

THTR 250 Zoom
Camera and Improvisation
Intermediate Screen Acting
Instructor: Joseph Hacker
Location: Shrine 105

This on-camera, workshop-style class has a prerequisite: THTR 105. As such, THTR 250 continues the exploration of screen acting to the next level. Because film is best described as a story told in pictures, the medium places a high premium on what we identify as “silent screen” acting, where the emotional implications of a specific circumstance is communicated principally through body language, gesture and facial expression. Controlled exposure to non-verbal situational improvisations prompts students to hone their awareness of these essentials and to incorporate them into the fundamental process of actualizing effective on-camera performance.

Objectives and Methods

The philosophy of SDA correctly maintains that the art and craft of acting is best learned on the stage. However, in today’s increasingly digital world, the study of acting cannot be considered complete without a detailed exposure to the technical adjustments an actor must make to achieve effectiveness when acting for the camera.

Among the numerous technical challenges of screen acting---many of which are a result of the “close up” proximity of the audience---are the camera’s ability to perceive a character’s thoughts; the emphasis on circumstance rather than dialogue to inform the essence of a given scene; and, very importantly, how the emotional implications of a specific circumstance is communicated by the character through body language, gesture and facial expression. The object of this class is to incorporate the fundamentals of THTR 105 with further exploration of acting for the screen by way of situational silent screen improvisations...putting a high emphasis on body language and gesture. In addition the impact of movement, camera angle, proximity to the perceived listener, to name a few will be explored.

Classes consist of discussions, video examples; on-camera exercises; situational improvisations; and scene work with video playback. Class work is supplemented by a required reading list. Timely submission of a special midterm paper is required. Students are required to keep a weekly journal, reflecting in specific detail one or more designated aspects of that day’s class experience.

NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE DEPENDING ON THE SIZE OF THE CLASS AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENT LEVEL OF THE PARTICIPANTS

tudents Are Required: to purchase one new 32GB or 64GB digital “SD Card” Class 10 with a speed of 94/95 (approximately \$40). (It does not have to be made by Sony.) We will use it every week including the first. Students will bring this SD card to each class meeting, including the first.



http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/917685-REG/sony_sf32ux_tqn_32gb_sdhc_uhs_1_memory_card.html

Required Reading: TBA

Recommended Reading: DIRECTING ACTORS, JUDITH WESTON, M. WIESE PRODUCTIONS
ACTIONS; THE ACTORS’ THESAURUS, DRAMA PUBLISHERS

Course Work and Final Exam: Students will work on camera every week. During and following each class students will make entries in a personal performance journal. Each entry will record in specific detail one or more designated aspects of that day's on-camera or preparation experience. These journals will serve as learning cues in conjunction with video replay analysis. They are intended to encourage disciplined, accurate, and beneficial self-appraisal skills. They will be reviewed for comment and discussion by the instructor periodically, at midterm and at term's end. No e-mailed papers will be accepted. Typed entries preferred. Format of the Final Exam to be announced.

Grading Policy:

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

- Focus /concentration in class
- Performance of On-camera exercises
- Communication of selected acting skills
- Active in-class student analysis
- Constructive feedback of classmate's presentations
- Meeting all assignment deadlines: reading, writing, acting
- Memorization of lines
- Availability to fellow classmates for collaboration

Grading scale for SDA: A indicates work of excellent quality; B of good quality; C of average quality; D of below average quality; F indicates inadequate work.

Grade Categories

1. In-Class Feedback And Participation 15%
2. Written assignments and Personal Journal 25%
3. On-camera exercises and Self Evaluations 25%
4. Final Exam 25%
5. Growth And Effort 10%

No late assignments, projects, exams, papers or exercises will be accepted.
No e-mailed papers will be accepted

Participation: Attendance is required and will be taken. No tardiness or absences are allowed. There is a high emphasis on class participation. Viewing and critiquing of other students' work is a critical component of the class. Absences will result in point reductions as noted on grading system schedule.

