

THTR 122: Improvisation and Theatre Games
2 Units Spring 2024 — Tuesdays — 4-5:50pm
Location: PED 208
Instructor: Nick Massouh (he/him)

Email: massouh@usc.edu

Hours: By appointment — schedule via email

Course Description

In this experiential workshop course, students will learn and build upon the tenets and rules of theatrical improvisation, with ultimate emphasis on applying these to one's own life. Through theatre games, and improvised experiences and performance, students will work toward freeing themselves physically, vocally, emotionally, and mentally, to stimulate communication, creativity, imagination, self-expression, and the collaborative spirit.

This course may be taken for credit twice.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Apply the "rules of improv" as they relate to relationship, storytelling, performance;
2. Practice being present in their mind, body and spirit;
3. Evaluate improv performances for content and quality;
4. Empathetically discover human nature through character exploration;
5. Perform confidently in unscripted material;
6. Evaluate their own performance and participation with the intent of self-growth;
7. and relate the improvisational theatre tenets to their own personal and professional lives.

Course Notes

Classes must be attended live and in-person (medical status withstanding), due to the collaborative, experiential, and performative nature of improv.

Communication

Please email me at massouh@usc.edu any time with questions or concerns. Emails will generally be returned within 48 hours on weekdays. I can also meet with you via my Zoom personal meeting room, or at an on-campus location as schedules allow.

I also ask that the class as a whole have a communication group, platform of your choice, so you can easily get in touch with each other.

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.

Required Viewing

Students may be given pdfs and/or links throughout the semester which they are expected to read and retain for discussion. All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Below is a general overview of the assignments. A detailed assignment description will be posted on Blackboard with ample time for each assignment.

- In-class exercises with enthusiastic participation are the most important part of your success in this class. The bulk of the coursework takes place in class experientially, as is the nature of improv — you must learn by Being Here Now. Points are awarded for presence, focus, attitude, willingness.
- Self-Reflections — You will write two self-reflections throughout the semester, one at the beginning of the semester, and one at the end. Detailed instructions and prompts will be posted on Blackboard.
- Live Improv Show Response — You will write one response to a live improv show. The show you choose to attend must be over the course of the semester, not something you have seen previously in your life. Sharing of shows and group outings are encouraged!
- Midterm and Final Jams — You will participate in a directed improv jam that includes various exercises, games, and scene work. Come ready to have fun. Everything will be a surprise and your job is to say “Yes”, have a positive attitude and support your classmates.

Grading Breakdown

| Assignment | % of Grade |
|--|------------|
| In-class exercises — presence, focus, attitude, willingness (2/class) | 36 |
| Self-Reflections (6 points each) | 12 |
| Live Improv Show Response | 8 |
| Midterm Team Extended Improv — comprehension, willingness, application of learned techniques | 20 |
| Final Jam — Skill level, growth, commitment, application of learned techniques | 24 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Grading Scale

| Letter grade | Corresponding numerical point range |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| 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

Performance Assignments are presented in class, and copies of associated written work do not need to be submitted, although you must be prepared.

Written assignments should be posted on Blackboard as a PDF attachment before the specified date and time, and should be formatted for clarity and readability. Late assignments will not be awarded full points. Do not send links to Google Docs.

Grades will generally be posted to Blackboard within a week. If you fail to turn in an assignment, it will show on Blackboard Grade Center — I cannot follow up with you to ask about missing assignments.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

This includes filming or recording of instructor and/or classmates without the explicit permission of all involved.

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](#).

Use of AI Generators

You may wish to use AI (e.g., ChatGPT and image generation tools) in this class. Learning to use AI is an emerging skill, and I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to provide guidance with these tools during office hours or after class. Keep in mind the following:

- AI tools are permitted to help you brainstorm topics or revise work you have already written.
- If you provide minimum-effort prompts, you will get low-quality results. You will need to refine your prompts to get good outcomes. This will take work.
- AI is a tool, but one that you need to acknowledge using. Please include notes at the end of any assignment that uses AI explaining how (and why) you used AI and indicate/specify the prompts you used to obtain the results what prompts you used to get the results. Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies.
- Be thoughtful about when AI is useful. Consider its appropriateness for each assignment or circumstance.

