

# Theatre: At A Glance

## **Talent and Accomplishment:** (courtesy of Dr. Tim Palkovic)

In acting, such a thing as talent exists, but it is particularly elusive. Actors do the things we do every day. If done well, it seems that little has been done by the actor. A frequent problem is negative self-talk: "I am not an actor" or "I am not creative." A student who believes these statements will deprive themselves from learning the skills of acting. Developmental processes can be learned, but only with positive self-talk.

Self-awareness is a key that allows emotional vulnerability. For this reason each student works at their own level with no comparison to the other class members. Self-judgment is the saboteur of good acting. Group cooperation, relation to others, and self-awareness are keys to success.

Frequently students state, as a personal goal in the class, that they wish to lose their fear of appearing before strangers. In practice, this is a goal that is next to impossible to achieve. Think of it: Each of us acts silly when we are certain that those we are with accept us without reservations for who we are. The reverse of losing fear must happen if we are to make progress. Each of us must have the goal to become a non-critical and loving friend to everyone in the class. We can all become expressive and willing to take risks because nobody is a stranger, but is a friend.

The loving acceptance of each other's frailties does not mean that we do not share in helping one another grow. The process is quite simple. Each game has rules and we, as watchers, can determine whether or not the players played by the rules in each game.

## **Helpful Tips and Things to Know:** (courtesy of Ken Roberts)

- It is important that the improv contain *who*, *what*, *where*
  - ✓ *who*: define your character
  - ✓ *what*: what is the situation, what is the conflict that will move or drive the scene
  - ✓ *where*: define your space.
- Warm-ups and exercises will help break the ice, stimulate the imagination and make the group feel easier about being silly as well as develop focus, risk taking, listening with ears and bodies, synchronicity, response time, trust within the group, reacting without thinking, quick thinking, and working together.
- Improvisational skills will enable the actor to instill the character with "real" and "personal" characteristics, as well as allow the actor to make the lines his own.
- Improvisational skills will give the actor the ability to "cover" or "ad lib" in a scene if necessary.
- Improvisation within the context of the monologue will enable the actor to create his space, to approach the work with self-confidence, and to present a truly unique interpretation.
- Improvisation of the scene or the monologue will let the actor know how well he/she knows the material.
- Monologues are used by the actor, not only in the context of the performance of the play as a whole, but are used in audition situations as well. Therefore it is essential that the actor have a stable set of monologues to perform in auditions encompassing comedy, drama, tragedy, spanning the classical theater to the modern theater.
- Perhaps the most important building block to having a successful semester is to trust each other. Without trust we cannot explore and fully realize the objectives and components of this course.

**Three Rules of Improvisation:** (According to Dan Diggles book, *Improv for Actors*)

- “Say the first thing that comes into your head.”
- “Say, ‘Yes. And ...’ to all of your partner’s offers.”
- “Make your partner look good.”

**20 Theatrical Terms:**

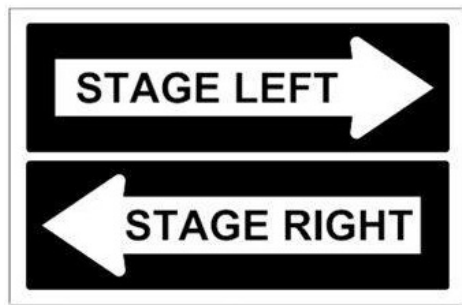
1. Ad lib – Lines supplied by the actor wherever they may be required, as in crowd scenes or to fill in where there would otherwise be an undesirable pause.
2. Blocking – The arrangement of the actors’ movements on the stage with respect to one another and the stage space.
3. Closed – The actor is turned away from the audience.
4. Counter Cross – A movement in opposition to the cross of another actor.
5. Cross – Movement from one area to another.
6. Cue – The last words of a speech or line indicating the time for another actor to speak.
7. Downstage – Toward the audience.
8. Enunciation – To speak clearly.
9. Motivation – Why the character acts a certain way.
10. Offstage – All parts of the stage not enclosed by the setting.
11. Onstage – The part of the stage enclosed by the setting that is visible to the audience.
12. Open – The actor is turned toward the audience.
13. Pacing – The rate of speed at which an actor speaks their lines.
14. Presence – The “it” quality that makes the audience want to watch an actor.
15. Projection – The ability to speak loudly without hurting one’s voice.
16. Stage Left – The actor’s left as he/she stands onstage facing the audience.
17. Stage Right – The actor’s right as he/she stands onstage facing the audience.
18. Stealing – Taking the audiences attention when it should be elsewhere.
19. Upstage – Away from the audience.
20. Upstaging – One actor is downstage and another is upstage, resulting in the downstage actor to turn upstage, which should be avoided.

