

THTR 122 Section 62624R
Improvisation and Theatre Games
Spring 2021
Tuesdays 4pm-5:50pm
2 Units

Location: [ZOOM LINK](#)

Instructor: Zachary Steel
Office: email Zach for Zoom Link
Office Hours: by appointment
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Course Description

Through improvisational theatre games and exercises, this class explores how to quiet our inner critic, access our most 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.

Addendum for Remote Learning

The spirit of improvisation remains the same whether we are in person with each other or interacting online which makes this class well-suited for both. Physically, there are some differences as we are looking into a computer and not at each other and we will make adjustments to accommodate for that. Some exercises will be done standing up and some will be done in the standard sitting-at-a-desk spatial relationship to the computer. The Zoom platform turns out to be a great tool for learning improv as it really forces us to focus on simplicity, listening and responding, and staying in the moment.

Learning Objectives

The goals for this course are as follows:

1. To identify the fundamental ingredients of an improv scene
2. To recognize the structure of various theatre games
3. To implement the principles of improv during in-class exercises
4. To evaluate the work of others based on their implementation of learned improv skills

Prerequisite(s): N/A

Co-Requisite(s): N/A

Concurrent Enrollment: N/A

Required Reading

[The Comedy Improv Handbook](#) by Matt Fotis and Siobhan O’Hara, sections 1 & 2 (available on Blackboard)

Suggested Readings

Improv 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. Ideally, this will be a “live” show (meaning happening in real time but remotely) but because of the limitations on these types of opportunities during the pandemic, a recorded improv performance will suffice. These reports will take the form of journal entries and be graded on thoroughness, application of principles and ideas studied in class, 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 (Discussion and Evaluation)	100	15
Final	100	20
TOTAL	600	100

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

- Please arrive promptly for class. Late arrivals disturb the learning of the whole class.
- There will be no unexcused absences. You are required to be in attendance for each class period unless you are attending class from a time zone where the class falls outside of the hours 7am-10pm. If that is the case, it is required that you watch the recording of the class (available on Blackboard) and keep up with all assignments and course materials.
- *No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*
- No social media posting about class.

Zoom etiquette:

- Please find as private and quiet a setting in your house as you possibly can. Keep in mind that as important as it is to not have any interruptions, it is also important to feel comfortable making sound and not be too concerned with disrupting others who are sharing a living/working space with you.
- Zoom camera should be on unless there is a specific reason for them to be turned off. Virtual backgrounds are ok.
- While we are in class, no applications should be in use on any device besides Zoom, unless otherwise instructed.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1 1/19	Syllabus Review, Class introduction		
Week 2 1/26	No Class (MLK, Jr. Day)	To be read: <u>The Comedy Improv Handbook</u> : Section I Improv History	
Week 3 2/2	Discussion - The Fundamentals of Improv Activity – Basic Improv games, establishing “the where”	To be read: <u>The Comedy Improv Handbook</u> : Section II Improv Rules	
Week 4 2/9	Activity – Basic Improv games, establishing “the where”	Suggested Reading for week 4: <u>Improvisation for the Theatre</u> by Viola Spolin	
Week 5 2/16	Activity – Basic Improv games establishing “the who”	Suggested Reading for weeks 5-7: <u>Impro</u> by Keith Johnstone	Due 2/15 @ 11pm Self-Assessment #1
Week 6 2/23	No Class (Wellness Day)		

Week 7 3/2	Activity – Basic Improv games establishing “the what”		
Week 8 3/9	Activity – Short form Improv games	Suggested Reading for weeks 8-11: <u>The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual</u> by Besser, Roberts, Walsh	
Week 9 3/16	Activity – Short form Improv games		
Week 10 3/23	Activity – Long form Improv games		
Week 11 3/30	Activity – Long form Improv games		<i>Due 3/29 @ 11pm Improv Report</i>
Week 12 4/6	Improv review and “Jam” prep	Suggested Reading for weeks 12-15: <u>Free Play</u> by Stephen Nachmanovitch	
Week 13 4/13	Improv review and “Jam” prep		
Week 14 4/20	Improv review and “Jam” prep		
Week 15 4/27	Improv Jam		<i>Due 4/26 @ 11pm Self-Assessment #2</i>
FINAL 5/11	Review Recording of Improv Jam		Date: Tuesday, May 11 th , 430pm – 630pm

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:

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

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: <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

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

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