



Characters and Relationships Class – *Core Lessons*

In 201 We Learn That: If we accept the moment and *feel* in-the-moment, then the audience comes to know our characters through their patterns of emotional behavior. And then the audience loves seeing those patterns play out over detailed worlds.

- **Take Care of Yourself** – You don’t need a scene partner to get grounded in a moment – deciding how you feel about you, where you are, and/or what you’re doing
- **Be Affected by Your Environment** – The improv stage is a blank canvas on which to create active elements that we can care emotionally about. The audience loves seeing us react to imagined stimuli.
- **Be Affected by Your Scene Partner** – Give your scene partner the keys to your engine. Empower them to make you feel. React through the lens of your relative status and/or formal relationship. Be willing to lose to them.
- **Stay Active** – The core of improv is reacting in-the-moment to the moment. Fill the moment with details that *make you* react as opposed to talking about something off stage, in the past, or in the present that you only talk about feeling about.
- **Be Dynamic** – Compelling characters are nuanced. One-Note characters gain dimension and build tension by diverting their emotional attention to something new. Having multiple perspectives to oscillate between keeps any one perspective from topping off or petering out.
- **Empower Your Scene Partner to Be Dynamic** – Allow your scene partner to be nuanced, too. Allow them to change without “sense” and avoid calling them out on any contradiction.
- **Expand by Asking “If This Then What?”** – Go wide and deep on details. Find inspiration from what’s already been established.
- **Establish Rhythms** – Make your scenes about characters’ patterns of emotional behavior. Sustainable scenes come from players’ finding a pattern between patterns of emotional behavior – one player’s actions trigger the other player’s emotions, triggering the first player to react, capping off the second player’s emotions, allowing the first player to return to the action that triggered the second player’s emotions...
- **Play Patient, Edit Eagerly** – Players on stage need to be in-the-moment, not searching for an edit. Players on the wings need to “follow their feet” to edit scenes on a high note.
- **Follow the Emotional Behavior** – Whether it’s in a scene, adding to a scene with a tertiary move, or setting up an inspired future scene, seek to heighten characters and relationships rather than following plot devices.
- **Heighten Characters with Pivots & Heighten Relationships with Split Screens** – The dimensions of The Coalition’s stage beg for these moves.



Character and Relationship Class – Instructor’s Outline

The audience wants to see you care about something made up in-the-moment on stage. They want to see you affected in-the-moment by your scene partner(s).

Without an emotional perspective, a character is a caricature. Without emotional stakes, a relationship is a cliché. At The Coalition Theater and in doing improv as improv does best, we strive to ensure Emotion is at the core of all the work we do.

In this class, students will focus on accessing emotion in-the-moment, building characters and relationships on emotional perspectives, and using patterns of emotional behaviors to drive scenes forward.

On Note Giving:

- 1. Focus notes on the key lessons you outline for each class.** It’s understandable to want to address all the issues you see, but too much instruction will be counterproductive to students’ engaging the moment. **Focusing on lessons *for everyone* also keeps notes from being too personal** for any newbie’s fragile improv ego. **Prioritize those notes that can apply to the group as a whole** – “*We should all be thinking about...*” – **over calling out specific players.**
- 2. Highlight the positive.** Pointing out good moves helps build the actor’s muscle memory and gives observers a model. **Draw attention to how good reactions lead to more successful outcomes.**
- 3. Just Say “Do This - ”.** Prompt students with instructions to “do” something, not “don’t do” something.” *Especially* if side-coaching, remember that, when trying to instill good behaviors, it is less effective for you to explain *why* your note is applicable than it is for improvisers to *experience* a scene that “feels right.” **Instruct them to perform an action; let them feel the effect.**
- 4. Use their examples wherever possible.** The curriculum provides examples, but the instruction will be more meaningful if you can base your lessons on their attempts.
- 5. Give the students that crave notes the notes they deserve.** The expectation should be set and met that students will get individual notes in 201. Instructors should always focus on constructive notes; **remember that notes aren’t for the scene they just did, they’re for the scene they’re about to do.** And the expectation should be set that students should at least try to embrace notes and do what the Instructor asks of them while in class; they can do what they want outside of class.



On Preparing Classes:

There are a lot of exercises listed; choose which ones you want to teach, adding your own where necessary. **Bottom line: At the end of this class students need to be able to perform Two Person Scenes “about” emotionally-driven characters and relationships** (opposed to plot/narrative) **that move forward** (rather than being stuck in conflict/negation) **and are engaged in the environment** (and not standing center stage talking). However you get there is really up to you.

Some exercises – especially in earlier weeks – may be repeats of ones they did in 101. Great! Now the expectation is they do even better at them – **with more emotion!** And you can be more direct in noting contributions.

Spend time preparing your own class each week based on, but not married to, the materials provided. You can't teach by reciting someone else's writing. Figure out what you want to say, and even practice saying it aloud.

On the 101 to 201 Transition:

BE UPFRONT with your students about the fact that, while the 101 class is designed to get students interested in improv and its community, the rest of the classes put more emphasis on training students to be good long-form improvisers. This might mean that classes are less “fun” than in 101 and that individuals will be receiving more personal notes with an eye toward helping them learn. We work and practice to get better.

On “Playing It Real”:

You are not confined to being honest to YOU on an improv stage. Characters are supported. Many improvisers are successful just playing shades of themselves on stage, rarely assuming accents or character postures. Some are skilled at immediately assuming a character's point-of-view, and, for these actors, consistently filtering through that character's perspective is very natural. For these players, “Play it real” is a constructive note.

For some players, hearing “play it real” sounds “boooooorrrringggg,” because “real” people mute their emotions and often refrain from big choices. At worst it sounds to these improvisers like a nothing-note from an instructor that doesn't know something constructive to say.

What we want is to be true to our character's emotional perspective; be honest to the choices your character has already made. We can play outlandish people far outside of who we are, but as long we play with a consistent emotional perspective a caricature becomes a character.



Week 1 – Being In-the-Moment

A scripted actor’s whole job is to make an audience believe that the emotional reaction they’ve rehearsed is real in-the-moment. In improvisation, we have a leg up; we are all experiencing what’s happening for the first time. So feel the moment.

Key Teachings:

- **Share Yourself** - The improv audience knows they’re seeing “you” on stage and that all you say comes out of your head; trust yourself to share yourself in-the-moment and react honestly.
- **Just Be and React** - You don’t have to tell jokes.
- **Agree** - You don’t need to have conflict.
- **Accept** - In-the-Moment Acceptance of what’s given to you can be your funniest move; “Yes, I am” will evoke a better reaction than almost any clever line.

Week 2 – Starting, and Getting To Emotion

All you need to start a scene is one thing: anything. Make one choice – a posture, an activity, an object, a location, etc. – and all other choices can flow out of that “anything.” The sooner though that Emotion is on the table though the better, as it is how our characters feel about themselves, their surroundings and each other that will be what our scenes are “about.”

Key Teachings:

- **Start Simply** – Any choice is a good place to expand from. There are infinite choices so we shouldn’t let initiating be a burden.
- **Feel** - Emotional behavior/perspective should be the core of all improvisation.
- **Feel About Something Actively On Stage With You** - It’s not enough to say you’re feeling (“I’m mad”); we have to see you experience the *reaction*.
- **Feel to 11** - Practicing emotion at the extremes in class will help make improvisers comfortable accessing emotions on stage.
- **Commit** - It doesn’t matter what emotion you choose or *why* you chose it as long as you continue emotionally reacting.
- **Don’t Let “Motivation” Keep You From Feeling** - Choosing to *decide* on an emotion without deference to “sense” can make for fun unique scenes.
- **Make assumptions about emotional subtext to heighten emotions.**
- **Set Up Reactions** - The sooner we identify how a player feels the better – because that *feeling* can be heightened by the player and played *to* by the player’s teammates. The sooner we can identify how a player feels about *a something* the better – because that something can be heightened by the player to heighten the player’s emotion and that something can be referenced/heightened by the player’s teammates to force *the player* into a *reaction*.



Week 3 – Engaging the Environment and Details

When we *see, touch, smell* and **REACT** to our environment, the audience can, too. When we have *things* in our environment that *make us feel*, then we can build and heighten scenes with emotional reactions. We want to *react through* instead of *thinking through* our scenes.

Key Teachings:

- **Mime** - Weight, volume and tension are the key characteristics of miming objects that help players and the audience “see” an object.
- **Let your miming inspire a scene but do not let it dictate the scene** - Mime gives us something to do so we're more than talking heads, but it shouldn't confine us.
- **Make Environment about more than objects** - What sounds fill the space? What about the temperature, precipitation and/or density of the atmosphere?
- **Stay Physically Active** – please don't just stand and talk in the middle of the stage.
- **Let Environment Affect You** – If you care about what's in-the-moment and in the space with your character, then more of that will evoke more emotional reaction.

Week 4 – Building Scenes Through Emotional Perspectives

We're going to define our characters with emotional reactions, then we'll find out what the scene's about by following those characters' emotional perspectives. In any scene, you have at least two different emotional perspectives to play from: **Your Personal and Scenic Emotional Perspectives** – How you feel about “I” and How you feel about “You.” **Your Personal Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who I am, what I have and what I'm doing.** **Your Scenic Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who my scene partner is, what my scene partner has and what my scene partner is doing.**

Key Teachings:

- **Feel About Active Elements** - “Active” Scene Elements are the who, what, where, when, why, etc. that exist *in-the-moment* of the scene and can therefore evoke in-the-moment reactions from emotional players.
- **Let Emotion Be Our Scene Guide** - All an improviser needs to decide is:
 - How to feel about “I”: How I feel about who I am, what I have and what I'm doing.
 - How to feel about “You”: How I feel about who my scene partner is, what my scene partner has and what my scene partner is doing.
- **When in doubt, React!**
- **When in doubt, Repeat!**
- **Make Our “What” About Emotional Reactions to Active Elements** - Commitment and repetition are the only “why” we need. But “Because” can elevate the emotional stakes of a scene with context.



Week 5 – Building Momentum

We want to expand off of what we've already established instead of redirecting or making up new things out of fear. We want to push our scenes forward through our emotional perspectives: heightening emotional reactions to deepening details and/or related objects / activities / environment. Heightening what's established – as opposed to only shallowly exploring a wide variety of things – will ramp up the pacing of the scene and earn players an edit.

Key Teachings:

- **Feel, Feel About Something, Let the Something Make You Feel, Repeat** - Engage the virtuous cycle of emotion inspiring details inspiring emotion inspiring details *building momentum*.
- **Be Vulnerable To The Moment** - the audience wants to see us affected by what's imagined.
- **Be Dynamic** – Finding a rhythm between your different reactions to various stimuli in a scene can sustain a scene.
- **Be Consistent First** - You must establish a pattern before tension can build from doing something new.
- **Lose** - In conflict, “lose” and you will win.
- **Attract** – The best way to interest someone else in what you want to do is to exhibit how awesome what you want to do is. Don't argue them to your side; attract them there.

Week 6 – Editing and Heightening with New Scenes

As the momentum builds through our emotional perspectives and reactions, we set our scenes up for satisfying ends – in improv parlance, “edits.” We can also leverage our characters and emotions to inspire new scenes.

Key Teachings:

- **Remember What's Fun** - Heighten what's fun through repetition.
- **Serve Reactions** - We want to execute tag-outs and split screens in service of *emotional stakes*.
- **Match** - Be a bigger version of Player One; Do what Player One did bigger – always a trusty default.
- **Editing Is a Move In And Of Itself** - Put the onus on initiating subsequent beats on those standing on the wings, but players shouldn't delay an edit because they feel they'll have to start the next scene.
- **Use NAMES**
- **Elevate the situation**
- **Elevate character's defining behaviors**
- **Elevate themes**
- **Map** - Lay the dynamic structure of one genre over the particulars of another genre to heighten thematic and narrative depths.



Week 7 – Finesse and Format

Side coaching individual Two Person scenes and montages of Two Person scenes.

Week 8 – Performance Prep

Run through the group’s “Class Action” showcase set with notes.



Character and Relationship Class – Class Curriculum

Week 1 –

Sample Introduction

*“In this class, we’ll focus on **accessing emotion in-the-moment, building characters and relationships on emotional perspectives, and using patterns of emotional behaviors to drive scenes forward.***

Emotion should be at the core of all improvisation – the audience loves seeing us care about things we make up on stage.

*The sooner we identify how a player feels the better – because that feeling can be heightened by the player and played to by the player’s teammates. **The sooner we can identify how a player feels about a “something” the better** – because that “something” can be heightened to heighten the player’s emotion and that something can be referenced/heightened by the player’s teammates to force the player into a reaction.*

*While there are myriad different theories on improvisation – and improvisers who successfully focus on crafting narratives – **The Coalition focuses on making “what the scene is about” about the emotional perspectives that define our characters and our relationships.** Reacting boldly in-the-moment to make-believe taps into the art’s unique surprise.”*

Class Expectations:

- **Foster a safe environment.** Students should be physically gentle and appropriate with one another. Students should be conscientious of subject matter that people find offensive and/or insulting. Treating each other positively, on and off stage, should be everyone’s goal. Students need to feel that they can try and fail without discomfort.
- **Respect your group by showing up** on time. Please let your instructor know if you are going to be late or miss a class. To respect students’ time, the instructor will strive to finish class on time; so the longer it takes to begin, the less time anyone has to play.
- **Students are allowed two absences.** A student who misses three classes will be asked to drop out of the class.
- **Come to class physically prepared to participate.** You want to wear clothing that will enable you to do whatever anyone else does on stage.
- **See shows! You get in free! Watching is essential to learning.** While attendance at shows isn’t mandatory to passing classes, it should be. Go see shows. And see them with your fellow improvisers. It WILL make you better.



Week 1 – Being In-the-Moment

Objective: Today is about **allowing yourself to be yourself on stage, focusing outward and allowing yourself to be affected.** You have a wealth of information from your life. You’ve had a ton of experiences and met a ton of people with a ton of perspectives. **We often try too hard to be clever when we could be leveraging real details that may come out of our mouths faster and arrive with greater impact.** A scripted actor’s whole job is to make an audience believe that the emotional reaction they’ve rehearsed is real in-the-moment. In improvisation, we have a leg up; we are all experiencing what’s happening for the first time. So just react. Don’t be in your head thinking about how you should feel or why you should feel. **Just react. React without words until the words come. React without why until the why presents itself. If you commit to your reaction, that’s all the “why” an audience needs.** If you invest in your emotion, the audience will believe that you have a reason even if you don’t have a motivation in mind. It’s more powerful to let the audience give your moves meaning than for you to over explain your motivations.

