

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## THTR 101: Introduction to Acting

Fall 2024

4 Units

Tuesdays & Thursdays // 8:00 am-9:50 am

Location: DAB 5

Instructor: Jill Alexander (she/her)

Email: [jealexan@usc.edu](mailto:jealexan@usc.edu)

Office Hours: By appointment in person or on Zoom

### Course Description

This course lays the foundation for studying the discipline and art of acting. The course will apply and explore concepts through classroom exercises and performances. Students will:

- Examine the actor's role in storytelling
- Connect text to the emotional and physical portrayal of a role
- Study concepts of acting theory as put forth by prominent acting teachers and actors
- Strive to be present and mindful
- Consider both their own and others' uniqueness
- Explore their own innate ability to imagine deeply and fully engage in play
- Respect their body as an instrument and build its physical and vocal abilities, including mind-body connection
- Adhere to the required discipline — being on time, rehearsing outside of class, and staying strong and healthy
- Live in a Process over Result mindset  
Think of every exercise as an experiment with the intent to explore and discover
- Think analytically and respectfully in response to others' work
- To enforce a spirit of generosity, curiosity, compassion, and courage in an environment that is fostering an ensemble

### Learning Objectives

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

- Practice basic acting skills such as focus, concentration, relaxation, imagination, play, vocal/physical/ mental presence
- Apply successful ensemble and partnership techniques
- Relate observed acting techniques to their own work
- Research and interpret text as it relates to acting and storytelling choices
- Deconstruct a script to make active and specific choices
- Integrate established acting theory and rehearsal techniques into their own work

**Prerequisite(s):** none

### Course Notes

This class very much functions as a laboratory, with much of the work being done in-class or prepared outside of class and then presented in class. Attendance and punctuality are key.

Because of the collaborative nature of the work, you will need to make time to meet up and rehearse with your fellow actors outside of class.

Both in-class and outside rehearsal require notes to be taken — please be prepared. Always have a paper notebook and something to write with.

## Communication

Please email me at [jealexan@usc.edu](mailto:jealexan@usc.edu) any time with questions or concerns. E-mails 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 our schedules allow.

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

## Accommodations

If you have current learning accommodations that are recognized by USC (LOA) please provide me with a copy you have an LOA, please make an appointment with me to discuss how we can address your accommodations in relation to the shape of the course.

If you do not currently have an LOA but acquire one during the semester, please provide me with your LOA as soon as possible.

## Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Brightspace will be updated regularly with announcements, readings, etc. Please check it often. For support with Brightspace contact [brightspace@usc.edu](mailto:brightspace@usc.edu) or 213-740-5555.

You will occasionally need to print scripts — please be prepared with printing capability. Printing costs should be thought of as part of textbook costs – printed scripts are an essential tool for an actor.

## Required Reading

*Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott

*Directing Actors* by Judith Weston

To get us started, I will post PDF's or links to a digital version of the portions we'll be reading in the coming week. Please secure your books by Thursday, September 5. The campus bookstore is ordering these books, but as they are not textbooks they are easy to obtain through [bookshop.com](http://bookshop.com) or [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) or through the L.A. public library system.

I have requested for these items to be available digitally through the USC library system. Each item has its own use limit but some of them can be used by multiple students at a time.

## Required Viewing

You are required to attend a USC School of Dramatic Arts play. This season's schedule is posted here: <https://dramaticarts.usc.edu/on-stage/>

Please note that *She Loves Me* and *As You Like It* are musicals (or musical adaptations) and the requirement here is for you to watch a live play, so any of the other performances will fulfill this

requirement. Make a plan to see one of these shows now so that you can schedule any work or other conflicts around this requirement.

## Supplementary Reading

*Letters to a Young Artist* by Anna Deavere Smith

*Sanford Meisner on Acting* by Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell

*Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* by Keith Johnstone

*Improvise: Scene from the Inside Out* by Mick Napier

*Save the Cat!* by Blake Snyder

## Description and Assessment of Assignments

Below is a general overview of the assignments. A detailed assignment description will be posted on Brightspace with ample time for you to prepare and complete your work.

The work we do includes:

Studio Work - This is an experience-based course. You will participate and commit with a generous heart, an open mind, and a devoted work ethic. You will not be graded on 'talent' in this class, you will be graded on your Quality of Doing.

- Individual Exercises – may require writing your own material or gathering written material to perform; will require outside rehearsal
- Partnered Exercises - may require writing your own material or gathering written material to perform; will require outside rehearsal
- Group Exercises – may require you to lead and/or research exercises to warm-up and strengthen your body, voice, and mind (your acting instrument).

