



Introduction to Improv Class – *Core Lessons*

In 101 We Learn That: Improv is acting and reacting in-the-moment. The audience loves to see us establish and care about made up details. Knowing we're making it up as we go along, the audience rewards in-the-moment confident choices, collaboration and vulnerable emotional reactions more than clever ideas.

- **Share Yourself** - Let the audience see *you* to give them the ability to connect with you and ultimately root for you.
- **Share the Air** – Don't be a stage hog.
- **Care** – The audience loves seeing us have emotional stakes in things we imagine.
- **Trust that Feeling is Enough** - Committed emotion is all the “what” and “why” a scene needs.
- **Trust that Following is Enough** - We don't need to be in our heads worried about *making* something happen once we learn how we can *follow* what's already happening to a collaborative end.
- **Agree** – Prioritize agreement over negotiation or explanation. Agreement helps us build together faster.
- **Accept** - “Yes, And” is the basis of improv – I accept what you do and I make my contribution aware of yours.
- **React** - If we make the object that we *feel* about *active* in the scene – imagined to be tangible/observable/repeatable on stage – then we have something to *react to* instead of just *talk about*.
- **Be Specific** – Specific details help the audience imagine the moment and believe that characters are rooted in that moment.
- **Mime** - Weight, volume and tension are the key characteristics of mime/object work that help players and the audience “see” an object.
- **Heighten** – Do more of what you're doing. Feel more about what you're feeling about. Make choices based on choices already made instead of creating all new information.
- **Play with Pacing** – Find a rhythm and a progression in the series of game moves to stoke the audience's expectations and satisfaction.



Introduction to Improv Class – *Instructor's Outline*

The main goal of this class is to get people excited about improv. Be supportive, be excited, be really encouraging of what they do. Make it fun for them so they love it.

Whether they signed up to perform or to just try something new, this class is designed for them. The lessons of acceptance, confident vulnerability and collaboration that Improvisation has to teach us can make us better partners, parents, co-workers, friends and, well, people.

This is, always remember, a CLASS, so students do have the expectation of learning concrete lessons and receiving feedback that helps them improve.

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 the reactions/moves that lead to 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.** While your instruction should focus on grounding the group in baseline material over addressing individual habits, some good students will seek out notes Lisa Simpson style and some confidently bad students will require notes Bart Simpson style. **Be empowered** to note both sets. **Just remember there's a contingent of your class that's just there to be supported** – so **"supportive of trying"** should be your default note-giving lens.



On Long Form and Short Form:

1. While long-forms can be short and short-forms long, the key differentiator is that in **Short Form improv the mechanics of the game are defined for the scene** and in **Long Form improv the mechanics of the game of the scene/show is discovered over the course of the scene/show.**
2. **The “game” of any scene – long or short form – is simply the “pattern of repeated behaviors heightening with personal stakes.”** As in Monopoly, as in Life.
3. **With its defined games, Short Form improv can teach students heightening and rhythm with a “safety net.”** This class will leverage particular Short Form games with patterns and rhythms that help an improviser doing Long Form.
4. **While the best Short Form includes emotional reactions to imagined stimuli, Long Form depends on it.** Characters’ “patterns of emotional behavior” matter more in Long Form than in Short Form, where adherence to the defined game alone can progress to success. **Students should be encouraged at every opportunity – but never forced – to dig into an emotional reaction. Emotional reaction to an imagined moment is improv’s greatest power.**

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 willing to confidently get on stage, make and accept choices, and care about imagined stimuli.**

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.



Week 1 – Confidence and Acceptance

Collaboratively building something out of nothing on stage requires *Confidence and Acceptance*. An improviser needs to be able to make bold choices and to stand by those choices. Improvisers need to accept and embrace each other's choices.

Key Teachings:

- **Take Care of One Another** - Learning improv requires a safe environment where players can trust each other and feel comfortable trying and failing.
- **Share Yourself** - Let the audience see *you* to give them the ability to connect with you and ultimately root for you. Allowing ourselves to be *us* helps us be in-the-moment.
- **Care** – The audience loves watching adults emotionally invest in imagined stimuli.
- **Agree** – Prioritize agreement over negotiation or explanation. Agreement helps us build together faster.
- **Accept** - “Yes, And” is the basis of improv – I **accept** what you do and build my contribution on top of yours. While support is “Awesome,” “agreement” isn’t a requirement as long as you “accept.”
- **Collaborate** - “Make your fellow player look good.” Embrace their choices and build off of their choices with your contributions.

Week 2 – Attention and Memory

If we are creating together we need to ensure that we hear each other's contributions. Focus outward to hear. Project out to be heard. **If we are building on established contributions we need to remember what those contributions were.**

Key Teachings:

- **Listen and Project** - We have to commit to ensuring we HEAR and ARE HEARD.
- **See/Hear, Mirror, Heighten** - We don't need to be in our heads worried about *making* something happen once we learn how we can *follow* what's already happening on stage to a collaborative end.
- **Remember** - We have to listen and *retain* so we can return to and heighten established information.
- **Feel Pacing** – Find the rhythm in what's been established and play with pacing to serve your purposes.

Week 3 – Playing in Space

When we see, touch, smell, hear and REACT to our environment, the audience can, too.

Key Teachings:

- **Be Specific** – The more specific, the more real what we create can feel.
- **Mime** - Weight, volume and tension are the key characteristics of mime/object work 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?

Week 4 – Playing From Emotion/Character

Emotion should be the core of our improvisation. Choosing to feel strongly about something made-up-in-the-moment is, well, insane. But it’s fun to watch. Surprise!

Key Teachings:

- **Practice emotion at the extremes** to become comfortable accessing emotions on stage.
- **Feel and Feel More** - Committed emotion is all the “what” and “why” a scene needs.
- **Start with Anything to Find a Feeling** - 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.
- **Agree; Don’t negotiate Your World** - If we agree, we can just *be*; we don’t have to explain or defend.
- **Continue Scenes by Heightening Reactions** - “How we feel about who we are, where we are and what we’re doing,” and “How we feel about who our scene partner is, where they are and what they’re doing” should be our focus in improv scenes.

Week 5 – Active Endowments for Emotional Reactions

Our scenes are “about” how we *feel* about ourselves, our environment and our scene partner. Making choices about how we feel and then committing to those emotions is how we progress a scene. **By endowing ourselves, our environments and our scene partners with attributes that can be “seen,” “touched,” and otherwise interacted with, we make it easier to “react through” our scenes.**

Key Teachings:

- **Make the object of our emotion *active* in the scene** –If we *feel* about objects and actions that are imagined to be tangible/observable/repeatable on stage – then we have something to *react to* instead of just *talk about*.
- **Find More Details through Emotion** – When you know what you’re feeling and what you’re feeling *about*, then our creative minds have a clear direction to explore new details.
- **Stay Physically Active with Active Elements** – It’s much harder to sit still when you love *this* cat than to sit in a chair and talk about loving cats.
- **Feel!** – Push that emotion through your words, actions, body and face; *show* us how you feel.



Week 6 – Fun With Games

Students get more experience initiating and building out scenes with emotion with the help of improv tools and short-form games that can be used in the upcoming Showcase.

Key Teachings:

- **Play Games** – “Game” is a sequence of actions, related by rules of cause-and-effect, that heightens with repetition.
- **Play “Short Form” Games** - The structure of Short Form games can help students confidently navigate two person scenes
 - o *Carpool (formerly Hitchhiker)*
 - o *New Choice*
 - o *Space Jump*
 - o *Four Corners*
 - o *Four Emotions*
 - o *Genres*
 - o *Advice Panel*
 - o *Freeze*
 - o *Foreign Dubbing*
- There are a bunch of standard improv tips/tricks for establishing and heightening a game by entering a scene in progress as a tertiary player
 - o *Tag-outs*
 - o *Walk-ons*
 - o *Split screens*

Week 7 – Practice

Hit unused lessons, revisit lessons that succeeded/struggled, introduce potential performance games/exercises and have fun.

Week 8 – Performance Prep

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



Introduction to Improv Class – Class Curriculum

Week 1 –

Sample Introduction

“My job in this class is to A) get you excited about improv, B) get you all grounded in fundamentals of improv, and C) have you enjoy the amazing community that is improv.

Whether you signed up to perform or to just try something new, this class is designed for you. The lessons of acceptance, confident vulnerability and collaboration that Improvisation has to teach us can make us better partners, parents, co-workers, friends and, well, people.

This is, of course, a CLASS, so I expect your expectation of me is learning concrete lessons and receiving feedback that helps you improve. And I aim to exceed that expectation.”