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Focusing outward, allowing ourselves to be ourselves, and being affected*

1.0 Introduction: Introduce the class and yourself

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS – Standing around a circle, we often start by shaking it out as it gets us physically warm, gets us to check-in and shake off our days. We shake our right arm above our head for eight counts as we count aloud, then we do the same with our left arm, then our right legs and then our left legs. Then we do the whole thing again to a 7 count. Then six. Etcetera. Don’t count faster than you can shake. Make eye contact with everyone around the circle at least once as we go through.

NAME THUMPER – Going around the circle, each person (teacher included) associates their name with an action – ex: “Jumping Jason,” while jumping; “Dancing, Dana,” while dancing; “Posing Patrick,” while posing. Go around once more so everyone knows everyone else’s name and action. Then play progresses with an individual doing their name/action and then another person’s name/action; that person then does their name/action and then another person’s name/action; etc. “Posing Patrick,” “Jumping Jason.” “Jumping Jason,” “Dancing Dana.” “Dancing Dana,” “Posing Patrick.”



1.1 Be Supportive: While a lot of this class will be focused on making individual choices, we can't forget that we always *improvise as a group*. Our guiding mantra should always be "making each other look good" through acceptance and support.

Suggested Exercises:

AWESOME! – Around the circle, students say something about themselves and/or their day to which the rest of class enthusiastically responds, "Awesome!"

Lessons:

- **Acceptance is fun** – don't waste time judging; the audience wants to see you enjoying one another.

"YES AND" OBJECT DESCRIPTION – Everyone's in a circle. The first player – designated by the instructor – looks into the empty space inside the circle and says, "I see a [blank]." The next player around the circle says, "Yes, and it is [blank]." And the play continues with each player building in turn on top of *all that came before*. The first player is the last to contribute some semblance of "Yes, and it is [blank]" to their initial object; then that second player begins a new "I see a [blank]."

Lessons:

- **The sooner everyone can "see" it, the sooner we can blow out the details** – Get specific.
- **Repeating Agreement is funny** – What's better than one person who believes something strange? Two people who feel that same way.
- **Agreement fosters collaborative building** – Many people united behind one emotional perspective will be able to heighten creative details to apexes beyond the reach of any single person.
- **Build in the same direction** – Follow the group: if the [blank] is an *old* toaster, build out all the things that make it "old"; don't give an old toaster new features. Avoid contradictions.
- **The "jokes" made by building off of each other's contributions will be funnier than those we force out to make ourselves look individually funny.**
- **Dig deep into the details** – After "An Asian elephant," the group should stay focused on an *Asian* elephant instead of getting less specific ("A Japanese elephant," "An elephant who's tusks work as chop sticks when eating sushi," "An elephant that dips all his sushi in peanut sauce").
- **Setting, not spiking** – Don't get hung up thinking of the funniest detail to add; your detail could set up your scene partner for a humorous detail, made funnier because it emerged through collaboration.
- **Trust the direction of the group** – Don't force something totally new because you think the group needs a change, trust the direction of the group; commit to each other.



- **EMOTIONAL PERSPECTIVE** – Somewhere around the midpoint of the exercise, focus players on having the SAME EMOTIONAL PERSPECTIVE toward the object; if the first player hates this toaster, we ALL hate the toaster
 - It'll be easier to heighten the details when we agree to an emotional perspective and “see” the object through that emotional perspective.

1.2 Be Confident: Confidence is what separates the AssCats that can do whatever they want to grand applause from the college improv troupes who sink even great moves with desperation. The audience needs to see you comfortable in improv’s chaos so they can relax and enjoy it all.

Suggested Exercises:

I AM SUPERMAN – Everyone stands in a circle. One at a time, each player will enter the circle, say “I am [NAME] and for the next 30 seconds, I am Superman” at which point the teacher will start a timer and the player does whatever they want until the time is up at which point everyone claps and the next player takes the circle. Players around the circle are NOT to interact with the player in the center. **The player in the center should be encouraged to talk about something they actually care about** – be willing to share your thoughts and feelings without censoring yourself for fear of judgement.

Lessons:

- **Surrender to your group** – It’s not up to the group to earn your trust; you have to give your trust freely. Let go of ego. Let your team know that you’re ready and willing to commit to doing anything – even being awkward - in front of them.
- **You can stand alone** – You don’t need to wait for another person to join you to start a scene. You have a wealth of feelings and life details to rely on if you’re alone on stage.
- **It sucks to be alone** – Don’t let your fellow players suffer on stage alone. Get out there and support each other.

HERE’S WHAT I KNOW – One player takes the stage with everyone else in the audience. The audience, with the teacher moderating, asks the player very technical or nonsensical or just *hard* questions. The player presents themselves as an expert in all areas and is therefore able to confidently respond to all questions.

Lessons:

- **Emotions always win** – A maniacal laugh. A dismissive ‘pshaw.’ Even an awkward misdirection. All of these non-informative but *emotional* responses keep a player in control.
- **Decisiveness is king** – Struggling to the “right” answer is rarely as satisfying as quickly deciding on *any* answer.
- **Commitment is all the sense you need** – Players can get hung up on thinking through responses that “make sense.” Forget sense. Just make a choice and stand by it confidently. Commitment to making a decision despite sense will make your



response sound “right” even if it isn’t and/or it’ll focus the scene on your “wrong” character instead of on the Q&A “stuff,” which is awesome.

- **Committed, You Can Stand By Yourself** – You can be on stage alone for 30 seconds or for five minutes. Commit to yourself. Don’t rely on meeting your scene partner center stage before the scene starts. You can be alone.

1.3 Be Yourself: Without scripts, improvisers are dependent on what’s in their head – details from their lives and their personal ability to access emotion in-the-moment. The audience loves seeing us on stage. Let the audience see you to give them the ability to connect with you and ultimately root for you.

Suggested Exercises:

CAFÉ SCENES – Two players sit in chairs facing each other. They are to have a conversation as themselves, trying not to worry about people watching them.

Students should have done Café Scenes in 101. As a **variation**, have students start with regular Café Scenes, but as soon as they get comfortable assign them caricatures (ex: monsters, ghosts, vampires, pirates, etc.) to use as filters. They keep their individual tics while assuming the world of their caricature.

Lessons:

- **Share your opinions** – We avoid “getting to know one another scenes” in improv because they end up being boring as players focus on figuring each other out instead of boldly committing to what they already *know*. A bold emotional statement immediately charges the scene with something interesting.
- **No questions** – Questions are invitations for information; statements *are* information. Get to the information. Instead of asking the other person, “What do you do?” tell them what you do (“I’m a lawyer”).
- **What you *did* or what you *will do* is ultimately less interesting than when we talk about the *present*** - We are talking about the present when we talk about what we *feel* or what we *care about*.
- **Focus outward and react** – What do *you* see? How do *you* feel about that? Don’t be in your head thinking about what to say; focus on your partner and share observations and feelings.
- **Be vulnerable** – Honest reactions are endearing; be endearing instead of calculating.
- **You don’t speak like a soap opera character** – Notice the ease with which people talk as themselves on stage. Notice the strain that improvisers put into their voice when playing caricatures on stage. “Improv voice” is avoided through the commitment to really listening and reacting.
- **Make your caricatures into characters** – Give all characters personal tics.



CONVERSATION PARTY – Players stand on stage in multiple groups of two or three people. Players are “at a party” as themselves, speaking as themselves to other who are also themselves. Tell them to hold a beverage of their choice. Give them a Word as a suggestion. The teacher conducts focus from one conversation to the next OR you can allow students to take and give focus.

Lessons:

- **Be specific** – You don’t have to try so hard to be funny. You just have to be specific. The surprise inherent to improvisation is made even more satisfying when we’re specific in-the-moment.
- **Care about what you say and make what your partner says matter to you** - The audience reaction of “I would have said that,” or “I know a woman who would have said that,” is such a satisfying response for any performance medium. In improvisation, that power is compounded as the audience knows that your reaction was “your” reaction in-the-moment.
- **Connect** – Don’t just sit in your head waiting for your next turn to speak; *listen* to what’s going on around you, let it seep in and affect you.
- **Juxtapose** – We don’t have to discuss our differences or negotiate out one “truth.” A party group who loves cats standing next to a group that loves dogs doesn’t need to engage in a fight. The audience sees both groups and wants both heightened next to each other.

1.4 Acceptance and Commitment: “Yes” is arguably the greatest emotional statement there is. Watching a player accept a belief given to them by another player is a fun surprise. When the player continues committing to that perspective the audience is engaged in rooting for the performer in a way unique to improvisation.

Suggested Exercises:

YES, YES I AM – Form lay-up lines on either side of the stage. The player on stage left endows the player on stage right with a strong emotional perspective (“You think Ringo is the best Beatle”). The player from stage right accepts the perspective (“Yes, I do”) and commits through several lines of dialogue (“He voices Thomas the Tank Engine” / “I own every Thomas trinket there is”).

Lessons:

- **“Yes” is funny** – There’s a surprise unique to improvisation in watching a player accept a perspective thrust upon them. The “Yes” of acceptance stands to be funnier than anything else even the cleverest person might have responded with.
- **Specificity heightens the funny of acceptance** – “Have you ever eaten a train, piece by piece, *after* you derailed it with your penis?” “Yes – for charity.”* When we *negotiate* the bizarre, we (and the audience) get bogged down trying to make sense. When we accept the bizarre, we (and the audience) explore and heighten fun worlds where the bizarre is “real.” [* thank you, *Mr. Show*]



- **Commit even (especially) if you don't know:** There's always a way to agree. "You're a sycophant." Don't know what that word means? "Yessir, I only describe myself in adjectives that begin with 's'."

YES, YES WE DO – Form lay-up lines on either side of the stage. The player on stage left runs on with an emotional imperative ("We have to find the remote!"). The player from stage right enthusiastically accepts the perspective ("Oh, God, quick; Last Man Standing is coming on!") and commits through several lines of dialogue ("I need my Tim Allen fix!" / "I need to hear that old cokehead's conservative rants!").

HOMEWORK –

- **Focus outward during your interactions:** Instead of being in our heads thinking up what to say, really listen and observe what's happening outside yourself during an interaction so that what you say is inspired by the moment.
- **Make another person look good:** If I say "Great Game of Thrones last night," don't say, "I don't own a TV," say "Yeah? I'd like to hear more about that."
- **Notice each other's tics:** Pay attention to those things that people in our lives do subconsciously. Ex: They sniff after making declarations; They flick their thumb with their ring finger; Their default agreement is "Oh, yeah, for sure." If we notice these things that make our friends/family individuals we can bring those tics to our characters to flesh them out.
- **Go see shows! Report back next week with examples of moments where you laughed at a player's authentic reaction.**



Week 2 – Starting, And Getting To Emotion

Objective: All you need to start a scene is one thing: Anything. Make one choice – a posture, an activity, an object, a location, a sound, etc. – and all other choices can flow out of that “anything.” This can be SIMPLE; don’t let starting a scene make you anxious.

The sooner that emotion is on the table though the better, as it is how our characters feel about themselves, their surroundings and each other that will be what our scenes are “about.”

Leading with emotion is a hugely powerful way to ground a scene in-the-moment. Don’t over-think an easy win. You don’t need a motivation. You just need commitment to the moment. Just react emotionally.

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Establishing scenes based in “feeling something about something”*

2.0 Warm-Ups: Revisit names, build energy and concentrate energy.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

NAME THUMPER – With EMOTIONAL alliterative names, for example: “Pouting Patrick.” Don’t play this so fast that players don’t own every emotion.

2.1 Emotional Heights/Depths: The audience wants to see improvisers caring about their imagined realities. But, I get, it; we’ve spent a lot of our lives swallowing our reactions. Having a feeling in-the-moment feels daunting. So let’s practice with how easy getting to “feeling” can be.

Suggested Exercises:

EMOTIONAL REACTION CIRCLE – Players stand in a circle around the instructor. The instructor is going to shout “an emotion” - use the “Circle Of Emotions” in the appendix of this curriculum - and everyone is going to feel that emotion. The instructor will then shout out a new emotion and everyone will feel that one.

They don’t need words – they can just make an emotional sound. It’s most important that they show their emotion in their posture and face. Have them **push their emotions** to 11. They shouldn’t worry about what they look like; everyone’s doing the same thing!

Lessons:

- **Exude the emotion physically** - Show what you’re feeling by reflecting it with your face and body.
- **Heightening emotion doesn’t always mean higher volumes** – Don’t get louder to show you care more; let it affect your body and face more. *Note: Screaming improvisers are hard to enjoy.*
- **Being bored or unaffected is hard to heighten** – Care.



EMOTIONAL CASCADE – Players in a circle. One Player, designated by the Instructor, starts with an emotional reaction, *any emotional reaction*. ***It doesn't need to be verbal. It can have words, but they should be minor.*** Then the next Player, clockwise, repeats that emotion – at LEAST hitting same level if not heightening it. Then play continues around the circle, with each player heightening the emotional reaction. When it gets back to Player One, they also have to heighten that initial emotion. Then Player Two can start a brand new emotion and the cascade goes again.

Lessons:

- **Push it past comfortable** – Being vulnerable enough to share big emotions can be hard, but we have to trust each other and the safe place to “go big” in practice. Support each other with applause.
- **Take on other's emotions** - A simple path to an emotion choice is adopting the emotional choice of your scene partner. And it's fun!
- **Exude the emotion physically** - 11 in sadness is rolling on the floor and weeping.

2.2 Emotional Context: Committed emotion is all the “what” and “why” a scene needs.

What's extra fun is that, when we do have emotion, **that emotion can add/change the meaning of our words and heighten the depth of our scenes.**

We don't need to be in our heads thinking about *why* we're feeling before we feel it. And we shouldn't be slogging through composing clever lines of dialogue when how we feel is more important. **Feel despite sense. Even nonsense gets power from emotion.**

Suggested Exercises:

EMOTIONAL NURSERY RHYME – Around a circle, a player recites a common nursery rhyme with an emotional filter: Sad, Excited, Angry, Elated, etc. The next player can do the same nursery rhyme with the same or new emotion or do a different nursery rhyme. The key here is the content doesn't matter at all. Focus is entirely on the emotion.

Variations:

- Song lyrics
- Old salts / sayings

Lessons:

- **The details gain weight with our emotional perspectives**
- **Acting is emoting** – Understanding a motivation can be hard and grueling. Committing to an emotion without regard to “sense” is easy and fun.



2.3 Emotional Reactions: If you are to “choose one thing” entering a scene, emotion is always a strong choice. It doesn’t matter what the choice was if you commit. And choosing to decide without deference to “sense” can make for fun unique scenes.

Suggested Exercises:

EMOTIONAL REACTION CIRCLE– Player One makes a decision in their head about what emotion they will use to react to Player Two through. Then Player Two says *anything* – more banal the better. And Player One has the previously decided upon emotional reaction to the *anything*. (“I have a dog” / “Fucking Christ!”)

