

FUZZY IMPROV

Mindset

Lesson 101-06 & 07

FUN with GAMES



CW4SP.com
Cls 6 Spring
04/27/2026

CLASS RULES:

To Do:

NAME TAGS

CHECK IN WITH TEAMMATES

HELP CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

BE KIND: NO ISM, NO POLITICS. Do not be offensive or insulting to your teammates.

BOUNDARIES - PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL. Be gentle and appropriate.

NEW CHOICE AND TIME OUT. Use these to steer the scene away from (or stop) anything you find upsetting or out of bounds.

The Improv world abounds with venues for R rated material. But this class will always be G rated and family friendly.

Class Structure: The first 45 minutes of the class we be doing exercises and games that focus on the concepts presented in this handout. The last 30 minutes we will be creating scenes using the concepts we learned.

Note: [G X] at the beginning of an item indicates the page of [Improv As Improv Does Best Curriculum](#), Introduction to Improvisation, *Patrick Gantz 2020* at which the topic can be found.

[HD] at the beginning of the topic indicates materials that I have added.

HAVE FUN! Harold Dreibelbis

6.0 Games

Objective for this session: To get more experience in initiating and building out scenes with emotion. To work with improv tools and short-form games that can be used in the upcoming Showcase.

Please note: Regardless of the short-form techniques employed, advancing a scene relies on making clear choices about your character's emotions and commitment to them. Incorporating mimed objects and environment enhances all scenes.

6.1 Fun with Games:

Focus on supporting your emotional choices with game mechanics to make fun scenes.

“**Game**” can have several meanings in Improv. *The Coalition Theater* based in Richmond VA is an improv hub where principles like collaboration, active listening, and community engagement are practiced in real-world settings. It uses this dictionary definition:

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

This is the definition used here.

In Improv, **the cause-and-effect relationship** between “When this happens” then “that happens” is useful not only to **focus your choices but also to connect with the audience.**

In **Short Form**, where the **mechanics of the “game” are told to the audience by the Host** 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** at which **a game’s mechanics** are played helps **pace the scene and build it toward an edit.** For example, in the game *New Choice*, the Host will sprinkle in “New Choice” a little at the beginning and more toward the end. In *Four Corners*, TMs get more time per scene initially and scenes are more quickly switched thereafter.

6.1 Suggested Exercises:

NEW CHOICE – TMs initiate and build scenes by expanding on and committing to emotional reactions.

- *Lessons:*
 - **Go bigger** – you do not HAVE to change your emotional perspective with each “New Choice.” You 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** – You can always flip a game on its head (“I love you” / “I hate you”).
 - ☠️ Too much inconsistency can make the audience lose interest in your characters.
 - ★ Wait to flip a game until the expectation that it will be continued is established. (Example: “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.**”) < This last choice is the Flip.

6.2 Playing With Expectations:

Repeating the game's cause-and-effect mechanics ("This" then "That") sets expectations, which can be met or subverted for entertaining results.

Suggested Exercises:

FOREIGN DUBBING –Two TMs on stage with two other TMs in the wings. The TMs on stage act out a scene using foreign gibberish, with the two TMs on the wings providing translations.

Lessons:

- Allow everyone to lead** – The Gibberish TMs influence the Translation TMs' verbal choices through their actions and emotions, while the Translation TMs' words prompt emotional and environmental responses from Gibberish TMs.

- Complement** – Audiences expect all TMs to work collaboratively, with contributions that support and accept each other by default.

Example: In gibberish a TM raises a mimed cup. The Translation TM might say, “This glass has Superman on it.”

- Contrast** – Playing with expectations can be fun, but it's important to set those expectations first; only then will breaking them be meaningful. If you make contrasting choices, let the contradiction remain. There's no need to resolve or explain every contradiction.

- Example: The gibberish sounds French. The seated TM makes the scene's location “Ohio.”

- Example: A TM goes on a gibberish rant for two minutes. The seated TM translates, “Of course.”

- Example: The Gibberish couple act like powerful people. The seated TM translates speaking like children.

6.2 Playing With Expectations (continued):

GENRES – Scenes are acted out and then repeated through the lens of given genres.

Lessons:

- **Memory** – You must Remember the original scene if you are to repeat it. This is a memory exercise.
- **Filter** – Fun occurs because of hearing and 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 you still want them to care about things like teenage girls.
- **Keep some things the same, change others.** – As you go through genres Follow the same general arc as the original scene.
 - Find fun in keeping certain lines of dialogue the same.
Example: 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 set, find the button. Find the Genre that you can address with only one line (a quip), then edit (Ex: Host: “The next genre is ‘Current Events.’” TM: “Ugh! – Let’s order a pizza.” -lights-).

6.3 Collaborating With Confidence:

The audience knows you're "making it up as you go" - making choices that "pop out of your head." They love to see you confidently engage in the moment – even if you have no real knowledge about the subject matter. The audience wants to see TMs "confidently in it together."

Suggested Exercises:

ADVICE PANEL – TMs then give advice through the filter of their assigned expertise.

