

**THTR 122**  
**Improvisation and Theatre Games**  
Mondays 4pm-5:50pm  
**Units: 2**

**Location:** MCC 109

**Instructor: Zachary Steel**

**Office:** JEF 208

**Office Hours:** by appointment

**Email:** [zsteel@usc.edu](mailto:zsteel@usc.edu)

**Cell #:** 347-546-0298

### **Course Description**

Through improv-based theatre games and exercises, this class explores how to quiet our inner critic, access our most organic and imaginative impulses, and create inspired, collaborative performances. The term “improv” refers to any type of theatre exercise or performance that doesn’t work from a previously written text. The work is composed on the spot. Often, but not always, the modern forms of improv theatre are comedic in nature. Our work will tend in that direction as well although this class does distinguish between comedic results and comedic efforts, as in the latter is not necessarily the path to the former. Improv, at its core, requires the participants to listen, be impulsive, be playful, and have an understanding of the fundamental rules of performance. This will be the focus of this class.

### **Learning Objectives**

The goals for this course are as follows:

- To learn the fundamental ingredients of an improv scene and how to be spontaneous within one.
- To be familiar with the structure of various theatre games.
- To understand what it means to listen on stage, engage with your environment, and be present
- To understand the value of “wholeness,” using our bodies to express impulses and embody character.
- To approach performance with a compassionate heart and emotional sensitivity.

**Prerequisite(s):** N/A

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

**Concurrent Enrollment:** N/A

### **Suggested Readings**

[Impro](#) by Keith Johnstone

[Improvisation for the Theatre](#) by Viola Spolin

[The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual](#) by Besser, Roberts, Walsh

[Free Play](#) by Stephen Nachmanovitch

### **Description and Assessment of Assignments**

There will be two “Self-Assessments” (due dates in the weekly breakdown), which are meant to document where you are in your comprehension and application of the work. Additionally, you will be required to

write an “Improv Report” about an improv show, either amateur or professional, that you will have seen. These will take the form of journal entries and be graded on thoroughness, effort, and clarity of thought.

### Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Assessment #1	100	10
Assessment #2	100	10
Improv Report	100	10
Class Work (games)	100	35
Participation	100	15
Final	100	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>100</b>

### Grading Scale (Example)

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

### Assignment Submission Policy

All written assignments will be turned via Turnitin on Blackboard prior to the date/time listed on the weekly breakdown.

### Grading Timeline

All assignments will be graded within a week of the due date.

### Additional Policies

**Regular Weekly Attendance** is the only way to get high points for “Participation,” and “Class Work” in Improv class. This is an activity course, missing even one class will lower your participation grade. Arriving at the start of class ready to work is part of your participation grade. If you are to be absent, e-mail the instructor to verify the reason. Please inform the instructor immediately if you have **any injuries or any conditions** that might prevent you from participating fully in the class. No cell phone use in class unless instructed.

Wear clothing and shoes that don’t impair your ability to move freely.

### Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	<b>Topics/Daily Activities</b>	<b>Readings and Homework</b>	<b>Deliverable/ Due Dates</b>
<b>Week 1</b>	Syllabus Review, Class introduction	Suggested Reading for weeks 1-4: <u>Improvisation for the Theatre</u> by Viola Spolin	
<b>Week 2</b>	No Class (MLK, Jr. Day)		
<b>Week 3</b>	Discussion - The Fundamentals of Improv Activity – Basic Improv games, establishing “the where”		
<b>Week 4</b>	Activity – Basic Improv games, establishing “the where”		
<b>Week 5</b>	Activity – Basic Improv games establishing “the who”	Suggested Reading for weeks 5-7: <u>Impro</u> by Keith Johnstone	<b><i>Due 2/10 @ 11pm Self-Assessment #1</i></b>
<b>Week 6</b>	No Class (President’s Day)		
<b>Week 7</b>	Activity – Basic Improv games establishing “the what”		
<b>Week 8</b>	Activity – Short form Improv games	Suggested Reading for weeks 8-11: <u>The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual</u> by Besser, Roberts, Walsh	
<b>Week 9</b>	Activity – Short form Improv games		
<b>Week 10</b>	Activity – Long form Improv games		
<b>Week 11</b>	Activity – Long form Improv games		<b><i>Due 3/30 @ 11pm Improv Report</i></b>
<b>Week 12</b>	Improv review and “Jam” prep	Suggested Reading for weeks 12-15: <u>Free Play</u> by Stephen Nachmanovitch	
<b>Week 13</b>	Improv review and “Jam” prep		
<b>Week 14</b>	Improv review and “Jam” prep		

<b>Week 15</b>	Invited Improv Jam		<b>Due 4/27 @ 11pm Self-Assessment #2</b>
<b>FINAL</b>	Review Video of Improv Jam		Date: Monday, May 11 <sup>th</sup> , 430pm – 630pm

## SDA PRODUCTIONS

SDA productions are courses and therefore do not supersede any other courses in which you are enrolled. When in an SDA production, students must not register for evening classes that conflict with regularly scheduled rehearsals. In short, being involved in an SDA production is a curricular assignment and must be treated as any other curricular assignment.

## EXTRA-CURRICULAR COMMITMENTS AND ISPS

Should you choose to participate in any extra-curricular project, such as an Independent Student Production, the SDA administration and faculty will not make allowances or exceptions for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, home work that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

## 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](http://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](mailto: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.

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### Support Systems:

*Campus Support & Intervention (CSI) – (213) 740-0411*

Campus Support & Intervention is an office within Campus Wellbeing and Crisis Intervention. We are a team of professionals here to assist students, faculty, and staff in navigating complex issues. Whether you are here seeking support for yourself or someone else, we are available to help you problem solve, understand options, and connect with resources.

<https://uscса.usc.edu>

*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](http://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](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. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://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: <https://titleix.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](http://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://titleix.usc.edu/>

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

*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](http://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu)