

Improv Section 101 – What you need to know.

Class Rules

- **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 away from (or stop) anything you find upsetting or out of bounds.
- The Improv world abounds with venues for R rated material. This class will be G rated and family friendly at all times.

HAVE FUN!

General concepts

No Props: except chairs (usually 2, but more can be used).

No strangers: You know the characters you are in a scene with for at least 6 months.

Phrases to initiate a scene:

TM1

- Open with a Self-Contained Emotional Statement (SCES) such as, “I love the aroma of my fresh mowed lawn!” Etc.
- “I’m pleasantly surprised that ...”, ping-pong this phrase back and forth between TMs to build and sustain a dialogue.
- “No offense, but...”, ping-pong this phrase back and forth between TMs to build and sustain a dialogue.
- “Imagine a world where ...”
- “I’m very curious about”
- “I’d love to know about...”
- “I couldn’t help but notice...”

Phrases to continue and sustain a scene:

TM2

- “Yes and ...”, agree and build on the reality your TMs give you.
- If TM 1 Initiates with a phrase from above, TM2 can ping-ponged that phrase (or another) to create and sustain a scene.

While in dialogue: remember Brevity and Clarity. No monologues, no soliloquies.

Cutting a Scene:

- Yell “Scene!” or “Cut” to end a scene. When you cut, be ready to initiate the next scene.
- Cut too soon rather than too late.
- The people in the scene cannot cut the scene.
- Anyone not in the scene can cut the scene.
- Cut on a Button (i.e., leave with a laugh).

Lesson 101-01, Confidence and Acceptance

1.1 Focus Outward: There is a ton of material to mine in your improv scene if you are committed to seeing it, hearing it, and embracing it. Do not be in your head worried about making something happen. Follow what is already happening, progress to a collaborative end. G8

There are neither mistakes nor the one right move - There is only “what has happened” and “what’s happening now.”

Repetition is heightening – 🧠 Do not create material unrelated to what is already at play.

★ Collaborative evolution is fun enough; do not force difference for difference’s sake.

It is about the group, not you – The laughter ebbs and flows (often with the rules of 3). Commit to your repetition so the next person can get a laugh. Serve the team in this, and 🧠 do not try to force a laugh.

1.2 Make Each Other Look Good: Embrace your TMs’ contributions without hesitation or judgment. Move forward, begin with “yes.” Build momentum with enthusiastic acceptance. G9

1.3 Be Yourself: Without scripts, as an improviser you depend on what is in your head – details from your life and your personal ability to access emotion in-the-moment. The audience loves seeing you on stage. G10

Share your opinions. Be YOU In-The-Moment. No questions (as a rule)

Stay in the Present. Be specific. Focus outward and react. Be Confidently Vulnerable.

1.4 In-The-Moment Emotions: The audience loves watching you care in-the-moment about imagined stimuli. G11

You do not need motivation to react.

SELF-CONTAINED EMOTIONAL STATEMENTS (SCES) - ABOUT:

SCESs express in-the-moment emotions. They are what you would say if you were alone on stage.

SCESs state your situation.

SCESs should express what you feel about that which is actively on stage with you.

SCESs let you react through rather than think through your scenes. Use them to create a positive feedback loop (+FBL, bigger input = bigger reaction = bigger input =...) to heighten your reaction.

💀 Do not dictate the scene to your partner.

★ Saying “I’m dying” allows your TMs to choose how to join you.

💀 But “Doctor, I’m dying,” forces your TM to be a doctor.

Core Emotions: Happiness, Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, Surprise, Disgust

Expanded Emotional Palette Excitement, Nervousness, Confusion, Curiosity, Embarrassed, Pride, Shame, Guilt, Hope, Despair, Love, Affection, Jealousy, Envy, Relief, Determined, Resentment, Wonder, Frustration, Contented, Regret, Suspicion, Playful, Sarcasm, Vulnerable, Confident, Lonely, Empathy, Indifferent.

1.5 Agreement: Agreement is a cornerstone of improv. G 12

You are on stage creating something out of nothing. Create just one thing, then you have something. Build that one thing up and out. Do not debate the validity of something made up. The audience loves to see you enthusiastically agree with details imagined in the moment.

💀 Too often our default position in life is disagreement or refusal to commit when uncertain.

