

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 101: Introduction to Acting
Section: 62610R
Location: MCC 109
Units: 4
Fall, 2023
Tuesday & Thursday, 6PM-7:50PM
Instructor: Jessy Hodges (she/her)
Contact Info: hodgesj@usc.edu
I will respond to your emails within 48 hrs.
Office Hours: Virtual or in person meetings
available upon request.

Course Description

"Acting is behaving truthfully under imaginary circumstances." -Sanford Meisner

This course lays the foundation for studying the discipline and art of acting through the study of various techniques and approaches. Through assigned readings, discussion and exercises, students will be introduced to the following concepts: the body as the actor's instrument, listening and responding, the role of the actor in character and storytelling, imagination work, and basic text work and analysis. Students will be encouraged to engage in a process over result mindset, think of every exercise as an experiment, be present and mindful, and explore their own innate ability to imagine deeply and fully engage in play. It is imperative that students approach this class with a spirit of generosity, curiosity, compassion and courage and that they foster an environment of listening and trust within the ensemble.

Learning Objectives

- Locate tension and identify habits and patterns in one's unique physical body that may inhibit their work as an actor.
- Demonstrate listening and responding authentically.
- Memorize and present small pieces of text, dialogue and scenes as assigned.
- Examine objective, context and relationship and use in basic text analysis.
- Demonstrate one's ability to be a contributive part of a functional, healthy ensemble through implementation of tools learned in class.

Course Notes & Additional Policies

- You are required to come to every class and to be on time. Due to the collaborative and experiential nature of this work, the quality of your educational experience depends on your physical presence and your respect of others' time and presence. Points may be deducted for missed in-class work due to absence or tardiness. In the event of an absence, you are responsible for the content of any missed class time (this includes if you have joined the class late). You must be ready to work at the start of each class.
- You will be required to meet up in groups/pairs outside of class for rehearsals and exercises as needed. Please make yourself available for your scene partners
- Assigned reading will be posted on Blackboard.
- Please be prepared to take notes in class.
- This class will be physical. Please take care of your physical and mental health and maintain good hygiene for the sake of yourself and others. You will be in close proximity with one another as is the nature of the work.
- Wear comfortable clothes to move in and expect to be either in socks or barefoot. If your hair needs to be tied back, please do so. Hats are generally discouraged. Acting can get messy, plan accordingly.
- Please don't eat in class unless absolutely necessary and please don't chew gum.

- 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.
- No technology whatsoever is allowed in class, phones must be away in bags (NOT in pockets).

If you have any concerns about any of the above, please speak with me privately.

Safety and Consent

Your physical and emotional safety is more important than anything else that happens in this class. Acting is a physical endeavor that often necessitates touch between participants. Some movement exercises that involve interacting with a partner or group may imply consent of appropriate touch. The following guidelines are intended to ensure a safe, respectful, and professional work environment:

- Actors should establish verbal consent to work physically with their scene partner and acknowledge each partner's physical boundaries before any work involving touch.
- You may change your boundaries at any time. It is not necessary to give a reason for a change in boundaries. I.e. consent may be revoked.
- Please know that you reserve the right to stop an exercise at any point in which you do not feel safe without explanation. We will establish a safe word.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Please alert me immediately if you ever feel unsafe in class.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Blackboard will be updated regularly with announcements, readings, etc. Please check often. Blackboard help for students is at studentblackboardhelp.usc.edu. You will occasionally need to print scripts — please be prepared with printing capability.

Required Reading

- *Letters to a Young Artist* by Anna Deavere Smith
- *Respect for Acting* by Uta Hagen
- PDFs of other selected readings will be posted to Blackboard, which students are expected to read and retain for discussion.

Books are available through the USC Bookstore (www.uscbookstore.com/textbooks) or wherever you like to buy books.

Required Viewing

You are required to attend a School of Dramatic Arts performance and write a response. If you cannot attend an SDA show due to scheduling, you may be permitted to watch a full-length play on Digital Theatre+ and write a response.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

- **In-Class Activities** – You are expected to participate in all class activities. You will not be graded on the end result or your level of “talent,” but on your collaborative spirit and your level of commitment.
- **Discussion** – Throughout the semester, we will hold discussions on homework, readings, and in-class activities. You will be graded on your level of participation in these discussions. There is no written journal required, but you will be asked to relay your outside work orally, so a written journal is encouraged for your own growth.

- **Text Project** - Work will be solo and chosen individually. Students will be required to memorize and present prepared text - details to be discussed in class.
- **Open Scene** - Work will be in pairs assigned by the instructor. Meetings and rehearsals outside of class are crucial to the success of this project. Outside rehearsals will be discussed in class. A final presentation of each open scene will be scheduled. Written component of the Open Scene will be discussed in class and posted on Blackboard.
- **Performance Response** - You are required to attend a School of Dramatic Arts performance, write a reflection on it and how it relates to our class work.
- **Contemporary Scene** - Work will be in pairs or groups as assigned by the instructor. Meetings and rehearsals outside of class are crucial to the success of this project. A final presentation of each contemporary scene will be scheduled — full costumes, props and overall preparation is mandatory.
- **Written Final** - tbd.

Grading Breakdown

| Assignment | Points | % of Grade |
|----------------------|--------|------------|
| In Class Activities | 100 | 20 |
| Discussion | 100 | 10 |
| Text Project | 100 | 15 |
| Open Scene | 100 | 15 |
| Performance Response | 100 | 10 |
| Contemporary Scene | 100 | 15 |
| Written Final | 100 | 15 |

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

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

Written Assignments should be posted on Blackboard as a PDF attachment before the specified date and time. You will be penalized for lateness.

Grading Timeline

Grades will generally be posted within a week of submission.