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.
- Let’s have fun.



Week 1 – Confidence and Acceptance

Objective: Collaboratively building something out of nothing on stage requires *Confidence and Acceptance*. An improviser needs to be able to make bold choices and to stand by those choices. Improvisers need to accept and embrace each other’s choices.

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Sharing Ourselves and Accepting Others*

1.0 Warm-Up:

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. Etc. Don’t count faster than you can shake. **Make eye contact with everyone around the circle at least once as we go through.**

- Did you smile? Laugh? We can’t improvise if we’re worried about what we look like. “Mutually assured embarrassment” or “The only person who looks foolish is the one that isn’t committed to looking the fool along with the group.”

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 Focus Outward: There is a ton of material for us to mine in our improv if we are committed to *seeing it, hearing it and embracing it*. We don’t need to be in our heads worried about *making something happen* once we learn how we can *follow* what’s already happening to a collaborative end.

Suggested Exercises:

ACTION PASS – In a circle, a player turns to his left and executes an action, any action – without sound. The next player observes that action – head to toe - and attempts to recreate it EXACTLY in turning to the player to their left.

Progression:

- Do it once through. Discuss what the group experienced/observed.
- What changed? What was dropped? Call out the little things.



- What made them laugh? – straight repetition, embracing something “accidental.”
- Then have them do it again focused on slowing down and really noticing all the nuances of a player’s action and working to repeat the action *exactly*.

Lessons:

- **See head to toe** – Take the time to really see all that players are giving you; Where are their toes pointed? How are their shoulders’ squared? What face are they making?
- **See more than you’re given** – The things a player does subconsciously or accidentally should be noticed and repeated; What did they do before and after the action?
- **There are no mistakes/There is no “right”** - There is only “what has happened” and “what’s happening now.”
- **Repetition is heightening** - We don’t *need* to create unrelated information when there is already material at play to mine. Collaborative evolution is a fun enough; don’t force difference for difference’s sake.
- **It’s about the group, not you** – The laughter ebbs and flows (often with the rules of 3, 7, 11, etc.). We as individuals need to commit to the repetition so the *next* person can get a laugh. Serve the team in this, and don’t try to force a laugh.

1.2 Making Each Other Look Good: Improvisers need to embrace each other’s contributions without hesitation or judgment. Moving forward begins with “yes.” Momentum builds with enthusiastic acceptance.

Suggested Exercises:

PASS “YES” AROUND – A player points at / makes eye contact with another player who *accepts* by saying “Yes.” The accepted player walks across the circle to stand in the place of the player who said “Yes.” The player who said “Yes” points at / makes eye contact with another player who says “Yes” so they can exchange physical position. And repeat.

Lessons:

- **Choose and accept** – Don’t waste time worrying, over-thinking or obsessing about looking silly.

AWESOME! – Around the circle, students share something they’ve done that day (ex: “I ate pancakes,” or “I got a parking ticket”) to which the rest of class enthusiastically (regardless of implication) responds, “Awesome!”

Lessons:

- **Acceptance is fun** – Don’t waste time judging; the audience wants to see you enjoying one another.
- **DETAILS are fun** – Too often we focus on something “fantastic” (ex: A Wizards’ War) that we can only paint in broad strokes...



- **OUR LIVES are fun** - ...But focusing on our actual lives breeds DETAILS that connect with the audience. **Leverage our lives' details.**

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. And, remember, YOU ARE “AWESOME” just the way you are, AND that subduing personal ticks when you're trying to act like someone else indicates you are “projecting” instead of “acting.” **One is most believable as oneself.**

Suggested Exercises:

CAFÉ SCENES – Two players sit in chairs facing each other. They are to have a conversation as THEIR ACTUAL SELVES – not characters. They are to try not to ignore the people watching them.

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.
- **Be YOU In-The-Moment** - 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.
- **“No questions”** – Too often questions in improv are desperate calls for information and identify an improviser who's afraid to make a choice, thus the no questions “rule.” By comparison, statements are informative choices. Get to the information. Instead of asking “What do you do?” say “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*. Note that when a participant tells a story about the past or future what's most interesting is the way they *emote in-the-moment* when telling the story.
- **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.
- **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. (“You have your collar unbuttoned; I never know what to do about those buttons.”)
- **We seek to be Confidently Vulnerable** – Honest reactions are endearing; be endearing instead of calculating. Don't just “listen” and “respond.” “Hear” and “react.” The audience wants to see us affected; we mustn't act bulletproof.



1.4 In-The-Moment Emotions: The audience loves watching adults care in-the-moment about imagined stimuli. As previously discussed, if you can leverage your personal emotions, “Awesome;” but we don’t need motivation for reaction. **Choose to feel; it doesn’t matter “why.” Continuing to feel more as a result of the same or similar stimuli is all the “sense” you need.**

Suggested Exercises:

EMOTIONAL CACOPHONY – I understand not everyone is equally comfortable expressing emotions – we’ll work on that over the course of our eight weeks – so in this exercise we’ll all do it at once so no one has to worry about what they look like to everyone because everyone’s doing it.

- “On the count of 3 I want you all to feel a feeling.”
- “Happy. Sad. Angry. Excited. Feel. 1.2. 3.”
- “Feel more.”
- “Express your feeling *physically* not just louder.”
- “New emotion. 1. 2. 3.”
- “Bigger, but quieter.”
- “New emotion. 1. 2. 3.”

SELF CONTAINED EMOTIONAL STATEMENTS – The sooner we care about something on stage the sooner the audience reacts to us. While there are many prompts for initiating scenes, improvisers are on solid footing as soon as they **“feel something about something.”** The “Self Contained Emotional Statement” is therefore a useful initiation format, and it is EASY: “I love this cat.” “I’m afraid of the dark.” “This pretension makes me punchy.” We don’t need to know *why* we feel what we do, we just need to *feel* like we do.

Have students give Self Contained Emotional Statements around a circle.

Lessons:

- It’s **“Self Contained” in that it’s what we’d say if we were alone on stage;** we’re not dictating the scene to our partner. “I’m dying” versus, “Doctor, I’m dying.” **We want our scene partners to be able to *choose* how to join us; the audience knows when a choice was decided or dictated, and prefers the former.**
- It’s a **“Statement” in that it makes a choice** and does not put the choice on the Answerer. “I’m dying” versus “Am I dying?”
- **And ideally the “something” we’re feeling about is *actively* on stage with us.**
- More of “this cat” will make me feel more “love.” When we decide “I feel [this] about [this],” our improv becomes Pavlovian – we *react through* rather than *think through* our scenes.



1.5 Agreement: Agreement is a cornerstone of improvisation. We're on stage creating something out of nothing. If I create one thing out of the ether then we have something. **We want to build that something up and out; we don't debate the validity of something made up.**

And the audience loves to see us enthusiastically agree to details imagined in-the-moment. Too often our default position in life is disagreement or refusal to commit when uncertain.

Suggested Exercise:

SELF CONTAINED EMOTIONAL STATEMENT CASCADE – Everyone stands in a circle. Player One gives a SCES (“I love the beach”). Player Two agrees with that SCES with their own SCES (“I love relaxing on the sand”). Player Three does the same and so on. Player One is the last to build a new SCES on top of the original (“Pink sand? I love it!”). And then Player Two starts the next cascade with a brand new SCES.

Lessons:

- **Enthusiastic Agreement gets a reaction** – Humans get relief from watching us support one another.
- **Commitment to One Another gets a reaction** – Whether *you* agree or not, your choice to agree with your fellow player's perspective earns audience good-will.
- **Following Heightens** – Agreement to and building on ONE idea focuses the funny faster.
- **Repetition Is Heightening** – Don't know what to say? Repeat exactly what you heard with more gusto.

1.6 Yes, And: “Yes, And” is improv's pithy mantra. I make a choice and you build on that choice.

Suggested Exercise:

TWO LINE LAY-UPS – Create two lines on either wing. One side is designated as the initiation side, tasked with entering stage with a SCES. The other side is the Join side, tasked with agreeing with Player One's perspective and providing an additional detail to feel about. Example: “*I hate this painting.*” “*Yeah, it looks like a 5 year old painted it.*”

Lessons:

- **The Self Contained Emotional Statement grounds us** – We shouldn't enter a scene dependent on our scene partner. We can initiate the moment we leave the wings and have something to do that we can continue even if no one joins us.
- **Make Agreement our default in scenes** – It's so easy to protect yourself with a “no” or a “but” but the audience loves when we commit wholeheartedly to our scene partner's reality.
- **Force agreement** – “Yes, and” keeps us from arguing, denying, negotiating, etc.
- **Force choices** – There's no room for questions in “yes, and.” “Yes, and” demands that we add information to the scene.