Learning Experience Evaluation

Learning Experience 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 to offer any feedback on the course.

Attendance

Being absent, late, or leaving early disturbs the important ensemble nature of this class, and in-class activity points will be deducted. You must be present and ready to work at the start of each class. In learning improv and theatre games, there is no comparable experience to being live in the room.

However, your health and the health of our community eclipses all. If your health status precludes you from attending class in-person, I will attempt to conduct class as hybrid, and request you attend class LIVE (via Zoom) with Camera On. I will not open the Zoom classroom unless you notify me via email before class begins. Travel and other scenarios are not grounds for attending via Zoom. Do not attend class in-person if you have symptoms of a virus. If you are not sure, please wear a mask.

Extracurricular activities do not excuse you from class work. Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university are exempt, with pre-submitted official documentation. See SDA Statement on Productions, ISPs, and Extra-Curricular Commitments below.

Classroom Norms

Devices — Engagement with cell phones and other electronic devices during class is prohibited. Cell phones should be left on silent in your backpack/bag (not pocket), away from your work in class. This is to encourage your focus, presence, and respect to your peers. Use of cell phones in class will negatively affect your in-class activity points for the day. Consider yourself untethered in this class.

Attire — Improv is physical and can get sweaty; dress accordingly. Your clothing and shoes should allow you to move freely and comfortably. Shoes should be closed-toed and stay on your feet — no flip-flops. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. Hats are generally discouraged.

Eating — Open food and drink is not permitted in any SDA classroom. Absolutely no chewing gum, please dispose of before class.

Break — We generally do not take an official break during class. Please be prepared to stay in the room and active as both a performer and audience member for the entire 110 minutes of class. In the event of an emergency for which you must leave the room, observe theatre rules of being discrete and respectful to your fellow actors (i.e do not enter or leave the room while others are performing).

Strike — You are expected to restore the classroom to neutral at the end of each class.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Please note: due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure will change to accommodate the needs of individuals and the ensemble. You are asked to remain flexible, and you will be informed of any changes as much as possible.

Most classes will begin with group work and warm-ups, exploring foundations of presence, physicality, focus, relaxation, concentration, imagination, storytelling, playfulness, and ensemble-building.

| | Date | Topics/Daily Activities | Due Today | Homework |
|---------|-------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Week 1 | Jan 9 | Improv Games and Scenes | | |
| Week 2 | Jan 16 | Improv Games and Scenes | | Write Self reflection |
| Week 3 | Jan 23 | Improv Games and Scenes | Self Reflection | |
| Week 4 | Jan 30 | Improv Games and Scenes | | |
| Week 5 | Feb 6 | Improv Games and Scenes | | |
| Week 6 | Feb 13 | Improv Games and Scenes | | |
| Week 7 | Feb 20 | Improv Games and Scenes | | |
| Week 8 | Feb 27 | Mid term Jam! | | |
| Week 9 | Mar 5 | Review Midterm Experience | | |
| Week 10 | Mar 19 | Improv Games and Scenes | | |
| Week 11 | Mar 26 | Improv Games and Scenes | | Last week to see live performance |
| Week 12 | Apr 2 | Improv Games and Scenes | Live Performance Review paper | |
| Week 13 | Apr 9 | Improv Games and Scenes | | |
| Week 14 | Apr 16 | Improv Games and Scenes | | Final Self Reflection |
| Week 15 | Apr 23 | Final Exam | Final self reflection due | |
| Week 16 | May 7 | Final Jam! Review semester and final performance. | | |

SDA Statements On...

Productions, ISPs, and Extra-Curricular Commitments

SDA productions, ISPs and extracurricular activities* do 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 are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.)

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>

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture

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.

USC Statements 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.

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.