dramatic Arts Theatre Season this semester <https://dramaticarts.usc.edu/on-stage/>. Pay attention to: a). the “style” and believability of the acting, b). the quality, volume, and pace of the dialogue, c). how much is communicated through looks and physical gestures, d). the character choices, both physical and behavioral the actor has made, and e). overall engagement of the actor within the circumstances of the story and style of the play. Each category is worth 3 pts-totaling 15 points. Please utilize specific moments and dialogue from the performance.
TICKET STUB AND PROGRAM FROM THE SHOW MUST BE STAPLED TO PAPER WHEN SUBMITTING IT AS PART OF THE GRADE OR PAPER WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.
- Studio Work—(20% of final grade) —Students will engage in “open scene” work and 10- minute play exercises. This will entail both out of class rehearsal (meeting with scene partner) and in-class rehearsal and will culminate in performance of 10-minute plays.
Preparation and rehearsal outside of class will be required
- “Actors Homework” – (10% of final grade) there will be specific worksheets that you will complete as preparation for your scene work
- Mid-term Exam—(20% of final grade)— This will be comprised of 1) a performed scene utilizing the basic tools of imagination and analysis 2) multiple choice and essay exam on the history of acting training in the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Final Exam— (20% of final grade)— This will be comprised of 1) a performed scene from a play 2) a multiple choice and essay exam.

Grading Breakdown

- Performance Paper 15%
- Studio Work 20%
- Mid-term Exam: Performance 5%
- Mid-term Exam: Multiple Choice and Essay Question 15%
- Actor Homework / 2 Worksheets totaling 10%
- Final Exam: Performance 5%
- Final Exam: Multiple Choice and Essay Question 15%

Grading Criteria

- **Excellent** A = 96-100 A- = 91-95
- **Very Good** B+ = 88-90 B = 85-87 B- = 81-84
- **Good** C+ = 78-80 C = 75-77 C- = 71-74
- **Satisfactory / Threshold** D+ = 68-70 D = 65-67 D- = 61-64
- **Unsatisfactory to Poor** F = 60 or below

The final course grade is articulated as a Letter Grade. This grade is translated into a G.P.A using the following scale: A = 4; A- = 3.7; B+ = 3.3; B = 3; B- = 2.7; C+ = 2.3; C = 2; C- = 1.7; D = 1; F = 0.

When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class has been good but will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

ATTENDANCE:

Absences/Tardiness:

Learning in class depends on the layering of intellectual and emotional discovery resulting from the consistent active exploration of **100%** of the Ensemble **No absences or tardies are allowed. Cumulative active class participation points will be lost.** *Attendance is weighted at no more than 15% as per University*

GRADING POLICY:

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

Grades are dictated by:

- Participation, preparation, attendance
- **Constructive** feedback of classmates' acting presentations
- Willingness to experiment and apply the constructive feedback of instructor and students on one's own scenes, presentations, and exercises
- Meeting all assignment deadlines: reading, writing, acting
- Application and understanding of methods being explored to scene work and studio exercises
- Scene and acting exercise preparation and presentation and memorization of lines
- Availability to fellow classmates to rehearse scenes

Note: *If a deadline is missed because of a classmate / project partner's unavailability, the available partner/s will not be penalized. If problems arise, a discussion with the professor with all involved must be arranged before the day of the scheduled scene or everyone will be held equally accountable. BEFORE ANY SCENE MAY BE REHEARSED ON ITS FEET IN CLASS, THERE MUST BE A MINIMUM OF 2 HOURS OF OUTSIDE REHEARSAL. LINES MUST BE ACCURATELY MEMORIZED BY SECOND IN CLASS REHEARSAL.*

Assessment of "Participation"

15% of the final grade is earned through class participation. This will be defined as:

- Students are required to be on time for all scheduled sessions unless they are genuinely too ill to attend or affected by unavoidable personal or external circumstances. If the student has more than 2 absences or late arrivals during the course they will not be able to fulfill their ability to fully participate in class. Additionally, students must keep the teacher informed of any absence or late arrival IN ADVANCE. Failure to do so also constitutes a lack of participation and points will be deducted.
- Printed copies of all scenes, monologues and play scripts must be brought to every class meeting. No electronic copies (laptops, tablets, phones) may be used in class. NO EXCEPTIONS.
- Appropriate rehearsal clothing and props for ALL EXERCISES AND IN CLASS REHEARSALS.
- Openness to new methods of working and eagerness to attempt them.
- In class active student analysis and commentary on text.
- Constructive feedback on classmates' acting presentations.
- Energized support of all classmates' work.
- Willingness to experiment and apply the constructive feedback of professor and fellow students
- Meeting all assignment deadlines.
- Memorization of assigned material.
- Availability to fellow classmates to rehearse outside class.

