

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## **Course ID and Title: THTR 122 Improvisation and Theatre Games**

**Units: 2**

SECTION 62631

**Term—Day—Time: FALL 2024 – Tuesdays – 2:00 - 3:50 pm**

**Location:** [McClintock Building and Theatre](#), MCC 111

**Instructor: AMRITA DHALIWAL**

**Office:** VIRTUAL

**Office Hours:** Available after class in person or can be arranged for other times at the convenience of the student.

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

**Teaching Assistant: N/A**

### **Course Description**

Through theatre games and exercises, this class explores how to quiet our inner critic, develop your state of play, access our most organic and imaginative impulses, and begin to create collaborative performances. The term “improv” refers to any type of theatre exercise or performance that doesn’t work from a previously written text. The work is composed on the spot. We are all capable of excelling in this work. This class is a laboratory to discover how we uniquely thrive within the structures of improv performance. Often, but not always, the modern forms of improv theatre are comedic in nature. Our work will tend in that direction as well although this class does distinguish between comedic results and comedic efforts, as in the latter is not necessarily the path to the former. Improv, at its core, requires the participants to listen, be impulsive, be playful, and have an understanding of the fundamental rules of performance. This will be the focus of this class.

### **Learning Objectives**

The goals for this course are as follows:

- To develop and identify an individual state of play
- To recognize the structure of various theatre games
- To create new or original games
- To implement the principles of improvisation during in-class exercises
- To evaluate the work of others based on their implementation of learned improv skills

**Prerequisite(s):** N/A

**Co-Requisite(s):** N/A

**Concurrent Enrollment:** N/A

**Recommended Preparation:** N/A

## Course Notes

### Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The Comedy Improv Handbook by Matt Fotis and Siobhan O'Hara, section 1 (available on Blackboard)

Improvise by Mick Napier, Introduction – Chapter 2 (available on Blackboard)

Truth in Comedy by Del Close and Charna Halpern, Introduction – Chapter 1 (available on Blackboard)

Improv for Actors by Dan Diggles – Chapter 1 (available on Blackboard)

[NPR Article / Audio](#) “From Hull House to Second City: How Chicago immigrants helped change theater”

### Optional Readings and Supplementary Materials

Impro by Keith Johnstone

Improvisation for the Theatre by Viola Spolin

Free Play by Stephen Nachmanovitch

Bossy Pants by Tina Fey

LTAYA by Ana Deveare Smith

### Description and Assessment of Assignments

There will be two **Self-Assessments** (due dates in the weekly breakdown), which are meant to document where you are in your comprehension and application of the work. Additionally, you will be required to write an **Improv Report** about an improv show, either amateur or professional, that you will have seen. These will take the form of journal entries and be graded on thoroughness, application of ideas and principles studied in class, and clarity of thought.

The **FINAL** will be an improv jam on the last day of class. It will be structured like a full length improv performance. During the final period, we will review the recording of the jam **over zoom**. This is the most important part of the process, and therefore your final grade is dependent on your participation in the jam AND your presence and participation in the video review.

### Participation

**Regular Weekly Attendance** is the only way to get high points for **Participation** and **Class Work** in Improv class. This is an activity course, missing even one class will lower your participation grade. Arriving at the start of class ready to work is part of your participation grade. If you are to be absent, e-mail the instructor to verify the reason. Please inform the instructor immediately if you have **any injuries or any conditions** that might prevent you from participating fully in the class. No cell phone use in class unless instructed.

### Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Self-Assessment #1	100	10
Self-Assessment #2	100	10
Improv Report	100	10
In-Class Work (games)	100	35
Participation (discussion and evaluation)	100	15
Final	100	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Self Assessment / Self Reflection are the same.

## Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

**Table 2 Course 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

All written assignments will be turned via email or Brightspace prior to the date/time listed on the weekly breakdown. However, some may also be completed during class.

## Grading Timeline

Grades will generally be posted within a week of submission.

## Course Specific Policies

Attendance and participation are very important and is the greatest driver in the course grade.