Lessons:

- **A committed emotion will always trump sense** – If you just feel and keep feeling, you never have to explain how/why you feel what you do.
- **Any emotion works** – If you try to “understand your motivation” before making a choice about how to feel, you’ll end up in a scene that’s been done a million times before. But, if you make a choice about how to feel before any context is established, then that scene has the potential to be different than any that’s been seen before (“I’m the first Johnson graduating college” / “Ooooh, my god. I’m so scared”).
- **Repetition is the only justification you need** – Don’t waste your time negotiating which feelings are valid; just heighten the emotion you chose to feel (If you choose to cry when your partner says, “I’m five,” don’t stop crying to explain why; just keep crying.)

2.4 Emotional Decision Making: We don’t need it “all figured out” the moment we step on stage. Make one choice and then build other choices on top of that choice.

We can start with emotion and build the details of our character around that. Or, we can start with a detail and build an emotional character from there. **All that's important is that we make a choice the moment we enter stage.** Let's practice how easy that first choice can be.

Suggested Exercises:

ENDOWMENT WALK – Students walk around the space as themselves. Teacher gives prompts for them to make choices from (see *Progression* below). Teacher asks additional questions to flesh out the characters – “If that’s what you’re doing,..where are you?...how does it affect your posture?” (see below for more). **What you build to in each iteration is asking, “How does [what you’re doing] make you feel?” Call on students to make an emotional noise** and then later **to voice in-character statements about how they’re feeling.** Then the Instructor has students reset, returning to walk around the space as themselves again. And Repeat.

Again, students shouldn't be worried about what they look like; everyone's doing the same thing!



Instructors, keep it brisk. You want to build through a bunch of prompts so don't belabor them. **Students don't have to nail each one as long as everyone walks away comfortable they can make a choice and build from it.**

Progression:

- Have players make simple choices to see how they affect the way they feel
 - **Change your rate** – speed up, slow down
 - Walk with a **different body part pushing forward** breaking the vertical plane first
 - Walk **like someone you know**
 - Make **a sound**
- Have players imagine active elements on stage to see how they can find feeling through these choices
 - Decide what the **atmosphere** is around them (i.e., Raining, cold, hot) and how they feel about it
 - Grab an **imagined object** from the air, decide what it is, how they feel about it
 - Engage in a **repeatable action** (i.e., “chopping wood”); how do they feel about it?
- Have players change their walk/posture by assuming one of the following prompts:
 - Impersonate a **celebrity**
 - Personify an **animal** (ex: how does a squirrel walk? A fish?)
 - Assume **high/low status**
 - Be a **caricature** (ex: assume the posture of a pirate, a spaceman, etc.)
- Having started them with one of the above directions, the Instructor then asks questions to get them to engage an emotional perspective and have that emotion affect them physically. **Basically “if this, then what” to find and heighten emotion.** For example, “How do you feel about the action you’re doing?”, “How does that feeling affect how you do the action?” **Push them to heighten the emotion and the effect.**
- After building them to deciding “how they feel about [it],” call out students to speak in their character’s voice about their emotional states – calling on students individually to contribute.
- **Laugh Track:** Feel free to play the start of a song to inspire students into character endowments.

Lessons:

- **Don't let starting a scene be intimidating** – All you need to start is one choice; you can find your emotional perspective for the scene by building on / diving into the decisions you have made.
- **Seek to establish emotion** – As emotion will drive our scenes, we don't want to stop our character development until we establish that emotional perspective.
- **Volume, Weight and Tension are our Mime tools** - Prompt students to give their imagined objects a physical presence through how it affects their body.



- **Break the cliché** – A high status person can be nice. A low status person can be happy.
- **Find the emotion beneath a caricature** – A pirate is a caricature. A pirate who is constantly afraid is a character.

2.5 No Pressure Initiations: Students shouldn't be intimidated to start a scene. They don't need to think of a perfect initiation; they just need to get out there and "choose one thing."

Players can feel very anxious about initiations. It is important for a teacher to balance emphasizing "strong initiations" and underscoring that "failure" isn't possible – all you need to start is "anything."

Suggested Exercises:

ANNOYANCE-STYLE SCENE STARTS - Have the class form a line across the back of the stage. Call out one name. That person should immediately take the stage and "take care of themselves" with **A choice: grab an object, engage an action, make a sound, assume a posture, "see" something and react to it, etc.** The moment you call that name, another improviser should be coming out on stage as well. That person must also "take care of themselves" with A choice. **The second player can choose AGREEMENT – it's both the easiest and most satisfying choice.**

If time permits additional rounds, **allow Players more lines back and forth with the instruction to double down on the choices they've already made**, with additional detail and heightened reaction. Point out where students heightened the choices they've already made, with additional detail and more emotional reaction. Point out where students filtered their descriptions/heightening through *emotional perspective*. **Run through this several times until you are confident everyone will take care of themselves right out of the gate and, eventually if not immediately, get to emotion.**

Lessons:

- **Commit to a choice the moment you enter stage** - A choice - any choice.
- **Agreement is awesome** – Don't negotiate an imagined reality.
- **You don't need motivation to have a feeling.**
- **Expand on the information you've already established** instead of scrambling to make up new stuff. **Commit to your choices.**
- **The sooner we can get to emotional perspective the better, but don't feel any pressure to start there.** All you need to start is anything.
- **Trust that repetition of an emotion/sound is all the "reason" you have to provide for what/how you feel.** Commit, don't explain.



BAT SHIT ACCEPTENCE LAYUPS – Rapid fire in pairs, players enter the stage from the wings. One player initiates with...whatever comes to mind; it can be crazy, it can be “lame.” The other player agrees with the world of that initiation no matter what it is. Ex: “I just saw a monkey eat its head”; “Me, too!”

Lessons:

- **Whatever is said will work if accepted and committed to.** Don’t put pressure on yourself to provide gold up top. And don’t keep that anxiety from letting you start scenes.

SOUND STARTS – From the wings in layup lines, one player enters stage making any sound. The other player can mirror that sound or provide a sound of their own. Rather than explain the motivation behind the sounds, the players just need to double down on their sounds, ideally finding the emotion of the sound.

Lessons:

- **Don’t wait until you’re center stage to make a sound.** The scene starts the moment your foot’s on stage.
- **Trust that repetition of an emotion/sound is all the “reason” you have to provide for what/how you feel.** Commit, don’t explain.

2.6 Emotional Initiations: You don’t have to initiate with statements. You can start with any choice: A sound, an object, an action, an environment, an atmosphere, etc. But **the sooner we get to feeling, and feeling about something active on stage with us the better** – because that *feeling* can be heightened by the player and played *to* by the player’s teammates. **The sooner we can identify how a player feels about a something the better** – because that something can be heightened by the player to heighten the player’s emotion and that something can be referenced/heightened by the player’s teammates to force *the player* into a *reaction*.

Suggested Exercises:

SELF CONTAINED EMOTIONAL STATEMENT CIRCLE – We want to “**feel something about something.**” Around a circle, everyone makes a Self Contained Emotional Statement. It can be as simple as “I love it here,” “I hate the arts,” or “I’m uncomfortable.” *Note:* the SCES might seem stiff but damnit it works.

Example:

- I love this cat
- I hate pulling weeds
- Des Moines, you’re impressive
- I’m proud of my shoes
- I’m afraid of my face
- I’m sad I have no friends



Lessons:

- **It's self-contained.** It's an "I" statement. It's a choice you make to take care of yourself, neither dictating or deferring to a scene partner.
- **It's a statement.** It's not a question shifting the responsibility of providing information to your partner. There's a period. It's definitive.
- **It's an *emotional* statement.** Emotion is one of our three key tools; let's get to it.
- **It's establishes an emotional *reaction*.** You need to feel and, for the *reaction*, you need to give that feeling a direction. Give X the power to make you feel Y.
- **It's active.** If I say, "I love cats," I'm just emoting. If I say, "I love *this* cat," I'm emotionally reacting. If we make the object of our emotion *active* in the scene – actually tangible/ observable/ repeatable on stage – then we have something to *react to* instead of just *talk about*.
- **Being self-contained, the statement places you on solid ground without dictating the scene to your partners** - Mick Napier urges us each to "take care of yourself" without confining the scene. Allow your partner the choice of whether to mirror you in some fashion or to take on something entirely their own. Give them the gift of freedom. Being self-contained is increasingly an imperative the larger a group you have on stage.

NOTE ON "SELF CONTAINED": Certainly we don't discourage improvisers from noticing, endowing and reacting to their scene partner. **HOWEVER, we focus first on improvisers finding something for themselves to engage in / feel about that does not depend on their scene partner BECAUSE improvisers' default is to focus on their scene partner to the exclusion of all else.**

This is understandable: The scene partner is the only other thing *actually, physically* on stage; everything else we have to imagine.

But if I see your students perform every scene standing center stage and talking to each other, you won't teach again.

The ideal state in Two Person Scenes will be for each improviser to choose how they feel A) about what they have personally going on and B) what their scene partner has going on. We just need to ensure students learn "A)" because they tend to only do "B)."

2.7 Emotional Scene Starts: Player One initiates with a Self Contained Emotional Statement (SCES). **How does Player Two join in? However they want to! All they have to do is make a choice for themselves.** Change their posture, grab an object, engage an activity, make a sound, come up with a Self Contained Emotional Statement of their own.

Player Two can also choose to **Agree** with Player One, **Heighten** Player One's perspective, and/or **React** to Player One.

What's important is that both players make a choice for themselves that can be built up so that **both characters feel something about something.**



Suggested Exercises:

SELF CONTAINED EMOTIONAL STATEMENTS AND JOIN LAY-UPS – Split the group in two and have them form separate lines on either wing of the stage. Designate one line as the Initiation Line. **One player from the Initiation Line enters stage with either a Self Contained Emotional Statement. The player at the head of the other line also enters – same time – and makes a choice of their own (to include the ability to Agree With and/or React To Player One).**

Lessons:

- **Feel something about something** – It's the initiation most conducive to success.
- **Agreement to imagined stimuli is funny** - Agreement is so satisfying and it doesn't have to be any harder than that.
- **Engage the environment** – Don't let your scene partner be the only other active element on stage. "See" those active elements to evoke deeper details. React to those active elements.
- **Don't know what to do next? Do more of what you did** – A Boy Scout Motto says, "If you're ever lost in a wood – hug a tree – hold onto the last place you knew you were."
- **No questions** – Questions are invitations for information; statements *are* information. Get to the information. Instead of asking "What do you do?" tell them what you do (ex: "I'm a lawyer.")
- **Just do more of what you're doing** – Don't worry about where the scene's going. Don't force conflict because that's what you think a scene "should be about." Just double down on how you feel – reacting to what you "see" and to your scene partner.

NOTE ON "JOINS": What's MOST important is that students practice getting on stage, making a choice and investing in that choice. Students don't need to get caught up with superfluous vocabulary at this stage. BUT when we look at the types of emotional choices a Player Two has at their disposal, those options can be grouped into 4 categories.

Categorizing 4 Types of "Joins" can help us focus a scene quickly, which makes them important to the 301 curriculum in illustrating how to set up Group Games. In 201, **while it can be helpful to provide students with a discrete list of options**, you don't want to unnecessarily overwhelm students. So...the Instructor's responsibility to "Joins" in this class is to be aware of the categorization and starting to point out examples of each where appropriate.

The 4 Types of Joins:

1. **Complete Agreement** – *"I love the stars." "They're so bright, sparkly and perfect."*
Agreement allows players to collaboratively heighten one emotional perspective.
2. **Tangential Agreement** – *"I love the stars." "I'm more a planets man myself."*
Tangential heightening enables juxtaposition of emotional perspectives and exploration of theme.
3. **Reaction** – *"I love the stars." "Your astronomy prowess isn't getting me in bed."*
Emotional reactions establish a sequence of cause-and-effect to heighten.



4. **Disparate Initiation** – *“I love the stars.” “Whoa, you hear that?”* We don’t have to “make sense” of disparate initiations, we can heighten through repetition of the emotions. The first time is random, second time is purposeful, third time is expected.

HOMEWORK –

- **Dissect the shows you watch:** Is the driving force of the show how characters will succeed in getting something done? You’re watching a drama. Is the driving force of the show how characters will be emotionally affected by escalating situations? You’re watching a comedy. **Most comedies on TV rely on arcing and resetting characters’ behaviors each episode.**
- **Notice what you care about, and how what you care about makes you feel:** Be conscious of those moments in your day-to-day life where “something makes you feel” and “more of that something makes you feel more.”
- **Go see shows! Report back next week with examples to compare and contrast where you saw improvisers focused on plot versus where you saw improvisers focused on emotional reactions.**



Week 3 – Engaging the Environment and Details

Objective: When we *see, touch, smell* and **REACT** to our environment, the audience can, too. When we have *things* in our environment that *make* us feel, then we can build and heighten scenes with emotional reactions.

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Practicing Two Person Scenes with an emphasis on emotionally engaging environment.*

3.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and introduce the class’ emphasis on mime.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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3.1 Mime: Weight, Volume and Tension are the key characteristics of a mimed object that help players and the audience “see” the object.

Suggested Exercises:

MAGIC CLAY – Around a circle, a player builds a mimed object “out of clay” and then hands the object to another player who emotionally reacts to it while interacting with it and then molds the “clay” into a brand new object. And repeat.

Lessons:

- **With practice, mime work becomes instinct – So practice.** When you’re engaged in an everyday action (brushing teeth, doing dishes, etc.) be conscious of your movements and the objects’ characteristics. Then try to mime those activities without the objects.
- **Really picture what you’re creating.**
- **If something’s not clear to you, don’t avoid it, feel the responsibility to make it clearer for everyone else.**

MAGIC CLAY WEAPONS – #1: Around a circle, a player mimes a weapon and then uses that weapon to *safely and respectfully* “kill” another player in the circle. The killed player then makes their own weapon and kills someone else.

#2: Around a circle, a player mimes a weapon and then targets another player they want to kill. The armed player approaches the target but *then experiences an emotional change of heart* and just hands their weapon to the next person in the circle. Repeat.



3.2 Environment and Mime: Have students practice building environments with mime and engaging in the objects/environment created by their scene partners.

Suggested Exercises:

BUILD A ROOM – With everyone else watching from the audience, a player enters a room through a door (push in?, pull out?, doorknob height?, door weight?), creates one mimed object somewhere in the space, and then leaves through the door. A second player enters, interacts with the first player’s object, creates their own new object, and then leaves. A third player enters, interacts with the first player’s object, interacts with the second player’s object, creates their own new object, and then leaves. Etcetera.

