

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## Theatre 404: Acting Theory

Section #62666R -- 4 units  
Spring 2023 -- Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:50 p.m.  
The Massman Theatre

### Dr. Sharon M. Carnicke

Professor of Theatre and Slavic Languages and Literatures  
116 DRC

**Office Hours:** By appointment via email.

**Contact Info:** [carnicke@usc.edu](mailto:carnicke@usc.edu)

### 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.

### Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

- The platforms for this course the USC room assigned, Blackboard, Zoom and the USC email system.
- Research can be conducted through electronic resources at the USC Library.

- A device that has a webcam, microphone, and internet access, as well as standard office software (including a power point for presentations and document/pdf software for written work) is necessary for this course.
- Presentations in class may be shared directly via Power Point or through Zoom.
- Written work must be submitted as **Word docs or PDFs** for files to open properly on Blackboard.

### **Class Session Notes**

This course will be conducted in person and will follow the policies and protocols for health and safety as established by USC and by LA City and County Officials. Zoom will be used for in-class presentations and for emergency purposes only. (See also **Course Norms and Expectations** below).

#### WHEN ON-GROUND:

- Arrive promptly and in compliance with health and safety protocols
- Bring reading and course materials with you to class.
- Be ready to participate.
- As per USC policy, only absences for religious holidays are excused. All other absences count. Should you need to miss class due to illness or emergencies, reach out to me and your peers, to help you catch up on any missed work. (See **Attendance** below.)
- Feel free to communicate with me about any difficulties you may be experiencing in class.

#### IF THE COURSE MUST MOVE ON-LINE:

- 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 about it.
- All times for Zoom links are given in LA time, so adjust accordingly if you are in another time zone.
- 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 as soon as possible.

### **Course Norms and Expectations**

**PARTICIPATION:** You are expected to participate fully in all classes, whether on-ground or online. If at any time you are unable to attend class, email me immediately. Participation and good communication about absences is mandatory **to achieve full credit** for the course.

**PREPARATION:** You are expected to arrive in class with your text and **having read and thought about the assignment** for that day. For in-class rehearsals, arrive having rehearsed at home prior to showing your work.

**ENSEMBLE:** We will function as an ensemble for this term's seminar. You are therefore expected to respect all members of the class; to work collaboratively with each other; and to show responsibility toward each other by fulfilling the course assignments.

**ATTENDANCE:** Attendance and punctuality are mandatory to build our ensemble. *You will forfeit your right to participate in class if you arrive late or come unprepared.* If you are ill, please do not come to class. I and your peers will help you catch up. Absences for auditions or professional work will also be counted as regular absences. (See also **Extracurricular Commitments and ISPs** below.) If you are unable to attend a class or will be late for any reason, email me in advance.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** While the content of each class session may be adjusted to accommodate the pace of class, due dates for graded assignments will not change. No late work will be accepted and students are expected to manage their time in accord with the due dates. If you have an unforeseen emergency, email me immediately.

**TECHNOLOGY:** Courtesy dictates that you put your cell phone away and do not surf the web on your laptop during class sessions.

**A pattern of lateness and/or absence and/or a lack in any of the expectations outlined here can significantly impact your final grade.** (See **Grading Breakdown** below.)

## Required Materials

The following materials have been ordered for you at the USC Bookstore (USCTEXT.com). You must purchase the Course Reader through the Bookstore (purchase instructions on Blackboard), but you may secure the other books online, if you prefer..

1. *Course Reader*. **IMPORTANT: You need this Course Reader for the first week of school!**
2. Hodge, *Actor Training*, (Routledge), e-copy available
3. Carnicke, *Dynamic Acting Through Active Analysis* (Methuen), e-copy available
4. Malague, *An Actress Prepares*, (Routledge), e-copy available
5. Anton Chekhov, *Four Plays and Three Jokes* (Hackett)

## Recommended Materials:

1. Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (Routledge)
2. Baron and Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, (U. of Michigan Press), e-copy available
3. Margolis and Tyler Renaud, *The Politics of American Actor Training*, (Routledge), e-copy available

## 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. See [The USC Student Handbook – Policies and Policy Governance](#) for full details.

