

**THTR 122 Improvisation and Theatre Games**

**Units: 2 Section: 62633**

**Fall 2021—Tuesdays—4pm-5:50pm**

**Location: MCC 109**

**Instructor: Judith Shelton**

**Office: TBD**

**Office Hours: Tuesdays 3-4pm, or by appointment**

**Contact Info: You may contact me Tuesday-Thursday, 9am-5pm**

Email preferred [judiths@usc.edu](mailto:judiths@usc.edu)

In an emergency only, text 626.390.3678

**Course Description**

Individual and group exercises to free the actor physically and emotionally and stimulate creativity, imagination, and self-expression. Each class will be a series of playful and thoughtful exercises to help the student discover more about themselves, their unique impulses, and humanity in general. Students will feel comfortable with spontaneity, flexible, and stable in unknown situations. Show up, each week, ready to explore and play. Leap, and the net will appear!

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Execute the concept of “Yes, and...”
- List the guidelines for successful improv
- Describe the elements of an improv scene
- Demonstrate various theatre games and improv exercises
- Create unscripted relationships and scenes in the moment, with only a 1-word suggestion

**Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

*Truth in Comedy: The Manual of Improvisation* by Charna Halpern, Del Close and Kim “Howard” Johnson (required)

*Improvisation and the Theatre* by Viola Spolin (recommended)

*Daily Rituals: How Artists Work* by Mason Currey (recommended)

*Art and Fear: Observations on The Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking* by David Bayles and Ted Orlando (recommended)

**Recommended Preparation** Read the suggested chapters or watch the suggested videos for discussion. Be on time. Wear clothing you can move in. Come willing to be silly, inquisitive, and supportive. Wear your mask, wash your hands, stay home and attend remotely if you are sick.

**Course Notes on Attendance**

This is a performance class, all “the good stuff” happens in class. Missing class means missing points for the in-class exercises and discussions, which will impact your grade. Also, being late or leaving early will cost you a participation point. You may participate in class remotely if you are sick and I do offer the option to make up 12 points if the need to miss class completely/arrive late/leave early arises. Use those missed classes wisely. We are in a pandemic and things might come up. Twelve points is all I offer, so make the effort to stay healthy and present in class. Please inform me immediately if you have **any injuries or conditions** that prevent you from participating fully in class. Strive to come to class, we can IMPROVISE a solution!

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

**Grades are not dictated by** the success of scenes and exercises or the instructor's subjective opinion of talent, intellect or sense of humor.

### **Grades are dictated by:**

Points. Each aspect of class has a point value: participation, in-class exercises, Midterm and Final. I provide options to make up 12 points max per semester. Details listed under "Make-Up Options".

#### **Participation (15 points, total):**

- In-class active student analysis of presented materials such as text and video clips
- Constructive feedback on classmates' work
- Willingness to experiment and apply the constructive feedback of instructor and the other students to one's own work
- Total focus on the moment and the work at hand
- If a student is late or leaves early, they will lose their participation point for that day

#### **Classwork (52 points, total):**

- Due to the performance aspect of improv and theatre games, exercises and homework assignments will be presented "live" during class time
- If a student misses an exercise/assignment, student accepts that they have missed their opportunity to play and will lose points which will impact their grade
- Student invests fully, striving to be open and honest and improve over time
- Student regularly "steps out" to join scenes and support their classmates

#### **Midterm (15 points):**

- The Midterm is a video worth 15 points, due at the beginning of the Midterm period, and should be no less than 4 minutes and no more than 5
- The Midterm is submitted electronically, via Blackboard or Google Drive (TBD)
- Tech problems happen. Please plan ahead and give yourself time to handle any surprise situations. No late videos accepted, Blackboard discussion board will close.
- Not posting a video on time will result in a loss of 15 points, which will impact your grade

#### **Final (18 points):**

- The Final paper is worth 18 points, due at the beginning of the Final period.
- The Final will be submitted electronically, via Blackboard.
- Tech problems happen. Please plan ahead and give yourself time to handle any surprise situations. No late papers or electronic submissions accepted.
- Not posting a paper on time will result in a loss of 18 points, which will impact your grade.