- **Repetition alone is heightening** – “Yes, and I am also afraid of that rock” is perfectly acceptable. The agreement should be prioritized over cleverness. “Yes, and” me, too is great collaborative building.

1.7 [Accept], And: While “Agreement” is excellent, the improviser’s “Yes” needn’t always be in agreement as long as it “accepts.” We don’t want students to feel they have to agree to something they might find offensive because “Yes, And” dictates it.

Suggested Exercise:

TWO LINE LAY-UPS – Create two lines, one on either wing. One side is designated as the initiation side, tasked with entering stage with a SCES. The other side is the Join side, tasked with entering stage and contributing their own SCES. The Joining player’s SCES can be in agreement with the initiation, related to it or not related to it; all it CAN’T be is in contradiction to the reality of the initiation.

Good Examples:

- “I hate this painting.” “Yeah, it looks like a 5 year old painted it.”
- “I hate this painting.” “I like the way it makes me feel.”
- “I hate this painting.” “Damn dog won’t stop barking.”

Bad Examples:

- “I hate this painting.” “It’s a sculpture.”
- “I hate this painting.” “You’re wrong; it’s awesome.”

Lessons:

- **If we are Accepting, we’re moving forward** – Denials and negotiations of reality keep us (and the audience) from being in the moment.
- **The more you Care, the better** – Point out contributions that made us laugh because an improviser emotionally reacted to imagined stimulus.
- **Committed juxtaposition is all the “sense” a scene needs** – If you’re in an art gallery and I have a dog, we don’t need to “make sense” of the reality in which those two facts are both true, we just have to accept that they both exist and commit to feeling about them.



1.8 To Continue The Scene, Feel More: If we can get to “feeling something about something” in a scene, then all we need to do to continue the scene is to feel *more* about that same something or related somethings. If the “something” is actively on stage with us, then more of that something will *make* us feel more, making our improv more reaction-based rather than thinking-based.

Suggested Exercise:

TWO LINE LAY-UPS WITH MORE LINES APIECE – Create two lines, one on either wing. One side is designated as the initiation side, tasked with entering stage with a SCES. The other side is the Join side, tasked with entering stage and contributing their own SCES. The Joining player’s SCES can be in agreement with the initiation, related to it or not related to it; all it CAN’T be is in contradiction to the reality of the initiation.

The players continue their scene by heightening the emotion and details of their initial feeling. *Example:* “I hate this painting.” “I like the way it makes me feel.” “It’s just three stupid black lines and one dumb red circle.” “I see a happy clown face.”

Lessons:

- **Committed juxtaposition is all the “sense” a scene needs** – If you’re in an art gallery and I have a dog, we don’t need to “make sense” of the reality in which those two facts are both true, we just have to accept that they both exist and commit to feeling about them.
- **Active Elements make us React** – Too often improv showcases two improvisers *talking about* something. We want to see our improvisers *reacting* to the moment they’re in. Having imagined stimuli that actively exists with us on stage – we can see it, touch it, etc. – can start to *make us feel*, keeping our improv more in-the-moment.

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 to have what you say *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 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.”



Week 2 – Attention and Memory

Objective: If we are creating together we need to ensure we hear each other's contributions. Focus outward to hear. Project out to be heard. **If we are building on established contributions we need to remember what those contributions were.**

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Hearing and leveraging each other's contributions.*

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

NAME THUMPER

21 – The group (without teacher) huddles in a tight circle and together counts to 21 with players contributing one number at a time. If two people speak at once, the group must start over.

Lessons:

- **Breathe;** Don't rush to speak; Share focus.
- **Don't rush to 21.** We are walking backward, making each subsequent step based on the trajectory laid down behind us; just build each move on top of the one before it.
- **Don't emphasize failure;** there are no “mistakes” on stage, only what happens.
 - The audience only knows you've “messed up” if you tell them you have.

2.1 Concentration: A lot can get lost on a crowded improv stage. We have to commit to ensuring we **HEAR** and **ARE HEARD** – listen and project.

Suggested Exercises:

RED BALL, RED BULL, BREAD BOWL – With the group in a circle, a player starts by saying, "Dustin, Red Ball" then mimes throwing to that player who catches it, says "Red Ball, Thank you" then passes it by saying "Lauren, Red Ball." Then you add more pretend balls/objects and try and keep them all going.

Variations:

- One version can go "green ball, purple ball, bouncy ball."
- Another variation focuses on phrases that sound similar (Red ball, Red bull, Bread Bowl, Thread Ball, Party Hat).



Lessons:

- Listen to words closely but also pay attention to more than the words, because what's mimed should all be different in each sequence and if you pay attention you don't miss it.

BIG BOOTY - One person is "Big Booty" everyone else is a number in order from the left of BB all the way around. First, count off – (Big Booty, Number One, Number Two, etc.) You start with a chant "Big Booty, UH HUH. Big Booty, Big Booty, Big Booty." Big Booty starts each round, following off the group chant with, "Big Booty, Number [of their choosing];" say, "Big Booty, Number Five." Then Number Five says, "Number Five, Number [of their choosing]." For example: "Big Booty/Number Five" "Number Five/Number One" "Number One/Big Booty," "Big Booty/Number Three," etc. When someone messes up (is too slow to pick up, or is inarticulate along with missing the beat), they go to the end (highest number) and everyone's number changes accordingly (number 1 gets out and becomes number 8, number 2 is now number 1, etc.) The chant starts up again to lead of each round of the game. If someone gets BB out, they become BB and lead the game.

CIRCLE OF SEQUENCES – A player points at another and says any word. That player points at another player and says another word inspired by the first. This continues until every player says a word and points to another player, with the final player to contribute pointing back to the first player to contribute. This is Sequence One; repeat it continuously until the group is comfortable with it. Establish a Sequence Two the same way, and then a Sequence Three. When players are comfortable with each Sequence individually, tell them that they now will be keeping them all going at once. Start with Sequence One and then tap the player starting Sequence Two on the shoulder, then tap the player starting Sequence Three on the shoulder.

Lessons:

- **Focus outward** – Can't be in your head freaking out; have to be ready and waiting for your turn.
- **Be sure you're heard** – Enunciate, make eye contact, and pointing helps.
- **Each individual is 100% responsible for the success of the group** – If a sequence is dropped, even if you didn't drop it, pick it up.

Variations:

- **Names** – Make Sequence One "Your Name" and Sequence Three "Their Name" to add to potential confusion so as to force increased concentration.



2.2 Listening to Build: We want to build collaboratively. We need to first hear before we can accept. We show we accept our fellow players' contributions by heightening them with our own contributions.

Suggested Exercises:

“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:

- **Focus outward** – Don’t be in your head thinking about what you’ll say. Focus out – listening to what other players say so you can build on it. AND actually try to SEE the object – use your *imagination* to visualize the object to inspire details.
- **The sooner everyone can “see” it, the sooner we can blow out the details** – Get specific.
- **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 whose tusks work as chopsticks 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.

Options:

- Instead of following the order around the circle, have players wipe the slate clean and start with a new object when *they* feel it’s time to move on.
- **Share the air** – Hesitators, contribute! Stage hogs, give someone else a chance!



PHRASE PASS – Like Action Pass, but with a Self Contained Emotional Statement to start.

Progression:

- Focusing on exactly what was given to you.
- Pick just *one thing* (one word, emotion, inflection, character, etc.) and heighten it 2 notches.

Lessons:

- Even with small things, we create a feedback loop that will heighten everything we do to places no one could imagine or achieve on their own.
- **You don't have to force evolution** – If everyone is concentrated on heightening what they see and hear, the phrase will naturally change. We want to continue embracing small changes to foster evolution instead of forcing mutations that separate an individual from the group.

2.3 Memory: We have to listen and *retain* so we can return to and heighten established information. Memory is a muscle to exercise.

Suggested Exercises:

STORY STEALING – Everyone in a circle. One at a time, players enter the center and tell a true, personal, 30 Second Story. It can be as simple as “Something that happened today that you cared about.” 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.
- **The more you remember, the more options you have** – You might not get the chance to revisit the story you remember best so you need to work to remember *everything*.
- **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 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?



2.4 More than Words: We have to share focus with the group. Being aware of our physical positions in relationship to one another is a critical component of hearing and being heard.

Suggested Exercises:

ONE PERSON WALKING – Students spread out through the room. Tell one person to start walking around the room, among the other students who remain frozen in space. Without talking – with one person walking at any given time – students take and give the power to walk. One person starts, the other stops; one person stops, the other starts. Students have to see each other to know when to give and take focus.

