

THTR 464: An Actor's Reel, Section #63168  
Units: 2  
Spring 2021  
Mondays, 2pm-4:50pm  
Location: Zoom  
Instructor: RODNEY TO  
Office Hours: Hours available upon request  
Contact Info: [rodneyto@usc.edu](mailto:rodneyto@usc.edu) / (917) 445-1040 m.

### Course Description

This course is designed to develop an intricate, yet holistic understanding of all fundamental creative and business elements which are essential to an actor's portfolio. By using the actor's demo reel as a preparatory baseline, we'll explore all areas of the "business" end of "show business" and uncover truths and myths about what is necessary to contend in today's artistic marketplace. The course intends to properly set a strong philosophical base and rigorously engage the actor so they feel confident in assembling their own personal, unique, specific and dynamic portfolio that will become the foundational marketing toolkit of their career.

### Learning Objectives

- Discuss and understand the overall business trajectory of show business as it has evolved over the past several decades and how current personal marketing has become an essential tool to compete in Entertainment.
- Understand the various positions (agent, manager, casting director, etc.) involved in an actor's career, how they function, and how they use portfolio tools (headshot, reel, etc.) to aide in (hopefully) procuring work for actors.
- We will watch and discuss a myriad of current demo reels and various other marketing materials and discuss their effectiveness.
- Explore on-camera acting technique and understand commonalities and differences from other theatrical forms.
- We will work on various scenes and monologues and, through constructive discourse, understand specifics that make each actor's work unique and how this information must translate in their marketing materials. "You can't judge your acting work if you don't know what you're looking for." - Rodney
- Rehearse and tape monologues that may (potentially) be used as the initial base of the actor's reel.
- Have complete knowledge of the day-to-day of working actors, covering auditioning, physical and mental health, financial responsibilities and supplemental work.
- We will finish the course with an *entry-level* reel that meets basic industry standards and expectations, but is also specific, unique, creative and personal so as to "stand out" and remain competitive.

### Note from Rodney:

*Actors, this class is your opportunity to gain a true understanding of the Entertainment Industry from a 'business perspective'. After all, in the eyes of the law, as a professional actor, you officially own your own business. Oftentimes, in business preparation courses, I find that acting students mire themselves in many costly details that detract from what is actually necessary for them to thrive. We'll use the virtual nature of this class to explore & vet from various professional perspectives (i.e. casting director, agent, director, producer, etc.) giving you a deeper, practical understanding of how your materials are used to represent, pitch and hire you as a professional artist. As a working actor and industry professional myself, it is my mission to provide clarity to any unanswered questions you may have about the industry, so you leave our time together well-informed, confident and fully prepared to do your best work.*

**Prerequisite(s):** As per the Schedule of Classes, either THTR 315A or 340A is required before taking this class.

#### **Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required**

Students will need internet access as well as access to a working digital camera. Mobile phones or tablets are desirable for easy mobility and access (*see MOBILE PHONE & TABLET POLICY below*). Basic editing software (ie iMovie, Movie Maker, etc.), access to basic sound and lighting equipment may also be useful, but *not* required.

#### **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

No textbook required. Coursework and assigned reading will be conferred throughout the semester.

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

**\*\*\*SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS NEEDED. WILL NOTIFY OF ALL CHANGES\*\*\***

#### **Grading Breakdown**

- Weekly assignments: 5pts x 15 weeks = **75pts\*\*\***
- Final Reel: **20pts**
- Class participation: **5pts †** (*see Participation breakdown below*)

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**Total: 100 points**

#### **Grading Scale**

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

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

#### **† Participation Breakdown:**

† **5pts EXCELLENT participation.** Demonstrates active, everyday engagement. Shows willingness & enthusiasm in discussions, class activity, and collaborations

† **4pts GOOD participation.** Frequent active participation. Engaged, willing semi-regular participation in discussions, class activity, and collaborations

