

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 122
Improvisation and Theatre Games
Section 62624
Units: 2
Spring 2022
Tuesdays 4-550pm
Location: MCC 111

Instructor: Zachary Steel
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***WEEKS 1 & 2 WILL BE ON ZOOM. PLEASE CHECK BLACKBOARD FOR LINK.**

Course Description

Through improv-based theatre games and exercises, this class explores how to quiet our inner critic, access our most organic and 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. We are all capable of excelling in this work. This class is a laboratory to discover how we uniquely thrive within the structures of improv performance. 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.

Learning Objectives

The goals for this course are as follows:

- To identify the fundamental ingredients of an improv scene
- To recognize the structure of various theatre games
- To implement the principles of improv during in-class exercises
- 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

Impro 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. These will take the form of journal entries and be graded on thoroughness, application of ideas and principles studied in class, and clarity of thought.

The **FINAL** will be an improv jam on the last day of class. It will be structured like a full length improv performance. During the final period, we will review the recording of the jam **over zoom**. This is the most important part of the process, and therefore your final grade is dependent on your participation in the jam AND your presence and participation in the video review.

Regular Weekly Attendance is the only way to get high points for **Participation** and **Class Work** in Improv class. This is an activity course, missing even one class will lower your participation grade. Arriving at the start of class ready to work is part of your participation grade. If you are to be absent, e-mail the instructor to verify the reason. Please inform the instructor immediately if you have **any injuries or any conditions** that might prevent you from participating fully in the class. No cell phone use in class unless instructed.

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

Grades will generally be posted within a week of submission.

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 with me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

Additional Policies

- Learning in class depends on the presence and participation of each individual student at a high commitment level. Points may be deducted for missed in-class work, in the event of absence or tardiness. In the event of an absence, you are responsible for the content of any missed class time. You must be ready to work at the start of each class.
- If you are going to be absent for COVID reasons or any other reason, it is required that you inform me in advance of the class, not thirty minutes before class or after class has begun.
- Please wear clothing in which you can move freely and comfortably. Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. Hats are generally discouraged. Acting can get messy, plan accordingly.
- Please reserve break-time activities for before and after class. Depending on the day's flow, we may or may not take an official break in the hour and fifty minutes of class — you should be prepared to stay active in the class, both as performer and audience.
- Please don't eat in class unless absolutely necessary and please never chew gum.
- If you are required to quarantine, we will come up with a solution so your educational experience will continue until you return to 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

This schedule is subject to change based on the flow and needs of the class.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1 (ON ZOOM)	Syllabus Review, Class introduction		
Week 2 (ON ZOOM)	Discussion: Improv History Activity: Basic Improv Games	To be read: The Comedy Improv Handbook: Section I Improv History	
Week 3	Discussion: The Fundamentals of Improv Activity: Basic Improv games	To be read: The Comedy Improv Handbook: Section II Improv Rules	
Week 4	Activity: Basic Improv games, establishing “the where”	Suggested Reading for week 4: <u>Improvisation for the Theatre</u> by Viola Spolin	
Week 5	Activity – Basic Improv games establishing “the what”		Due 2/7 @ 11pm Self-Assessment #1
Week 6	Activity: Basic Improv games establishing “the who”		
Week 7	Activity: Basic Improv games establishing “the who”	Homework: Bring in an impersonation of a loved one. More details will be discussed in class.	
Week 8	Activity – Short form Improv games	Suggested Reading for week 7: <u>Improv</u> by Keith Johnstone	
Week 9	Activity – Short form Improv games		
SPRING BREAK 3/13-3/20			
Week 10	Activity – Long form Improv games	Suggested Reading for week 11: <u>The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual</u> by Besser, Roberts, Walsh	
Week 11	Activity – Long form Improv games		Due 3/28 @ 11pm Improv Report
Week 12	Improv review and “Jam” prep		
Week 13	Improv review and “Jam” prep		

Week 14	Improv review and "Jam" prep		
Week 15	Invited Improv Jam	Suggested Reading for week 15: <u>Free Play</u> by Stephen Nachmanovitch	Due 4/27 @ 11pm Self-Assessment #2
FINAL (ON ZOOM)	Review Video of Improv Jam		Date: Tuesday, May 10 th , 430pm – 630pm

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. 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.

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.

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/>).

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>

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
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

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

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, 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

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

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, 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

Non-emergency assistance or information.