Now *two* people are walking at a time. Now three. Build to where half the class should always be walking and then work back down to one person walking.

Lessons:

- Make eye contact.
- Give and take focus.
- Be willing to surrender focus to your scene partner.

2.5 Rhythm and Pacing: We can use pacing to evoke audience reactions if we can find our rhythms. Short Form games’ mechanics have an inherent rhythm we can use to ramp up, slow down or otherwise oscillate pacing.

Suggested Exercises:

FOUR CORNERS – Four players stand in a square shape, two facing the audience with the remaining two behind them. Each pair gets a suggestion to inspire their scene (Suggestions: Relationship, Period in Time, Object, Occupation, Location.) The instructor shouts “Shift Right/Left” to have the players rotate and switch to the next scene. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

Player pairs engage each interaction like a stand-alone scene: Initiating with an SCES and joining with an emotional reaction of one’s own that can be anything except contradictory.

The “Shift Right/Left” mechanic helps the Host pace the collection of scenes. Best Practice is to:

- Allow each pair more time for dialogue at the outset and then makes switches sooner and sooner;
- “Switch” in one direction for at least two rounds and then use the opposite “switch” to oscillate energies;
- Illustrate how YOU the Instructor would edit scenes/beats.

Lessons:

- **Make choices quick** – The more players on stage the less time there is to “figure out” what’s happening. Everyone is better off if each improviser is committed to “feeling something about something” as soon as possible.



- **Play to the moment, not for the Edit** – The “danger” of being aware of Short Form’s dictated mechanics on you, is that improvisers can start playing for the joke line instead of trusting that our in-the-moment emotional reactions to imagined stimuli are our biggest laughs. **We have to play the long game of investing in the moment even if the moment is not very long.**
- **We can but don’t have to return where we left off** – What’s always more important is to follow the characters’ reactions. That can mean following a timeline (Ex: “*Hi, I’m your baby sitter,*”/ “*Please go to sleep,*”/ “*How are you still not asleep?*”) or bouncing through time (Ex: “*Hi, I’m your baby sitter,*”/ “*Hi, I’m your TA,*”/ “*Hi, I’m your nurse.*”)

SPACE JUMP – One player engages a physical scene based on the audience’s suggestion of a “chore” like doing laundry, raking leaves, etc. Player Two enters, signifying a new scene. Player Two sets up a new scene taking Player One – and the physical position they were in - to a new place (Ex: *Player One was bending down to pick up a dollar, Player Two makes them both field hands with hoes*). Player Three enters and sets up a new scene based off the poses of Players One and Two. Repeat with a fourth and fifth player. Then have the fifth player leave stage to return the remaining players to the fourth scene. Then the fourth player leaves, returning the scene to the third environment. Repeat until the initial player is back in the initial environment. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

Lessons:

- **Silence is fun** – Whether as Player One engaging environment in the first scene or Player Four joining the chorus, **put more focus on embodying your reactions than explaining them.**
- Again, **enthusiastic acceptance of another player’s contribution is improv’s superpower.** Immediately accept whatever world you’re brought to and the audience will love you for it.
- **More people on stage necessitates more agreement** – You can’t have four or more people on stage all with different perspectives/characters; it just gets too messy. Encourage players to **agree to each other’s perspectives and mirror each other’s physicality** to minimize the amount of “stuff” on stage and to focus the scene.
- **MORE PHYSICAL THE BETTER** – Players having to justify their physical position/pose moving through and back through the scenes is part of the fun.
 - In the sequence’s ascent, it’s fun to transpose players’ physical positions into new worlds. *Ex: Cheerleaders become air traffic control people.*
 - In transitioning back through the Sequence, a scene that had fallen into the doldrums is sparked back up when players leap to their previous stage positions *as ninjas.*
 - In the sequence’s ascent, a scene of *characters frantically preparing for a party transitioned into a scene of characters trapped in a fire.* In transitioning back through the sequence, the scene of *prone bodies burnt*



from the fire became hosts lying on the floor in the wake of an insane party.

HOMEWORK –

- **Steal a story:** In a group of your good friends, steal one of those good friends' stories and retell it with heightened details and heightened emotion. Find the pacing of making the reveal that you are purposely stealing a story obvious. Extra points the sooner you tell your story after the story was originally told.
- **Notice Beat Structure in your favorite TV shows:** Pay more attention to the progression in shows from establishing a behavior, heightening that behavior and (potentially) flipping/addressing that behavior. Longer forms (The Wire v Simpsons) take more episodes to tell a character's arc. **Most comedies on TV rely on arcing and resetting characters' behaviors each episode.**
- **Go see shows! Report back to me next week with examples of when the pacing of shows you saw engaged you and when it lagged.**



Week 3 – Playing In Space

Objective: When we *see, touch, smell* and **REACT** to our environment, the audience can, too.

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Imagining, interacting with, and reacting to the active elements in our environment*

3.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and revisit a concentration exercise with added emphasis on mime.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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

Progression:

- **Care about the thing you give** – Show how you feel (without words) about the thing you crafted out of clay.
- **Care about the thing you receive** – Show how you feel about what you’re given.
- **Think about oscillation of reactions** – I receive your clay tiara joyfully, then I mash it into a wad I angry deposit on the next improviser like it’s garbage.

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:

BUILD A ROOM –With everyone else watching from the audience, a player enters a room through a door (push in?, pull out?, door knob 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.**

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.



DO SOMETHING TOGETHER APART - Three people up at a time. Tell each to think of a manual task to engage in. When the instructor says, “Go,” the players each silently engage the action they’d individually thought up: Paint a fence, fix your spaceship, save your favorite zoo animal, build an instrument from scratch, etc. The activities are mimed and there should be little to no interaction between the players – like they are in their own world, like a split screen.

Lessons:

- **As long as you commit, it doesn’t matter what you’re doing** – Three players can all be doing very different things but as long as each player’s move is accepted in each other’s space, then the audience accepts it. If you’re okay with it, they are.
- **Commit harder in the face of uncertainty** - Don’t know how to fix a carburetor? Fake it with commitment and at the audience will follow you whether you get it wrong or right; they want to see you try, the more boldly the better.

INVISIBLE TUG OF WAR - Everybody has a tug of war but the rope is invisible, the rules are that the rope must look real, can't stretch or be elastic. Have a little miming moment: "Feel the rope" etc. We aren't playing by actual tug of war rules; the point is to have a scene where we look like we are. We aren't on opposing teams; we're all on the same "doesn't this look like a real tug of war?" team.

Lessons:

- **Give and take** – As in all improv, you have to follow the person in front of you. In Tug Of War, the sequence of following looks great – it’s really a two person scene with the two players facing each other in the lead for making decisions (though they also have to follow each other).
- **Funnier when you lose** – Giving way is funnier than forcing someone to your will.

3.2 You Are Not What You Do: Let your miming inspire a scene but do not let it dictate the scene. When you and a friend engage an activity, how much dialogue goes to discussing that activity? Do you talk about doing the dishes while doing the dishes? Mime gives us something to do so we're more than talking heads, but it shouldn't confine us. *Dependent on time, these are the exercises to skip.*

Suggested Exercises:

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? – Get an audience suggestion of an action/activity (“Milking a cow.”) Player One mimes that action. Player Two asks, “What are you doing?” Player One has to say something that is **not** what they are doing and **not** what the action could also be construed as doing (“Flying two kites.”) Anything **different** works: “I’m rinsing rutabagas”; “I’m wrestling sea monkeys.” Player Two has to mime



that action. Player One asks, “What are you doing?” Repeat. When a Player can’t think of what to say, says what they are doing or says something that could be seen in their physical activity, that Player is “out” and another Player steps in. As rounds progress, the rhythm should get faster and the judging of players’ contributions should get more critical. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

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 their sequence of mimed interactions now 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 engaged in dialogue more interesting to watch.
- **Engage environment, rest your tongue** – If we have something to do, we don’t have to rely so hard on our words.

3.3 Beyond Objects: Environment is about more than objects. What sounds fill the space? Ambient noises? Loud music? A series of unexpected explosions?

What about the atmosphere? Is it hot? Raining? Low gravity?

Suggested Exercises:

SOUNDSCAPE – Sit players in a circle, give them a location and have them build out the noises of that location. It’s basically one vignette in a Bat opening. Emphasize fleshing out the space. Remind them to share the air.

Variation:

- Let them create an environment without a suggestion, building on their contributed sounds.



Lessons:

- **Experience the cacophony** – Push them to explore all the different types of sound: words, mechanics, organics, ambiance, etc.