† **3pts AVERAGE participation.** Semi-regular, but active participation in discussions, class activity, and collaborations

#### **Further Participation Notes:**

All aspects of a life in the Entertainment Industry is nothing short of a fully collaborative, immersive process. I cannot emphasize enough how much (more) you will learn by listening to, working with, and supporting your fellow classmates. Therefore daily participation and active engagement in class (discussions, classwork, etc.) is essential and *will* factor into your final grade. **Therefore no absences or late arrivals will be allowed.** *Participation is weighted at no more than 15% as per University Guidelines.*

## Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments will be discussed in detail at the end of each class period. Assignments will be either emailed, uploaded, or presented in class per Rodney's instruction.

## Late Submission Policy

Assignments are expected to be completed by the due date & time. Grades on late assignments will be deducted appropriately. I reserve the right to not accept late assignments at my discretion.

## • NETIQUETTE:

**The online learning modality for the Arts & Entertainment Industry is a new frontier for everyone. We are discovering how to best navigate these newer practices together. While certainly not ideal, let's embrace this as an opportunity.**

- I will be expecting that you do your best to treat this as a traditional classroom. Do your best to find a quiet space in your home where you can sit up comfortably and focus with little-to-no distractions or disturbances. No outdoor spots unless you discuss it with me first. I am acutely aware (and sensitive to the fact) that everyone's circumstances vary, so if you're unable to find a reasonable working spot for class, please contact me privately to discuss.
- Even though we will be online and in your homes this semester, students must wear appropriate, casual, classroom clothes - no pajamas. Be professional, mature, and respectful; wear nothing revealing or distasteful.
- Please log-on from a desktop (or laptop) if possible. Oftentimes, I find when students log-on from their phone or tablet, the smaller nature of these devices lends itself to the student being too casual, less alert and easily distracted.
- Remember safety at all times. Do NOT drive while in class. You will be logged-off and marked with an unexcused absence if you attempt to take class while driving or exercising or shopping or cleaning or babysitting - Yes, I've seen it all.
- No 'other' technology during class. Phones must be on silent and put away. Unless I invite you to do so, phones may only be taken out during breaks. I am keenly aware when you are reading your phones unnecessarily - trust me, I'm not *that* old. Any intentional use of your devices for non-class purposes (texting, emailing, viewing of non-class related materials, playing video games, etc.) will negatively reflect your participation grade.
- Except for water, no food or drinks are allowed in class.
- No pets or any other distractions such as toys, video games, etc.
- Do not share personal class dealings and discoveries outside of class. We will be working hard to establish trust with each other. Respect is paramount. Communicate freely, honestly, and frequently, but always be respectful, mindful, mature.

***I pride myself in treating all students like professionals-in-training. It's important that you begin your journey to becoming professionals by behaving as such throughout this course which, at the very least, begins with proper, respectful usage of your devices. No one in the history of the world has died or will die because of you paying attention in class.***

## Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

**\*\*\*SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS NEEDED. WILL NOTIFY OF ALL CHANGES\*\*\***

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverables/ Due Dates
Week 1 1/18	MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY	NO	CLASSES
Week 2 1/25	Intro to course / Begin discussion on the professional life of an Industry professional and toolkit.	Collect and bring in marketing materials that you have thus far. Bring in things to describe who you are as an artist and be prepared to discuss in class.	Presentations will be made in class on Tuesday, 2/1.
Week 3 2/1	<b>Business A:</b> In-class individual presentations / discuss individual marketing strategies	Pick 2 actors of note whose work you feel reflect your own. Bring in 2 short clips to screen and be prepared to discuss their work and what contributes to their appeal.	Email choices to Rodney by Friday, 2/5 at 12noon!!!
Week 4 2/8	<b>Business A (cont'd):</b> Screen clips / Open forum discussion w/ cohort comparing and contrasting choices w/ presenting actor.	Read handout (given in-class) regarding on-camera technique and be prepared to discuss in class. Also, read <b>DOG SEES GOD</b> by Bert V. Royal (Rodney will hand out)	
Week 5 2/15	PRESIDENTS' DAY	NO	CLASSES