## Assignment Submission Policy

- Required dates, submission information, and presentation topics will be posted on Blackboard. Weekly announcements will help keep you on track and alert you to any adjustments in the schedule.
- All performances and presentations must be given during class sessions as scheduled.
- Written work will be submitted through Blackboard via Word or PDF.
- No late work will be accepted for graded assignments.
- If you have conflicts with the timely submission of assignments, contact me **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.
- **The monologue must be chosen from either a verse play (from any culture or from an ancient drama) or from a Chekhov play (chosen from *Four Plays and Three Jokes*). If you choose Chekhov, you are required to use my translation.**
- It is wise to choose a monologue that you have not previously performed 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:

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: An Active Analysis Etude on an assigned scene from Chekhov (P/NP)**

- To be performed in class as assigned.

**C: 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. You may deliver a low-tech talk or use a Power Point, shared directly with the class or through Zoom. A one page written outline or your Power Point with a bibliography of 3 to 4 sources will also be due at the time of the presentation.
2. **The Final Examination will be in two parts:** (a) Submit to Blackboard a written response of 1-2 pages to a question to be posed in the assignment instructions on Blackboard; and (b) during the in-person final examination session, repeat a monologue assignment of your choice in order to perfect it. **The final examination is scheduled as required by the university. Please make any travel arrangements with this final date and time in mind.**

**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/or responsibility toward the work in class have been lacking.

If you have a pattern of repeated absences, a lack of participation in class discussions/exercises and late submission of assignments/papers, your final grade will be lowered further by as much as one half to one full grade.

### 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 need any learning accommodations, be sure to contact the USC Office of Disabilities (see **Support Systems** below) and present a letter with your approved accommodations to Dr. Carnicke in the first weeks of the semester and before any assignments are due.
2. If you are a non-native speaker of English and/or an international student, make an appointment with Dr. Carnicke in the first two weeks to determine whether language accommodations might be helpful.
3. If you have a religious holiday or any other conflict, inform me during the first two weeks.
4. Any work that does not fulfill the required assignment is an automatic F.
5. If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W.
6. 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.
7. For further SDA and USC Policies, see below.

### Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown (All Dates are Subject to USC/SDA Changes.)

**NOTE:** For each unit of in-class contact time, USC also expects, on average, two hours of out of class student work per week over a semester. This course is 4 units of in-class time with an expected eight hours on average of out of class work per week.

Tu Jan. 10: Course Introduction

Meet and greet; discussion of the goals for the course; assignment of Presentation Topics/Dates

- **Reading:** The Syllabus
- **DUE: Submit for approval your choice of monologue no later than Friday, Jan. 13, at noon.**

## MODULE I: Coquelin and Gestural Acting

Th Jan. 12/ Tu Jan. 17: Painting the Character's Portrait

- **Readings:** Selections on Coquelin, Garrick, Clairon, and Delsarte, and drawings from 19<sup>th</sup> century acting text books in the *Course Reader*.
- **Coordinated Presentations** on Gestural Acting
- "How to Rehearse" via Coquelin's Method

Th Jan. 19/Tu Jan. 24: In-class rehearsals

Th Jan. 26: Gestural Performance and the Audience (1 hour); Repeat your in-class rehearsal (voluntary)

- **Reading:** Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting* in the *Course Reader*

**REGISTRATION NOTE:** Friday, Jan. 27, is the last day to add, audit, or select the "P/NP" option.

Tu Jan. 31: **FIRST GRADED PERFORMANCE AND REPORT USING COQUELIN'S METHOD**

Th Feb. 2: Physical/Gestural Acting in Film and Contemporary Theatre

- **Readings:** Chapter 17 on SITI Company in *Actor Training*; chapter on John Wayne in *Course Reader*.
- **Coordinated Presentations** on historical and contemporary approaches to physical acting

