

Teacher Best Practices –

Let's get better! Read these. Add. Tweak. Critique. Let's grow!

Pework:

- All provided materials are a jumping off point. **You're the teacher.** Teach what makes sense to you. Encourage *your* point of view. **BUT, be sure to read the materials thoroughly to ensure you note the standard Core Lessons students should learn.**
- **Make your own Lesson Plan for each class.**
 - There are often several suggested exercises listed to illustrate important points. Choose which you're excited to teach or add an exercise.
 - **Articulating improv is important.** Practice aloud the key points you want to make. Remember students will learn better from practice than from lecture.
 - **Connect exercises with learning.** While the emphasis in teaching should be on having fun over becoming perfect improvisers, students expect a *class*, not recess.
 - Students like to hear your vision for each class at the beginning of each class and a summation of learnings at the end of each class.
 - Whether you tell them what they're going to learn before an exercise or tease out what they've learned after an exercise, make sure they feel they've learned something with each exercise.
 - Constrain your notes to the focus of the class – more reason to know ahead of time what you're going to teach. It's too easy to get lost trying to perfect everything, and that exhausts and confuses students.
 - Make preparing for each class a priority before each class. **Manage your time** (consider outlining your class format and notate what approximate times you think you should be done with each section).
- Ask your TA what they want from this experience, decide what you need them to do and schedule a standing date for communicating.
 - Teachers and TAs work in many different ways:
 - Model student – evoking good notes and bearing bad
 - Translator – rephrasing the teacher's notes in his/her words
 - Note Taker – keeping notes on scenes and players' tendencies
 - Example Provider – illustrating moves and leading exercises
 - TAs should be provided the following experiences:
 - Being guided through how you design a class ahead of time and evolve with the class in-the-moment
 - Leading warm-ups from curriculum and warm-ups of their design
 - Leading notes after exercises/scenes/games and [where applicable] runs of scenes/games/longform

Introductions:

First Class Key Points to Make –

- **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 later 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.
- **Foster a safe environment. Be respectful.** Students should be physically gentle and appropriate with one another. Strive not to offend or to be offended. 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.
- **Be sensitive to identity.** Default to "they" pronouns. Prompt students for their pronouns during introductions. Encourage open, respectful conversation about what students need.
- **Come to class physically prepared to participate** – you want to wear clothing that will enable you to do whatever anyone else does on stage.
- **Ask students what they want out of this class** – Getting out of my comfort zone. Performing. Conquering stage fright. Understand where they are.
- See shows! You get in free! **Watching is essential to learning.** Take time in each class to promote shows (specifically –what should they look for) and ask about shows they saw (specifically – what did they like).
- **Communicate.** During the first class inform them you'll be sending an email the next day to put them all on a – non spammable – email thread. Note: Classes in the past have set up Facebook pages, etc. Ensure class has instructor's contact info.
- Have fun. This is the greatest community in the world. Know and enjoy each other. **Go out for drinks after first class.** Encourage students to get together on their own after other classes – the more they know/trust each other the better they'll play together.

Start of Every Class –

- **Ask:** What shows did you see? Specifically, what did you like / what didn't you like? What didn't you understand? What are you excited to do?
- **Tell:** "This week you have these specific opportunities to see and do improv..." Share the week's schedule. Focus them on shows that relate to their level/learnings.
 - **Ask:** Who else has shows and/or news to promote this week?
- **Remind:** Review what has been learned to date. Ask them. Ask for questions.
- **Foreshadow:** Outline your vision for the specific class and how it fits into the larger picture of A) the class topic (101, 201, etc.) and/or B) On-stage, before-an-audience improvisation.

BUT, Shake it up now and then! From the evaluations – "Break the mold a little one week. Example: Run into class; skip warmups and b.s. smalltalk; throw a group on stage and yell "GO". Sometimes you need to shake up the routine."