1.6 Yes, And: “Yes, And” is improv’s pithy mantra. You make a choice and your TMs build on that choice.

1.7 [Accept], And: While “Agreement” is excellent, your “Yes” need not always agree if it “accepts.” [G 13]

1.8 Positive Feedback Loop: To Continue the Scene, find the [HD] Positive Feed Back Loop (+FBL): If your scene is going nowhere, find your Positive Feedback Loop. Pick something that is actively on stage, let it make you feel more. Make your improv more reaction-based rather than thinking-based.

101-02 Attention & Memory

2.0 Objective for this session: [G 15]

Be Attentive. We are creating collaboratively. Ensure you hear each other's contributions. Focus outward to hear. Project out so you can be heard.

Remember what you hear. You are building on your TMs contributions. Remember those contributions.

2.1 Concentration:

On a crowded improv stage, it is easy for things to get lost. Make sure you hear your TMs by listening closely and are projecting clearly so you can be heard.

Focus on Success:

💀 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.

2.2 Listening to Build:

Build collaboratively, hear so you can accept. Show you accept your fellow TMs' contributions by heightening them with our own contributions. [G 17]

TMs should focus on having the SAME EMOTIONAL PERSPECTIVE toward an object; if the first TM hates this toaster, ALL hate the toaster. [G17]

Build in the same direction. Dig deep into the details. Trust the direction of the group. Share the air – Hesitators, contribute! Stage hogs, give someone else a chance.

2.3 Memory: [G18]

Listen and retain so YOU can return to and heighten established information. Memory is muscle exercise. The more you remember, the more options you have. Remember specific. Remember reactions.

2.4 More than Words:

We must share focus with the group. Being aware of our physical positions in relationship to one another is a critical component of hearing your TMs and your being heard by them. [G19]

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

2.5 Rhythm and Pacing: [G 19]

You can use pacing to evoke audience reactions if you can find the rhythms.

Make quick choices. Play to the moment, not for the Edit. [G 20]

- Silence is fun – Put more focus on embodying your reactions than explaining them.
- Enthusiastic acceptance of your TM's contribution is your superpower.
- More people on stage necessitate more agreement.
- Agree with each other's perspectives and mirror each other's physicality.
- The MORE PHYSICAL THE BETTER.

01-03 Playing in Space

3.0 Objective: See, touch, smell and REACT to the actively imagined elements of your environment.

3.1 Object Work G22: Weight, Volume and Tension are the key characteristics of an imagined object. Express these characteristics to help TMs and the audience “see” the object. Find Physical Reference Points for imagined Object. With practice, object work becomes instinct – So practice. Really picture what you are creating. Weight, Volume and Tension are the key characteristics of a mimed object.

DO WHAT YOU DO WHERE YOU DO IT – G23 Leveraging your personal life will make being specific easy.

What you do / objects you have inform your character – find an emotional perspective. “Sense Memory” – “see” and “feel” what your imagined objects channel. If you commit, it does not matter what you are doing. G24 Commit harder in the face of uncertainty (when you are not familiar with the subject / object.) Give and take –It is Funnier when you lose –

3.2 You Are Not What You Do: G24

Object work supplies Improv’s scene props: The object work is not what the scene is about. It can inspire a scene but should not dictate the scene.

Object work gives you scene props to interact with so you 're more than talking heads. Object work should free you, not confine you.

- Activities gain weight from your dialogue –
- Stage pictures make scenes more interesting –
- Engage environment, rest your tongue –

3.3 Beyond Objects: G25

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?

3.4 More Rhythm and Pacing: G26

The Short Form games you have been working on have mechanics that lend an inherent rhythm. To create tension and interest, you can ramp up, slow down or otherwise oscillate pacing.

Adding pacing to your object work allows you confidence.

Your silent engagement with objects creates tension in your scene.

Sharing that tension gives your team focus rhythm and pacing.

101-04 Playing from Emotion / Character

4.0 Objective for this session: Focus on getting to and relaxing in emotional reactions. This is what scenes are about.

Emotion should be the core of our improvisation. Choosing to feel strongly about something made-up-in-the-moment is, well, insane. But it is fun to watch. Surprise! G28-9

- Practice emotion at the extremes
- Feel and Feel More
- Start with Anything to Find a Feeling
- Agree; 🤖 Don't negotiate the world of your scene
- Continue scenes by heightening reactions –
- React without words until the words come
- If you invest in your emotion, the audience will believe that you have a reason for the scene even if you don't have a motivation in mind. You do not need motivation. You just need commitment to the moment.
- Emotions affect your relative distance.
- Heightening does not mean volume
- Emote like no one's watching or judging. Sometimes people struggle with emotions, and that is okay – Improvisers must emote.