## MODULE II: Early Stanislavsky and Inner Acting

Tu Feb. 7: Nemirovich-Danchenko's Approach to Inner Monologue

- **Readings:** Selections on Salvini and Nemirovich-Danchenko in the *Course Reader*; and the chapter on Stanislavsky in *Actor Training*
- **Coordinated Presentations** on Inner Acting
- Discussion on the roots of the Stanislavsky System and its early practice

Th Feb. 9: Early Stanislavsky Workshop

- First Studio Exercises
- "How to Rehearse" via the Moscow Art Theatre's inner monologue

Week of Feb. 14/16 : In-class rehearsals

Tu Feb. 21: **SECOND GRADED PERFORMANCE AND REPORT ON NEMIROVICH-DANCHENKO'S INNER MONOLOGUE**

Th Feb. 23: Inner Monologues in film-acting

- **Reading:** "Elizabeth Taylor: My Kind of Acting" in *Course Reader*.
- **Coordinated Presentations** on film actors who excel in inner monologue.

**REGISTRATION NOTE:** Friday, Feb. 24, is the last day to drop a course without "W" or change to a letter grade.

## MODULE III: Mid to Late Stanislavsky—Action and Active Analysis

Tu Feb. 28: Focus on Action

- **Readings:** Re-read the chapter on Stanislavsky in *Actor Training*; excerpts from *An Actor Prepares* in *Course Reader*
- "How to Rehearse" using Playable Verbs

Th March 2/Tu March 7: In-Class rehearsals

Th March 9: **THIRD GRADED PERFORMANCE AND REPORT ON STANISLAVSKY'S PLAYABLE VERBS**

**SPRING RECESS – NO CLASSES ON MARCH 14 AND 16!!!**

Tu March 21: Active Analysis through the lens of Maria Knebel

- **Reading:** Part I of *Dynamic Acting through Active Analysis* and the chapter on Maria Knebel in *Actor Training*

Th March 23: In-Class Exercises on Active Analysis (Scenarios)

- **Reading:** Part II, Lesson 1 in *Dynamic Acting through Active Analysis*

Tu March 28/Th March 30: The Active Analysis of a Scene (Etudes)

- Reading: Part II, Lessons 2 and 3 in *Dynamic Acting through Active Analysis*
- A Chekhov scene for study (TBA).

Tu April 4: **P/NP ETUDES ON CHEKHOV SCENES**

**MODULE IV: The American Method**

Th April 6: The Moscow Art Theatre's Tours to the UC and the Roots of the American Method

- **Coordinated Presentations on the Roots of the Method**

Tu April 11: The Debate on Emotion in the Method

- **Readings:** chapter on The Method in *Actor Training*; and in the *Course Reader* Archer, *Masks or Faces*, and Strasberg, "A Dream of Passion"

Th April 13: Focus on Strasberg

- **Reading:** Chapter on Strasberg in *An Actress Prepares*
- Exercises from Strasberg

Tu April 18: Focus on Adler

- **Reading:** Chapter on Adler in *An Actress Prepares*
- Exercises from Adler

Th April 20: Focus on Meisner (1 hour); The System or The Method

- **Reading:** Chapter on Meisner in *An Actress Prepares*
- Exercises from Meisner
- Discussion on the differences between Stanislavsky and the leading proponents of the Method

Th April 25: Contemporary Acting Approaches in the United States

- **Readings:** David Wiles and "Why Johnny Can't Act" in the *Course Reader*
- **Coordinated Presentations** on Contemporary Method Teachers and Black Acting Techniques

**Th April 27: Course Conclusions**

- **Reading:** Ed Hooks in the *Course Reader*
- Concluding Discussion

**Final Examination Date: Thursday, May 4, 2-4 pm (See above for details.)**

\*\*\*

## **FURTHER SDA AND USC POLICIES:**

### **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 [The USC Student Handbook – Policies and Policy Governance](#). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.

#### **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](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.

\*\*\*

#### **Health and Participation in Class**

You are expected to follow all health and safety protocols that are established by USC and LA County during the semester. 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 USC’s instructions. 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 progress in class so that your education is not disrupted.

If face coverings (masks) are mandated indoors including in classrooms, they 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/>).



\*\*\*

**Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture Statement:**

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

\*\*\*

**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](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.