Lessons:

- **Weight, Volume and Tension are the key characteristics of a mimed object that help players and the audience “see” the object.** After introducing these three characteristics, you can then use the words to side coach – ex “Weight!”
- **One Reason for this Activity is to Teach “Finding Reference Points for Mime.”** Because our improvised reality is thin air, it can be difficult to confidently engage imagined objects our fellow players interact with. The Keys are:
 - **Noting where fellow players’ feet are when they interact with the imagined object.**
 - **Noting how high against the back wall of the stage our fellow players’ limbs raised to interact with imagined objects.**
- **It’s also really fun to watch multiple improvisers engage with the same imagined objects.** We too often mime in silos. Get confident engaging the objects/environment that someone else creates.
- **If something’s not clear to you, don’t avoid it; feel the responsibility to make it clearer for everyone else.** Go slower. Give “it” more Weight/Volume/Tension.
- **With practice, mime work becomes instinct – So practice.** When you’re engaged in an everyday action (brushing teeth, doing dishes, etc.) be conscious of your movements and the objects’ characteristics. Then try to mime those activities without the objects.
- **Really picture what you’re creating** – We “see” details if we’re really “picturing” it and not just imagining it in our heads.

DO WHAT YOU DO WHERE YOU DO IT – Have a player engage in a mimed activity they are very familiar with in a space imagined based on their actual house/work/etc. Moderated by the instructor, players from the audience get to ask questions that the player has to respond to in mime (“What else is around you?” / “Is it hard to do or easy?” / “Do you like it or do you hate it?”) – *we want to drive students toward specifics.*

Variations:

- **Inhabiting other spaces you know** – A coworker’s office space, a friend’s house, a business you frequent.



Lessons:

- **Leveraging your personal life will make being specific easy.**
- **What we do / objects we have inform our character** – Strive to find an emotional perspective through your actions and details.
- **“Sense Memory”** – Greg Travares of SC’s Theatre 99 talks about sense memory; that if we really concentrate on “seeing” and “feeling” what we’re engaged with on stage, then we can channel the emotions we’ve felt while engaged with those things/actions off-stage.
- **Look at what you’ve imagined** – When asked a question, don’t look at the Questioner; look at where the answer lies in the environment. We don’t want to be in our heads thinking up the right answer, we want to be focused out on what we imagine so our answer is a reaction, not a contrived idea.

3.3 Multi-Tasking With Mime: Even if what we’re doing doesn’t “matter” to the scene in any way, we should engage in mime/environment as it makes for an interesting stage picture. Conversely, we don’t want to become so focused on mime/environment work that our scenes become nothing more than “talking about what we’re doing.”

Suggested Exercises:

MIMED SEQUENCE / DIALOGUE SEQUENCE - Two players on stage are given a suggestion of location. Each player, in mime - without interacting or trying to tell a story - must define five objects in the space. Then have players go back to their starting positions. Tell them to go through that same sequence of mimed interactions again with dialogue and reacting to one another, BUT without talking about what they are doing.

Progression:

- Players will struggle not to talk about what they’re doing; stage coach quickly to get them re-centered if they go too far down that rabbit hole.
- Players will stop engaging environment and devolve to talking heads once they reach the end of their sequences; encourage them to keep engaged, developing new environmental elements while building on dialogue.

Lessons:

- **Activities gain weight in conjunction with the dialogue** – Don’t undermine subtext by making it explicit; let the audience make connections between what’s being done and what’s being said.
- **A stage picture makes scenes more interesting** – Simply moving around the space and engaging in the environment – even if nothing is explicitly addressed or explicitly drives the scene – will make players more interesting to watch while engaged in dialogue.
- **Engage environment, rest your tongue** – If we have something to do, we don’t have to rely so hard on our words.



CHORE TIME - Two players on stage are given a suggestion of a household chore to do together. Players should start the scenes focused on miming individually, without dialogue. Then when dialogue comes, it should focus primarily on a topic unrelated to the chore at hand. Imagine doing dishes with a loved one: While some dialogue might pertain to your actions (“Hand me that towel,” “Let me reach behind you,” “Can this go in the dishwasher,” etc.) most of the dialogue is going to be unrelated conversation (“How was your day?” “This [news item] makes me mad,” “I’m having lunch with Tim tomorrow,” etc.).

Lessons:

- **Balancing engaging mime and engaging conversation can be tough** – It takes practice and it’s worth it.
- **Emotional reactions may pause our mime, but we can always restart** – An emotional reaction can stop us in our tracks (ex: “No, he didn’t!”), but it shouldn’t mean the death of mime for the rest of the scene. It’s definitely okay to drop what you’re doing, but pick it up again.

3.4 Active Endowments and Emotion Exercises: Endow your environment and have an emotional stake in the details. The audience loves seeing us CARE ABOUT imagined stimuli. **If we make the object of our emotion active in the scene – actually tangible /observable /repeatable on stage – then we have something to react to instead of just talk about.**

Suggested Exercises:

MIRROR, ACTION, OBJECT - Get three players on stage, standing in a line facing the audience, at least an arm’s span apart. **Player One** (most stage left) **is tasked with looking into a mirror and feeling about what they see.** **Player Two** **is tasked with engaging in an activity and feeling about what they do.** **Player Three** **is tasked with defining an object through mime and feeling about that thing.** (Yes, the Action position can use an object and the Object position can engage an action.)

These are three separate vignettes explored in silence (though any emotional noises felt are welcome). Play continues until the instructor points to each player in turn and says “**Emotional Sound,**” **spurring the player to make a noise that indicates their emotional state.** Then the Instructor points to each player and says, “**Statement,**” **at which point players provide a Self-Contained Emotional Statement defining how what they’ve imagined makes them feel** – for example, by position, “I love my gut,” “This job is killing me,” and “Silly putty gives me the giggles.” Then Player One sits down, Player Two moves to the Mirror position, Player Three moves to Action position and Player Four enters to take the Object position.

Lessons:

- **Feel about what you imagine; allow more of what you’re imagining to make you feel more.**



- The player in the Mirror position, for example, loves his gut; **when he pushes his stomach out to make more of a gut, we see more love in his expression.** When we watch him discover his “love handles,” we see **even more love** fill his face. When he shakes the whole mess,... you guessed it... **more love.**
- The player in the Action position, is not just miming typing while being miserable at the same time; **with each typed word, misery further inhabits her hunched posture. Each successive word is harder and harder to type** as each requires more struggle from her soul.
- The player in the Object position connects his giggles to the putty’s stretch. Not just giggle and stretch. **He shows the audience the cause and effect. Stretch. Giggle. Stretch further. Giggle longer. Stretch further still. Giggle further still.**
- Establishing “rules” of cause and effect gives the world we’ve imagined power over us. What we imagine *makes* us feel. **Capitalize on the power of patterns with clearly defined cause and effect.**
- A player who imagines something active on stage with them and feels about it doesn’t *need* another player on stage to make it a scene.

3.5 Seeing and Reacting to Active Endowments Off Stage: We want to “See” what we create in our scenes. “Seeing” will breed additional details. In the following exercise, players are focused on the environment beyond the stage. While they are creating things out of reach, they still need to see it to blow out the details and be emotionally affected by what’s seen.

THAT’S MY - Two players take the stage. One is designated as the initiator. The initiator must begin their line with “That’s my...”and indicates a physical presence on or beyond stage (*For example, “That’s my grandpa,” “That’s my kid playing goalie”*). Importantly, the initiator should *feel* about the object being addressed. The second player must also begin their line with “That’s my...”, indicates a physical presence for their object and feel about their object. The players don’t have to refer to the same type of object – both don’t have to have a grandpa, for example – but the scene is tighter if the two objects are at least related. The players though can have totally different feelings toward their objects; it’s simply important that they feel something. Think of two dads looking through the glass at their new babies. Think about two people admiring their cars in a lot. Think about two parents watching their children play a sport.

The purpose is to have improvisers focus outward on active elements and to feel about them. The struggle in the “That’s my...” Exercise is that the object a player defines is passive unless the players emotionally react to the endowed details. Players need to ensure their reactions to those endowed reactions keep the scene in-the-moment. Instructors should focus on encouraging players to endow their surroundings with details and to feel an impact of those details.



Lessons:

- **“See it”** - “See it” (like “Feel”) is a hard note to give an adult but (with “Feel”) is one of the two most important notes to give. If we do take the time with an improvised soda can in our hands to look at it see it and feel about it, we start our scenes in our right brain as opposed to locking our scene partner in the eyes while thinking about the importance of soda. Imagine two scenes with the suggestion of “soda.” One initiates with “You hear about this soda tax?” And the other initiates with a guy studying his can’s label, holding a sip in his mouth, swallowing and then marching in place to offset the calories with steps. Which scene do you want to continue seeing?
- Even when you create active elements on stage, they’re still imagined, so it’s too easy to fall into talking about them instead of “seeing” them. We can create funny details. But **details the audience witnesses us discovering in-the-moment evoke laughter without having to be funny.**
- **Caring trumps Creating.** We can create a detailed world that the audience can follow, but when we can *care* about our world the audience engages in it with us. Emotionally invest in imagined stimuli.

HOMEWORK –

- **Pay attention to what you do where you do it:** Take a moment in the course of your life interacting with everyday objects to:
 - **Feel the weight.**
 - **Notice the dimensions.**
 - **Play with the tension.**
 - **Extra credit to putting the thing down and trying the same action in mime.**
- **Pay attention to Atmosphere and how it affects how you carry yourself.** Our environment shapes our posture. Notice it so as to use it on the improv stage.
- **Make dinner (or do a chore) with someone:** Think about the way we interact with friends/family when engaged in an activity with them: Our dialogue is rarely all about the thing we’re doing. We might be cutting vegetables while discussing shock over a recent show we watched. Conversely, we might interrupt an argument to ask for something out of the refrigerator.
- **Go see shows! Report back next week with examples of a moment that really came to life because players with engaged in their active environment.**



Week 4 – Building Scenes Through Emotional Reactions

Objective: In any scene you have **at least two** different emotional perspectives to play from: **Your Personal and Scenic Emotional Perspectives** – How you feel about “I” and How you feel about “You.” Players don’t *need* to engage more than one emotional perspective, but doing so helps keep scenes more dynamic and sustainable.

- **Your Personal Emotional Perspective** = How I feel about who I am, what I have, where I am and what I’m doing.
- **Your Scenic Emotional Perspective** = How I feel about who my scene partner is, what my scene partner has and what my scene partner is doing.

We’re going to define our characters with emotional reactions, then find the scene by following those characters’ emotional perspectives. For example, Sue is excited to see a dog that turns out to be vicious, though she shrugs off the warnings; the scene continues by heightening the dog’s viciousness and Sue’s willingness to claim it’s all okay.

We can then craft sustainable scenes by finding the rhythm *between* perspectives. For example, Billy is frustrated that he can’t make a toy work, Jane is annoyed by Billy because she’s trying to read, Billy is awed by Jane and quiets down, Jane returns to her being titillated by her book, and then Billy grows more frustrated over his toy...

There is Pattern work involved in heightening a character’s and a scene’s “game.”

- **Pattern** – a sequence that can be repeated / a structure that can be reused.
- **Game** – a sequence of actions, related by rules of cause-and-effect, that heightens with repetition

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Establishing patterns of emotional perspectives and behaviors to set up scenes sustained by personal and scenic games.*

NOTE: *If you want to do the Double Blind Scenes in this class, I would suggest you BRING A BLANKET or SHEET*

4.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and emphasize the importance of emotion

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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EMOTIONAL CASCADE CIRCLE



4.1 Establishing a Personal Game: If I “feel something about something” on stage, then more of that “something” will make me “feel” more, and then I have established a pattern of emotional behavior.

It’s important to have a **PERSONAL** pattern of emotional behavior so that an improviser is not totally dependent on their scene partner. Too often an improviser only focuses on their scene partner. Mick Napier reminds us to “Take care of yourself.”

The Self Contained Emotional Statement (SCES) grounds us without dictating the scene to a partner (it’s Self Contained). **Most importantly it defines an emotional perspective for us. And ideally it lays clear that our emotion is a reaction to something *active* on stage with us that can evoke more emotional reactions moving forward.**

The repetition of the reaction makes a pattern of emotional behavior that defines our “Personal Game.” The audience comes to *know* our Characters through their patterns of emotional behavior.

Suggested Exercises:

PERSONAL ENDOWMENT CIRCLE – One by one around a circle, each player “feels something about something.” Encourage the use of Self Contained Emotional Statements, for example:

- I love this cat
- I hate pulling weeds
- Des Moines, you’re impressive
- I’m proud of my shoes
- I’m afraid of my face
- I’m sad I have no friends

Lessons:

- **Take care of yourself** - We don’t *need* anyone else. You’re never alone on stage, even if you’re the only improviser not on the wings; you have a world to explore and to react to.
- **Set up Reactions by making the thing we care about Active on stage with us** – If the thing we feel about is something we can “see” and interact with on stage, then *more of the thing* will *make us* feel more.
- **Active elements keep us physically active** – it’s much harder to sit still when you love *this* cat than to sit in a chair and talk about loving cats.
- **Emotions trump words.** How we feel is more important than what we say. We want to *act*, showing the audience we are actually feeling, not just saying we feel. **FOR STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH THIS: Tell them to start with an emotional noise and then give their statement.**
- **If we Want something that’s not actively on stage with us (i.e. "seeable," "touchable"), the ABSENCE of that thing is the active element we should be emotionally reacting to in-the-moment.**
- **INSTRUCTORS** – Identify students’ strong SCES examples that show how moving forward more of the “something” will *make* the player feel more.



4.2 Establishing a Scenic Game: We also have our scene partner to endow and react to.

The danger is when improvisers rely only on their scene partner – as they are the only other tangible presence on stage.

When we endow our scene partners with attributes that “make us” feel, then we “give them the keys to our engine.” The audience loves it when we give our scene partners power over us.

You want to decide how you feel about who your scene partner is, what your scene partner has and/or what your scene partner is doing. Finding something active about your scene partner to *feel* about will help facilitate a scene you can both *react through* instead of *think through*.

The repetition of our reaction to “something” about our scene partner makes a pattern of emotional behavior that defines our “Scenic Game.” How we react to each other defines our Relationship.

