

THTR 322— Improv 2: Advanced Improv

2 Units

Spring 2020 — Thursdays — 3-5:50pm

Location: PED 202

Instructor: Kirstin Eggers

Office: MCC 214

Office Hours: By appointment. Please schedule via email.

Email: kqeggers@usc.edu

Phone: (c) 323.898.7388 — emergencies only, email preferred.

Course Description

*"Improv is the only belief system I've ever experienced
that directly works on how to be. Just how to be." — Ilana Glazer*

In this workshop course, we will continue the study of the rules and structure of improvised comedy scene work, with an emphasis in improvised comedic character development and advanced improvisational performance techniques. Students will explore various avenues of modern improvisational comedy, for use in varied mediums, and will search for continued ways to pioneer new improv performance experiences. Lastly, we will work to form a true ensemble — a cornerstone in successful comedic performance.

Prerequisites: THTR 101 or THTR 122

Learning Objectives

This course is designed to educate students on the techniques of performing improv for comedic purposes. By the end of the course, students should have a better sense of the use of improv as a tool for performance, writing, and storytelling in general, as well as an appreciation for improv as a performance art in and of itself. Students will embrace relationship and character commitment as the road to successful comedy, rather than pushing the need to "be funny." Students will amass a body of characters and techniques, a positive mindset for the collaborative and creative process, and a sense of the importance of braveness, boldness, and discipline to carry into their personal, professional, and performance lives.

"I'm not funny. What I am is brave." — Lucille Ball

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

All required books should be available at the USC Bookstore. Additional readings may be available via ARES/USC Library. You will be informed of e-availability as much as possible.

Required Reading

- *How to Be the Greatest Improviser on Earth* by Will Hines
- You will be given handouts and/or web links throughout the semester which you are expected to read and retain for discussion.

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. The show should preferably be a type of improv with which you are unfamiliar.

On-campus, there are several student groups that perform regularly. Off-campus, notable improv groups/theaters include UCB, The Groundlings, The Black Version, Impro Theatre, Second City LA, among others. You are welcome to do your own research as well. The show you attend must be over the course of the semester, not something you have seen previously in your life.

Recommended Reading

- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual* by Ian Roberts & Matt Walsh

- *Improvisation for the Theatre* by Viola Spolin
- *Improv: Improvisation and the Theatre* by Keith Johnstone
- *Improv Nation: How We Made A Great American Art* by Sam Wasson

Recommended Viewing

- A variety of live improv shows, especially formats with which you are less familiar
- Improvised (or semi-scripted) movies and television, such as Christopher Guest-directed movies, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Bajillion Dollar Properties*, *The League*, *Reno 911*, among others
- Improvised character podcasts such as *Comedy Bang Bang*, *The Hills of Baldwin*, *Spontaneanation*, *With Special Guest Lauren Lapkus*, among others
- *Whose Line Is It Anyway* episodes

Description and Assessment of Assignments

- Participation — You literally cannot learn improv without DOING improv. You are expected to participate and commit with a generous heart, an open mind and a devoted work ethic. You are not graded on 'talent' in this class, you are graded on your Quality of Doing — there is no progress without putting in the work. This includes discussion about readings and assignments.
- Ensemble Work — You are expected to become part of an ensemble. This includes support and encouragement for your teammates, patience, curiosity and communication. You may be required to meet outside of class with your teammates.
As a class, you should establish an information sharing group (platform of your choosing) early in the semester. You must be able to contact each member of your ensemble easily.
- Written Assignments — You will write two Self-Reflections, an Opening and a Closing. You should respond honestly, candidly, and thoughtfully. Prompts for Opening Reflection are in the Weekly Breakdown, Closing prompts will be given in class. The Reflections should be 400 words at a minimum. Unless otherwise specified, written assignments should be emailed to me (kqeggers@usc.edu) as a PDF attachment before the specified date and time. Late assignments will not be awarded full points.

You will write one response to a Live Improv Show of your choice. You are encouraged to see a show of which the format is unfamiliar to you. I am happy to give suggestions. Your response should be a minimum of 600 words, prompts given in class/emailed.
- Warm-Up Leader — Each student will lead the class in an improv "warm-up" that may focus on the concepts of focus, release, playfulness, ensemble-building, imagination, quick thinking, fearlessness, etc. Dates will be assigned. Warm-Up Leaders must be prepared and ready on the specified day.
- Performances — Students should prepare mentally, and possibly with specific forethought, for all performance-based assignments. Improvisers are expected to review all improv rules, and all formats of the specified exercise and be ready to employ them. For our final, extra production duties may be assigned.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation — Attendance, focus, attitude, willingness	15	15
Ensemble Work — Contribution to a supportive environment	10	10
Opening Reflection (written)	5	5
Warm-up Leader	5	5
Four Through the Door (midterm)	15	15
Live Improv Show Response (written)	10	10
Original Improv Creation (+ written explanation)	10	10
Final Workshop — Enthusiasm, growth, application of learned techniques	20	20
Final Reflection (written)	5	5
Final Character Interview	5	5
TOTAL	100	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

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

- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W (April 3).
- I am happy to discuss your work and/or grade with you at any time.

Assignment Submission Policy

- Written Assignments should be emailed to me (kqeggers@usc.edu) as a PDF attachment before the specified date and time, unless otherwise specified. Written assignments should follow MLA guidelines. Late assignments will not be awarded full points. Do not send links to Google Docs.
- Rehearsal and Performance Assignments are presented in class, and copies of written work do not need to be submitted, although you will refer to your work and must be prepared.