In-Class Note Giving:

- **Accept notes** – you may not agree with all the instructors notes; trust that all notes are given for the sake of pushing the group forward and strive to incorporate the instruction you've been given. We ask that students try.
- **Elevate Notes, part one:** Especially in 101, it can be advantageous to, when giving notes, speak to the group rather than the individual – as the opposite can shame the novice. Rather than, “Joe, when you said no to Jane...” choose “When *we* negate in a scene...”
- **Elevate Notes, part two:** To be useful the note needs to provide guidance on how to navigate *future scenes* better. Knowing what I should have said if I were ever again a penguin in a nunnery is less constructive than understanding how, for example, commitment to emotional perspectives can focus a whacky scene.
- Point out **Trends of Behavior/Moves** - with specific examples. “This often leads to this. Whereas this tends to result in this.”
- Give **Constructive Actions to Take** – “I would like to see you do this.” “When met with this, do this.”
- **Remember that to learn, improv students have to “feel success.”** In the face of confusion we can tend to want to explain more; we need to have them DO IT MORE. **Teach to THEIR example.**
- **There are no mistakes**, except for acknowledging to the audience that you think a move was a mistake. If the audience saw it, it exists; to ignore it is to draw more attention to it.
- **The only one who looks foolish is the one who doesn't commit to the foolishness.** We're imagining characters and worlds on a blank stage; the improviser who calls us out as “the straight man” is the buzzkill.
- **The classic “No” Notes (“don't ask questions,” “don't be strangers,” “don't negotiate,” can all be trumped by FEELING SOMETHING ABOUT SOMETHING.** The “No” Notes are red flags that an improviser is in their head thinking and deciding rather than feeling and reacting.
- **Know why the good went well.** You have to be able to dissect what made the good scenes good: Heightening emotion, detail, reactions, collaboration? Just being damn funny? Ask: What made that easy/fun for you?
- **Side Coaching:** Interrupt with a “Do,” not a “Do Not;” progress is enabled when you show them a path to take as opposed to stopping them in their tracks to dissect how they're doing “wrong.” Be concise so students can quickly get back into the scene.
- **Ensure that everyone participates / Focus players on finding a balance inside the group** – Encourage hesitators to go for it. Insist that stage hogs dial it back.
- **Be confident, consistent and constructive in your noting.** Take “does that make sense?” out of your vocabulary; Students may say “yes” but they'll doubt you because you doubt yourself. Similarly, when you act like you need to carefully deliver a note because you're worried it will be taken personally, it will be. If you're giving constructive notes that clearly serve a stated goal, then students will not take those notes personally.

Personal / Written Note Giving:

- **Students love getting personalized notes.** 201, 301 and 401 teachers should be expected to write/give personalized notes to each student. Preparing for post-class notes throughout class is ideal; tracking scenes and tendencies throughout classes is easier than trying to remember scenes and discern trends post-class. Take notes and use your TA.
 - Students like receiving personal notes after the seventh class, giving them a final class to practice in and an opportunity to hit goals in the showcase.
 - Focus on constructive notes: ensure there is more “try this...” than “don’t do this...” While you shouldn’t shy from taking the 1-on-1 opportunity to alert players to tendencies that may be detrimental to the group, always strive to provide a potential fix for every perceived deficit.

Handling Undesirable Behaviors in Students

- Seek to have a CONVERSATION about your observation so they don’t feel chastened, while asserting at the end of the day that you are the authority in the situation and cannot abide certain behaviors for the sake of the entire group.
 - Start with Observation. Use “I” statements. “I noticed/felt/observed that...”
 - Give specific, objective examples. “I noticed you were slurring your words in the Build A Room exercise...”
 - Keep it a Conversation. Be open to them sharing their position. Hear them. “I hear you.” “Thank you for sharing.”
 - Explain Implications of Behavior so to keep focus on the good of the work and the good of the team. “While this work can be cathartic, if we’re just dumping our baggage on stage it will make others less interested in playing with us.”
 - Give Expectations for Future Behavior and lay out Potential Repercussions if there is no change.
- While some conversations have to happen 1 on 1 after the moment, where possible we need to address issues when they occur.
 - We make notes seem personal when we worry about how they’ll come off personally – we need to strive to make our conversations about behavior focused on the work, and not about the improviser as a person.
 - Call out the observation. “You made fun of Jane’s shirt.”
 - Use your own perspective to keep it off the victim. “If I was in that position, I would feel...”
 - Don’t rub the offender’s face in it; move on. “Let’s just all avoid commenting on each other’s style. Cool? Let’s get two more people up.”
- If players are putting their fellow improvisers into compromising positions on stage:
 - Remind them improv is more about being affected than trying to affect others.
 - “Good improv accepts.” We shouldn’t be dictating demands on our players’ actions.
 - If you think your idea is a funny position for a character to be in, PUT YOURSELF in that position, don’t force it on a fellow player.