**Stage areas:**

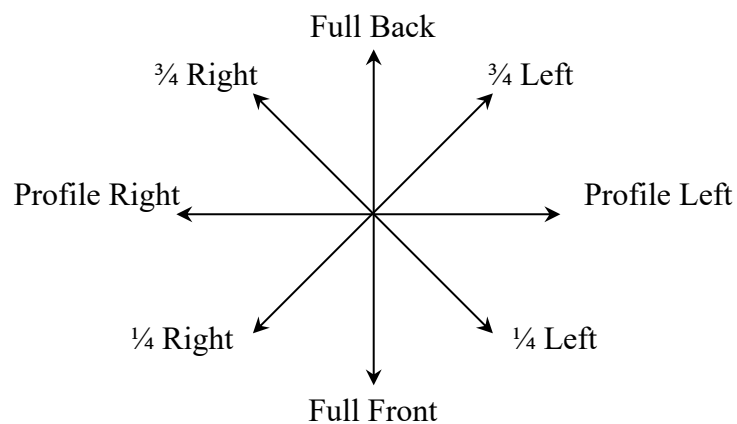
Up Right	Up Center	Up Left
Right	Center	Left
Down Right	Down Center	Down Left

*Audience*

For the actor, stage right and stage left are true. For the audience and director, they are backwards.



**Body Position:**



*Audience*

# IMPROVISATION GAMES

## Common Objectives of Theatre Games:

- trust building
- ensemble building
- observation and movement
- improvisation
- emotional availability

### NAME GAME #1

**Explanation:** A game for the first day of class, so that everyone learns each other's names.

**How to Play:** The participants sit or stand in a circle. The leader says, "We are having a party, and everyone has to bring something for the party that begins with the same first letter as their name. My name is *JANINE*, and I am bringing a bag of *JELLYBEANS*." The person to the leader's right says his name and item, and then repeats the leader's name and item: "My name is *ERIK*, I am going to bring *EGG SALAD*. This is *JANINE*, who is bringing *JELLYBEANS*." Each person in turn introduces himself, announces their item, and repeats the name and item of everyone who preceded them. This means that the last person has to remember everyone in the group, or at least try. The leader should encourage others to help out when participants get stuck on someone's name or item, with verbal or pantomimed clues. Easily change it up from a food item to a hobby.

### PARK BENCH

**Explanation:** In this game, one person decides the character for both participants. The other participant has to react to this while trying to determine their character.

**How to Play:** One participant sits on a bench. The setting is a park, and the person on the bench has no character until the second participant enters. The second participant has decided who she is, and who the person sitting on the park bench is. For example, the person entering could decide, "The person on the bench is a famous author, and I am a great fan of their work." In this situation, the actor would recognize the person on the bench, react to seeing their favorite author in person, ask for an autograph, and tell the author about which books she likes best. The actor on the bench, meanwhile, has to adapt to the situation, developing their character bit by bit. The improvisation ends when one actor exits, hopefully after everyone figures out whom they are.

**Notes:** With younger or less experienced actors, the leader may want to supply the person entering with characters, so that there is no worry about clear characters.

### FAIRY TALE IN A MINUTE

The actors pick a fairy tale (or get one from the audience) and then act out the story in one minute. Then they must act out the same thing in 30 seconds. THEN they must act it out in 10 seconds.

### INSTANT MONOLOGUES

This game works on quick thinking and verbalizing. Players form a line. The caller gives the first player a topic, which can be any word or phrase. That player must instantly start a monologue on that topic, and must talk until the caller moves on to the next person in line. Topics can be absolutely anything from "the summer of '69" to "verbs." It is helpful if the caller has a list of topics drawn up so he or she doesn't have to think them up on the spot.

