

Improvisation and Theatre Games (122)

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Office hours by appointment

Improvisation and Theatre Games (122) That is the official name of this class, however, I really want to change the name to “Gifts of Imperfection” Failure is key to appreciate what we are going to do in this class. So much so that your grades depend on it! We will explore with reckless abandon the art of improvisation and the key to that exploration is failure. *Without judgement and with courage.* To risk, to fail and still strive to do their best, *spent themselves at a worthy cause, and prepared to fail while daring greatly* (h/t Teddy Roosevelt* See below) In both life and improv, failure is inevitable. You don't always win. You can, however, learn from that failure, pick yourself up with great enthusiasm, and place yourself in the arena again.

We will have the courage to be vulnerable and be affected by the other person's emotional choices, supporting them and making them look good. We will explore all of this like a trapeze artist, big huge jumps across casums to the waiting arms of our scene partner, who will accept our ideas. If things should go wrong and we miss the jump, we will spring back up from the safety net of our classmates below us. This is a workshop course, in which each student actively participates in every class. There are usually no written midterms or exams. However, students must attend class for the Final Exam period during its regularly scheduled time.

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.- Theodore Roosevelt, The Man in the Arena. Excerpt from the speech “Citizenship In A Republic”

GRADING

Grades are based on the quality of participation (i.e. frequency of attendance (5%), supportiveness of fellow students (20%), commitment to the exercises (50%), enthusiasm for learning and improvement (25%), at each student's own capability.) Students are NOT judged on their mastery of each exercise, but on their willingness to **COMMIT ENTHUSIASTICALLY** to each exercise or scene. I strongly encourage you to use this class as an opportunity to trust yourselves, have fun, go for it and take risks!

ONE as in 1, absence is permitted per semester, excused or unexcused, other than documented medical explanations. Each absence after the first will result in a 1/2 point grade drop (e.g. from an A to an A-). Lateness is not allowed and *two lates are recorded as an absence*.

CLASS RULES:

Be fiercely supportive and respectful of each other. During other students' scenes, please **DO NOT TALK. DO NOT TEXT. DO NOT CHECK CELL PHONES.** There will be a brief break at the halfway mark, so you will have an opportunity then to take personal time. **DO NOT DO OTHER CLASS HOMEWORK.** These actions will cause your grades to drop immediately. Pay attention to your classmates' work onstage. You will learn as much from their participation as your own.

Show up every week. Come to play. Commit to the warm up. *Muster your energy and play hard.* Be supportive and respectful of each other. Be vulnerable! Be prepared to be on your feet for the entire class. Exhibit a concrete desire to improve your skills. Do all this: You get an A.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an in-depth study of improvised scene work. We will explore the primary tools for creating improvised scenes and developing full characters. You will be encouraged to make strong emotional and character choices. This course emphasizes character development through exercises and scene work, while introducing advanced improv theory and technique. We will continue to explore the WHY ("today is important") of the scene.

We will also review/reinforce the basic concepts of improv:

- The Power of Yes compels you!
- Yes And...ing
- Yes And...Because...ing
- Strong active listening skills!

- Ensemble Building
- Teamwork, what someone else is offering is more important than your idea.
- Making SEC! (Strong Emotional Choices)
- Raising the stakes...(Killing the Vampire)
- Commitment and how not to fear relationships.
- Being Specific. Be very, very, specific.
- Operating at the height of *your* intelligence.
- Relationships* *See commitment
- Justification and support. Be a team supporter!
- Triangulation in scenes and life. The Tilt!
- Listening skills for life AND BEYOND!

EMPHASIS ON STORY AND CHARACTER POV

A character is a person you create who is, in at least one very specific way, unlike yourself. This can be a behavioral aspect, a different value system, point of view, demeanor, IQ, cultural context, etc. How does your character view the world and the people around you? This course gives you a great opportunity to use your imagination and try out behaviors and attitudes that might be very different from your own.

A character is not merely an accent, a posture, a repeated catch phrase or an overly broad stereotype void of original features. For the character to be effective it must be grounded in reality. I encourage you to observe people around you and keep a notebook of your observations. What character traits make you laugh? Make you crazy? Pay attention to specifics/details. You will be asked to create at least 2 original fully-formed characters in this course.

BE CHANGED TO DISCOVER YOUR STORY

A story has a beginning, middle and end. However, it's what happens to our characters during those events that causes them to change. That change is what makes a story so satisfying. Who is our character and how do they handle the situation in front of them? Do they evolve emotionally based on what has happened to them? Character is story, and if story means change then characters changing is what makes a great story.

OBJECTIVE

To understand and learn the basic tenets of improvisation and how it can be applied to storytelling, the workplace, acting and being a contributor to the human experience.

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 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://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety>. This is important for the safety of the 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, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other 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/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

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.