3.4 More Rhythm and Pacing: Engagement with imagined objects breeds confidence.

Having a reason to be silently engaged breeds tension. And a shared environment breeds focus.

Short Form games' mechanics have an inherent rhythm we can use to ramp up, slow down or otherwise oscillate pacing.

Suggested Exercises:

BIOSPHERE (a tweak of SPACE JUMP) – A short form game focused on exploring Atmosphere. One player enters stage, miming their reaction to an atmosphere (temp, precipitation, pressure, etc.) – ex: shivering and saying, “It’s so cold in the arctic zone.” A second player enters and changes which room of the Biosphere the two players are in – ex: trying to cover her head while saying, “Stupid rainforest area.” Player One must immediately accept Player Two’s new reality. A third player enters and establishes a brand new atmosphere for all three players to accept and react to. Repeat with a fourth and fifth player. Then have the fifth player leave stage to return the remaining players to the fourth atmosphere/environment. Then the fourth player leaves, returning the scene to the third atmosphere. Repeat until the initial player is back in the initial atmosphere/environment. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

Lessons:

- **Atmosphere is the least utilized active element in improv** – Do yourself the favor of engaging in it.
- **Explore the options** – Push them to explore all the different types of atmosphere: temp, precipitation, pressure, dust, fog, etc.
- **Feel it, just don’t speak to it** – Feel the drops of rain, become crippled by the cold, sweat in the heat, etc.
- **Silence is fun** – Whether as Player One engaging environment in the first scene or Player Four joining the chorus, **put more focus on embodying your reactions than explaining them.**
- Again, **enthusiastic acceptance of another player’s contribution is improv’s superpower.** Immediately accept whatever world you’re brought to and the audience will love you for it.
- **More people on stage necessitates more agreement** – You can’t have four or more people on stage all with different perspectives/characters; it just gets too messy. Encourage players to **agree to each other’s perspectives and mirror each other’s physicality** to minimize the amount of “stuff” on stage and to focus the scene.
- **MORE PHYSICAL THE BETTER** – Players having to justify their physical position/pose moving through and back through the scenes is part of the fun.
 - In the sequence’s assent, it’s fun to transpose players’ physical positions into new worlds. *Ex: Shielding your eyes in the Desert Zone becomes waving away mosquitos in the Jungle Zone.*



- In transitioning back through the Sequence, a scene that had fallen into the doldrums is sparked back up when players leap to their previous stage positions *in the Volcano Zone*.
- In the sequence's ascent, a scene of characters frantically sealed in the Radiation Zone transitioned into a scene of characters prancing around trying to catch Unicorn Butterflies in the Magical Zone. In transitioning back through the sequence, characters closely studying Unicorn Butterflies trapped in their fists become characters hunched over a volcano as if surrounding a trashcan fire, blowing in their cupped hands for the warmth ("I thought it would be hotter.")

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.
- **Go see shows! Report back to me next week with examples of a moment that really came to life because players with engaged in their active environment.**



Week 4 – Playing From Emotion/Character

Objective: Emotion should be at the core of all improvisation – the audience loves seeing us care about imagined things and characters on stage.

When we try to screen write in-the-moment - trying to come up with clever twists or engaging in conflict or plot – we’re never going to be as good as screenwriters with the time to edit and rewrite. The best we can hope for then is for the audience to say, “That was amazing *considering you made it up on the spot.*” We want just “That was amazing,” without the qualifiers. **We can get there by making our scenes “about” characters that react in-the-moment and relationships forged in-the-moment.** A staged actor’s job is to make you believe the reactions they’ve rehearsed are 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 we 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.**

Just react emotionally. Don’t over-think an easy win. You don’t need a motivation. You just need commitment to the moment.

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Getting to and relaxing in emotional reactions as what our scenes “are about.”*

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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CACOPHONOUS CIRCLE OF EMOTION – Instructor stands in the middle of the circle of students. The Instructor gives the group an emotion (Happiness, Sadness, Fear [Google emotions], etc.) and the group all physicalizes and verbalizes the emotion. Instructor changes the emotion and the group changes their emotion. They don’t need words – they can just make an emotional sound.

Lessons:

- **Emotions affect your relative distance** – Players pull back from the circle with emotions like “afraid,” “shy,” etc. They move in with more aggressive emotions.
- **Heightening doesn’t mean volume** – As players are pushed toward emotional heights their inclination may be to get louder. One can get intense without getting too loud/shrill for the audience to be willing to listen.
- **Emote like no one’s watching/judging.**



- **Sometimes people struggle with emotions, and that's okay** – *But* improvisers *have to* emote. You don't need a motivation. **You just need to appear to feel.**

4.1 Emotional Heights/Depths: Committed emotion should be an improviser's base at all times. We need to be able to exhibit the highest highs and lowest lows on stage so we need to practice emotion at the extremes to become comfortable in that space.

Suggested Exercises:

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 their 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.
- **Being bored or unaffected is hard to heighten** – Care.
- **Exude the emotion physically** - 11 in sadness is rolling on the floor and weeping.

4.2 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.

Suggested Exercises:

EMOTIONAL NURSERY RHYME – Around a circle, a player recites a common nursery rhyme with an emotional filter. The next player does the same nursery rhyme, further heightening the same emotion or trying on a new emotion. Repeat with different nursery rhymes.

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.



4.3 Emotional Matching: If we agree, we can just *be*; we don't have to explain or defend. Have fun just *being* emotional together, trusting that your commitment to the same emotion is all the context for your relationship that's needed.

Suggested Exercises:

CARPOOL (*formerly Hitchhiker, but game is smoother when players assume characters know each other*) – One player starts, driving a car, expressing a self-contained emotional perspective ("I love the South"). A second player enters the scene, entering with their own emotional perspective ("The South scares me"). **The driver immediately embraces the new player's perspective, and the two come into agreement, heightening the perspective they now share with additional details supporting that perspective** ("Oh, my god, look at all the Confederate flags"). A third player enters, entering the car with a new emotional perspective ("I think Mississippi's beautiful"). **The driver and the second player immediately accept and embrace this new perspective.** Repeat with new players continuing to add in.

NOTE:

- **Potential Class Action Game**
- It's infinitely more fun when we assume we know each other than when we waste time getting to know one another. That said, we KNOW each other by our patterns of emotional reactions, so **we can quickly elevate a scene where characters don't know each other by boldly sharing our feelings.**

Variations:

- Let the driver leave and have the car rotate around as more passengers are added.
- BUS STOP: Players mimic and heighten each other as they add themselves to a Bus Stop environment. Players can leave by way of a bus.
- ANY LOCATION: When each student enters that location, all the students already in that location adopt the emotional perspective of the joiner.
- CAR JACKER: For big groups, split in two. Have the groups replace each other *en masse*. Quick, collective agreement is key. See Pijor's 101 Showcase for clarity: <https://improvesbest.com/2017/05/23/showcasing-students/>

Lessons:

- **BEING AFFECTED IS AWESOME – Allow yourself to change with another's perspective.** The bigger the emotion and the quicker the agreement the better.
- **If we agree, we can just *be*; we don't have to explain or defend.**
- **Trust that your commitment to the same emotion is all the context for your relationship that's needed.**



4.4 Emotional Perspectives Made Easy: Some improvisers are gifted at immediately deciding upon an emotional perspective and inhabiting characters that can react with heightening emotion in-the-moment. But **one shouldn't let finding an emotional perspective be a stressful process.**

The path to an emotional perspective can start with “just one thing” – one choice we expand upon and invest in.

A group can find an emotional perspective collaboratively – building on each other's choices with agreement.

Suggested Exercises:

CHARACTER WALK – students walk around the space as themselves. Teacher gives prompts for them to make choices from (see *Progression* below). Once students have embraced the prompt, the Instructor asks, “**How does what you're doing make you feel?**” **Call on students to make emotional noises (ex: [sigh], [growl], etc.) and/or make self-contained statements about how they're feeling about what they're doing.** Then the Instructor has students reset, returning to walk around the space as themselves again. And repeat.

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 (e.g. 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 (e.g. “chopping wood”); how do they feel about it?
- 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.



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.

4.5 No Pressure Initiations: Starting a scene can feel like the hardest part of a scene. And yet all we need to do to start is anything. **We just have to get out there and make A Choice.** The sooner we can get to emotion the better, but all we need to start a scene is...*anything*. If you make one decision – where you are, how you stand, what you're doing/holding, etc. – you can build the rest of the scene by investing in that one decision. If I'm picking my nose, what does that say about my age? If I'm forty-five and picking my nose, where am I? If I'm forty-five and picking my nose in a restaurant, am I embarrassed?