NOTE FROM THE DISABILITY SERVICES OFFICE: "Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday thru Friday, 8:30 to 5:00. The office is in the Student Union 301 and the phone number is 213 740 0776.

Course Schedule: Weekly Breakdown

Class Sequence #1
(Classes #1 thru #6)

Set Stations / assign video pairs

Video example: In the City of Sylvia

Discussion: Objectives / purpose of this class

4 quotes and an event

Valli A story told in pictures...Moving pictures

The thought pauses at the critical junctures that elicits the action that tells the story.

Four Quotes

“The best screen actors are able to do nothing, and that is much more difficult than it sounds”

“It always surprises me that so many actors think acting is about the words.”

“It’s called “Motion pictures” (we have to be able to see what you’re feeling)... Vallie Lopez

“Where you are is who you are.” The place...create the place, it will tell you what to do.

Video examples

Secret Obsession

Fracture et al

Langley

I Robot

Hush

Panic Room

Discussion: Review What is Acting:

Acting is doing / Thinking is doing / Acting is thinking
(backwards from 100 by sevens)

Asleep and not dreaming

Stage/screen: fundamentals of acting: unifying dynamics.

Doing: Behaving truthfully in imaginary circumstances.

Thought: the essence of the change on screen

Ultimate goal: virtual auditioning / film work

Anthony Hopkins / 300 times

In a hit early...Your time is now

Assign: Daily Journal

Monologues for later: One minute

A person is in a specific place, talking to a specific person for a specific reason.

Menu

Exercises: Silent Improvs / wide angle / close-up / re-takes

“Italian restaurant” et al

Acting is doing / thinking is doing

Non-verbal circumstances / situations

Body language and gesture

Non-verbal behavior specific to a given place

Creating a specific metaphorical or symbolic place.

Exercise: Entries set the event

Video Examples: Killer entries:

“Jonathan Langley et .al

“Unsane”

Entering with purpose.

Wide angle / close-up coverage.

Inner monologue / creating a contrast

Through an obje

Assign: Handout “Lila” sides

Video Pairs

Class Sequence #2

(Classes #7 thru #11)

What communicates thought:

facial gesture, body language, pauses,

body shifting, middle distance...imly or sugest

thought

Exercise: Scene: “Lila” On camera / wide angle / close-up / re-takes
video pairs

Exercise: Listening: Monologues/ body language / the place

Thinking / listening

Video pairs features listener

Speaker with back to camera / medium /close-up

Hear / listen / form an opinion / want to speak / speak

A person in a specific place talking to another person for
a specific reason. Place / Relationship / Intent / Stakes

Creating the place Stella style

Significance / metaphor of the place

Changes that affect change: The place / change the physical action / change the relationship / change the overall sensation / speaking through an object / Middle distance

Looking implies thought
The middle distance implies thought

Vocal projection: Addressing the perceived distance
The measure of the mic

The issue of “Size” / “Smaller” vs. “Closer”

long shot / medium shot/ close-up.
“you are enough”
The “button”
Let the blows land
Hypnotizing your counter-part

Mid-term: To Be Announced

Class Sequence #3

(Classes #11 thru #15 Visible thinking : Defining “active” thoughts
Movement is thinking / pausing is thinking
shifting with an active mind
movement towards / Movement away

Concepts applied / Assigned Scenes

“Mckinley Linder”

“Amy”

Assigned Scenes, TBA / working in video pairs

Camera set-ups

Scenes: master/two shot/ over the shoulder/close-ups:

Multiple camera, re-takes, etc

Hitting marks / cheating for the camera

Shooting out of order.

The close-up / unique dynamic

Close-ups cont'd / a communication with the audience

The impact of looking...When and at what

Thinking on camera
silent monologue doing a task
“McKinley Linder”

Verbal action Vs. Non-verbal re-action
Inner monologues

Final Assignment TBA

NOTE: All of the above subject to change

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