## Classroom norms

Classroom norms will be set and agreed upon on the first day of class with the class resulting in a set of community agreements.

## Zoom etiquette

A few guidelines in case there is class held on zoom:

- Please find as private and quiet a setting in your house as you possibly can. Keep in mind that as important as it is to not have any interruptions, it is also important to feel comfortable making

sound and not be too concerned with disrupting others who are sharing a living/working space with you.

- As much as you can, try to remain in a fixed spot. *Regarding a fixed spot, basically avoid traveling around with your device during class as it can be distracting to others.*
- When situating your camera, avoid strong backlight (i.e. window behind you as you face the screen.)
- Please be on time for the start of ALL CLASSES. The Zoom room will be open ten minutes prior to class and will be closed when class begins. If you show up late, you will be let in at an appropriate time so as to avoid disruption.
- Zoom camera should be on unless there is a specific reason for them to be turned off. Virtual backgrounds are ok.
- While we are in class, no applications should be in use on any device besides Zoom, unless otherwise instructed.

## **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.

## **AI POLICY**

This course aims to develop your unique creative 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.

If found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as grade penalties, such as an "F" grade on the assignment, exam, or in the course.

## **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. The process and intent of the end-of-semester evaluation should be provided. In addition, a mid-semester evaluation is recommended practice for early course correction. [Contact CET](#) for support in creating a mid-semester evaluation.]

### Course Schedule

	<b>Topics/Daily Activities</b>	<b>Readings and Homework</b>	<b>Deliverable/ Due Dates</b>
<b>Week 1</b> 8/27	Syllabus Review, Play intro, Community Agreements		
<b>Week 2</b> 9/3	Discussion: Improv History Activity: Beginning Improv games (exploring yes and)	<b>To be read:</b> The Comedy Improv Handbook: Section I Improv History <a href="#">NPR Article / Audio</a> “From Hull House to Second City: How Chicago immigrants helped change theater”	
<b>Week 3</b> 9/10	Discussion: The Fundamentals of Improv Activity: Beginning Improv games (exploring yes and)	<b>To be read:</b> Improvise by Mick Napier, Introduction – Chapter 2 Truth in Comedy by Del Close and Charna Halpern, Introduction – Chapter 1 Improv for Actors by Dan Diggles – Chapter 1	
<b>Week 4</b> 9/17	Activity: Basic Improv games, establishing “the where”	Suggested Reading for week 4: <a href="#">Improvisation for the Theatre</a> by Viola Spolin	
<b>Week 5</b> 9/24	Activity – Basic Improv games establishing “the what”		<b>Self-Reflection #1</b>

<b>Week 6</b> 10/01	Activity: Basic Improv games establishing "the who"		
<b>Week 7</b> 10/08	Activity: Basic Improv games establishing "the who"	<b>Homework:</b> Bring in an impersonation of a loved one. More details will be discussed in class.	
<b>Week 8</b> 10/15	Activity – Play	Suggested Reading for week 8: <u>Impro</u> by Keith Johnstone	
<b>Week 9</b> 10/22	Activity – Play		
<b>Week 10</b> 10/29	Activity – Putting it all together	Suggested Readings for week 10: <u>Bossy Pants</u> by Tina Fey <u>LTAYA</u> by Ana Devereare Smith	
<b>Week 11</b> 11/05	Activity – Scenes		<b>Due 10/31</b> <b>Improv Report</b>
<b>Week 12</b> 11/12	Improv review and "Jam" prep		
<b>Week 13</b> 11/19	Improv review and "Jam" prep		
<b>Week 14</b> 11/26	Self-Assessment Day		<b>In person</b> <b>Self-Reflection #2</b>
<b>Week 15</b> 12/3	Invited Improv Jam	Suggested Reading for week 15: <u>Free Play</u> by Stephen Nachmanovitch	<b>In person</b> <b>Self-Reflection #2</b>
<b>FINAL</b>	Review Video of Improv Jam	<b>In person.</b>	Date: <b>TBD</b>

## **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.

## **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.