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 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:

- **Agreement is awesome** – Don't negotiate an imagined reality.
- **You don't need motivation to have a feeling.**
- **A scene needs information. But expand on what you've already got. Commit to it.**
- **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.



4.6 Trusting Emotion Over “Sense”: We don’t need to “know our motivation” before making the choice to emotionally react. We can find motivation through commitment to the emotion, and *we never have to have motivation at all*. **We strive to make our scenes “about” our characters’ patterns of emotional behavior.**

Suggested Exercises:

4 EMOTIONS – Divide your playing space into 4 quadrants: down stage right, down stage left, up stage right and up stage left. It can help to use masking tape to delineate the quadrants for players. Get two players on stage. Give each quadrant an emotion – they should all be very different. Give players a suggestion of a Location. Players start in a quadrant feeling as defined by that quadrant’s emotion. They then move between quadrants, changing their emotions as they move to different areas. **NOTE: Potential Class Action Game**

Movement between the quadrants can be leveraged to pace the scene. Best Practice is to:

- Establish one’s self in each quadrant, focused more on objects/location than on our scene partner.
- As the scene progresses, make transitions between quadrants faster and faster
- Really push emotions as the scene progresses, making bold emotional reactions the moment one moves into a new quadrant.

Lessons:

- **Just feel** – You don’t even need words, just make and repeat an emotional sound.
- **Imagined objects can trigger our emotions** – Using the location can be useful. If you imagine an object in each quadrant that can “make you” feel that quadrant’s emotion it can help with your reactions.
- **Focus on reactions over conversations** – If you get into a conversation with your scene partner it’ll be harder to use each quadrant’s emotion. If you’re committed to just reacting then the scene will flow smoother.
- **Emotion can propel us** – Use the stage space! Students leap into the same quadrant as their scene partner as they feel “love.” Students put distance between themselves and their scene partner as they explore “fear.”

PATRICK GASKILL’S “GIBBERISH” – Inspired by training at The Annoyance Theater in Chicago, Patrick Gaskill ran his 101 through the following exercises.

GIBBERISH TALK SHOW - When everyone returned from break, I started speaking only in gibberish. I set up chairs and mimed that they should form an audience and three players should join me on stage. I interview each player (they should all pick up that they are to only use gibberish too). If they're emotionally flat I try to draw out an emotional reaction from them. Then I take questions from the audience and we just play out a little talk show. With every little prompting everyone played up their emotions, even reactions from the audience.



GIBBERISH SCENE STARTS - I mime and explain that the students should line up on both wings and do layup scenes. It helps to choose a consistent word to call scene with (I used "SHHUH!"). Encourage them to pick up objects if they don't.

GLORPA - Explain that the students are to play Freeze, except that they should yell GLORPA! and clap to indicate a freeze. I also yelled GLORPA and clapped to reinforce it.

- After some time, I paused them and said (in English) that the player in the scene who didn't just tag in is allowed to use one line of English when they want to.
- Then, pause them and say that the player who tags in can also use one line of English, but they must wait until the other player has spoken English.
- Then, pause them and explain both players can use as much English as they want.

After “Glorpa” concluded, I congratulated them for improvising for almost an hour without using words, asked them how they felt about it. **Asked them how the scenes changed when they were allowed to use English again. Almost certainly, the scenes will get slower, have less environment and object work, they'll struggle with saying things, and a lot of arguing and negotiating.**

I pointed how much fun they were having at the beginning, just coming out and doing things, leading with a body part (a la character walk), and they had such big, fun emotions. There was more matching when they didn't have words so it felt easier. Tell them that our goal is to get our normal scene work to that place.

HOMEWORK –

- **Study your friends:** Think about how particular people in your life stand, walk, talk, etc. Do their physical attributes reflect their emotional perspectives? For example: Do the happy people in our lives talk fast or slow?
 - **Work on an Impression of someone you care about.**
- **Notice the objects in your life that make you feel:** What “things” in your life do you love? Hate? Be aware in interacting with those things in real life how the interacting affects your emotions.
 - **Practice in mime interacting with something from real life you care about.**
- **Go see shows! Report back to me next week with examples of moments where you laughed at a character’s emotional reaction and/or when a player put on a really rich character that you were compelled by.**



Week 5 – Active Endowments for Emotional Reactions

Objective: Our scenes are “about” how we *feel* about ourselves, our environment and our scene partner. Making choices about how we feel and then committing to those emotions is how we progress a scene. **By endowing ourselves, our environments and our scene partners with attributes that can be “seen,” “touched,” and otherwise interacted with, we make it easier to “react through” our scenes.**

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Making and reacting to endowments*

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

BOOM, DROP SOME KNOWLEDGE – Instructor starts, “Boom, drop some knowledge. [Student/TA], drop some knowledge.” Identified player shares something they know personally to be true (“The Smurfs are Belgian,” “The ninth digit of pi is...”). The group jumps in – **the whole purpose is for the group to find the rhythm of the exercise**, following the group’s impulses, cutting off the knowledge provider more and more as the game builds – with, “BOOM, drop some knowledge.” At which point the last knowledge provider calls out, “[Name], drop some knowledge.” Repeat.

- **As improvisers, our script is our own, so it’s fun to share yourself with the audience through your knowledge.**
- **The best improvisers are avid learners.**

5.1 Imagined Endowments: The audience loves seeing us react to imagined stimuli – knowing we’re improvising, our commitment to something made up in-the-moment is a surprise to the audience. **If we “feel something about something,” then that something – or more somethings like it – have the ability to *make us feel* more. Then we’re thinking less and reacting more.** If I say, “I love cats,” I’m just emoting. If I say, “I love *this* cat,” I’m emotionally *reacting to something I can “see,” “touch” and otherwise interact with.*

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.**
- **Remember Weight, Volume, and Tension** the three keys to engaging mime!



5.2 Endowing Our Scene Partner: We also have our scene partner to endow and react to. *The danger is when improvisers focus only on their scene partner – as 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.

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 confidence
- I desire your friendship

Lessons:

- **Give gifts** – It’s much more fun to be endowed with information (“Ugh, you got fat”) than to be burdened with requests for information (“What are you doing?”).
- **Want something? Feel the 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 hogtied 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.

5.3 Setting Up Multiple Endowments and Reactions: Too often scenes start with two players meeting center stage and having a conversation about something. **We want to see characters emotionally engaged in multi-faceted worlds.** 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.**

Mechanics: Player One starts engaged in the environment (with an action, object, atmosphere, etc.) without words. Player Two starts with their back to the stage. 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,” Player Two turns toward stage and speaks through the filter of their chosen emotion – he can react to the scene partner OR he can react to his own activity/environment. **Note:** *Player Two needn’t be literally entering the scene every time. He is turning into the scene for the purposes of being kept unaware of Player One’s physicality, but, having turned, he can (and should) act as though he’s 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.

- **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 then “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 all 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 argue about the need to produce architectural drawings. When one player decides to just draw, she produces a spiraling squiggle and a bold dot. Then looking at her drawing, the player announces that she's produced a spiral staircase and a fireman's pole.

- **Words smerds** - Saying 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.

DOUBLE BLIND SCENES – The Instructor and the TA split the stage by holding up a blanket or sheet. Players One and Two start engaged in the environment (with an action, object, atmosphere, etc.) 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.

Lessons:

- **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.

5.4 Juggling Multiple Endowments and Reactions: In every scene each player has the power to make a choice about how they feel about themselves, their environment *and* their scene partner. Finding the rhythm between all those endowments and reactions can help make for sustainable long-form improv scenes.

"How we feel about who we are, where we are and what we're doing," and "How we feel about who our scene partner is, where they are and what they're doing" should be our focus in improv scenes. Let "How we feel" trump all else, especially plot and "sense."

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.

Suggested Exercises:

“SWITCH” – Players One and Two stand on stage facing the audience. When the Instructor says, “Go,” both players are to engage in endowing and feeling about themselves or their environment. Then when the Instructor says, “Switch,” the players are to look at each other, endow each other and feel about each other. Then every time the Instructor calls, “Switch,” players oscillate between their personal thing and engaging their scene partner.

The Instructor is helping them feel the rhythm in playing with different patterns of emotional behavior. *Instructors should relax in the fact that this can be clunky; focus more on doing reps than on dissecting any one rep with too many notes.*

Lessons:

- **Being DYNAMIC is awesome** – The audience loves our multifaceted characters. We should therefore strive to be more than one-note.
- **Making sharp choices is funny!** – With every move she makes, I’m falling more and more in love with my scene partner. I’m almost bursting with love when I take a sip of my coffee and “AAAhhhh, damnit! I got the effing wrong order!” Bold moves in different directions leverages a strength of clowning.
- **Unsure of what to do next? Do more of what you were doing** – Invest more emotion, identify more details, expand the environment, etc.
- **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.
- **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 whore.”)
- **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.