Discussion — You will participate thoughtfully and respectfully in discussions about readings, viewings, rehearsals, and other topics as they arise. Always keep a paper journal at your side so you have a place to jot ideas and feedback.

Writing – Actors must have a relationship to text. Some of your writing assignments will be analysis of course topics; other assignments will be to generate your own material to perform in class. You will have ample time to prepare and turn in this material.

Performance Response — You will write a response to an SDA production that you attend in person.

## Grading Breakdown

Assignments	Points
In-class activities (presence, focus, attitude, willingness, support)	28
Individual Performance Exercise	5
Partner Exercises	10
See a play and respond to it	5
Written Material for Midterm	5
Midterm Performances	10
Open Scenes - Partnered	15
Written Material for Final	5
Final Performances	10
Final Written Response	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

## Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following 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

Written assignments should be posted on Brightspace 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.

Performance Assignments are presented in class. Preparation is key.

## Grading Timeline

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

## Course Specific Policies

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

*Campus 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).*

This includes your syllabus and course handouts as well as details about the work we do in class.

Respect each other's privacy.

## Attendance

Enthusiastic participation and engagement are key to your success in this class. Your attendance is crucial to the work.

You must be present and ready to work at the start of each class.

Do not be late. If you are more than 5 minutes late to class you will be marked tardy. If you are tardy three or more times your grade may be docked.

Do not be absent. Points will be deducted for missed Studio work and class discussions. In the event of an absence, you are responsible for following up with your classmates to gather any missed material or feedback.

## ILLNESS POLICY -

If you are running a fever of 100 or more or have run a fever of 100 or more within the last 24 hours do not come to class. In order for the absence to be excused, you must notify me by e-mail ahead of class and you must adhere to university protocols i.e. contact the campus nurse. (Students should call USC Student Health at 213-740-9355 or send a message through [mySHR](#) to the Advice Nurse. An advice nurse is available by phone 24/7.)

If you are sick with Covid you must follow [campus protocol](#); this includes informing your close contacts (which includes your classmates and myself.) In order for a Covid absence to be excused, you must notify me by e-mail ahead of class and you must adhere to university protocols regarding testing and masking.

In short, illnesses are not excused unless you e-mail me in advance that you are missing class because you are sick.

If you wish to be excused for a religious observation, you must give me advance notice.

There are no excused absences or tardies for work, conferences, school productions or rehearsals, or other classes you are enrolled in.

## Classroom norms

Devices — Cell phones and other electronic devices should be left on silent with your belongings. This is to encourage your focus, mindfulness, and to show respect to the class. In short, no cellphone use in class.

Attire — You're going to need to be able to move freely and comfortably. Shoes must be closed-toed — no flip-flops and no bare feet. If your hair gets in your face, secure it back. I may ask you to remove a hat or distracting jewelry during studio work.

Eating — Food and drink is not permitted during any SDA class.

Break — This class is less than 2 hours and I will use the full time and do not have a set break though there will be times when we take one. Think of this class as a movie. Use the restroom ahead of time.

***It is disruptive to come in and out of a performance class.*** If you must leave the room, do it surreptitiously. Never enter or exit the room when someone is performing or working. Only enter or exit the room between performances or work.

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

## 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.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

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.

### **THERE IS TO BE NO USE OF A.I. IN THIS CLASS. PERIOD.**

This course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, 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 text, code, or other content is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

### **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.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. 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 relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty and is strictly prohibited. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

### **Course Evaluations**

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. I will set aside time on our last class for you to complete your course evaluation.

### **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: A Weekly Breakdown**

*Please note-- due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure may change to accommodate the ensemble and the time that each exercise requires. Please remain flexible.*

Every class will begin with group work - exploring foundations of voice, physicality, relaxation, concentration, imagination, focus, storytelling, playfulness, and ensemble-building.



Week to Week Breakdown - THTR 101 - Jill Alexander (Fall 2024)