#### **Make-up options:**

- If you must miss an in-class exercise or assignment, you may make up 12 points, total, by Friday, December 3rd (last day of classes) at 11:59pm. Blackboard closes at 11:59pm.
- You may make up **8 points** by performing in an improv show.  
You must submit a clip or photographic evidence and two hearty paragraphs on the experience via the specific discussion board on Blackboard in order to receive credit.
- You may make up **6 points** by attending a live improv show.  
You must post a photo of ticket or show AND two hearty paragraphs on the experience via the specific discussion board on Blackboard
- You may make up **4 points** by interviewing someone or improvising a character monologue and posting the clip to the specific discussion board on Blackboard
- Technical or link issues will result in a loss of points, double check your submission
- Make-up points cannot take you over 100 points, or replace the Midterm or Final

### Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation	15	15
Class Exercises	52	52
Midterm Video	15	15
Final Paper	18	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

**Excellent: A (4) = 100-96; A- (3.7) = 95-90**

**Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80**

**Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70**

**Poor: D (.7-1.3) = 60's**

**Fail: F (0) = 59 and below**

### Assignment Submission Policy

All exercises are presented in class, no electronic submissions of in-class exercises accepted. Make up work, Midterm videos, and Final papers will be submitted online via Blackboard.

### Grading Timeline

I will review your make up work within 48 hours of submission, between T-Th. I am happy to discuss your grade with you at any time, please make an appointment.

### Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

### Course evaluation

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. You should expect to receive an email update once the system has launched to provide your feedback on this course. In addition, you are always welcome to connect with me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

### Auditing Student Policy

Auditing students attend class strictly as an observer and will not participate.

## Additional Policies

Absolutely no distractions while in class. No eating, drinking, social media, or phones, while in class. We need to focus and shut out the noise so we can make our own! (Corny? You betcha!)

## Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Text in **bold** indicates **assignment requiring preparation**.

*(This timeline is subject to change depending on the dynamics, pace and unpredictability of the creative process of any given class. Being in class ensures you are aware of any changes.)*

## EDI @SDA: Professional Development/Mandatory EDI Training

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

As part of our EDI initiatives and call to action, some workshops will be offered to faculty and staff and to students. Competencies that will be included: Anti-Racism (Faculty/Staff) and Equity Mindedness (Faculty/Staff), and then Theater Intimacy & Building Cultures of Consent (Students, Faculty/Staff). More details will follow. NOTE: All SDA classes will be cancelled to support involvement in this effort.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
<b>Week 1</b>	Warm-up, introductions and discussion of syllabus (our contract)	Ch. 1 <i>Truth in Comedy</i> What is Improv, Anyway?	To discuss in week 2
<b>Week 2</b>	Discussion of reading In-class exercises	Ch. 2 <i>Truth in Comedy</i> But, Seriously Folks...	To discuss in week 3
<b>Week 3</b>	Discussion of reading In-class exercises	Ch. 3 <i>Truth in Comedy</i> Support and Trust	To discuss in week 4
<b>Week 4</b>	Discussion of reading In-class exercises	Ch. 4 <i>Truth in Comedy</i> Agreement	To discuss in week 5
<b>Week 5</b>	Discussion of reading In-class exercises	Ch. 5 <i>Truth in Comedy</i> Initiations and Game Moves	To discuss in week 6
<b>Week 6</b>	Discussion of reading In-class exercises Review what is needed for the Midterm	<b>Write Midterm Paper</b> assessing progress in class and goals going forward Post to Bb Discussion Board	<b>Due by the beginning of your Midterm period, week 7, Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>, 3:59pm</b>
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>MIDTERM</b> Discussion of paper discoveries and insights In-class exercises	<b>No homework</b>	<b>Relax and enjoy!</b>
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>Online Improv via Zoom</b> Games to develop interview skills and a deeper connection	Watch Episode 1 Middleditch & Schwartz	To discuss in week 9
<b>Week 9</b>	Discussion of Episode 1 In-class exercises	Ch. 6 <i>Truth in Comedy</i> Moment to Moment to Moment	To discuss in week 10
<b>Week 10</b>	Discussion of reading In-class exercises	Ch. 7 <i>Truth in Comedy</i> Building a Scene	To discuss in week 11
<b>Week 11</b>	Discussion of reading In-class exercises	Ch. 8 <i>Truth in Comedy</i> One Mind, Many Bodies	To discuss in week 12