Suggested Exercises:

SCENIC ENDOWMENT CIRCLE – One by one around a circle, each player turns to the player to their left, engages an emotion and makes explicit what it is about the player to their left’s character that is evoking that emotion. The endowed player has no role but to stand there. *The endowed player must not be mocked!*

Example:

- I love your hat
- I hate how smug you are
- You dead-lifted 200 pounds? Impressive.
- I’m proud you’re my son
- I’m afraid of your soul
- I desire your friendship

Lessons:

- **Give gifts** – It’s much more fun to be endowed with information (“Ugh, you got old”) than to be burdened with requests for information (“What are you doing?”).
- **Endow your scene partner with power over you.** Go farther than “I’m mad at you;” instead, a line like “Your persistent optimism makes me mad” gives your scene partner something they can do that will force a reaction out of you.
- **Want something? Feel its absence.** – To avoid head-butting, don’t “demand;” focus on “desire.” You can want something from your scene partner, but you don’t want to become hog-tied fighting for what you want. How does not having what you want *right now* make you feel?
- **Give the gift of freedom** – If you tell me, “I hate how smug you are,” I don’t have to directly respond to your feeling; I can focus on what I’m smug about (“I’m a golden god”) or I can do anything I want (“I’m tired of this wallpaper”). You don’t want your scene partner to feel constrained to address or discuss your feeling (which is more likely the case with “Stop being smug,” “Why are you so smug?” or “Let’s talk about your smugness.”)



- **Give the gift of dynamite** – If you say, “Your tap dancing makes me so horny,” you better believe I’m going to tap dance.

4.3 Setting Up Multiple Endowments and Reactions: Scenes in which each player has a Personal Game AND a Scenic Game are more dynamic and sustainable. We strive to *each* bring endowments and emotional perspectives to the stage that can be played with over the course of a scene.

Suggested Exercises:

BLIND SCENES – Doing Blind Scenes has proven a digestible exercise for getting students to recognize the power of having BOTH something they care about personally AND an emotional perspective toward their scene partner. **The KEY LESSONS are ensuring both players engage their personal environment and emotionally react to one another.**

Blind Scenes Focused on Personal Games First Mechanics: The Instructor and the TA split the stage by holding up a blanket or sheet. Players One and Two start engaged in a Personal Game (how they feel about who they are, what they’re doing, where they are) on either side of the divider. When the blanket is dropped and pulled away, the players can engage in dialogue (though they don’t have to rush to speak). They should act as though they were capable of seeing each other the entire time. They start with Personal Games, find Scenic Games, and then find the rhythm between them.

Blind Scenes Starting With A Personal Game Initiation And A Scenic Game Initiation Mechanics: Player One starts engaged in a Personal Game (how they feel about who they are, what they’re doing, where they are) without words. Player Two starts with their back to the stage or on the other side of a curtain. Give Player One time to engage in the activity/environment and make sure they *feel* about that activity/ environment. With their back turned to what’s happening on stage, Player Two chooses a way to feel (without any context). When the Instructor says, “Go” or drops the curtain, Player Two turns toward stage and speaks through the filter of their chosen emotion – they can react to the scene partner OR they can react to their own activity/environment. ***Note: Player Two needn’t be literally entering the scene every time. They are turning into the scene for the purposes of being kept unaware of Player One’s physicality, but having turned they can (and should) act as though they’ve been facing the scene the entire time.***

Lessons:

There are a lot of lessons here. Pepper them through critiquing scenes after they finish and/or Side Coaching during a scene.



- **No justification necessary** – If players’ environments don’t align, they don’t have to make sense of why they’re together. They can just accept and heighten what’s happening.
- **Commitment is the only justification you need** – If players’ initiations don’t align, they don’t have to make sense of why they’re together. They can just accept and heighten what’s happening.
- **What you started with is your rock** - You don’t need another player on stage with you to have a scene, and you better not give up the scene you started the moment another player appears.
- **Both players should engage the environment** – The “entering” player should find something for themselves to do on stage
- **Keep it active** - If you find yourself in a scene talking about something off stage or otherwise not in the present moment, it’s up to you to stake the scene on an active element. Another player forces you to sit down in a psychiatrist scene with a “Tell me about your mother” initiation? Say, “I hate anyone who gives me advice. That’s why I carry this knife.” Suddenly the scene’s on stage, not off stage in an imagined moment between parent and child.
- **Our goal is to react through rather than think through our scenes** - Improvisers are often in-their-heads thinking through scenes. What’s happening? What’s my motivation? Where should this scene go? If we attach an emotional reaction to something physically sharing the stage than “if this then what” equals “more of that something makes me feel more of my emotion.” Then something is already “happening” on stage. Then your commitment to repeating your emotion is all the “motivation” you need. And then the scene heightens and evolves in-the-moment rather than according to some plot.
- **Seeing is believing** - Improvisers like to stand stage center and talk, putting the onus for the scene’s humor on their lines. If you’re a great, clever actor, maybe this works fine for you. I prefer to watch improvisers engage their physical world. Committed to seeing, feeling and otherwise experiencing their environment, players discover *inspired* lines. For example, two players are arguing about the need to produce architectural drawings. When one player decides to just draw, they produce a spiraling squiggle and a bold dot. Then looking at their drawing, the player announces that they’ve produced a spiral staircase and a fireman’s pole.
- **Words smerds** - Saying that you feel one way has less impact than feeling that way. In reaction to Player One finding a plush dog on stage, Player Two explains, “Stuffed animals freak me out.” Clever. If in reaction to Player One finding a plush dog on stage, Player Two shouts, “Yeargh!” – then there’s actual dynamite on stage, not just the promise of potential dynamite.
- **The choice is yours** - If you’re trying to “figure out” a scene, so is the audience. Everyone’s waiting for something to happen, but *you and your scene partner* are



the ones with the power to make something happen. You don't have to wait to react. Feel something about something. The sooner you do, the sooner there is a catalyst and a reaction on stage, and the sooner something is happening.

4.4 Two Person Scenes Heightening Emotion: Establish an emotional perspective, heighten the emotional perspective through reaction to active details, and edit – That's scene.

We want to avoid negotiation, conflict and the tepid, talked-out “discovery” that stagnates scenes' growth.

The KEY LESSON is for each improviser to choose BOTH how they feel A) about what they have personally going on and B) what their scene partner has going on.

Suggested Exercises:

TWO PERSON SCENES – Player One initiates from stage left. Player Two initiates from stage right. **Players can choose to start focused on their Personal or Scenic Games, but ultimately should be encouraged to decide BOTH** how they feel about “I” and “You” – engaging an active endowment about themselves AND about their scene partner.

After initiating, Players can build their scenes with these options -

Players invest in what they initiate with more detail and/or emotional reaction. “If this is true, what else is true?” I love this cat and I LOVE this tiger. I abhor my scene partner's fashion sense; I really hate the plaid of his bowtie against his lime green frilly shirt.

Players who found their Personal Perspective should ensure they have a Scenic Perspective. Players who found their Scenic Perspective should ensure they have a Personal Perspective.

Your Instructor eyes should be focused on identifying the rhythm between perspectives; there is no right or wrong rhythm, but how cleanly students find *their rhythm* may dictate how comfortable they feel in their scenes. Did they each invest in one perspective before deciding on their other perspective? Did they quickly decide both perspectives and then oscillate between them?

Players can certainly have more than one Personal and Scenic Game. It's fun to watch players dramatically change emotions. Note though that improvisers are all too willing to bail on an emotion before heightening it as far as it can go, so encourage students to force the heightening of one emotional perspective before changing. Changing is good; changing before momentum is built kills all power.

After a few lines back and forth, teacher calls “Scene” and two new players start the exercise.



Instructors' Guide to Different Initiation/Join Pairings -

There is no right way to start and join a scene – and the vocabulary we use to describe those ways only matters in how it informs learning. Here are descriptions of different initiation/join pairing that can help Instructors in giving notes, identifying strengths and struggles.

- **Personal / Personal** - Player One engages a personal emotional perspective and Player Two engages a personal emotional perspective. **The advantage is that, with each player grounding in “something for themselves” the scene immediately has more “stuff” to play with.**
 - **Agreement Join**...is awesome. “I feel this way.” “So do I.” There’s magic in two players agreeing to bold choices when they can’t know where it’s heading. Don’t know what to say? Agreement is always a great choice.
 - Player 1 – (basking in the hot sun) “I love this beach.”
 - Player 2 – (basking in the hot sun) “Awesome effing beach.”
 - **Tangential/Complementary Join** ...agreeing with some facts of the initiation but, for example, bringing a different emotional perspective to the same object or bringing the same emotional perspective to a different object.
 - Player 1 – (basking in the hot sun) “I love this beach.”
 - Player 2 – (modeling a swimsuit) “I look hot in this bikini.”
 - **Disparate Joins** ...are like the Seinfeld opening where George is into one thing and Jerry another; it’s fun to watch them selfishly engage their own thing before finally acknowledging the other’s thing
 - Player 1 – (basking in the hot sun) “I love this beach.”
 - Player 2 – (holding his stomach) “Ugh, I regret eating that hot dog.”
- **Scenic / Scenic** - Player One engages an active aspect of Player Two with an emotional perspective and Player Two engages an active aspect of Player One with an emotional perspective. **This opening is often very dynamic, as characters engage with and react to each other. This is the most overplayed of choices, as our fellow players typically represent the only active element we don’t have to imagine. The danger is that too often when we engage our scene partner first, as they are the only active element on stage outside our imagination, we never explore the world beyond our relationship.**
 - Player 1 – I love you.
 - Player 2 – I laugh at your weakness.
- **Personal / Scenic** – Player One engages a personal emotional perspective and Player Two REACTS EMOTIONALLY to an active aspect of Player One. **This opening is good in that it shows a Player One who is willing and able to make a choice for their self without another player on stage; the danger is that Player Two, in immediately engaging in Player One, will never establish something Personal for their self.**
 - Player One – (staring forlornly at the Cat’s Cradle he works with his fingers) “sigh.”
 - Player Two – “Oh, I’ve had it with your attitude, mister.”



- **Scenic / Personal** – Player One engages an active aspect of Player Two with an emotional perspective and Player Two engages a personal emotional perspective. **This is the rarest, as typically if a player initiates with an endowment of the entering improviser, the entering improviser feels some pressure to react to that endowment. But Player Two can exhibit real savvy in establishing their self with something personal even when Player One’s initiation narrows the scope of the scene.**
 - Player 1 – I want to kill you and steal your life.
 - Player 2 – Oh, hey, my Diamond of the Month Club package arrived!

Lessons:

The following are a long list of notes to use in evaluating students’ scenes.

- **Don’t give up your thing** – Heightening our individual choices together is all we need to move the scene forward. Trying to “figure out” how our things mesh, fighting each other’s thing or dropping our thing in favor of our partner’s thing robs scenes of their potential.
- **Strive to define both a Personal and a Scenic Perspective** – If you’ve only been engaging your scene partner, engage the environment. If you haven’t figured out how you feel about your scene partner, have an emotional reaction – any emotional reaction – to what they say or do.
- **Commitment avoids justification** – Explaining why two people are on stage often saps the energy from a scene. When two players commit to simply heightening their choices, no one will question the juxtaposition of even the most mismatched initiations.
- **Reactionary statements avoid negotiation** – When we’re not comfortable with and/or don’t understand what’s happening on stage, we revert to asking questions that often bog down scenes. Simply making choices moves us forward and making *emotional* choices helps statements stand without defense (“What do you mean, I’m a pig?” versus “Oh, I’m a pig. You’re a dirty city rat.”)
- **Heightening avoids conflict** – “I want to kill you”/ “I want to kiss you.” If these are the initiations, we don’t want to debate or argue – *heighten the feelings*. You don’t have to address the disparity between feelings right away if ever. Heighten conflict/tension by heightening your part of it. Addressing/discussing conflict/tension takes the dynamite out of the scene.
- **Make Scenic/Personal Initiations less rare** - It can be fun for Player Two to choose a personally grounding emotional perspective despite Player One’s attempt to initially engage them in their thing.
- **Bored? React!** – Don’t know what to do in a scene? Have an emotional reaction to an active element.
- **Lost? Repeat!** – I scream. Why? I don’t know. So I keep screaming, heightening the emotion of the scream. Don’t stop what you’re doing to make “sense” of it; Find “sense” through continuing doing what you’re doing.



- **Be affected** - There's power in reacting in-the-moment to another player's perspective/actions/choices. When we don't react to a fellow player's move that deserves a reaction we risk pulling the rug out from under the scene.
- **Feel first, understand second (if ever)** – Don't wait to “understand your motivation” before making a choice about how to feel.
- **Never trapped by your choice** – While players should be encouraged to push their heightening before changing course onto a new thing, players should never feel trapped by the things. “I love my teddy bear.” I heighten why I love my teddy bear (“He doesn't judge”) but I don't have to react only to teddy. “I really love my fluffy duck.”/ “She doesn't give a shit.”
- **You can not want to do something; do it anyway** - Player One turns to join Player Two's “We gotta clean this house” initiation with an “Ugh. Cleaning up sucks.” Fine. But Player One better still engage in cleaning up the house. What's funnier? Watching two players argue or watching Player One submit to cleaning up while physically feeling the “suck” of every moment?
- **Forget screenwriting; be a producer** - “When I sneeze, garlic comes out!” Clever. “Achoo! Ahh! Garlic!” Better – shown not told.
- **Lose** - The best tool in avoiding conflict? Losing. Losing is such a powerful skill. One, it allows players to disengage from talking-head arguments. Two, the losing player wins in the audience's eyes – don't ever underestimate the endearing quality of a player who is willing to be affected.
- **Attract, Don't Fight** - Will your scene partner not agree to your awesome idea? Don't fight them on it. Show them why what you want is superior. This not only disengages argument but it also engages active scene elements. (*You want your older brother to build a sandcastle with you. He doesn't want to. Have so much fun building a sandcastle on your own that he has to come engage with what you want.*) (*You want your life partner to come to home. She doesn't want to. That's okay. You're having so much fun at home that you don't need her. She'll come home.*)
- **More than one character can be dynamic** – “Build a sandcastle with me”/ “Let me read my book”/ “Okay, I'll have fun building a sandcastle alone”/ “Great. I'll enjoy engaging this book solo”/ “Let me read a line” / “Let me build a spire”/ “Come back and build with me”/ “How could you leave this book? It's awesome.” That's fun.

HOMEWORK –

- **Be mindful of what makes you feel:** What activities, objects, and environments make you feel an emotion? How does more time with those things make you feel more? Who in your life gets an emotional reaction out of you? What is it *specifically* that you react to (even if just in your head)? Notice these things in real life and you can bring them to stage.



- **Describe your Facebook friends:** If I was to point out a Facebook friend of yours and ask, “Who’s that?” and you said, “Oh, we went to college together, she lives in Maine, has two kids,” I’ll posit that you don’t really *know* her. But if you say, “Oh, she’s a trip. She’s obsessed with dolphins. And she giggles when she talks about them,” I’ll know you *know* her. We know our friends by their patterns of behavior, not by their resume.
- **Go see shows! Report back to me next week with examples of Two Person Scenes you admired.**



Week 5 – Playing with Two Person Scenes

Objective: At its core, improv depends on establishing and heightening patterns of emotional behavior. There are many exercises designed to help us with this establishing and heightening as well as exercises that help us prioritize emotions while exploring scenic details.