Lessons:

- **Commit to Trying** – ★ Play to the height of your intelligence. Try and the audience will support you. ☠ Give up ("I don't know anything about X") and the audience will be disappointed.

Example: You are assigned to be an expert "sycophant." Say you don't know what that is. So, you decide to focus your dialogue on words that start with "s." An awesome and intelligent choice!

- **Duologues** – TMs sitting together and speaking to the audience is an improv staple. They are best when their **characters agree and react to one another**, sharing in-the-moment how they feel about each other.
- **Pacing** – Host may help to pace this game, directing the scene between the TMs. Host will minimize the amount of time that he/she takes up.

6.4 Acceptance and Physical Transformations:

The audience loves seeing you make bold choices inspired by your fellow TMs and to see those choices accepted by your TMs.

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

Suggested Exercises:

FREEZE TAG – TMs in a scene freeze, are tagged out and replaced. A new scene ensues.

Lessons:

- **Focus on Personal and Scenic Endowments** over plot/justification – When you enter the scene, feel about what position you are adopting. Or feel about the position of your TM rather than trying to come up with a clever justification for why you pose as you do.
- **No hesitation** – You don’t have to have any idea before calling “Freeze.” Have fun, 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 with confidence appears purposeful.
- **Accept what you’re given** – A TM joins you on stage. Confidently follow their initiation; don’t make conflict unnecessarily.
- **Big physical choices** made in one scene make the next scene more fun right off the bat. “Transformations” are fun in improv as an edit.
- **Vary it up** – If the last scene was low energy - Go high energy! If the last scene was about children - Be old people!

6.5 Heightening Characters and Relationships over Plot:

There are common Improv tools used to improve and heighten games in scenes: **Tag-Outs, Walk-Ons, and Split Screens.**

These tools are most effective when:

- **One use follows another – If a Tag-Out is used, use another. When used, Tag-Outs become the tool for the scene. 🚫 Do not also use Walk-Ons.**
- **Tools are used to heighten Characters and Relationships - not plot.**

Suggested Exercises:

TAG-OUT, what happens –

A “tag-out” allows the audience to see how a character from a scene will react to different characters.

To perform a tag-out, you enter a scene in progress and tag the TM that you will replace on stage.

Example: 2 TMs initiate a scene on stage. You are in the wings watching the scene. Look for what causes the performing TMs’ reactions. Consider what will build on or heighten their reactions.

When you see your opportunity, enter the scene. Tag-out the TM who caused the reaction and do more of what they did. This will cause an even greater reaction. (Positive feedback loop!)

So, if in the initial scene TM1 felt TM2 was lazy, then TM3 can tag out TM2 and be even lazier to get a bigger reaction out of TM1.

Lesson for Tag-Outs on next page.

6.5 Lessons: TAG-OUT

- **Focus on heightening TMs' reactions** – Given the choice of which TM to tag out, keep the TM on stage that reacts the most. Give the remaining TM a heightened a new catalyst that will pump up their reaction. Don't reference the initial scene – 🦋 Do not psychoanalysis or report on the prior scene. Don't talk about the prior scene, instead actively heighten it.
- **Be a bigger version of the previous TM** - Do what the tagged-out TM did, only bigger. This is a trusty default (Your TM was excited by snails; you are going to be really excited by snails).
- **Wherever You're Taken, Trust it** – If TM3 takes TM1's snail lover to see the animated movie Turbo (a 2013 DreamWorks animated sports comedy about a garden snail who gains super speed and pursues his dream of racing in the Indianapolis 500.), TM1 is expected to heighten his excitement. TM1 can relax in knowing that wherever he's transported he just needs to trust in his emotional reactions.
- **The more Tag-Outs the funnier** – This run should heighten the SAME initial character. In a show there can be a chain of tag-outs. But beware that too many (more than 3?) often undercuts the progression of heightening and can make it more difficult to find an edit.

6.5 WALK-ON, what happens :

There is a 2 TM scene in progress. You are in the wings watching the scene. Look for what you can contribute to moving the game(s) forward. When you see your opportunity, enter the scene as another character.

- Example: Two high school boys are feeling self-conscious in the hallway, so you enter as a mean girl to point out their foibles.
- Example: Two TMs are arguing over the value of the movie they just left, so you enter to agree with one and rile the other.

Lessons:

- **Focus on heightening what is happening between the initial characters –**
 - ☞ Don't enter with new information just because you think it will be funny.
 - ☆ You 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 the 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.

6.5 Canadian Walk-Through, what happens-

This is a tool I learned at Improv Cincinnati. A “walk-through” is a playful variation on a walk-on. **In a walk-through a TM passes through the scene with minimal interaction.** The descriptor “Canadian” may be a tongue-in-cheek label to describe a polite, non-intrusive walk-through—consistent with the stereotype of Canadian politeness.

- Example: A TM walk through the scene, adding one line (quip) or perhaps a gesture before exiting.
- Example: I find the Canadian walk-through a perfect device to deliver a quip.