TWO PERSON SCENES – Player One initiates from stage left. Player Two initiates from stage right. They can start with anything. They can react to one another but they should be sure to have some environment as well – some reason to be in the location that doesn't involve the scene partner. Given more lines, players invest in what they initiate with more detail and/or emotional reaction. **Have players decide BOTH how they feel about “I” and “You” – engaging an active endowment about themselves AND about their scene partner.** After a few lines back and forth, teacher calls “Scene” and two new players start the exercise.

Progression:

- After a run where everyone has been through the exercise, have them talk about what they liked – whether they were in the scene or just watching.
- Have them identify what felt fun and easy.
- Have them identify when they were uncertain of what to do next.

Lessons:

- **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 feel 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.”/ “He doesn't give a shit.”

HOMEWORK –

- **Remember Seinfeld:** Many Seinfeld episodes would start with George talking about one thing and Jerry talking about another, seemingly without hearing (or caring) about the other's topic. It was an awesome way to ground each character for the episode before they started dealing/reacting to each other's “thing.”
- **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 to me next week with examples of a moment that really came to life because players were engaged in their active environment.**



Week 6 – Fun With Games

Objective: Students get more experience initiating and building out scenes with emotion with the help of improv tools and short-form games that can be used in the upcoming Showcase.

Remember: Despite whatever short-form gimmick is laid atop the scene, **making choices about how we feel and then committing to those emotions is how we progress a scene.** And all scenes benefit from having mimed objects/environment.

“Tonight We’re Going to Focus On” -

- *Supporting our emotional choices with game mechanics to make fun scenes*

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21 – Be patient and share the air

SCENE INITIATION LAY-UPS – Remember that we want to “feel something about something” in our scenes. Have a *quick* practice of initiating and joining focused on making the choice to feel.

6.1 “Games”: While “Game” gets used in myriad ways in the improv community, the dictionary’s definition is what The Coalition uses:

- **Game** – a sequence of actions, related by rules of cause-and-effect, that heightens with repetition.

The relationship between “When this happens” “this happens” is useful not only to focus improvisers’ choices but also to connect with the audience. In Short Form, where the mechanics of the “game” are told to the audience before the scene starts, the audience starts reacting to the “cause” and the *expectation of the effect* instead of just to the effect itself.

The rhythm with which a game’s mechanic is played helps pace the scene and build it toward an edit. For example, in New Choice the Instructor sprinkles in “New Choice” a little at the beginning and more toward the end. In Four Corners, players get more time per scene initially and scenes are more quickly switched thereafter.



Suggested Exercises:

NEW CHOICE – Players initiate and build scenes by expanding on / committing to emotional reactions. When the instructor says, “New Choice,” players must redo their last line of dialogue – heightening details, changing emotions, etc. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

Lessons:

- **Go bigger** – A player does not HAVE to change their emotional perspective with each “New Choice.” They can choose the same choice but BIGGER and MORE DETAILED (ex: “I’m the coolest guy in school” – New Choice – “In all the universe I am the most Fonzy-esque dude that has ever existed”)
- **Build** – If given a quick succession of “New Choice” prompts, build a progression on top of your initial choice. (ex: “I’m the coolest guy in school” – New Choice – “In all the universe I am the most Fonzy-esque dude that has ever existed” - New Choice – “Nowhere anywhere is there anyone that is as rad, tubular or as otherwise bodacious as I!”)
- **Flipping** – We can always flip a game on its head (“I love you” / “I hate you”). But note that too much inconsistency can make the audience lose interest in our characters. Better to wait to flip a game until the expectation that it will be continued is established. (ex: “I’m the coolest guy in school” – New Choice – “In all the universe I am the most Fonzy-esque dude that has ever existed” - New Choice – “Nowhere anywhere is there anyone that is as rad, tubular or as otherwise bodacious as I!” - New Choice – “I’m the lamest.”)
- **INSTRUCTOR NOTE:** Be wary of directing too much with your calls for “New Choice.” Some like to call “New [specific action]” – while this can help focus a player on heightening on specific, if the Instructor is too specific – “New [sarcastic laugh]” – the improviser will be put in their head. Make them look good. And remember that your shouts of “New [choice]” need to pale in frequency to their dialogue.

6.2 Playing With Expectations: Repetition of relationship mechanics (“This” then “That”) establishes expectations for the audience. These expectations can be played to and against for fun effect.

Suggested Exercises:

FOREIGN DUBBING – This game adds extra levels to our patterns of emotional reaction. Two players on stage with two other players on the wings. The players on stage act out a scene using foreign gibberish, with the two players on the wings providing translations. Players need to share the air to ensure everyone can be heard. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

Both sets of players are approaching the scene just like they would in a regular Two Person Scene. And neither set should be worried about “making sense.”



Lessons:

- **Allow everyone to lead** – The gibberish pair make choices about their emotions and their environment that lead the seated pair to verbalize choices. Conversely, the seated pair make verbal choices that the gibberish pair react to emotionally and engage in through their environment.
- **Complement** – Remember the audience wants to see us “working collaboratively together.” So the default setting should be that both sets of players’ contributions support, agree with and accept each other.
 - *Example:* In gibberish a player raises a mimed cup. The seated player says, “This glass has Superman on it.”
- **Contrast** – There is fun to be had in playing against expectations, but remember those expectations have to be established before upending them can have any impact. **If contrasting choices are made, just allow the contradiction to exist; it does not have to be addressed or solved.**
 - *Ex:* The gibberish sounds French. The seated player makes the scene’s location “Ohio.”
 - *Ex:* A player goes on a gibberish rant for two minutes. The seated player translates, “Of course.”
 - *Ex:* The gibberish couple has acted like powerful people. Through the seated players we learn they are children.

GENRES – The Instructor gets/has a list of Movie/TV Genres (Ex: Horror, Disney, Western, etc.) Two or Three Players get on stage and engage a scene as they would any regular Two or Three Person Scene (remember: More Players? Less Stuff. If you choose to do Three Person Scenes, encourage players to Agree with one another.) The scene will be short and the Instructor will call the edit.

Players will then be given a Genre through which for them to repeat the original scene. Repeat a few times with different genres. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

Lessons:

- **Remember Memory?** – We have to Remember the original scene if we are to repeat it. This can be a good memory exercise.
- **Filter** – The funny of this game is hearing/seeing old things through a new lens. If the first scene was a teenage girls’ sleepover and the new genre is “Western,” it’s fun to see cowboys sleeping around a fire, but we still want them to care about things like the teenage girls would have.
- **Keep some things the same, change others** – In addition to following the same general scene arc as the original as we go through genres, we can find fun in keeping certain lines of dialogue the same (Ex: the teenage girls, the cowboys and the aliens all say, “OMG”). What changes from one iteration to another should continue to change and heighten (Ex: “It cost me ten dollars!” says a teenager; “It cost me my best horse and favorite spittoon!” says a cowboy; “It cost me a blurkin flurbittydoo!” says an alien).



- **Pacing** – Each iteration can get faster and/or more energetic. Once expectations are established, the Instructor can give a Genre that players address with only one line before the edit comes (Ex: “The next genre is ‘Porn.’” “Someone order a pizza?” -lights-).

6.3 Collaborating With Confidence: The audience knows we’re “making it up as we go” - making choices that “come out of our individual heads.” **The audience loves to see us confidently engage the moment** – even if we have no real knowledge about the subject matter. **The audience wants to see us “confidently in it together.”**

Suggested Exercises:

ADVICE PANEL – The Instructor separates the cast into groups of Two or Three across the stage. The Instructor assigns each group a topic they are collectively “experts” in (Ex: The middle ages, insects, sleep, etc.). Then the Instructor gets the audience to ask for advice (Ex: “How do I get a girl to like me?” “How can I control my anger?” etc.). Players then give advice through the filter of their assigned expertise. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

Lessons:

- **Commit to Trying** – As long as you are trying the audience will support you. If you give up (“I don’t know anything about X”) you just disappoint the audience. I’ve seen players who were supposed to be experts in being “sycophants” focus their bits on “words that start with ‘s’” because they didn’t know what the word meant and it was awesome.
- **Duologues** – Players sitting together speaking to the audience is an improv staple. They are best when the characters agree and react to one another, sharing in-the-moment how they feel about each other.
- **Pacing** – The Instructor helps to pace this game by playing Host and directing the scene between the groups. Instructors though should minimize the amount of time that they take up talking.