<b>Week 12</b>	Discussion of reading In-class exercises	Ch. 9 <i>Truth in Comedy</i> Environmentally Aware	To discuss in week 13
<b>Week 13</b>	First Improv Jam- Games and scenes Decide which games and scenes we'd like to play	Watch Episode 3 Middleditch & Schwartz	To discuss in week 14
<b>Week 14</b>	Second Improv Jam- Games and scenes Finalize which games and scenes we'd like to play	<b>Write Final Paper:</b> What are your new skills? How do you plan on using these skills going forward? How could they be helpful in school, work, relationships, and creativity?	<b>Due by the beginning of your Final: Dec. 14<sup>th</sup> at 4:30pm</b>
<b>FINAL</b>	<b>FINAL Improv Jam- Guests encouraged and welcomed!</b>		<b>Thank you for working with me! Enjoy your Winter break.</b>

### **KEY DATES**

Friday, Sept. 10: Last day to add or drop this class without a "W", or to select "P/NP"

Friday, October 8: Last day to change "P/NP" to letter grade

Thursday – Friday, October 14-15: Fall Recess

Friday, November 12: Last day to drop this class with a mark of "W"

Wednesday – Sunday, November 24-28: Thanksgiving Break

Friday, December 3: Fall semester classes end

Saturday – Tuesday, December 4-7: Study Days

Wednesday – Wednesday, December 8-15: Exams

Wednesday – Sunday, December 16-January 9: Winter Break

### **Additional Notes**

- ***No food or drinks are allowed during class at any time, per Covid protocols.***

**Welcome to Improv and Theatre Games, dear students! It is a joy and privilege to get to know each of you through our collaborative and creative exploration of what happens at the intersection of humanity and circumstance. Do good work, endeavor to know yourself better, risk a little, support each other, make lasting friendships, and reveal your true self in your work and play. We are going to have a blast together!**

**Judith Shelton (Jude)**

## **SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities\* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

\*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

### **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 GFS 120 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) 814-4618 (Vidoe Phone), (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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#### **Health and Participation in Class**

You are expected to complete your Trojan Check screener daily and, as your instructor, I may ask you to show your daily screening in class. Your health and safety, and the health and safety of your peers, are my top priorities. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you must follow the instructions on Trojan Check. My hope is that if you are feeling ill or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, you will stay home to protect others. I will ensure that you can continue to participate in class remotely so that your education is not disrupted.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC requires that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors including in classrooms. Face coverings must cover your nose and mouth and be worn throughout the class session. A mask with a valve is not considered an adequate face covering and should not be used, as it can expel exhaled air, increasing the risk to others. Eating or drinking during class is prohibited because of the risk posed by removing your mask for these activities. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in your being asked to leave the classroom immediately. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering and eating/drinking policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

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**SDA Student Support & Reporting Form:**

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

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**Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health* - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.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 – 24/7 on call  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

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 Services (RSVP)* - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)* - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298  
[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment* - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298 usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Student Accessibility Services* - (213) 740-0776  
<https://osas.usc.edu>

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Campus Support and Intervention* - (213) 821-4710  
[campussupport.usc.edu](http://campussupport.usc.edu)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC* - (213) 740-2101

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC*: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, 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) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.