

USC School of Dramatic Arts

Theatre 404: Acting Theory

Section #62666R -- 4 units

Spring 2022 -- Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:50 p.m.

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Office Hours: Office hours by appointment via email.

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Course Description

Methods of acting from the eighteenth century to the present are explored through a combination of historical readings, practical exercises, and graded performances. Major issues that will organize class include: How do we describe what the actor does? Do different rehearsal techniques lead to different kinds of performances? How do actors from diverse backgrounds create characters and tell stories? How do we evaluate performance given changing times, media, and different cultures? What are the power dynamics in actor training that contribute to discrimination in the business of acting? The course combines academic study with acting.

Prerequisite(s): THTR 101 and THTR 125

Recommended Preparation: Intermediate/advanced acting and critical studies courses.

Learning Objectives

- Build knowledge and appreciation about the long and diverse history of acting.
- Create awareness of the power dynamics in acting classes that contribute to discrimination with regard to race, gender, and disabilities.
- Sharpen critical thinking through readings and analytical assignments.
- Apply acting skills (i.e. relaxation, concentration, attention, observation, and imagination) to the various techniques studied in this course.
- Experience the rehearsal and performance differences in the techniques studied in the course through monologues and exercises performed in class.

Learner Outcomes

- Demonstrate knowledge about the history of acting through discussions and short reflective papers on the acting techniques studied in class.
- Develop expertise on one topic in the history of acting through a researched presentation, delivered to the full class.
- Practice critical thinking through low-stakes assignments and class discussions.
- Consolidate acting skills (i.e. relaxation, concentration, attention, observation, and imagination) by applying them to the techniques studied in this course.
- Rehearse at home and perform in class three graded monologues in order to (a) further develop your acting skills; and (b) experience the differences among the major acting techniques.
- Examine the power dynamics in acting classes that contribute to discrimination through a culmination project.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

- The platforms for this course are Blackboard, Zoom, the USC email system, and the USC room as assigned.
- Research can be conducted through electronic resources at the USC Library.
- A device that has a webcam, microphone, and internet access is necessary.
- Written work can be submitted as Word docs or as a PDF.

Course Notes for the Online Environment

- **PARTICIPATION:** You are expected to participate fully in all classes, whether on-ground or online (asynchronous sessions through Blackboard and synchronous classes on zoom). Participation in asynchronous and synchronous classes and low-stakes assignments is mandatory to achieve full credit for the course. If you cannot attend a session (either online or in person), or if you have internet issues during any online session, contact Dr. Carnicke or Ms. Sabo as soon as possible.
- **ON-GROUND:** For the safety of all, you are responsible for following all USC, SDA, and LA County COVID protocols, when present in class and on campus.
- **NETIQUETTE:**
 1. Dress (at least from the waist up) and act as if this were a professional commitment—because it is. Many job interviews and professional gigs now happen online, so think of this as practice.
 2. Keep your camera on (so we all can see you), mute your microphone (to avoid feedback) unless you are speaking, and log on as individuals. If you have bandwidth or connectivity problems that make it best to keep your camera off, please speak with me or our CA about it.
 3. **All times for my links are LA time**, so adjust accordingly if you are in another time zone.
 4. If for any reason my internet goes down during a class session, I will reconnect as soon as I am able. If your internet goes down, communicate with me or our CA as soon as possible.
 5. Courtesy dictates that you turn off your cell phone and do not surf the web on your laptop during class sessions on zoom.
 6. If at any time you are unable to make a synchronous class or meet a Blackboard or zoom assignment deadline, email Dr. Carnicke or Ms. Sabo immediately.
- See below for notes on due dates and submission of assignments.

Course Norms

Please respect all members of the class; bring a collaborative attitude to all course sessions; and show a disciplined commitment to the course assignments. A lack in any of these areas will impact the final grade.

Required Materials

The following materials have been ordered for you at the USC Bookstore (USCTEXT.com):

1. *Digital THTR 404 Course Reader:*
 - Available for purchase at <https://shop.universitycustompublishing.com/select-school/>
 - Information on the purchase and usage of the digital reader will be posted on Blackboard.
 - **IMPORTANT NOTE:** You need the *Course Reader* for the first week of school! GET THIS ASAP.
2. Hodge, *Actor Training*, Routledge, ISBN: 9780415471688, e-copy available
3. Malague, *An Actress Prepares*, Routledge, ISBN: 9780415681575, e-copy available
4. Baron and Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, U. of Michigan Press, ISBN: 9780472050253, e-copy available
5. Margolis and Tyler Renaud, *The Politics of American Actor Training*, Routledge, ISBN: 9780415896535, e-copy available
 - **NOTE:** This book will be used for the Culmination Project.

Recommended Sources:

Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (Routledge).

Anton Chekhov, *Four Plays and Three Jokes* (Hackett).