In a team rehearsal, TMs took on the character of goths. During the scene, I walked through in front of them and as they looked over to me, using a Flip, I said as an aside to the audience, “Oh Margaret, look at those cute little goths!” I continued walking off stage.

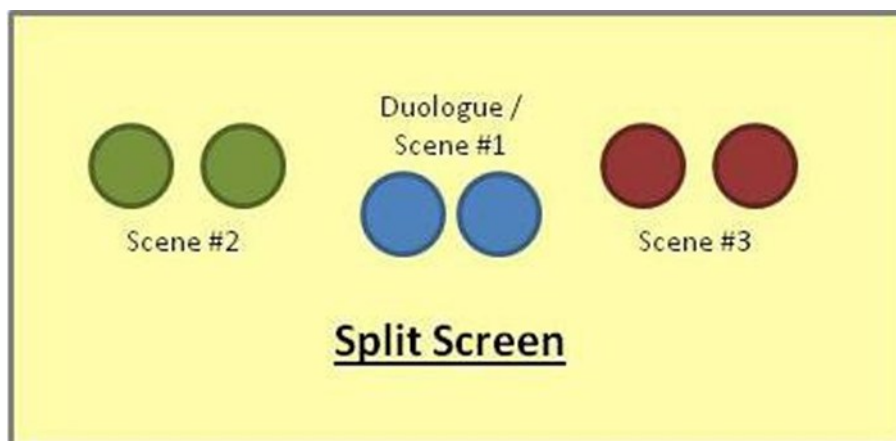
Purpose: Practicing Canadian walk-throughs teaches restraint, timing, and how to contribute without hijacking the scene.

6.5 SPLIT SCREEN, what happens –

The Split Screen enables a team to heighten relationship dynamics in a way that makes for an interesting stage picture. Several different scenes can coexist on the same stage. You want to execute split screens in service of heightening the relationship stakes.

To perform a split screen:

- **Scene 1:** TMs 1 and 2 are in the initial scene. Say they play political campaigners who remain optimistic despite their candidate clearly being the underdog.
- **Scene 2:** TM3 and TM4 start a new scene in a different area of the stage. This new scene should heighten the relationship stakes of the initial scene with new characters and/or circumstances. They play two Apostles who remain naively optimistic about what people in Sodom are willing to give up to follow Jesus.
- **Scene 3:** TM5 and TM6 can also come on to create a 3rd new scene along the same line.
- **Let each set of TMs take the focus for their dialogue.**



To practice, have TMs lay Split Screens onto a Two Person Scene.

6.5 Lessons: SPLIT SCREEN-

- **Elevate the situation** – If spies are stealing secrets, have mountaintop-sitting, spiritual gurus stealing life's secrets. Have Moses steal the Commandments.
- **Elevate themes** – By drawing on reactions from the originating scene's team members (TMs) and circumstances, you enhance the broader relevance of those responses and signal to your peers that you are emphasizing the underlying theme. For instance, if Scene 1 has a dog waiting for his master to come back from the store, Scene 2 can effectively amplify this theme by depicting a sailor's wife awaiting her husband's return.

Mapping-

This technique involves **overlaying the dynamic framework of one genre onto the specific elements of another** to enhance thematic and narrative complexity. For example, two male performers might engage in a discussion about cars or sports while their conversation subtly addresses topics related to women or relationships. Alternatively, one can apply the emotional dynamic of a young man requesting a father's permission to marry his daughter to a scenario where a teenager asks his father for the car keys—such as, "Son, what are your intentions regarding my vehicle?"

HOMEWORK –

- **Go see shows!** Report back to me next week with examples of mechanics TMs 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.

IN CLOSING:

Overcoming fear, a summary of pages *from Overcoming Fear, A guide for Budding Improvisers*, by Colin Thornton and Jon Ulrich. Visit the Fuzzy Improv page on CW4SP.com for its Amazon link.

> **Fear happens to everybody.** You may fear several things: the unknown, losing control, public speaking, past negative or critical experiences or not being accepted.

> Three expressions of fear that are toxic to improvisors: *Fight, Flight and Freeze*. Today's topic:

Fear Expression #3- FREEZE Not responding/not building onto a partner's ideas. You may know that feeling of having memorized something important only to find it frustratingly inaccessible at a crucial moment. Imagine that same thing happening without having to memorize anything.

Example, *THE DEER IN THE HEADLIGHTS*

The *DEER IN THE HEADLIGHTS* stops speaking completely.

You are a Deer in Headlights when your brain locks up to the point that you can't think of anything to say. Often, you are experiencing cognitive foginess and are no longer listening to your TM. You may apologize to the teacher or class for not knowing what to say next.

Improv's warm-up exercises and games help train you how to remain in the scene.

"You know you're getting old when you stoop to tie your shoelaces and wonder what else you could do while you're down there."



-George Burns

Material for this lesson is based on *Improv As Improv Does Best* Curriculum, Introduction to Improvisation by Patrick Gantz 2020.