### ANYTHING BUT

Pass an ordinary object around the room. The actors must use the object as something other than what it really is (for ex: open a stapler up and use it as a telephone).

### **WORD-AT-A-TIME STORY**

In this game the players tell a story by going around a circle, each contributing one word. The object is to create a coherent story with consistent characters, point of view, and plot. Players should concentrate on reacting specifically to the word said right before them. Preplanning is useless, because the other players do not know what you have planned. This game also will not work if players attempt to make things difficult for the next player, or try to be funny. All they will succeed in doing is making the story become ridiculous, then nonsensical. This game works on focusing on the purpose of the game rather than trying to be funny, and on focusing energy.

### **ALPHABET**

This is a difficult game, but a crowd pleaser. Two to four players start a scene. The only rule is that each consecutive line must start with the next letter of the alphabet. For example, if the first line was, "All right, I confess! Just stop torturing me!" the next line might be, "But I haven't even gotten out the thumb screws yet. Couldn't you hold out for just a little longer?" then "Can't you see I'm in great pain? I want to confess!" and so on, as logically as possible. Skipping x is strongly suggested, as it has a tendency to result a great many misplaced xylophones and x-ray machines. It is also helpful to have someone outside the scene say the letters in order as they come up.

### **SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY**

This game is based on the series of poems called Spoon River Anthology. Three players stand in a line, each in front of a chair. Each player is given a character and an attitude, emotion, or state of being by the audience. They then tell the audience the story of the day they all died. The players speak directly to the audience and give and take who is telling the story. The character's deaths should be related and occur very close together. As each character dies, the player sits on the chair behind him.

### **SUPERHEROES**

This activity begins with one actor and a suggestion from the audience. The performer announces, "I am a superhero. What's my special power?" The audience will hopefully offer a lot of entertaining suggestions. The performer should quickly select the most "workable" suggestion. The scene begins. The actor establishes his character, setting, and conflict. Then the actor will introduce the next superhero. Through playful exposition, he will explain the new hero's name and superpowers. And the insanity continues. Each new superhero introduces the next character until five or six players have had a chance to show off their eccentric powers (and perhaps resolve the conflict). Each superhero exits in reverse order as he/she goes out to solve the problem. First superhero explains the resolution to the conflict.

### **SLAP, SLAP, LEFT SNAP, RIGHT SNAP**

**Purpose:** Getting to know you game and rhythm recognition

- a) Sit on the floor in a big circle.
- b) One person starts the action: "Slap, Slap, Clap, Snap." This is done by patting one's legs with both hands, clapping in front of you, and then snapping with both hands. Do it several times until everyone in the circle is comfortable with the rhythm.
- c) The leader then calls out his/her name on the Right Snap.
- d) The person to the right goes next. On the left snap, he/she says the person's name to their left. On the right snap, he/she says their name.
- e) Any time the rhythm is broken, the person who broke the rhythm is out (optional). The person sitting next to the one who missed should start the rhythm again. Repeats it several times until everyone is comfortable with it, and on "snap" calls out a name, etc.
- f) When everyone gets comfortable with the game, increase the fun by speeding up the rhythm.

### **TRUST CIRCLE**

Students stand in a circle. One comes to the center and is blindfolded. The actors in the circle keep their eyes on the actor in the middle with hands at the ready. The student in the middle walks until he / she reaches the "wall". The students at the wall gently guide and turn the actor. The facilitator should watch for nervous oddities and breathing irregularities in the actor as he/she walks. More advanced performers walk quicker and can even run.

### **THE MACHINE**

**Purpose:** Working as a community to create something new! Develops creativity, concentration, and group cooperation.

- a) Start with one student making a noise and a simple repeatable gesture.
- b) When the student has a rhythm and another student has an idea for a movement which connects to the first gesture that student joins the first student by making a new noise and movement which connects to the original gesture.
- c) Each student joins in with a new noise and gesture and connects to the others in some way until all students are involved in creating the machine.

Evaluation:

1. What did you imagine the machine you created was?
2. What was your part in making it?
3. How could we make the machine better?
4. Was it difficult to keep your concentration until everyone was creating the machine?