- This translation is required if you choose to perform a Chekhov monologue.

Assignment Submission Policy

- Required dates, submission information, and the list of presentation topics will be posted on Blackboard. Weekly announcements will help keep you on track and let you know of any necessary adjustments to the schedule.
- All performances and presentations are scheduled for class sessions.
- Written work will be submitted through Blackboard.
- No late work will be accepted for graded assignments.
- If you have conflicts or issues with the timely submission of assignments, contact Dr. Carnicke or Ms. Sabo in advance of the deadlines.

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Breakdown

A: Three graded performances with written reports -- 60% of Final Grade

- The same monologue will be performed using three different acting techniques in order to experience how the techniques studied in class lead to different performance results.
- Each performance will be accompanied by a 2 page performance report.

Monologue Choice and Performances:

- Submit your monologue choice during the first week of class for suggestions and approval.
- Given the range of techniques that we will study, a monologue with heightened language (a verse play from any culture or an ancient play) would allow you the greatest scope for exploration. A monologue from a Chekhov farce (chosen from *Four Plays and Three Jokes*) would also be acceptable.
- It is wise to choose a monologue that you have not previously performed in another class or a production in order to insure that you approach the work with fresh eyes.
- It is also wise to choose a monologue from a play with which you are familiar or have studied in another class.
- Your monologue should be no longer than two minutes (about half a page); judicious cutting is allowed.
- Each of the three performances should be rehearsed and memorized as demonstrated in class.

Prompt for the 2-Page Performance Reports:

Address each of the following issues in your paper, using specific examples from the readings or from the class discussions to explain what you mean:

1. Summarize what specific work you did to prepare for your performance (about a paragraph).
2. Explain how your preparation fits into the historical technique under discussion in class by referring to class materials and discussions in your explanation. You must incorporate class work into your paper for full credit (about a page to a page-and-a-half).
3. Assess what you have accomplished and what else you might try if you were to perform this assignment again (about a paragraph).

Other Information on Performances:

“How to Rehearse”:

- Working demonstrations of the technique under study will be held in class to help you prepare for each performance.
- Volunteers will be drawn from class participants. If you wish to volunteer, please make that known in advance.

In-Class Rehearsals:

- Come to rehearsals having prepared your work in advance. If you are unprepared, you forfeit your opportunity to work.
- In-class rehearsals are intended to give you feedback on your performance prior to its being graded, not as a substitute for out-of-class rehearsals.

B: Two Other Graded Assignments -- 40% of Final Grade

1. **A Five-Minute In-Class Presentation** on a topic that enhances the course material. Topics with due dates will be distributed in the first week. These presentations are intended to spark discussion, and therefore will be held to the time limit. A one page written outline with a bibliography of 2 to 4 sources will be due at the time of the presentation.
2. **A Final Culmination Project:** A written report (3 pages max.) and an oral version (2 min. max) due at the Final Examination, on the power structures that undergird acting classes. This project will require you to select and analyze a chapter of your choice from *The Politics of American Actor Training*.

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.

Grading Breakdown and Scale

The graded assignments will be weighted as detailed above. P/NP assignments will affect your final grade if you neglect them with NP being counted as an F. The final course grade is determined according to the following scale:

Excellent:	A	95-100
Excellent:	A-	90-94
Good:	B+	87-89
Good:	B	83-86
Good:	B-	80-82
Average:	C+	77-79
Average:	C	73-76
Average:	C-	70-72
Poor:	D+	67-69
Poor:	D	63-66
Poor:	D-	60-62
Failing:	F	59 and below

"Excellent" means that clear understanding of the class material is coupled with original and creative insight; "good" means that the class material has been understood clearly; "average" means that the class material has been generally understood, but gaps in understanding remain; "poor" means that there are identifiable gaps in the understanding of class material; "failure" means that there is poor understanding of the class content by term's end; and/or gaps in the successful completion of work; and/or a lack of responsibility toward the class ensemble.

When the raw average of all assignments falls between two grades, the final grade will reflect the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance, participation and responsibility to the class have been good, but will reflect the negative end of the scale when attendance, participation and responsibility have been lacking. If poor attendance, participation and/or responsibility have impacted the class ensemble or your project partner's ability to work, your grade will be lowered further.

Grading Timeline

Every effort will be made to turn back work in a timely fashion. Grades and Feedback will be available through Blackboard.

Additional Course Policies

1. If you are not a native speaker of English and/or you are an international student, make an appointment with Dr. Carnicke in the first two weeks to determine whether language accommodations might be necessary.
2. If you have a religious holiday or any other conflict, inform Dr. Carnicke or Ms. Sabo during the first two weeks.
3. Any work that does not fulfill the required assignment is an automatic F.
4. If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W.
5. I will be happy to discuss your work at any time during the semester, and I encourage each of you to meet with me at least once before the scheduled exam.
6. For USC Policies, see below.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

NOTE: All Dates are Subject to USC and SDA Policy Changes.

