

**Improv 1: Improv and Theatre Games (THTR 122)**  
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Office hours by appointment

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**Improv and Theatre Games (122)** That is the official name of this class, however, I really want to change the name to “**Gifts of Imperfection!**” Being ok with failure is key to appreciate what we are going to learn in this class. So much so, that your grades depend on it! We will explore with *reckless abandon* the art of improvisation and the key to that exploration, is failure. *Without judgment and with courage!* To risk, to fail and still strive to do their best, *spent themselves at a worthy cause, and prepared to fail while daring greatly* (h/t Teddy Roosevelt\* See below) In both life and improv, failure is inevitable. You don't always win. You can, however, learn from that failure, pick yourself up with great enthusiasm, and place yourself in the arena again.

We will learn to have courage, to be vulnerable and be affected by the other person's emotional choices, supporting them and making our scene partner look good. We will explore all of this like a trapeze artist, big huge jumps across chasms to the waiting arms of our scene partner, who will accept our ideas. If things should go wrong and we miss the jump, we will spring back up from the safety net of our classmates below us. This is a workshop course, in which each student actively participates in every class. There are usually no written midterms or exams. However, *students must attend class for the Final Exam period during its regularly scheduled time.*

## **GRADING**

Grades are based on the quality of participation (i.e. frequency of attendance (30%), supportiveness of fellow students (45%), commitment to the exercises (20%), enthusiasm for learning and improvement (5%), at each student's own capability.) Students are NOT judged on their mastery of each exercise, but on their willingness to **COMMIT ENTHUSIASTICALLY** to each exercise or scene. I strongly encourage you to use this class as an opportunity to trust yourselves, have fun, and take risks!

**ONE** as in 1, absence is permitted per semester, excused or unexcused, other than documented medical explanations. Each absence after the first will result in a 1/2 point grade drop (e.g. from an A to an A-). Lateness is not allowed and *two lates are recorded as an absence.*

## CLASS RULES:

Be fiercely supportive and respectful of each other. During other students' scenes, please **DO NOT TALK. DO NOT TEXT. DO NOT CHECK CELL PHONES.** There will be a brief break at the halfway mark, so you will have an opportunity then to take personal time. **DO NOT DO OTHER CLASS HOMEWORK.** These actions will cause your grades to drop immediately. Pay attention to your classmates' work onstage. You will learn as much from their participation as your own.

Show up every week. Come to play. Commit to the warm up. *Muster your energy and play hard.* Be supportive and respectful of each other. Be vulnerable! Be prepared to be on your feet for the entire class. Exhibit a concrete desire to improve your skills. Do all this: You get an A.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an in-depth study of improvised scene work. We will explore the primary tools for creating improvised scenes and developing full characters. You will be encouraged to make strong emotional and character choices. This course emphasizes character development through exercises and scene work, while introducing advanced improv theory and technique. We will continue to explore the WHY ("today is important") of the scene.

We will also review/reinforce the basic concepts of improv:

- The Power of Yes compels you!
- Yes And...ing
- Yes And...Because...ing
- Strong active listening skills!
- Ensemble Building
- Teamwork, what someone else is offering is more important than your idea.
- Making SEC! (Strong Emotional Choices)
- Raising the stakes...(Killing the Vampire)
- Commitment and how not to fear relationships.
- Being Specific. Be very, very, specific.
- Operating at the height of your intelligence.

- Relationships\* Relationships\* Relationships\* \*See commitment
- Justification and support. Be a team supporter!
- Triangulation in scenes and life. The Tilt!
- Listening skills for life AND BEYOND!

## **EMPHASIS ON STORY, THROUGH CHARACTER**

A character is a person you create who is, in at least one very specific way, unlike yourself. This can be a behavioral aspect, a different value system, point of view, demeanor, IQ, cultural context, etc. How does your character view the world and the people around you? This course gives you a great opportunity to use your imagination and try out behaviors and attitudes that might be very different from your own.

A character is not merely an accent, a posture, a repeated catch phrase or an overly broad stereotype void of original features. For the character to be effective it must be grounded in reality. I encourage you to observe people around you and keep a notebook of your observations. What character traits make you laugh? Frustrate you? Pay attention to specifics/details. You will be asked to create at least 2 original fully-formed characters in this course.

These characters and their relationships will create a story. If we are in the moment and listening to each other by being in the moment the stories will reveal themselves to us.

## **FOCUS ON CHANGE TO DISCOVER STORY**

A story has a beginning, middle and end. However, it's what happens to our characters during those events that causes them to change. That change is what makes a story so satisfying. Who is our character and how do they handle the situation in front of them? Do they evolve emotionally based on what has happened to them? Character is story, and if story means change then characters changing is what makes a great story.

## **OBJECTIVE**

To understand and learn the basic tenets of improvisation and how it can be applied to storytelling, the workplace, acting and being human. To live in the moment and trust that being in that moment and keeping our mind focused on 'now' is a lesson all its own.

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## **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 the Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video 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 the 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](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](http://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.

## **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

### **Academic Conduct**

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## **Standards**

**<https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. 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>.**

**Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the Department of Public Safety <http://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person.**

**The Center for Women and Men <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources. Support Systems A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.**

## **The Office of Disability Services and Programs**

**[http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.**

*\*“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.” - Theodore Roosevelt*