Variation: Decide on a type of machine and then have everyone create it together- everyone starts at the same time.

### **MIRRORS!**

**Purpose:** Focus and understanding of the give and take of creativity and action on stage.

- a) Pair each student. If you have an odd number of students you as leader may have a partner.
- b) Each pair faces one another while standing. Assign one of the pair to be the leader and one to be the follower
- c) The leader should make slow deliberate movements that the follower can easily mirror.
- d) Switch the follower to leader and vice versa. Repeat.
- e) Switch again but have the leader increase the pace.
- f) Switch again and increase the pace once more
- g) Now call NO LEADER. The pair must focus and feel together what movement they would like to make.
- h) Evaluate with the students the ease of the process or difficulty. "What worked?"

### **FREEZE**

Have two students begin an improvised scene of some kind of action that requires teamwork (washing a car, making cookies, etc.). After a minute or so, or as soon as they've gotten "into" the routine, the instructor will clap hands or otherwise signal them to come to a complete freeze. Either choose someone or ask for a volunteer to take the place of one of the two actors. When in place, the new actor will begin a completely new and different action that evolves from the frozen pose. [For instance, waxing a car could evolve into petting a dog] This repeats until imaginations run dry.

### **TALK SHOW**

Have one of the actors play a host of a talk/interview show. Have another actor (or actors) play a guest. The audience should give the host and guest specific personality types--and give the guests occupations, hobbies, raison d'etre (reason for existence), etc.

## **DIRECTOR / ACTOR**

Place students into groups (10 per group is a good size). Instruct them to remove their shoes and place them in a pile. Ask for 2 volunteers – designate 1 the actor and 1 the director; they should stand facing each other about 2 meters apart. The others line up on sides of the two standing actors. Initially, the actor should have his/her back to the director. The actors sitting need to set up a gauntlet of shoes; an obstacle course. The director will then instruct the actor how to navigate the gauntlet without touching any part of a shoe OR actor sitting on the side. **VARIATION:** eventually, have the actor turn and face the director; this is difficult for the director because directions have to be backwards.

## **TONGUE TWISTERS**

**Purpose:** To concentrate on the use of the articulation muscles and tools in the mouth. Focus on good diction and working the mouth broadly when forming the words (A few suggested tongue twisters):

I thought a thought.  
But the thought I thought wasn't the thought  
I thought I thought.

One-One was a racehorse.  
Two-Two was one, too.  
When One-One won one race,  
Two-Two won one, too.

Say this sharply, say this sweetly,  
Say this shortly, say this softly.  
Say this sixteen times very quickly.

Rubber Baby Buggy Bumpers! (Repeat. Increase the tempo.)

Toy Boat (Repeat. Increase the tempo.)

Silly Sally swiftly shooed seven silly sheep.  
The seven silly sheep Silly Sally shooed  
Shilly-shallied south.  
These sheep shouldn't sleep in a shack;  
Sheep should sleep in a shed.

## **PARTY QUIRKS**

In this game, students work in small groups (i.e., 4-6 players) with one actor hosting a party. Each guest has a quirk that is unknown to the host. The host must try to guess each guest's quirks. Actors must work as an ensemble to make this large scene work. Actors focus on comedic timing and supporting one another. Students identify strengths and weaknesses of their own, and each other's work. They identify what makes a good performance. Activity requires students to make quick and clear character choices, to take note of others' actions, to listen actively and to ensure that the group keeps the story moving forward. Common suggestions include: physical quirk, emotional quirk, celebrity, inanimate objects, or any combination.

## **QUESTIONS ONLY**

Two contestants enact a scene given by the Compere, but can only use questions in their dialogue. If one slips up and puts in a statement, they are replaced with another player.

### **SCENES FROM A HAT**

All players assume positions on the sides of the stage. The facilitator draws scenes from a hat, which were suggested by the audience prior to the show. The players must act out the scenes suggested by the audience.

### **PROPS**

The players are given various props which they use to construct scenes/gags with. The facilitator uses his buzzer to switch between gags.

### **HOT SPOT**

Actors stand in a circle. One runs to center and sings a song. Another runs in, taps the singer, and sings another song. This continues.