	STUDIO EXERCISE	STUDIO WORK POINT VALUE	READING DUE	HOMEWORK	HOMEWORK POINT VALUE
<b>Week 1</b>					
<b>August 27 (Tuesday)</b>	Introductions. Review syllabus. Shape of the class.			Find and prepare a SERVICE REVIEW / Read DIRECTING ACTORS - intro plus one chapter per class (13 weeks)	2
<b>August 29 (Thursday)</b>	SERVICE REVIEW EXERCISE	3		See a PLAY; write a response paper (due anytime during the semester)/ READ your assignments	5
<b>Week 2</b>					
<b>September 3 (Tuesday)</b>	SERVICE REVIEW EXERCISE (cont'd)		Intro - DIRECTING ACTORS	Read	
<b>September 5 (Thursday)</b>	SERVICE REVIEW EXERCISE (cont'd)		Ch 1 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Read	
<b>Week 3</b>					
<b>September 10 (Tuesday)</b>	Introduce Repetition		Ch 2 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Rehearse with your partners and read	
<b>September 12 (Thursday)</b>	PARTNER EXERCISES 1A	5	Ch 3 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Rehearse with your partners and read	
<b>Week 4</b>					
<b>September 17 (Tuesday)</b>	PARTNER EXERCISES 1B		Ch 4 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Rehearse with your partners and read	
<b>September 19 (Thursday)</b>	PARTNER EXERCISES 1C		Ch 5 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Rehearse with your partners and read	
<b>Week 5</b>					
<b>September 24 (Tuesday)</b>	PARTNER EXERCISES 2A	5	Ch 6 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Rehearse with your partners and read	
<b>September 26 (Thursday)</b>	PARTNER EXERCISES 2B		Ch 7 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Rehearse with your partners and read	
<b>Week 6</b>					

	STUDIO EXERCISE	STUDIO WORK POINT VALUE	READING DUE	HOMEWORK	HOMEWORK POINT VALUE
October 1 (Tuesday)	PARTNER EXERCISES 2C		Ch 8 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Rehearse with your partners and read	
October 3 (Thursday)	Studio Work catch up day / Potential guest speaker		Ch 9 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Review exercise part 2: write your own "review"; work with a partner	5
<b>Week 7</b>	MIDTERMS (10/7-11/8 grading period)				
October 8 (Tuesday)	MIDTERM performances	10	Ch 10 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Read	
October 10 (Thursday)	NO CLASS - FALL RECESS		Ch 11 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Read	
<b>Week 8</b>					
October 15 (Tuesday)	MIDTERM performances (cont'd)		Ch 12 - DIRECTING ACTORS	Read	
October 17 (Thursday)	MIDTERM performances (cont'd)			Read	
<b>Week 9</b>					
October 22 (Tuesday)	Open scenes 1A	5	Intro → Short Assignments - BIRD BY BIRD	Rehearse with your partners/ sections and read	
October 24 (Thursday)	Open scenes 1B		Shitty First Drafts → Perfectionism - BIRD BY BIRD	Rehearse with your partners/ sections and read	
<b>Week 10</b>					
October 29 (Tuesday)	Open scenes 1C		School Lunches → Character - BIRD BY BIRD	Rehearse with your partners/ sections and read	
October 31 (Thursday) HALLOWEEN	Open scenes 2A	5	Plot → Dialogue - BIRD BY BIRD	Rehearse with your partners/ sections and read	
<b>Week 11</b>					
November 5 (Tuesday) ELECTION DAY	Open scenes 2B		Set Design → False Starts - BIRD BY BIRD	Rehearse with your partners/ sections and read	

	STUDIO EXERCISE	STUDIO WORK POINT VALUE	READING DUE	HOMEWORK	HOMEWORK POINT VALUE
November 7 (Thursday)	Open scenes 2C		Plot Treatment→ How Do You Know When You're Done? - BIRD BY BIRD	Rehearse with your partners/ sections and read	
<b>Week 12</b>					
November 12 (Tuesday)	Open scenes 3A	5	Part 2 - BIRD BY BIRD	Rehearse with your partners/ sections and read	
November 14 (Thursday)	Open scenes 3B		Part 3 - BIRD BY BIRD	Write an open scene with your final partner and read	5
<b>Week 13</b>					
November 19 (Tuesday)	Open scenes 3C		Part 4→ Part 5 - BIRD BY BIRD	Rehearse with your partners and sections	
November 21 (Thursday)	Studio Work catch up day / Potential guest speaker			Rehearse with your partners and sections	
<b>Week 14</b>					
November 26 (Tuesday)	<b>FINAL PERFORMANCE</b>	10		Rehearse with your partners and sections	
November 28 (Thursday)	NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING				
<b>Week 15</b>					
December 3 (Tuesday)	<b>FINAL PERFORMANCE (cont'd)</b>			Rehearse with your partners and sections	
December 5 (Thursday)	<b>FINAL PERFORMANCE (cont'd)</b>			Write your final - a response to the prompt I give you which will be related to everything you learned in this class. This will be due during our set finals meeting on 12/17	
December 17 (Tuesday)	FINAL RESPONSE DUE	7			

## **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theatre 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>

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

### **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](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:**

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

### **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 consists 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) 740-2500  
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](mailto: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.