Sharing of Course Materials Outside of the Learning Environment Policy

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.

Optional Readings and Supplementary Materials

- *Towards a Poor Theatre* by Jerzy Grotowski
- *The Creative Act* by Rick Rubin
- *On Acting* by Sanford Meisner
- Additional School of Dramatic Arts performances
- Live theatre — local suggestions upon request
- Movies, movies, movies!
- High quality recorded theatre — Digital Theatre+ and Broadway HD are both excellent resources

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

AI Generator Policy

Since creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated tools is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

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.

Course schedule:

SECTION 1: TEXT PROJECT

Exploring the body as our instrument, connecting with the text and practicing the work of being seen.

| Week | Date | Topics/Daily Activities | Due Today | Homework |
|------|------------------|--|-----------|---|
| 1 | Tuesday 8.22 | Welcome/Introductions. Syllabus and expectations review. Class kick-off. | | Read "Basics" from <i>Letters to a Young Artist</i> for discussion. Please begin to look for an existing piece of writing that feels personal to you and ignites you in some way. This may be a poem, a passage from a book or script, song lyrics, etc. It should not be something you wrote. Please read from a hard copy, NOT a screen. (DUE TUESDAY 9.5) |
| | Thursday 8.24 | Exercises | Reading | Read "Relationships" from <i>Letters to a Young Artist</i> for discussion. Read excerpt from <i>Towards a Poor Theatre</i> posted in Blackboard. Begin to memorize your Text Project text *by rote for 9.5. (<i>*the process of learning something by repetition, rather than by understanding it.</i>) |
| 2 | Tuesday 8.29 | Exercises. Discuss Text Project. | Reading | Read "Work" from <i>Letters to a Young Artist</i> . Continue Text Project memorization. |
| | Thursday 8.31 | Exercises. | Reading | Read "Matters of the Mind," and "Matters of the Heart" from <i>Letters to a Young Artist</i> . Memorized Text Project text DUE TUESDAY! |

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|---|------------------|---|---------------------|--|
| 3 | Tuesday 9.5 | BY ROTE TEXT PROJECT PRESENTATIONS. | MEMORIZED TEXT | Read Uta Hagen's "9 Questions" from <i>Respect for Acting</i> . |
| | Thursday 9.7 | Discuss "9 Questions." Discuss objectives, <i>acting is doing</i> . | Reading | Group 3 & 4 read "Keeping the Faith," "Art and Society," and "The Death of Cool" from <i>Letters to a Young Artist</i> for discussion. Group 1 & 2 PREPARE Text Project Performances. |
| 4 | Tuesday 9.12 | Group 1 Text Project Performances. | Group 1 Performance | |
| | Thursday 9.14 | Group 2 Text Project Performances. | Group 2 Performance | Group 1 & 2 read "Keeping the Faith," "Art and Society," and "The Death of Cool" from <i>Letters to a Young Artist</i> for discussion. Group 3 & 4 PREPARE Text Project Performances. |
| 5 | Tuesday 9.19 | Group 3 Text Project Performances. | Group 3 performance | |
| | Thursday 9.21 | Group 4 Text Project Performances. | Group 4 performance | Reading TBD |

SECTION 2: OPEN SCENES

Exploring subtext, relationship and basic objective with tactic AKA "action."

| Week | Date | Topics/Daily Activities | Due Today | Homework |
|------|-------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| 6 | Tuesday 9.26 | Yes/No Exercise | Reading due as assigned from this point forward. | Begin reading Play(s) for Contemp. Scenes TBD |
| | Thursday 9.28 | Yes/No Exercise | | |
| 7 | Tuesday 10.3 | Open Scenes (first round) | | Rehearsal |
| | Thursday 10.5 | Open Scenes (first round) | | Rehearsal |
| 8 | Tuesday 10.10 | Open Scenes (first round) | | Rehearsal |
| | Thursday 10.12 | NO CLASS | | Rehearsal |

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|----|-------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| 9 | Tuesday 10.17 | Open Scenes (second round) | | Rehearsal |
| | Thursday 10.19 | Open Scenes (second round) | | Rehearsal |
| 10 | Tuesday 10.24 | Open Scenes (second round) | | Rehearsal |
| | Thursday 10.26 | Open Scenes (second round) | | Play(s) for Contemp. Scenes must be read by this point! |

SECTION 3: CONTEMPORARY SCENES

Continuing our exploration of honest listening and responding, focusing on text analysis from a behavioral and emotional lens.

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|-------|--------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| 11 | Tuesday 10.31 spoooookyy | Contemporary Scene Work | Reminder: Please make sure you have seen an SDA show and completed your reflection! | Rehearsal |
| | Thursday 11.2 | Contemporary Scene Work | | Rehearsal |
| 12 | Tuesday 11.7 | Contemporary Scene Work | | Rehearsal |
| | Thursday 11.9 | Contemporary Scene Work | | Rehearsal |
| 13 | Tuesday 11.14 | Contemporary Scene Work | | Rehearsal |
| | Thursday 11.16 | Contemporary Scene Work | | Rehearsal |
| 14 | Tuesday 11.21 | Contemporary Scene Work | | Rehearsal |
| | Thursday 11.23 | NO CLASS | | Rehearsal |
| 15 | Tuesday 11.28 | Contemporary scene work. | | Rehearsal |
| | Thursday 11.30 | Contemporary scene work. | Reminder: Please make sure you have seen an SDA show and completed your reflection! | Writing Component for Final TBD. |
| Final | THURSDAY 12.7 @ 7PM | Final ensemble reflection together. Group offering. AMA. | Final Writing Component. | Happy Break! |

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@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

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

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

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

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

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

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.