### **EXPERT TRANSLATION**

Two players stand on stage. One player is assigned a nationality (suggested by the audience). The other must translate what he/she is saying into English. The "ethnic" player doesn't have to be a native or be able to speak the language; they can improvise as best they can. The translating player must work some topic into their translation (example: driving, washing the dog).

### **NEWS REPORT**

A game for four players. One player is removed which needs to guess the others. This is the news anchor. The facilitator assigns the remaining players a quirk or character as in "Party Quirks" – co-anchor, weather, and sports. The anchor establishes the topic of the news. A fifth actor may be added as a field reporter.

### **MOVING PEOPLE / MANNEQUIN**

Two contestants play this game with the aid of two audience members. The contestants act out a scene, but cannot move. Instead, the audience members move their arms, legs, head, etc. for them.

### **YES GAME**

Stand in a circle. Starting actor looks to make eye contact with someone in the circle. When eye contact is established, he/she points to them and he/she says, "Yes." Actor who pointed walks to new position. In the time it takes to walk, the new actor must make eye contact and point before the other actor takes his/her place. Variations: No pointing. Next levels: have multiple pointers; no sound cues – only eye contact.

### **NUMBER GAME**

Start at 1 and count on. No two actors can say the same number at the same time or you start again. No order or direction or patterning should be given. Silence is the connective tissue of the game. Silence and not speaking is as much a contribution as speaking a number.

### **PASS THE BALL**

Pass the ball around a circle in 60 seconds without dropping it. No skipping people or dropping the ball. Decrease time incrementally to increase effectiveness.

### **MOVIE TOSS EXPLOSION**

As long as you hold the ball, you can say the titles of as many movies as you want. Then toss the ball to anyone. The new person can say as many movies as he/she wants. However, they cannot repeat any movies already stated. Be specific with movie franchises (ex. Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince). If an actor is struggling, other may call for the ball. The ball toss represents a strong or weak impulse.



## PIRATES!

The facilitator calls out a series of commands. Slowly at first and builds in pace. As each command is called, the actor as a specific physical and vocal task. The physical and vocal task doesn't end until the next command is called. The task of the facilitator is to get actors out. He / She may use any trickery to get them out. When there is one left, we have our winner!

### List of Commands:

Command	#	Vocal Task	Physical Task
Attack	1	Aaarrggg	Draw Sword; Run Downstage
Captain's on Deck (at Ease)	1	Aye, sir!	Feet Together, Salute – Cannot Move Or Do Anything Until “At Ease” Is Said
Captain's Parrot	1	Polly Want a Cracker?	Makes Wings And Strut Around Like A Chicken
Fire the Cannon	1	Boom	One Fist Goes Back And Then Forward In Small Gesture
Land Ho	1		Run Stage Right; Look Out
Mermaid	1	Hello, Sailor	One Foot Behind Other, One Hand On Hip, One Hand Over Head Waving
Peg Leg Jim	1	What are ya lookin at?	One Leg Straight, Other Normal; Walk Around
Pirates	1	Aaarrggg	Arms Flexed In Front
Retreat	1	Aaahhh	Hands Up In The Air; Run Up Stage
Sea Sickness	1	Puking	Hands Over Stomach; Bend Over
Shark Attack	1	Ooo Aaah	Jumping From Left To Right With Arms Up
Ship A'Hoy	1		Run Stage Left; Look Out
Walk the Plank	1	Aaahhh	Walk One Foot In Front Of The Other; Fall To Ground
Man Overboard	2		One Actor On All Fours; Other Actor Places Foot On Back Looking For The Man
Mutiny	2	Aaarrggg	Two Actors Engage In Sword Fighting
Scrub the Floor	2	Scrubby Scrubby	Face Each Other On All Fours While Cleaning The Floor
Submarine	2	Beep	One Lay On Stomach With One Leg Up; Other Uses Leg As Periscope
Crow's Nest	3		Back To Back To Back; Link Arms; Looking Up
Dinner Time	4	Yum	Create Square; Bend Over And Eat Quickly
Row the Boat	4	Caller: Row Rowers: Stroke	Caller Stands Facing Rowers Rowers Sit On Floor Rowing