The exercises in this section may help students confidently build and navigate Two Person Scenes. Design a class that best serves the needs of your students. If you think your class would be distracted by these exercises and would be better served just running Two Person Scenes with the lessons from this class baked into Side and Post Coaching, feel free.

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Practicing Two Person Scenes [with exercises to help us establish, heighten and navigate our characters, relationships and worlds].*

5.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy and concentrate energy.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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5.1 Character Building: We choose to feel, reacting emotionally without deference to “sense.” But. Choices about our characters’ and relationships’ who, what, where, when and why can help inform our emotional perspective. And our emotional perspectives can help flesh out those character, relationship and environmental details. It’s a virtuous cycle of emotions building details building emotion building details building momentum.

Suggested Exercises:

CHARACTER BUILDING EXERCISES – Instructor, you can do as many or as few of these as you’d like. More detail on this exercise can be found here:

<https://improvesbest.com/2016/09/29/5-round-character-creation-warm-ups/>, or search “round” in the Search bar at improvesbest.com.

The group gets in a circle and contribute in no particular order. In short, the rounds are as follows:

1. **Friends and Family** – Think of someone you know. One at a time, for 30 seconds or a line of dialogue (Instructor’s Choice) be that person. Don’t comment on that person, rather think about embodying them where they are now doing what they’re doing now.
2. **Impressions and Occupations** – Think of a celebrity impression you can do (doesn’t have to be done “well”). Now think of an ordinary occupation (fry cook,



banker, etc.). One at a time, for 30 seconds or a line of dialogue (Instructor’s Choice) be that celebrity doing that job.

3. **Animals and Attributes** – Think of an animal. Go around the circle and say what animal each player was thinking about. Now, shift left; each player has the animal of player on their right. Go around the circle and review players’ new animal. **In this round you are going to personify that animal.** This isn’t [Richard Scarry](#) – you are not a humanoid animal – you are a human with the animal’s characteristics. Posture? Voice? Facial expression? **“Now, think about something you personally care about.”** Anything – as long as you *feel* about it. One at a time, for 30 seconds or a line of dialogue (Instructor’s Choice) **personify the animal while sharing your perspective on that something you care about.**
4. **Name, Story and Embodiment - Player One gives a name** – for example, Pepper van Diesel. **Player Two gives a story inspired by the name** – for example, Texan oil fortune heiress. **Player Three then enters the circle and for 30 seconds or a line of dialogue (Instructor’s Choice) embodies that character and does a monologue** – for example, *(with a sassy southern accent and a cowboy’s posture)* “Smart as a whip and quick on the trigger...”
5. **Accent, Aspect & Occupation** – Player One gives an accent – ex: “southern.” Player Two gives an aspect – ex: “has a lisp,” “is paranoid,” “is a vampire,” etc. Player Three gives an occupation – ex: “telephone repair person.” And then Player Four does about 30 seconds as that character - they introduce themselves and talk about their life, etc. Then then the previous Player Two offers the next accent....

Lessons:

- **Expand your character range**
- **Push yourself out of your “go to” characters**

“YES, BECAUSE” – Either around a Circle or through Lay-Ups, Player One makes a *statement* about they feel about their self or their scene partner. Player Two heightens that feeling by making explicit the reason why Player One feels like they do (“I’m afraid of roller coasters” / “Because I dropped you as a baby”).

Lessons:

- **Feeling Comes First** – Don’t wait on your motivation before feeling something. Let feeling something, and the repetition of that feeling something, lead to an understanding of “why” (if needed at all).
- **Stay In-the-Moment** – Commitment to reacting to the last thing said will keep us committed to the moment and focusing outward.
- **Take a beat** – The best thing about emotions is feeling them. We don’t have to respond verbally right away. Take a moment to be affected, to *feel* the impact of the line. And do it maybe before knowing “the impact of the line.”



“WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?” - At some point in a scene, a player has to choose to respond with “What did you just say?” This gives extra importance to the line that proceeded it, even if that line originally carried no weight (Ex: “Right this way, Ma’am”).

Lessons:

- **Our reactions are what give meaning** – If our characters react like a line had meaning (even if our improvisers don’t know “why”), the line carries weight.
- **Prioritize be affected over being defensive** – An “Oh, gosh, I’m sorry,” is better than delivering “an explanation.”

5.2 Starting Together: We should strive to not be dependent on our scene partners and to have “something” to feel about outside of their presence. But. Getting connected to our fellow players up top can also help us feel grounded for the rest of the scene.

Suggested Exercises:

EYE CONTACT SCENES (MEISNER) – Two players on stage. They stand opposite each other, mirroring each other. They mirror movements, face, emotion, stance, everything. Remind them to also mirror feet and legs, so they become aware of the whole body. Players One and Two have to make *statements* back and forth without breaking eye contact. For the sake of the exercise, these scenes can consist of two players standing center stage as talking-heads.

Progression:

- Players can start repeating back and forth statements that are observations of one another. (Ex: “You’re wearing pants,” “I’m wearing pants,” “You’re wearing pants,”...)
- After two repetitions, players can change to different statements to repeat back and forth. Player Two should take the lead on the 1st change and the lead should go back and forth after that.
- Players can focus on Emotional Statements instead of Observational Statements (Ex: “I’m bored,”...)

Lessons:

- Be yourself to **worry less about “acting” and more about “connecting.”**
- **Just focus on each other** – Through repetition the dialogue means less then how people say it and how they are reacting to each other.
 - Partners go through various stages of giggling, smiling, trance like staring, seriousness and melancholy.
- **Harder to assert when pressured** – We tend to want to ask questions or make weak statements when forced up against our scene partners. We have to be (*or at least “seem”*) confident even in the face of demanding insecurity.



5.3 Text & Subtext: The sooner it's known what our characters react to, the sooner we can all use those identified Triggers to get more reactions out of us. But. Our feelings don't always have to be explicit to be effective. The following exercises explore making our feelings explicit and playing with subtext. Through discussion, students can explore which tactics they find "easier" and/or "more fun."

Suggested Exercises:

MANTRAS – Players One and Two each have a Self Contained Emotional Statement that they make to the audience before the scene officially starts. Inside the scene, they have to start with their Mantras and then repeat them throughout the scene.

Lessons:

- **Keeping our mantra in mind keeps us grounded** – Repeating what you feel throughout the scene will help keep you feeling it.
- **Take your time between lines** – Feel the power of silence.
- **Having emotional reactions/feelings gives you time to think** – Feeling and continuing to feel keeps us from being in our heads thinking up content.

SECRETS – Player One is given a secret objective by the Instructor that elicits an emotional response from Player Two's character (Ex: get your partner to hug you, make your partner cry, make your partner's character laugh, etc.). Player One is to pursue this objective WITHOUT explicitly asking Player Two for what they want (Ex: "I'm lonely," "I just heard the saddest story," "Stupid chicken fucked a duck," etc.).

Mechanics -

- Player One IS NOT ALLOWED to accomplish the objective within the 1st minute of the scene (instructor will raise their hand at the 1 minute mark)
- The scene will end between the 3-5 minute mark (whenever is a good time to call the scene), regardless of whether or not the objective was accomplished.
- Instructor asks the class what they think the objective was before revealing what it was and whether Player 1 accomplished their objective.

Lessons:

- **Exploring a character's Wants is a way to make an emotional perspective more active.**
- **Playing with tension of what's happening on the surface of the scene vs. what's underneath the scene (subtext) can be fun. It can also lead to confusion.** Discuss.
- **Make a strong personal emotional/character choice at the top, independent of whatever choice your scene partner makes.**
- **Not letting students accomplish their objective within the first minute forces them to make their choice, but to also be patient with it.**
 - For example, if you know your objective is to get your partner to eventually shove you, you'll start to plant those antagonistic emotional seeds in that first minute, setting a solid foundation for the scene, and then after that minute mark, you can start to actively pursue your want.



- **You may have to beg in the end, but try Attracting and Losing To Win first** – You don't want this to be a fight between what you want and what your scene partner is willing to give. **You want your scene partner to WANT to give you what you want.**
- **The scenes that fail are the ones where the player is trying to be clever about getting their want.** It's like when I was in kindergarten and my swim instructor dropped plastic rings to the bottom of the pool and told us all we had to retrieve them (*trying* to get us to fully submerge our heads underwater). Of course, I only saw the objective so I picked up the rings with my toes.
- What happens if you easily accomplish your objective early on, but you still have 1 min + of the scene left? Let's say you got shoved or hugged at 1:20? Don't let it become an all out fight or love fest yet. **Disengage from the emotional trigger, explore and add details, and then continue pursuing your objective to a heightened extent.**

SUBTEXT REACTIONS LAY-UPS – Make assumptions to heighten emotions. “Have you seen my wallet?” “I get it; I'm not fiscally responsible!” Seeking to use emotions to drive scenes, we can make our partner's contributions *matter* even if they don't initially resonate. Player One initiates with a very innocuous line (“Oh, look, a mushroom”). Player Two makes that line matter by making a strong assumption about what that line could mean (“I'm sorry that I ever told you about me tripping on shrooms”). Edit.

Lessons:

- **Don't feel pressure to explain the subtext/Commitment trumps sense** – “What a beautiful sunset”/ “I'll never cheat on you.” All that matters is that Player Two thought up a “cheating” subtext from Player One's “sunset” it doesn't have to be justified.
- **Don't defend; heighten** – Player One needs to make assumptions, too. “What a beautiful sunset”/ “I'll never cheat on you”/ “I knew it. You're cheating on me”/ “That you would think I could ever cheat on me is inexcusable.”

5.4 Losing: The best tool in avoiding conflict? Losing. **Losing is such a powerful skill. One, it allows players to disengage from talking-head arguments. Two, the losing player wins in the audience's eyes – don't ever underestimate the endearing quality of a player who is willing to be affected.**

Bite your tongue. Swallow your pride. Engage in an unrelated shiny active element on stage. Be the dynamic character and the scene's about you. Your scene partner will hurry to be affected also because the audience reacted so favorably to you. Or, your scene partner will support your dynamism by feeding you fuel to heighten your dueling emotions.



Suggested Exercises:

TURN THE OTHER CHEEK – Prepare contrasting pairs of scenic desires (“Love me”/ “Leave me”; “We have to stop rocking”/ “Never stop a’rockin’”; “I need you to understand my truth”/ “I’ll never believe your lies”). Instruct players to initiate fully believing in their given desire. Build tension, sure. But the first player to acquiesce wins. And the exercise’s focus is understanding how “losing” affects the scene. SEE APPENDIX FOR SUGGESTIONS FOR LOSING

Lessons:

- **Giving in ≠ Giving up** – If you acquiesce, that doesn’t mean you’ve given up on your desire. You can return to it. And you can acquiesce again. The dueling emotional reactions is what makes you a dynamic character.
- **More than one character can be dynamic** – “Love me”/ “Leave me”/ “Okay, I’m leaving”/ “Stay.” That’s fun.

5.5 Attract, Don’t Fight: Will your scene partner not agree to your awesome idea? Don’t fight him on it. Show him why what you want is superior. This not only disengages argument but it also engages active scene elements.

You want your older brother to build a sandcastle with you. He doesn’t want to. Have so much fun building a sandcastle on your own that he *has* to come engage with what you want.

You want your life partner to come to home. She doesn’t want to. That’s okay. You’re having so much fun at home that you don’t need her. She’ll come home.

Suggested Exercises:

ATTRACT, DON’T FIGHT – Prepare contrasting pairs of personal desires (“I want quiet”/ “I want to blast this song”; “Wake up”/ “Let me sleep”; “Being healthy is awesome”/ “Cigarettes make me cool” SEE APPENDIX). Instruct players to initiate fully believing in their given desire. Build tension, sure. But the first player to disengage the argument by engaging what they want by themselves with positive emotion wins. And the exercise’s focus is understanding how “attracting” with emotional engagement into active scene elements progresses the scene more successfully than argument and/or negotiation.

Lessons:

- **Positives progress; Negatives stagnant** – Remember that agreement fosters collaborative building. If your fellow player doesn’t want to play your game, that’s fine; have fun without him. The fun will move the scene forward. Disagreeing roots the scene in static emotion. Dynamic characters breed dynamic scenes.
- **More than one character can be dynamic** – “Build a sandcastle with me”/ “Let me read my book”/ “Okay, I’ll have fun building a sandcastle alone”/ “Great. I’ll enjoy engaging this book solo”/ “Let me read a line” / “Let me build a spire”/



“Come back and build with me”/ “How could you leave this book? It’s awesome.” That’s fun.

5.6 Relationship/Status Stakes: Our “What” is emotional reactions to active elements. Commitment and repetition are the only “why” we need. But. “Because” can elevate the emotional stakes of a scene with context.

Relationship Status – “I don’t like your shoes” gains weight in the context of the relationship between “I” and “you.” What if “I” is a neighborhood kid? A boss? A romantic conquest? How we feel about the relationship can heighten the stakes of our emotional reactions to active elements. Our formal STATUS with regard to one another can provide a filter through which to speak; for example, we express our furiousness much differently to our bosses than to our spouses. As improvisers, we don’t want to wait to portray status until we’ve figured out our motivation. If we choose to react through status – cowering, intimidating, etc. – that can lead to discovering our motivations.

RELATIONSHIP/STATUS STAKES Suggested Exercises:

DECK OF CARDS – Prepare a deck of cards that includes a different number/face card for every player (there should only be one King, one 2, etc.). Players take a card and put it face-out on their forehead without looking at it first. Then all players walk around the space. Without speaking, players work out their respective status through mimed deference and/or dismissal. High and low cards typically get established first, with the in-between cards struggling for consistency. It doesn’t have to become worked out cleanly before it’s edited.

Lessons:

- **Show status without words** – If you see an Ace, you should be deferential. If you see a 2, you can be dismissive. Paying attention to how other people react to you versus others can help you to determine your status.

Variations:

- **Vary suits** – Mix red and black cards (still only one King, 2, etc.). See if that figures into how people chose to react to one another.
- **Use only high or low cards** – When people see an Ace, they’ll defer even if they also have an Ace. We can all play low-status. **Status is a choice we make.**
- **Use only middle cards** – We tend to only remember to play with status when a player takes an extreme role (ex: president or toddler). **Bring status play to playing middling pairs, too.**
- **Better to make a choice and be wrong than to not make a choice** – Not sure how you relate to an 8? Make a choice. You might be wrong but what’s right is more likely to get sorted out when players make choices as opposed to when players act unsure about their relative status.