Course Introduction (1 week)

- 1: Week of Jan. 11/13:
- Introductions to the course and to each other
 - Submit for approval your choice of monologue for the course no later than Friday at noon.
 - Assignment of Topics for Presentations.

MODULE I: Coquelin and Gestural Acting (3½ weeks)

- 2: Week of Jan. 18/20:
- Readings: Selections on Coquelin, Garrick, Clairon, and Delsarte, and drawings from 19th century acting text books in the *Course Reader*.
 - Presentations on Coquelin, the rivalry of Clairon and Dumesnil, Delsarte, Ira Aldridge
 - "How to Rehearse" via Coquelin's Method
- 3: Week of Jan. 25, 27
- 4a: Tuesday, Feb. 1
- In-class rehearsals

REGISTRATION NOTE: Friday, Jan. 28, is the last day to add/drop this class without a "W" or to select the "P/NP" option.

- 4b: Thursday, Feb. 3:
- FIRST GRADED PERFORMANCE AND REPORT USING COQUELIN'S METHOD**
- 5a: Tuesday, Feb. 8
- Physical/Gestural Acting in Film and Contemporary Theatre
 - Readings: Chapters 7 and 8 in *Reframing Screen Performance*
 - Presentations on physical acting: Laban, Mei Lanfang, Viewpoints, Suzuki Technique

MODULE II: Early Stanislavsky and Inner Acting (4 weeks)

- 5b: Thursday, Feb. 10
- Readings: Selections on Salvini and Nemirovich-Danchenko in the *Course Reader*
 - Presentations on Duse, Nemirovich-Danchenko, and Salvini

- 6: Week of February 15, 17
- Early Stanislavsky reading, the chapter on Stanislavsky in *Actor Training*.
 - First Studio Exercises
 - “How to Rehearse” via the Moscow Art Theatre’s inner monologue

7: Week of Feb. 22, 24

- 8a: Tuesday, March 1
- In-class rehearsals

REGISTRATION NOTE: Friday, Feb. 25, is the last day to drop a course without a “W” or to change “P/NP” to a letter grade.

8b: Thursday, March 3
SECOND GRADED PERFORMANCE AND REPORT USING THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE’S INNER MONOLOGUE

- 9a: Tuesday, March 8
- Inner Monologues in film-acting
 - Presentations on Elizabeth Taylor, Toshiro Mifune, Jennifer Lawrence, The American Negro Theatre

MODULE III: Late Stanislavsky and Action (3 weeks)

- 9b: Thursday, March 10
- Readings: review chapter on Stanislavsky and Stanislavsky readings from *An Actor Prepares* in *Course Reader*
 - How to Rehearse using Playable Verbs

Spring Recess—No Classes on March 15, 17

- 10: Week of March 22, 24
- In-Class rehearsals

11a: Tuesday, March 29
THIRD GRADED PERFORMANCE AND REPORT USING PLAYABLE VERBS

11b: Thursday, March 31*

- 12a: Tuesday, April 5
- Active Analysis and Maria Knebel
 - Reading, Chapter on Maria Knebel in *Actor Training*
 - Presentations on Soviet censorship of Stanislavsky and Maria Knebel
 - In-Class Exercise on Active Analysis (Scenarios)

MODULE IV: The American Method (2½ weeks)

- 12b: Thursday, April 7
- Readings: chapter on The Method in *Actor Training*; and “A Dream of Passion” selection on Strasberg in the *Course Reader*
 - Presentations on The American Lab Theatre, the Group Theatre, the Actors Studio

REGISTRATION NOTE: Friday, April 8, is the last day to drop this course with a mark of “W.”

- 13: Week of April 12, 14
- Focus on Strasberg and Adler
 - Read chapters on Strasberg and Adler in *An Actress Prepares*
 - Exercises from Strasberg and Adler
- 14: Week of April 19, 21
- Read chapter on Meisner in *An Actress Prepares*
 - Exercises from Meisner
 - Presentations on Ivana Chubbuck, Uta Hagen, Michael Chekhov Technique

Course Conclusions (1 week)

- 15: Week of April 26, 28
- REPEAT ONE SELECTED MONOLOGUE FROM THE COURSE IN ORDER TO PERFECT THE PERFORMANCE
 - Readings: Introduction to *An Actress Prepares*; Chapter 6 in *Reframing Screen Performance*; and David Wiles, "Why Johnny Can't Act" and Ed Hooks in the *Course Reader*
 - Concluding Discussion

Final Examination Date:

Thursday, May 5, 2-4: Written reports and oral presentations of Culminating Projects are due.

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 (Video 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.