6.4 Acceptance and Physical Transformations: The audience loves seeing us make bold choices inspired by our fellow players and to see those choices accepted by our fellow players.

The audience also loves “Transformations” wherein a player’s physicality on stage is transported to a different world (Ex: A player playing the drums is made into a player clasping the harness on a roller coaster).

Suggested Exercises:

FREEZE TAG – Two players start a scene given an audience suggestion. From the wings, Player Three says, “Freeze,” and the Players One and Two *freeze* in the physical position they’re in. Player Three confidently tags out the player they want to replace and



assumes that physical position as Player One/Two goes to the wings. Player Three initiates a brand new scene transporting their physical positions to a new location/situation/relationship/etc. This new scene continues until Player Four shouts, “Freeze!” And repeat. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

Lessons:

- **Focus on Personal and Scenic Endowments over plot/justification** – When the third player enters the scene, encourage them to *feel* about what position they’re adopting or to *feel* about the position of their scene partner instead of trying to come up with a clever justification for why they’re posed like they are.
- **No hesitation necessary** – You don’t have to have any idea before calling “Freeze.” It can be fun to just get out on stage and discover the scene in-the-moment. Assume the position and decide how you feel.
- **Confidence sells** – Don’t worry about making “sense” with your stage picture. Whatever you do *confidently* appears purposeful.
- **Accept what you’re given** – If joined on stage, confidently follow your joiner’s initiation; don’t make conflict unnecessarily.
- **The bigger the physical choices you make in one scene, the more fun the next scene will be right off the bat.** “Transformations” are fun in improv as an edit.
- **Vary it up** – The last scene was low energy? Go high energy! The last scene as about children? Be old people!

SPACE JUMP / BIOSPHERE (see mechanics and lessons from earlier in curriculum)

6.5 Heightening Characters and Relationships over Plot: There are common tools used in improv for establishing and heightening games in scenes, to include Tag-Outs, Walk-Ons, and Split Screens. These tools are most effective when:

- **One use is followed by another** – If one Tag-Out is used, there should be another. Conversely, if a player chooses to employ a Tag-Out, Tags-Outs are then the tool for the scene; players *should not also* employ Walk-Ons.
- **Moves are made to heighten Characters and Relationships in play not plot** – *Examples:* Through a Tag-Out, a know-it-all student is shown being a know-it-all at work. Siamese twins Walk Through a scene where a couple is breaking up. A scene where a player struggles while working out is juxtaposed against a scene where a superhero struggles to save the day.

Suggested Exercises:

TAG OUT – A “tag out” allows the audience to see how a character from one scene will react to another character. To perform a tag out, a player enters a scene in progress and literally tags the player that he/she will replace on stage. Have two players initiate a scene on stage. Players on the wings should be watching the scene in progress trying to answer the question of “What do these players react to?” A third player can then enter the



scene, “tag out” the player they want to leave the scene and then initiate to the remaining player in an attempt to heighten that player’s reaction. For example, if in the initial scene Player One felt Player Two was lazy, then Player Three can tag out Player Two and be even lazier to get a bigger reaction out of Player One.

Lessons:

- **Focus on heightening players’ reactions** – Given the choice of which player to tag out, keep the player on stage that reacts the most; that’s the player you want to heighten with a new catalyst for their reactions.
- **Don’t reference the initial scene** – No psychiatrists. No reporters. We don’t want to see you talk about the scene we just saw, we want to see you actively heighten the scene we just saw.
- **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).
- **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.
- **One Tag-Out, Two Tag-Outs, More** – If your class is really getting the idea of tag-outs, feel free to let them do a run of two or more tag-outs. This run should heighten the SAME initial character. In show we *can* tag-out in a chain (Player Three tags out Player One, Player Four tags out Player Two, etc.) but that often undercuts the progression of heightening and can make it more difficult to find an edit.

WALK ON – We can enter a two player scene in progress as another character, offering a move that contributes to the progression of the game(s) at play. Two high school boys are feeling self-conscious in the hallway so Player 3 enters as a mean girl to point out their foibles. Two players are arguing over the value of the movie they just left, so Player 3 enters to agree with one of them and rile the other.

Lessons:

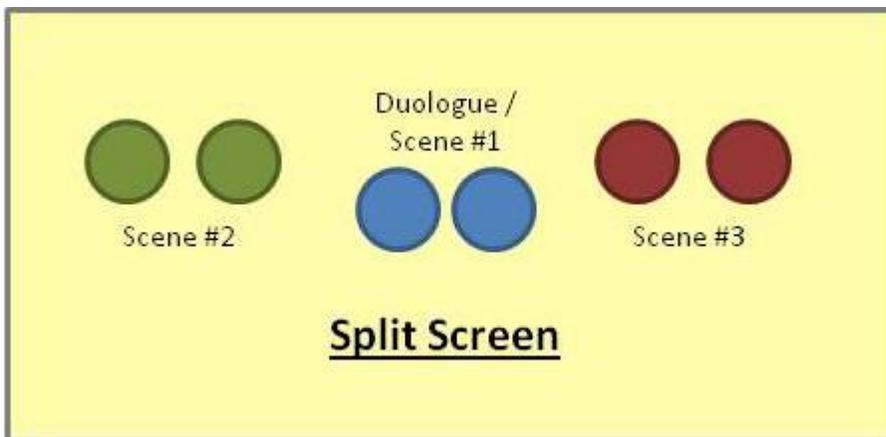
- **Focus on heightening what is happening between the initial characters** – We don’t want to come on with new information just because we think it will be funny. We want to HEIGHTEN WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN ESTABLISHED. If you are entering a scene, you must serve the scene in progress.
- **The scene is not about you / Walk OFF** – If there is one tertiary move an improviser knows, it’s the Walk-on. Unfortunately, too few improvisers know to Walk Off. *You’re a tertiary character; the scene’s not about you.* A Walk-on should only be used to heighten/sharpen a game already at play. An entering character must acquiesce to those already on stage and strive not to be the focus of the scene.



SPLIT SCREEN – 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.**

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.



Lessons:

- **Elevate the situation** – Spies stealing secrets? Have mountaintop-sitting, spiritual gurus stealing life’s secrets. Have Moses steal the Commandments.
- **Elevate themes** – In lifting the *reactions* from the originating scene’s players and situation, we give those reactions wider applicability and telegraph to our fellow players that we are heightening the *theme* represented in those reactions. (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. Two male improvisers talk about cars or sports while really talking about women and/or sex. Play the emotional dynamic of a young man asking a father for his daughter’s hand over the particulars of a teenager asking his dad for the car keys – “Boy, what are your intentions with my sedan?”



HOMEWORK –

- **Go see shows! Report back to me next week with examples of mechanics players used to build a game pattern.**
- **Go see a SHORT FORM Show! Check out your local Comedy Sportz.**
- **Participate in a Mixer and/or Jambalaya! These are two great opportunities to see and try out various Short Form Games.**



Week 7 – Practice

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

Practice all the potential Class Action Short Form games, giving all students the opportunity to play through all games.

YOU, the Instructor, have to practice, too – articulating games as you would for an audience and hosting a Short Form set. *If you would like practice running a Short Form set, reach out; we'll make it happen.* You have to keep energy up and strive to end on high notes and keep the pace of games and the time between games brisk. The showcase will go longer than you expect.

Practice what you want to say to introduce/explain games and get suggestions – don't assume you know how! **PRACTICE! OUT LOUD!**

When you facilitate games (think: "New Choice") be sure you're heightening their ideas and not the funny thing in your own head. Keep your contribution proud, concise and brief.

Running the various Short Form games in various combinations should help inform your set list. You want a set of short-form games that showcases your students' best attributes with equal potential stage time for each performer. You should strive to ensure everyone appears in at least three games.

NOTE: NO ELIMINATION OR LINE GAMES. Elimination games and most Line games go against the collaborative vibe our 101 strives for. *No "Story, Story, Die," "161/I like my women," etc.*

Suggested Exercises:

CARPOOL/CARJACKER -

FOUR CORNERS –

FOUR EMOTIONS –

GENRES –

SPACE JUMP -

NEW CHOICE -

FREEZE –

FOREIGN DUBBING –

ADVICE PANEL –



Week 8 – Performance Prep

Objective: Having decided on who will be playing what games in the Class Showcase, 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.

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.

REALLY IMPORTANT NOTE: Encourage your students to sign up for 201, but acknowledge that 201 is a different world than 101. **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.