BAG OF EMOTIONS & RELATIONSHIPS – Player One takes a printed slip of paper out of the pre-prepared “Emotions” bag (“I’m hypnotized by your charm”). Player Two takes a printed slip out of the pre-prepared “Relationships” bag (*Your scene partner is your babysitter*). Player One initiates (with the line of dialogue or an approximation). Player Two has an emotional reaction to Player One’s emotion through the filter of the given relationship (explicitly explaining the relationship or not). **SEE APPENDIX FOR EXAMPLE LINES you can remove and cut out.**

Lessons:

- **Relationship informs feeling** –Whose mouth a line came out of can determine whether we like the sound of it or not. But a relationship’s description is not enough; we have to decide how we *feel* about that relationship.
- **Status** – The regard to which we hold our scene partner’s emotional opinion can determine our reaction. Is her opinion inscrutable even if you disagree? Is he such peon that nothing he says could be right? Do you bite your tongue or speak your mind? Do you take advantage or show mercy?
- **Allow emotions to coexist; don’t mute conflicting desires** – A boy sits across from a girl, pining silently while coolly attempting to flirt: that’s a drama aided by a camera’s close-ups. A boy sitting across from a girl shouts, “I love you,” only to then remember that she’s cooler than he is so he self-consciously retracts his assertion: that’s a comedy that explodes on stage.

STATUS ZIPPER – Players One and Two do a scene in which they are instructed to determine the status between them. Player Three tag-outs or pivots to start a new scene with one of the Player’s characters with the intention of getting them to flip status. Player Four then does a scene with Player Three. Scene 1: Boss and Employee. Scene 2: Boss and Mother In Law. Scene 3: Mother In Law and Rabbi.

Lessons:

- **Oscillating Statuses in Tag-out runs can be fun but...** - To really heighten a run it’s often best to heighten status in one direction if it’s in play. For example, a guy that disrespects authority is put with the president, then the Intergalactic Senate Leader, then God. But this is a fun exercise.
- **Filter the same context through different statuses** – A pretentious record store owner belittling a customer for not liking The Pixies may have to choke back his scorn in front of his fiancé’s father who also dislikes The Pixies.
- **Facets make characters** – [Be dynamic](#). Being affected by changes in status provides us one more opportunity to showcase our characters’ dimension. Status shifts can be a fun staple in Three Person Scenes, too, wherein, for example, a high status person walks in and out of a scene and a player oscillates between low and high status with their entrances and exits.



DUOLOGUES – The teacher/class interviews a pair of players sitting on stage who have known each other for a very long time. Players can assume/endow *anything* about the other and, while emotional reactions abound, nothing is *surprising* to either of them.

Lessons:

- **“Day in the life” Not “The Day When”** – It’s more fun watching a couple who should break-up exhibit all the behaviors that indicate the “because” they should break up than for the couple to directly address that they should break-up and argue about it. Accepting a relationship often means accepting the relationship’s permanence. Remember that in scenes where you’re trying to change another person. Suffering the present is being affected, which is more in-the-moment than demanding or negotiating. Accept being affected – *everything he does annoys me, and that’s clear to the audience and my scene partner, but I’m going to explore being annoyed instead of trying to not be annoyed.*
- **Let familiarity breed emotion not mute it** – Knowing you don’t have to solve the problem should enable you to explore the problem with emotions at 11. “It really upsets me that my wife sleeps around, I hate it today and I’ll hate it tomorrow, but that’s my burden. When I said, ‘I do,’ I meant it.”

5.7 Behavioral Stakes: Our scenes should prioritize The Moment over the past or the future. But. By making an assumption about the past we can jump-start stakes by assuming a history for characters’ patterns of emotional behavior – a player who is doing something for the hundredth time is defining herself as a person, and a player who is doing something for the first time after having done something else a hundred times is being affected.

BEHAVIOR Suggested Exercises:

(BUT) YOU ALWAYS/NEVER – Player One initiates to Player Two with a statement starting with one of the following variations:

- You Always...smile
- You Never...pick up your trash
- But You Always...read my mind
- But You Never...eat fast food

Player Two accepts the reality of the endowment. Player Two should *feel* about the endowment (Not being able to smile makes me sad). Player Two should *heighten* the endowment by elevating/expanding the details (“I feel like Prometheus stealing Doritos Tacos from the gods!”).

Lessons:

- **You’re *that* guy; how does it feel?** – Don’t just be Comic Boy Guy; love all things comics; despise books without pictures.
- **Actively experience** – Don’t just talk about what you’ve done or what you will do; engage the active elements of the present moment.



YOU ALSO / I ALSO – Every line of dialogue must start with either “You also…” or “I also…”. Heighten the details through an emotional perspective. Accept the endowments, engaging physically and in the present.

- “You Also have booger hanging.” “You Also have no tact.” “I Also am disgusted by you.” “I Also have bad gas.”
- “I Also paint amazingly.” “You Also live in a mansion.” “I Also make computer chips without practical purposes.” “I Also want to sell crap for millions.”

Lessons:

- **Start in the middle** – Making assumptions jump starts our scenes. Choosing to react emotionally to and with those assumptions turbo charges our scenes.
- **Actively experience** – Don’t just talk about what you’ve done or what you will do; engage the active elements of the present moment.
- **Can’t argue with these endowments.**

5.8 Situational Stakes: We want to prioritize our emotional reactions in-the-moment over negotiation of plot. But. If we remember to keep in-the-moment emotional reactions at our core we can explore “exciting” situations. It’s the emotional stakes of success or failure that can keep us in-the-moment (Ex: “We have five minutes to defuse this bomb or we’re dead.”/ “I don’t want to die.”)

SITUATIONAL Suggested Exercises:

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE – Players initiate two person scenes with the wildest, crazy-detailed quests/needs that they can imagine. “It is left to us janitors to slay the dragon.” “Build me a robot that makes robots and runs on souls.” They seek solutions. They pursue options.

Lessons:

- **Try, don’t discuss** – “I don’t know if this will work.” Shut up. Try it.
- **Don’t talk about it; feel about it** – Think about cleaning up a party before your parents get home. Hopefully you’re spending less dialogue talking about how “That goes there,” and more time feeling, “Oh, man, I’m so dead.”
- **All that matters is that you feel** – Care about what you’re doing. Experience successes and failures emotionally. The Matrix was totally predicated on the intricacies of plot (and special effects) and when plot failed, there was no emotion (too *cool*) to carry it. “The Flux-Capacitor” was the only sense Back To The Future needed; it had Marty and Doc and their emotional reactions.
- **Confidently engage environment** – Explore your wild premise beyond words. More often, the stranger the world, the more we hang back from making physical choices (“I’m a pilot but I don’t know how to fly a plane so I’m scared to engage the cockpit’s control”). Do *whatever* confidently and deliberately (How do you build a mainframe? “Like this. Ugh. Umph. Twist. Torque. Here.”)



- **Get Satisfaction** – We often unnecessarily fear achieving our wants to avoid dealing with what lies on the other side. When that fear has power over the scene it stagnates. What happens when you give the guy who wants a robot a robot? What if you left when someone demands that you “get out of here”? What if you can suddenly do the thing you couldn’t do? Especially if we have emotionally committed characters, we can feel comfortable exploring the other side of our obstacles.

I WAS JUST – Player One starts on stage alone. They explore the environment – engaging an activity. Most importantly, the player attaches a feeling to the objects and/or activity – Does she hate what she’s doing? Does he fear what he holds? The more the player engages the activity or object, the more they should feel about that activity or object. When Player One has clearly engaged the environment emotionally – and the Instructor can provide a signal if necessary – Player Two enters the stage. Player One initiates with “I was just…” cleaning the dishes / writing my last will and testament/watching this hilarious video/ etc. Don’t just explain; express how you feel about the environment you’ve engaged in. Player Two needs to emotionally engage the environment, too. And remember, Agreement is never a bad choice – feel what Player One feels, engage what Player One engages, have what Player One has (if Player One is pregnant, be pregnant, regardless of your gender). Player Two certainly does not have to mirror Player One’s emotional and physical engagement, but they should feel something about something. Until the scene is called, Players continue to see, endow and feel about their environment. And of course they can see, endow and feel about their scene partner’s actions and reactions as well. **The purpose is to have improvisers focus outward on active elements and to feel about them. The struggle in the “I was just…” Exercise is that a player risks giving up on emotionally endowing and engaging with the environment the moment another player is there to stand center stage with arms by their side and talk with. In instructing this exercise, the coach should focus on encouraging players to balance engaging each other’s actions and reactions with continuing to endow and engage with their surroundings.**

Lessons:

- **Be wary of creating too many scenes where Player One’s reaction to Player Two is to cover up what they were doing and/or feeling.** It can be funny. But be sure to still engage the emotional activity. If you can oscillate between the activity you’re emotionally compelled to engage and your desire to deny your actions and feelings because of the other player’s prescience, fine. But remember, the audience prefers if your embarrassment is paired with reasons to be embarrassed.
- **Even when you create active elements on stage, they’re still imagined, so it’s too easy to fall into talking about them instead of “seeing” them.** Don’t just say the toy firetruck is made of sturdy materials; feel the weight and density of those materials. Don’t just say the toy firetruck is worn; notice the chipped paint. Don’t just remember that the toy firetruck was annoying; be annoyed in the present by that high-pitched siren you’re hearing.



- **A Two Person scene is about those characters feeling, but they should care about more than each other.** There should be a reason each character is there doing that which doesn't hinge on the other character's presence.

HOMEWORK –

- **Find examples:** Find examples of filmed scenes you'd like to aspire to do through improv. If you can't find a video clip, describe it. Email the class. Sketch comedy is clearly a good source, but any drama showing a character being affected is a good learning aide.
- **Go see shows WITH YOUR CLASS! Hang out afterward. Talk about scenes that inspired you. Talk about scenes where you thought, "I'd done this instead..."**



Week 6 – Editing and Heightening with New Scenes

Objective: As the momentum builds through our emotional perspectives and reactions, we set our scenes up for satisfying ends – in improv parlance, “edits.” We can also leverage established Characters and Relationships to inspire new scenes.

In building new scenes on top of previous scenes, we heighten established patterns of emotional behavior through new details (Ex: A character who talks baby-talk to babies, talks doggie-talk to dogs, and seedling-talk to plants.) **We can explore established themes through new Characters and Relationships** (Ex: A boss talks to her assistant like he’s Siri, and a customer expects a Barnes & Noble employee to perform like Amazon.com).

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Finding edits for our scenes and creating new scenes based on edited scenes.*

6.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and emote boldly.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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HOT SPOT – Players stand in a circle. Instructor provides a word for inspiration. One player enters the center and begins singing a song inspired by that word. In no particular order, players enter to take the place of the player in the center and sing a new song. Players around the circle are free to sing along.

Lessons:

- **We don’t wait for each other to “finish,” but we look to find a good moment to take attention** – Just like editing scenes.
- **Hesitate and miss your connection** – While players should be encouraged to inspire their moves based on what preceded it, players that wait too long over-thinking their move’s connection is going to miss their chance to enter the stage.
- **Just start** – A player needn’t know all the words to the song to enter the circle. Just get out there and start - and commit to continuing confidently.
- **Focus outward and support your fellow player** – Don’t be in your head thinking about what you’re going to do while a player is standing in the circle suffering through what they’re doing.



6.1 Remember what you like; Repeat: We have to listen and *retain* so we can return to and heighten established information. Memory is a muscle to exercise. But the exercise can be *fun* – focus on what makes you laugh, what engages you.

Suggested Exercises:

STORY STEALING – Everyone in a circle. One at a time, players enter the center and tell a true, personal, 30 Second Story. Once everyone has told a story, the teacher tells the class that players now have to enter the center and recreate someone else’s story. Every story should be revisited once by another player.

Lessons:

- **Don’t mock; mirror** – This is not about making fun of each other, it’s about making each other look good by remembering their story.
- **Remember specifically** – Remembering a few specific details will be more powerful than remembering everything generally.
- **Remember reactions** – Our emotional reactions are improv gold; focus on those when setting other player’s stories to memory.
- **See what’s not purposefully being shown** – Recreating what our fellow players initially did subconsciously is great fun. How do they stand? How do they move? What do they sound like?

SCENE STEALING – Two players do a scene. Two different players redo the scene, repeating and heightening details, characters, stakes, and *emotion*.

Lessons:

- **We remember the good stuff** – They’ll drop questions, carry over specifics, and remember good stuff. Point that out.
- **The bad stuff becomes good when we repeat it** – *Make each other look good!* The first time is “random”; the second time is “purposeful”; the third time is “expected.”
- **Don’t skimp on the emotion** - Player Two might have been simply overwhelmed during the Offer dialogue, but Player Three and Four heighten the emotion of being overwhelmed characters.
- **Remember beginnings and ends** – The first line and the last line of the previous scene are the ones most guaranteed to, if repeated/heightened, connect with the audience’s pattern-mind.



6.2 Heightening Through Tag-Outs: A “tag out” allows the audience to see how a character from a previous scene will react to another character/scenario/etc. We want to execute tag-outs in service of heightening the *emotional* stakes. We do this by **focusing our initiation on what can trigger a player’s established pattern of emotional behavior.**

Suggested Exercises:

TAG OUTS –To perform a tag out, a player enters a scene in progress and literally tags the player that they will replace on stage.

Two players engage a normal scene while other players watch from the wings. Players on the wings watch to understand what characters on stage react to, so as to be able to heighten that character’s reactions in a new scene through a Tag-out.

We seek to **elevate characters’ defining behaviors** –

- Player One is an enthusiastic baseball commentator; Have him do color commentary at his accountant day job; Have him narrate as he video tapes his son’s birthday.
- Player One is an obnoxious tourist in France. Bring him to a series of more Third World, destitute countries.
- Player One is good at fixing cars but doesn’t like to. Take him on a space walk to fix a space station.

To practice, have players force a Tag-out onto a Two Person Scene.

