Transitioning Acting Curriculum Online
& Live-Stream Theatre
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Online Theatre Courses

Online education is growing in popularity and demand; 20 percent of today's college students are studying entirely online and 10 percent are taking one or more online courses. Online theatre courses are by no means a new concept in theatre education. Many universities and colleges offer one or more online theatre courses. Some of the more popular online theatre courses include, Theatre History, Playwriting, Dramaturgy, Playscript Analysis, and Playreading/Masterpieces. As you can tell, these classes are primarily history/theory-based courses that rely heavily on reading and writing. What about acting classes? Can acting classes translate to an online learning model? Short answer: Yes! Below are some tips, lesson ideas, and examples of how to transition an acting class.

Tips:

1. **Keep Your Lessons the Same**

   Rather than trying to reinvent your syllabus, see if there is a way to transition your lesson-plans online.
   - **Lectures** can be easily recorded or live-streamed.
   - **Class discussions** can take place through video chats or online discussion boards.
   - **Presentations** can be done in the style of a webinar.
   - **Performances** can be done as monologues, filmed recordings, radio plays, or even Live-Stream Theatre format (see below for more information on Live-Stream Theatre).

2. **Use Technology as an Advantage Rather Than an Obstacle**

   Engage students online with technology-centric lessons. Links and online resources can personalize the learning experience.
   - YouTube Videos & Ted Talks
   - Union and Association Websites
   - Theatre Websites
   - Theatre Job Boards
   - Free Software Trials
   - Guest Artist Interviews

3. **Video/Audio Chat vs. Written Chat vs. Collaborative Chat**

   Decide which interaction method is best for your class. Better yet, utilize all three methods for differentiation.
   - **Video Chat:** Engage your students face-to-face with video/audio chats. Applications like *Zoom* and *Google Hangouts* provide a virtual group setting.

- **Written Chat:** Every Learning Management Systems like Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, and Schoology, provide chat options for students and instructors to interact with one another. Have students respond to a prompt, or have students respond to each other.
- **Collaborative Chat:** Applications like Google Docs allows multiple people (students and instructors) to view, edit, and/or comment the same document. There are many opportunities to enhance collaboration and class-wide discussions through Google Docs.

4. **Customizable Lessons**
   Rather than having the entire class complete the same project, assignment, or performance, allow each student to choose an online project that best suits her/his interests. Customizable lessons take more work when planning but offer more buy-in for the students.

Lesson Plan Ideas:

Job Application
Students will find a job-posting or job description for their desired job in performing arts. Based on the job-description, students will create/update their resumes and complete a cover letter as if they are going to apply for that job. Additionally, the instructor could simulate a mock-interview for the class and interview a few willing students. Students could also pair up and perform Skype interviews for each other (an increasingly popular interview model in today's job-search market). The instructor may provide resume-building tips, interviewing tips, and use this lesson as a way of highlighting different jobs in the field of performing arts.

Guest Artists/Scholars
Find an established theatre practitioner/scholar to interview or guest-present for your class. Have your class "tune in" to the session and ask their own questions. The internet is a great way to connect with artists and scholars around the world. Guests could be invited to speak on a current lesson, or guest artists could serve as a one-day lesson/experience.

Podcasts and YouTube Videos
Have students write and create a podcast or YouTube video based on your course topics. Challenge students to become experts in a given topic and present that information online. They can get creative with what type of podcast or YouTube video they choose: interviews, monologues, presentations, etc.

Radio Plays
Rather than performing a staged production, dust off one of the many popular radio plays for scene study. Students can easily rehearse online and perform online. The entire class can listen to each performance live by listening to the "radio" performance.

Voice Over Unit
Offer students an opportunity to practice their voice over skills with a voice over unit. Have students select an animated show/film, a book, manuscript, etc. Require students to use 3-5 varying voices within a 3-5 minute scene. This performance can be done individually or as a group. Students may choose to read a book (like audio book actors) or dub their own voice over

an established animated show/film. Students may also create a voice acting reel that showcases different characters/voices for radio and other voice work. Students will be able to practice skills in speech and dialects.

Film Auditions & Tape Auditions
Some auditions require students to submit their audition electronically. Have students create an audition tape for theatre and/or film.