Additional Policies

Attendance — Attendance, punctuality, and enthusiastic participation is critical to your success in this class, as a respectful member of an ensemble, and the weekly learning and rehearsal process. There are no excused absences or tardies. Although attendance is not the only factor in your participation grade, please note that being absent for more than 15% of classes, or being late (or leaving early) for more than 25% of classes, or a combination thereof, will automatically lower your final grade. Additional points may also be deducted for missed in-class work.

Devices — 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.

Attire — Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way, whether by unwanted exposure or physical limitations. Neutral clothing is encouraged. Shoes should be closed-toed and stay on your feet — no flip-flops. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. Hats are generally discouraged. As you know, improv can get wild — dress accordingly.

Eating — Food/drink is not permitted in SDA classrooms, water excepted. Absolutely no gum.

Strike — Please help restore the classroom to neutral at the end of each class.

Break — We may take an official break at the halfway point of class, depending on the day's needs, however, be prepared to stay in the classroom for the 3 hours of class. In the event of an emergency for which you must leave the room, observe theatre rules of being discrete and respectful to your fellow actors — never enter or leave while improvisers are working or receiving feedback.

Strike — You are expected to restore the classroom to neutral at the end of each class.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

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

Every class will begin with group warm-ups.

Week	Date	Topics/ Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
WEEK ONE	Jan 16	Welcome/Introductions. Begin ensemble work. Syllabus review. Review rules of Improv. Begin scene work.		Read pages 1-55 of <i>How To Be The Greatest Improviser on Earth (HTBTGIOE??)</i> . Opening Reflection. 400+ words on: What draws you to improv? What do you hope to get out of this class? What personal traits do you feel help you with improv/ performing and what might hold you back? What are your strategies for working through that?
WEEK TWO	Jan 23	Tenets/Basics of Improv. Continue to review improv foundations. Games/ exercises to support basic improv structure.	Pages 1-60 of <i>HTBTGIOE</i> for discussion. Opening Reflection, emailed to kqegggers@usc.edu as a pdf attachment before 3pm.	Read pages 61-125 of <i>HTBTGIOE</i> .
WEEK THREE	Jan 30	Begin Character Work. Continue to review improv foundations, with emphasis on longer scene work. Begin character exploration. Schedule Warm-Up Leaders.	Pages 61-125 of <i>HTBTGIOE</i> for discussion.	Read pages 135-207 of <i>HTBTGIOE</i> .

Week	Date	Topics/ Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
WEEK FOUR	Feb 6	Physicality/Voice Exploration. Character work continued, including spectrum of reality work. Practice open scenes, filling in the details of character, location, story, etc. Warm-up Leaders begin.	Warm-Up Leaders begin — be ready for your assigned week. Pages 135-207 of <i>HTBTGIOE</i> for discussion.	Bring one costume piece to be shared.
WEEK FIVE	Feb 13	Costume Monologue presentation. Further character work within scenes.	Bring one costume piece to be shared.	
WEEK SIX	Feb 20	Character Work/Scene Work. Continuation of character work in scenes. Prep for midterm.		Prep for midterm — solo character work.
WEEK SEVEN	Feb 27	MIDTERM (part 1): Improvised character exercise "Four Through the Door."		Prep for midterm — solo character work.
WEEK EIGHT	Mar 5	MIDTERM (part 2): Improvised character exercise "Four Through the Door."		
WEEK NINE	Mar 12	Improv Types. Introduction to Improv types — discuss and explore, short-forms, long-forms, narrative, genre, alt, etc.		Written Response to Live Improv Show, unfamiliar genre strongly encouraged. Min. 600 words, prompts given in class/emailed.
SPRING BREAK — NO CLASS				
WEEK TEN	Mar 26	Discuss attended shows. Improv type exploration, continued.	Written Response to Live Improv Show, emailed as pdf attachment before 3pm.	Prepare and plan presentation and written explanation of original improv format/game for performance purposes.
WEEK ELEVEN	Apr 2	Original improv presentations begin.	Present Original Improv Format/Games. Written explanation.	
WEEK TWELVE	Apr 9	Original improv presentations continued. Catch-up and coverage as needed.	Present Original Improv Format/Games. Written explanation.	
WEEK THIRTEEN	Apr 16	Review and rehearse games/formats. Catch-up and coverage as needed.		Prepare for Final Workshop.
WEEK FOURTEEN	Apr 23	Learning Experience Evaluations. Rehearse. Establish show list and callers.		Prepare for Final Workshop.

Week	Date	Topics/ Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
WEEK FIFTEEN	Apr 30	Final Workshop — 4:30pm — details TBD.	FINAL WORKSHOP READY TO GO.	
FINAL	Tues May 12 2-4pm	Discuss workshop. Character interviews.	Final reflection, due by 11:59pm, emailed as pdf attachment. Prompts TBD.	

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.

*"Because what else are we going to do? Say no?
Say no to an opportunity that may be slightly out of our comfort zone?
Quiet our voice because we are worried it is not perfect?
I believe great people do things before they are ready." — Amy Poehler*

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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, 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 engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255 www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.
- Sexual Assault Resource Center sarc.usc.edu
Visit website for information about how to get help, help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources.
- Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086 equity.usc.edu
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class.
- Bias Assessment Response and Support studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response.
- The Office of Disability Services and Programs dsp.usc.edu
Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations.
- Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710 studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic.
- Diversity at USC diversity.usc.edu
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students.
- USC Emergency Information emergency.usc.edu
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.
- USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 community. dps.usc.edu
24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC.