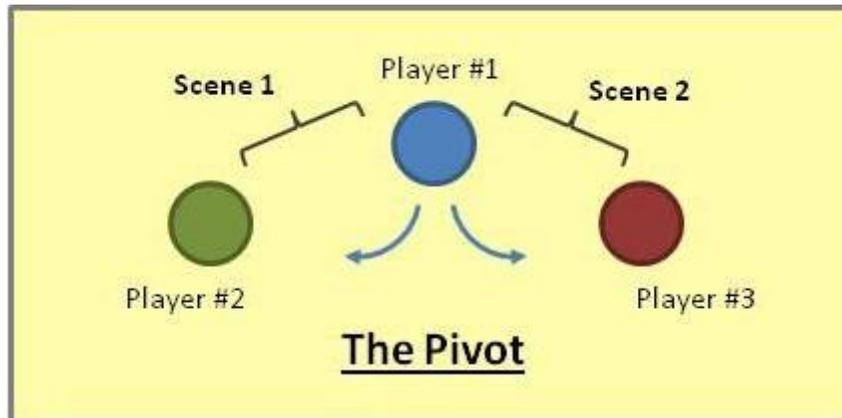
Lessons:

- **MATCHING: Being a bigger version of Player One; Do what Player One did bigger** – Always a trusty default (You were excited by snails? I’m going to be *really* excited by snails).
- **Keep it Active / Avoid Being a Psychiatrist** – We don’t want to rehash the previous scene (“Tell me about your feelings for snails. Remember? In the last scene when you liked snails?”). **Initiate with new active elements that can affect characters emotionally in the present moment.**
- **Wherever You’re Taken, Trust In You** – If Player Three takes Player One’s snail lover to see the animated movie Turbo, Player One is expected to heighten his *excitement*. **Player One can relax in knowing that wherever he’s transported he just needs to trust in his emotional reactions.**
- **Elevate the Details** – A player who fears action figures can be terrified of *all* little versions of things. A player obsessed with her eyebrows can obsess over everything she trims. A tenant complaining to her absentee landlord can also complain to an absentee God.
- **Run a Series** – A group doesn’t *have* to do a *run* of tag-outs, but if they do, they should keep the same pivot character in place. For consistency if Player Three keeps Player One on stage, Player Four should tag-out Player Three, not Player One. In this way a character’s game is heightened. Otherwise, a zipper-type run of tag-outs tends to rely on plot-heavy initiations and often grows stale.



Variation:

- **Pivot (Swivel/Barn Door) instead of Tag Out** – Sometimes the physical act of tagging in and out can look sloppy. A team can use the Pivot to execute the same essential move as a Tag Out without the tagging. Player Three approaches the opposite side of Player One from Player Two. Player One then swivels their body to be in the scene with Player Three. Player Two can then leave stage, allowing space for Player Four to enter on the opposite side of Player One from Player Three. The Pivot is just a smooth-looking Tag Out.



The Pivot also allows two scenes to happen without players having to leave stage. For example, Player 1 is telling Player 2 all about his success in last night's date. Player 3 enters stage on the other side of Player 1 from Player 2 to initiate a look into the actual date. Player 1 can *pivot* between scenes from his central position – turning to Player 3 to do the date scene and then turning back to Player 2 to continue exalting his date prowess. Players 2 and 3 do not have to leave stage when they're not in play, they just have to remain frozen or neutral.

6.3 Heightening Through Split Screens: The Split Screen enables a team to heighten relationship dynamics in a way that makes for a sexy stage picture. Several different scenes can coexist on the same stage. **We want to execute split screens in service of heightening the relationship stakes.**

Elevate the situation – Spies stealing secrets? Have mountaintop-sitting, spiritual gurus stealing life's secrets. Have Moses steal the Commandments.

Elevate themes – In bringing established patterns of emotional behavior to new characters and relationships, we give those patterns wider applicability and telegraph to our fellow players that we are heightening the *theme*. (A sailor's wife awaiting her husband's return could be nicely heightened with a dog awaiting his master's return from the store).

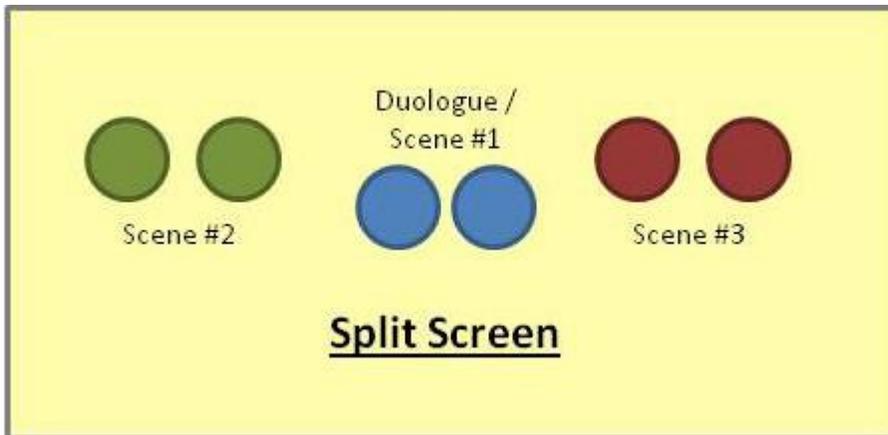


Mapping - Lay the dynamic structure of one genre over the particulars of another genre to heighten thematic and narrative depths. To heighten navigating a tense domestic issue, two improvisers are literally trying to defuse a bomb that's sensitive about the way it looks. A guy hoping to get back together with his gal is literally running for the office of Boyfriend.

Suggested Exercises:

SPLIT SCREEN –To perform a split screen, Player 3 and Player 4 start a new scene in a different area of the stage from Players 1 and 2. This new scene should heighten the relationship stakes of the initial scene with new characters and/or circumstances. For example: In the initial scene, Democratic campaigners remain optimistic despite clearly being in a red state. In the split screen, two Apostles remain naively optimistic about what people in Sodom are willing to give up to follow Jesus.

To practice, have players force Split Screens onto a Two Person Scene.



6.4 Edits: Scenes can also end. They can be “edited.” **In the standard improv edit, an improviser runs across the front of the stage – “sweeping” between the players on stage and the audience – toward the far wing. This is the sign to players on stage to exit stage.**

Sometimes the player who edits a scene swivels around and initiates the next scene. **The danger is students missing the right edit point because they are thinking of how they want to initiate the next scene.** So my recommendation is to **make the Sweep Edit a move on its own, with the expectation that two other players will initiate the next scene after an edit.**

Editing is about timing. You want to close a scene on a high note. Often the audience’s reaction indicates where that high note is. Better to edit too soon rather than too late. **Trust though that if players on stage are committing to their patterns of emotional behavior, if an edit is “missed” there will be another high moment shortly as the pattern repeats.**

Suggested Exercises:

EDIT / PIVOT / SPLIT SCREEN MONTAGE – Two players get up on stage to do a scene. All other players are on the wings. Any student from the wings can initiate a Pivot if they see a character they want to heighten, a Split Screen if they see a relationship they



want to heighten, or an Edit if the scene calls for it. Try to vary it up – encourage students to push Pivots and Split Screens and to Edit liberally.

Of course, following Edits, players are able to start brand new scenes. Of course, especially as a montage goes on, there should be more scenes “somehow inspired by previous scenes” than “totally brand new” scenes.

Lessons:

- **Put the onus on initiating subsequent beats on those standing on the wings -**
The players in the original scene need to be focused on the scene in play; those on the wings have the time to think up an initiation. When players from the originating scene initiate their own subsequent beats, it is too likely that they will over-prioritize plot or simply repeat what they did originally.
- **Use NAMES** – It’s easier to solicit the participation of Player One from a previous scene if you can say, “Hey, Jack...”
- **Being the one that edits does NOT mean you HAVE to be the person to start the next scene -** Don’t miss a needed edit because you can’t think of how to start the next scene.
- **If you’re building your scenes on patterns of emotional perspective, you don’t ever have to worry about a missed edit -** Hit a funny height? If you’re on the wings, trust that players will continue investing in their pattern and another height will come. On stage, continue investing in your pattern; don’t freak out and make a change.
- **One move deserves another** – If your team executes one Pivot, they should look to do another. In this we leverage pattern work and make each other look good – even a Pivot that does not go well can be made to “look good” – and get laughs – with repetition.

EDIT / PIVOT / SPLIT SCREEN REVOLVER – Two players get up on stage to do a scene. All other players form a line on each of the wings. Only the players at the heads of either line can choose to Edit, Pivot or Split Screen. Students cannot jump the line to enter stage. If Players Three and Four are at the heads of their lines and Player Three initiates a Split Screen, Player Four has to join her. If Player Three sweeps, Players Four and Five have to start a new scene.

Lessons:

- **YOU are responsible for editing/starting the next scene** – You can’t assume “someone else will do it.” We all must bear 100% of the responsibility to get on stage and make each other look good.



HOMEWORK –

- **Find examples:** Find examples of filmed scenes that reflect the value of Tag-Outs and Split Screens. Think about montages in *The Simpsons* and “cutaways” in *Family Guy* for Tag-Outs, though prioritize those that heighten an established character reaction, and aren’t just random. Think about “Summer Nights” from *Grease* as a Split Screen – an exploration through different lens.
- **Go see shows! Did you see a Tag-Out, Pivot or Split Screen? Did you see a missed opportunity for one?**



Week 7 – Finesse and Format

Objective: Hit unused lessons (Week 5?), revisit lessons that succeeded/struggled, introduce potential performance games/exercises and have fun.

Run Two Person Scenes with side coaching.

Introduce the group’s format and potentially run through with side coaching.

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Honing our Two Person Scene work through your Showcase format.*

7.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and emote boldly.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

I AM SUPERMAN – Own the stage (center of the circle) for 30 seconds. Be Confidently Vulnerable. Be yourself. Be a character. Talk or don’t. Engage environment, emotion, or neither – try something you’ve been doing less.

FIVE MIRRORED CHARACTERS - “One at time, in no particular order, each player will enter the circle and create five characters. Pick a posture. Engage an environment. Endow yourself. Then speak a line of dialogue in that character’s voice. Then everyone else also assumes that character and speaks that same line. Then the player in the circle does a new character and then everyone on the circle mirrors. Repeat. After their fifth character, the player in the circle says, “One,” in that fifth character’s voice. And everyone else mirrors the delivery. Same with “Two” and so on to “Five” – all in the voice of that fifth character. Then a new player enters the circle, and the exercise resets.

Variation:

- Instead of counting “One” to “Five” all as the fifth character, try going back through each previous character – one for each number.

Lessons:

- **You each have a wealth of characters you can do.**
- **You can each do each other’s characters.**



7.1 Potential Formats: Many different formats have been used in 201 showcases. **Use the one you feel best showcases your group’s talents.**

A “Successful” 201 Showcase show will show **students more focused on heightening emotions than on negotiating the plot of a scene.** Ideally they’ll **develop Characters and Relationships through patterns of emotional behavior.** And **subsequent scenes will heighten those Characters and Relationships and Themes.**

MONTAGE – A run of scenes and subsequent scenes, edited and continued by the group.

Lessons:

- **Callback** – Revisit and heighten details and reactions from earlier in the run.
- **Variance** – Vary the emotional energy, scene length, scene type, cast size, etc.

THREE TRANSITIONS MONTAGE – With a huge group, a montage of just Two Person scenes can be tedious. So the Q1 2014 class used the following format.

Progression:

- **Two Person Scene** – The first scene is a two-person scene based on a suggestion
- **Two Person Scene Wipe** – Editing the scene in progress with a physical wipe, players can initiate brand new two person scenes
- **Tag Outs/Pivots** – To heighten one established player’s Personal Game, a new player can enter stage, perform a “Tag Out” or “Pivot” and have a Two Person scene with the established player.
- **Split Screen** – To heighten a Scenic Game between two established players, new players can initiate another Two Person scene on a different part of the stage, drawing focus.

ARMANDO DIAZ MONTAGE – In his 201, Matt Newman started by giving a monologue that students used as inspiration for their initial run of scenes.

DUOLOGUE MONTAGE – In one 201, David Pijor had two pre-determined students do duologues in chairs to inspire their initial run of scenes. Two additional sets of duologues can be inserted throughout the format.

LAUGH TRACK – In another 201, David Pijor ran The Coalition’s Laugh Track format in which two person scenes are inspired by a few bars of a song while students establish themselves physically and emotionally in silence. It was great. David had to put in extra time to curate a playlist for practices and the showcase, but it was worth it.



Week 8 – Performance Prep

Objective: Run through the group’s “Class Action” showcase set with notes.

Students don’t have to perform, but hopefully they’ll want to.

Teachers can design any performance that showcases their class’ skills.

8.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and emote boldly.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

I AM SUPERMAN – Own the stage (center of the circle) for 30 seconds. Be Confidently Vulnerable. Be yourself. Be a character. Talk or don’t. Engage environment, emotion, or neither – try something you’ve been doing less.

HOT SEAT – One student in a chair on stage. Another student from the audience says what they “like about playing with” them. The Complimentee now takes the Hot Seat. And repeat.

Variation:

- After the compliment, the Complimented and the Complimentee do a scene together. Then the Complimentee takes the Hot Seat.

Lessons:

- **Zach Arnold** said about Improv Instruction, “**Look at The Fantastic Four. They were all exposed to the same radiation. All came out different. Together a fantastic fighting force.**” Let’s appreciate how our differences support our whole.

PASS THE SNAP – This is a fun group focus warm-up that I like to introduce to students on their last class night so they can do it as part of their pre-show warm-up. (Hopefully all students can snap their fingers.) Students snap their fingers to send the snap to a fellow player who receives by snapping their fingers. Snap to release. Snap to receive. Students start in a circle but should start walking around. You can bounce it. Loft it. You can break it in two or more.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Tell students not to wear flip flops, ties, hats, or clothing with logos/etc. on them – these items of clothing end up getting in the way of our ability to portray any character. **Players also shouldn’t wear anything that would keep them from being able to follow and do anything any other player does** – short skirts, platform shoes, excessively tight clothes.



APPENDIX

Emotion/Relationship Exercise - mix and match, one from each column

You disgust me.	Your scene partner is your boss
I'm hypnotized by your charms.	Your scene partner is your babysitter
You make me nervous.	Your scene partner is your spouse
You crack me up.	Your scene partner is God.
I don't believe you.	Your scene partner is your child.
You scare me.	Your scene partner is your twin.
I'm incredibly attracted to you.	Your scene partner is your creation.
You're my hero.	Your scene partner is some dumb kid.
I wish I never met you.	Your scene partner is your parent.
I want to be just like you.	Your scene partner is your jailer/warden.



Losing /Attracting Exercise – keep strips from each row together

“Love me”	“Leave me”
“We have to stop rocking”	“Never stop a’rockin”
“I need you to understand my truth”	“I’ll never believe your lies”
We have to get out of here.	We can’t survive out there.
Wake up.	Let me sleep.
Let’s name him Perry.	Let’s name him Gus.
I quit.	We need you.
This sucks.	Suck it up.
You will date me.	I will never date you.
“Being healthy is awesome”	“Cigarettes make me cool”
“We should play in the sun”	“We should stay in the shade.”
Cats are the best.	Dogs are the best.
TV is the most informative medium.	Reading is the best.
Let’s take our Honeymoon at the beach.	Let’s take our Honeymoon in a ski lodge.
I want this job.	You’ll hate it here.



Secrets -

Get your partner to hug you
Make your partner cry
Make your partner's character laugh
Get your partner to tell you they love you
Get your partner to tell you they hate you
Make your scene partner leave the stage
Make your scene partner scream



Emotion Wheel –