<p><b>Week 6</b></p> <p>2/22</p>	<p><b>Begin On-Camera Technique:</b> Introduce basic on camera techniques, concepts, commonalities &amp; differences to other theatrical platforms.</p>	<p>Assign scenes and scene partners and set schedule to rehearse individually outside of class.</p>	<p>Rehearse assigned scenes from <b>DOG SEES GOD</b> and be ready to present scenes in class on Monday, 3/1!</p>
<p><b>Week 7</b></p> <p>3/1</p>	<p><b>On-camera Technique (cont'd):</b> Present scenes in class and discuss. Work on adjustments, beat shifts, etc.</p>	<p>Receive assigned monologues to tape and present in class.</p>	<p>Taped monologue due <b>NO LATER THAN Saturday, 3/6 at 12pm</b>. Present monologues on Monday, 3/8.</p>
<p><b>Week 8</b></p> <p>3/8</p>	<p><b>On-camera Technique (cont'd):</b> Screen taped monologues. Discuss framing (single/multi-cam framing), and what is presented within frame.</p>	<p>Begin to research monologues for final reels and bring options to class</p>	<p>Bring monologue options to class on Monday, 3/15. Be prepared to discuss.</p>
<p><b>Week 9</b></p> <p>3/15</p>	<p><b>On-cam technique(cont'd.):</b> Class forum: based on early pitches, discuss monologue options. Begin discussing auditioning on-cam.</p>	<p>Receive assigned audition material</p>	<p>Rehearse and prepare assigned audition material to present in class on Monday, 3/22</p>
<p><b>Week 10</b></p> <p>3/22</p>	<p><b>On-cam technique (cont'd):</b> Present prepared auditions and discuss. / Begin discussion for final reels.</p>	<p>TBA</p>	<p>TBA</p>

<p>Week 11</p> <p>3/29</p>	<p><b>GUEST #1 (TBA)</b></p> <p>Industry insider will work on audition with you.</p>	<p>Solidify monologue choices.</p>	<p>Rehearse monologue choices and be as off-book as possible and be ready to work with Rodney on 4/5.</p>
<p>Week 12</p> <p>4/5</p>	<p>Work with Rodney individually / Discuss choices for second monologue</p>	<p>Research 2nd monologue</p>	<p>Rehearse 2nd monologue to present and discuss in class on Monday, 4/12.</p>
<p>Week 13</p> <p>4/12</p>	<p>Set final options for monologues to be taped on own / Individual work sessions w/Rodney times TBA.</p>	<p>Tape final reel monologues</p>	<p>Gather marketing materials from semester to present and pitch in class on 4/19 (good time to tape draft versions of monologue and get notes before taping final version)</p>
<p>Week 14</p> <p>4/19</p>	<p><b>Business B</b> Pitching yourself to class. With marketing materials gathered including draft of reel, we will pitch selves to class/clients.</p>	<p>Continue taping final reels</p>	<p>By now you should have set your final tapes</p>
<p>Week 15</p> <p>4/26</p>	<p><b>Business B (cont'd)</b> Open business discussion &amp; wrap up. What to do next? What do we do with our stuff? How do we land rep? Continuing ed.</p>	<p><b>LAST CLASS OF SEMESTER!</b></p>	<p><b>FINAL REELS DUE BY END OF DAY SUNDAY, 5/2!</b> <b>NO EXCEPTIONS!</b></p>

Week 16  5/2 to 5/9	STUDY WEEK	NO	CLASSES
FINALS WEEK  Week of 5/10	FINALS	WEEK	

**\*\*\*\*YOUR FINAL PROJECTS WILL BE SCREENED ON MONDAY,  
MAY 10 from 2pm-4pm\*\*\*\***

### 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:**

*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: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.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. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

*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)

*Student Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

*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)