Live-Stream Theatre
Live-Stream Theatre provides both an immediate physical presence and an online experience by providing audiences with two performance locations. In this project, plays are written and are meant to be performed over an online video messaging platform like Google Hangout or Skype. One actor/character is performing in one location (with his/her own audience) while another actor/character is in a different geographic location with a separate audience. Each of the audiences are viewing the same play at the same time, but through the perspective of different characters. Just as each character views the other character online, so does the audience. (Scenes for Live-Stream Theatre are available in the "Scenes" folder.)
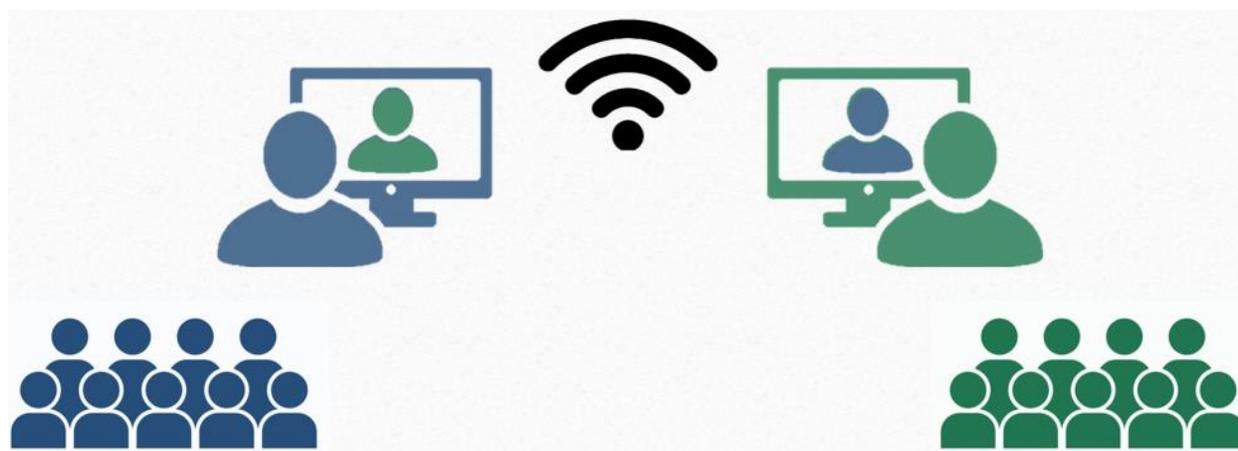
Online Rehearsal Ideas

Rehearsing normative plays and musicals online presents new challenges than teaching online. Below is a list of tips to consider while you plan your online rehearsals.

Make Your Rehearsal a "Class"
Request through your Learning Management System (Blackboard, Canvas, Schoology, Moodle, etc) to make your show a "class." This will allow students to "enroll," and you can provide all materials in one location (schedules, dramaturgical research, notes, blocking, contact info, links, etc.). If/when you do this, you'll be able to conduct your online rehearsals with greater ease.

Scene Work
Consider scheduling Scene Work Sessions with your cast through Zoom or Google Hangouts. You can have actors "attend" a virtual rehearsal with their scene partner. Rather than focusing on

blocking, establish moments, intentions, timing, etc. Similar to table work and beat work, removing the blocking will help actors focus on the clarity and delivery of their lines as well as the intentions behind their scene partner(s) lines. Video chat might seem to be a disadvantage, but you'll be able to see every actor's actions/reactions with an unobstructed view.

Blocking
If you must block online (I know it's not ideal), consider providing students with your blocking notes, or have your stage manager distribute predetermined blocking notes. You can use this as a jumping off point for when you're back in your rehearsal/performance space.

If you prefer to block organically, video chat the actors and provide them with a floorplan for all relevant scenes. I recommend asking your stage manager to use a white board to help track blocking ideas. Actors can try to replicate the floorplan in their remote location or they can simply tell the stage manager their intended blocking choices as they work/read through the scene.

Both of these options will get you 90% of the way there. They don't seamlessly replace blocking rehearsals, but they will reduce the in-person time needed to pull everything together in a blocking review or spacing rehearsal.

Choreography
Ask the choreographer to record her/himself and provide that recording to the cast. If you prefer to develop choreography organically, consider having dancers film 1-2 minutes of dancing/movements/shapes. They can then share their videos with their cast, and begin to collaborate based on each of the videos. Alternatively, you could assign students to groups of 2-4 dancers and have them Skype one another and collaborate live. Task each group with choreographing a section, and then have them share that with the ensemble or choreographer.

Tech & Design
Weekly design meetings can easily be done through video chats, and designers can independently work on their respective designs.

Shared drives and folders allow designers to provide their work, concepts, and designs with the cast and crew.

Paper tech rehearsals can be utilized during the online rehearsal period for sound/lights/projections.

Detailed plans should be made to hang lights and build sets/props once crews have access to their shops/stage. Consider creating a remote shop for larger set pieces and intricate props. Schools may make special consideration/exceptions for one or two people working in a shop or on stage, so it might be worth asking administrators/deans for approval.

Please feel free to reach out for more information about anything listed on this document. I can also help you tailor your lessons to an online platform.