Additional Studio Policies

Except for water, no food or drinks are allowed in class at any time. NO EATING DURING CLASS

Please use restroom before class and during break, do not interrupt the flow of class with leaving studio, at which point you must inform instructor

*There is absolutely no technology allowed in the classroom. No cellphones, no computers. No texting, no social media – **TURN THEM OFF AND PUT THEM AWAY** Anyone caught using cellphone in class will be held responsible for destroying the working atmosphere in the classroom and graded accordingly*

All students must help with the set up and strike of every class

Students must place all extraneous belongings, (backpacks, sweaters, jackets, skateboards, laptops, cell phones, etc.) in the designated corner of the classroom at the start of class

*Students must be in proper rehearsal clothes (whatever they may be and understand that they change throughout the semester) at the start of class. **NO FLIP FLOPS UNLESS THE SCENE OR CLASS TAKES PLACE AT THE BEACH!***

Weekly Schedule (CALENDAR SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Week 1 1/14 th -16 th	Intro to Course / Questions about acting. STUDIO: Acting exercises, Theatre Games: Physical and Sensorial Exercises VIEW: The Origins of Acting and "The Method." ASSIGN FOR Next THRS: Chapters 1 & 2 <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i> ASSIGN FOR TUESDAY: Bring in a film or TV scene featuring great acting. ASSIGN for TUESDAY 28 th : 3-minute sensorial exercise
Week 2 2/21 ST -23 RD	STUDIO: Acting Exercises, Theatre Games: Igniting imagination via Senses VIEW: Scenes brought in by class: Discussion "What makes a great performance?" DISCUSSION THURSDAYS: Chapters 1 & 2 ASSIGN: for THURSDAY Discussion: Chpts.3&4, <i>The Great Acting Teachers...</i> ASSIGN: for TUESDAY 28 th Sensorial exercises
Week 3 1/28 th -30 ^{9th}	STUDIO: Acting Exercises, Theatre Games: Listening VIEW: Sensorial Exercises DISCUSSION THURSDAYS : Ch. 3&4, <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i> ASSIGN: Personal Story – True or False. Write a story and give it to someone to perform. ASSIGN: for Discussion Thursday: Chapters. 5 & 6
Week 4 2/4 th -2/6 TH	STUDIO: Acting exercises, Theatre Games: Circumstances: Spolin Work VIEW: Actors Present Personal Stories DISCUSSION THURSDAYS: Chpts. 5 & 6, <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i> ASSIGN: Open Scenes and Scene Partners ASSIGN: DISCUSSION THURSDAY: Chapters 7 & 8* <i>The Great Acting Teachers...</i> OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND SDA MAINSTAGE SHOWS BEGIN NOW! PERFORMANCE PAPERS DUE 3/10th

Week 5 2/11 th -13 th	STUDIO: Acting exercises, Theatre Games: Exercises in Support of Open Scenes STUDIO: Address Rehearsal Process of Open Scenes DISCUSSION THURSDAYS : Chpts. 7 & 8, <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i> ASSIGN: Actor Homework; Hagen 6 Steps Worksheet on Open Scenes-DUE TUESDAY ASSIGN: Rehearsal of Open Scene with Partner ASSIGN: Chapters 9 & 10 for Discussion THURSDAY OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND SDA MAINSTAGE SHOWS BEGIN NOW! PERFORMANCE PAPERS DUE 3/10th
Week 6 2/18 th -20 th	STUDIO: First Pass Open Scenes w/ Notes. Hagen Worksheets Due TUESDAY DISCUSSION THURSDAY: Chapters 9 & 10 ASSIGN: Outside Rehearsals ASSIGN: Chapters 11 & 12 for DISCUSSION THURSDAY OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND SDA MAINSTAGE for Performance paper due 3/10 th
Week 7 2/25 th -27 th	STUDIO: Continued Rehearsal of Open Scenes w/ Notes. ASSIGN: Final Performance of Open Scenes due 3/3 ASSIGN: Midterm, part two: Written Exam 3/5 OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND SDA MAINSTAGE –for Performance paper due 3/10 th
Week 8 3/3 rd -5 th	STUDIO: Second Pass Open Scenes w/ Notes. MIDTERM, PART ONE: Final Performances of Open Scenes on 3/3 MIDTERM, PART TWO: Written Exam on 3/5 OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND SDA MAINSTAGE –for Performance paper due 3/10 th
Week 9 10 th -12 th	STUDIO: Begin Scene Study ASSIGN: New Scenes PERFORMANCE PAPER DUE TUESDAY 3/10
Week 10 SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK 3/17 th -19 th
Week 11 24 th -26 th	STUDIO: Scene Study – In Class Rehearsal: First Table Read VIEW: Acting in Film, Michael Cane DISCUSS: Acting in Film, Michael Cane ASSIGN: Actor Homework; Hagen 6 Steps Worksheet 4/2
Week 12 3/31 st -4/2 nd	STUDIO: Scene Study – In Class Rehearsal: Second Table Read HAND IN : Hagen Worksheets Thursday 4/2
Week 13 2/7 th -9 th	STUDIO: Scene Study – In Class Rehearsal: First Pass Work Through GROUP ONE: FIRST PASS_WORK THROUGH/Tuesday GROUP TWO : FIRST PASS WORK THROUGH/Thursday
Week 14 4/14 th -4/16 th	STUDIO: Scene Study – FIRST SHOWING GROUP ONE: TUESDAY GROUP TWO: THURSDAY DISCUSSION OF WORK
Week 15 4/21 st -4/23 rd	STUDIO: FINAL PART ONE: PEFORMANCE OF SCENES Group One: TUESDAY GROUP TWO: THURSDAY DISCUSSION OF WORK
Week 16 4/28 th -4/30 th	DISCUSSION AND WRAP UP PREPARE FOR: FINAL PART TWO:WRITTEN EXAM
FINAL: Wednesday May 13 th	FINAL PART TWO:WRITTEN EXAM – MULTIPLE CHOICE AND ESSAY. 8 a.m. to 10 a.m.

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 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