4.1 Emotional Heights/Depths: Go for the low and the high of each emotion. G29

- Push past comfortable –
- Acting bored or unaffected is hard to heighten – Care.
- Exude the emotion physically

4.2 Emotional Context: Committed emotion is all the “what” and “why” a scene needs. G29
The details gain weight with our emotional perspectives. Acting is emoting. Committing to an emotion without regard to “sense” is easy and fun.

4.3 Emotional Matching: If you agree, you can just be. You do not 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 is needed. G30

BEING AFFECTED IS AWESOME – Allow yourself to change with another's perspective.

- If you agree, you can just be, you do not have to explain or defend.
- Trust that your commitment to the same emotion is all the context for your relationship that is needed.

4.4 Emotional Perspectives Made Easy: Great improvisers can immediately decide upon an emotional perspective and become characters that react with heightening emotion in-the-moment. Start with “just one thing” – one choice you expand upon and invest in. TMs

can find an emotional perspective collaboratively – building on TMs’ choices with agreement. G31

- • 🐞 Do not 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 and diving into the decisions you have already made.

4.5 No Pressure Initiations: Starting a scene can feel like a challenging task. And yet all you need to do to start is anything. Get out there and make A Choice. The sooner you can get to emotion the better, but all you need to start a scene is...anything. G32 Make one decision (where you are, how you stand, what you are doing/holding, etc.) and build the rest of the scene by investing in that.

4.6 Trusting Emotion Over “Sense”: • Just feel – You do not even need words.

- Imagined objects can trigger our emotions – • Focus on reactions over conversations – • Emotion can propel you – • You do not need language when expressing emotion. • You do not need language to initiate a scene.

101-05 GIFTS Active Endowments for Emotional Reactions

5.0 Objective for this session: To make your scenes focus on how you feel about yourself, your environment, and your TMs. Choose to commit to your emotions. Give yourself, your surroundings, and your partner tangible attributes (Gifts/Endowments). This makes it easier to react and move your scene forward.

5.1 Imagined Endowments: Focus on giving and receiving gifts and endowments with which to build your scene.

- React to imagined stimuli.
- When you feel something about something, Create an Emotional Positive Feedback Loop (E+FBL).
- Think less and react more
- ★ Be specific and in the moment, react to something and not just talk about it.
- Establishing “rules” of cause and effect gives the world you have imagined power over you. What you imagine makes you feel. Capitalize on the power of patterns with clearly defined cause and effect.
- When you imagine something active on stage with you and feel about it, you do not need another player on stage to create a scene.
- Remember Weight, Volume, and Tension are the three keys to engaging object work!

5.2 Endowing Your Scene Partner: You have your TMs to gift and react to. But do not focus only on your TMs – remember the other tangible presences on stage.

Give your TMs attributes that trigger emotions. Give them something to work with in the scene. Give gifts – ★ It is much more fun to be endowed with information than to be burdened with a requested for information. Want something? Feel the absence – focus on “desire.” Give the gift of freedom Your scene partner is not constrained to address or discuss your feelings. Give the gift of dynamite – If you are told, “Your tap dancing makes me so attracted to you,” you better believe you are going to tap dance.

5.3 Setting Up Multiple Endowments and Reactions:

We want to see characters emotionally engaged in multi-faceted worlds. All TMs must strive to bring endowments and emotional perspectives to the stage that can be played with over the course of a scene.

- No justification is necessary – Commitment is the only justification you need – What you start with is your rock - Both TMs should engage the environment –
- Stake the scene on an active element Your goal is to react through rather than think through your scenes – Attach an emotional reaction to something Seeing is believing - engage in your imagined world. Be committed to seeing, feeling, and otherwise experiencing your environment. You and your TMs will discover inspired lines.
- Words smerds – Showing your feelings is more impactful than telling us how you feel.
- The choice is yours - If you are trying to “figure out” a scene, so is the audience.

5.4 Juggling Multiple Endowments and Reactions: In every scene each TM has the power to make a choice about how they feel about themselves, their environment, and their scene partner. Find the rhythm. How you feel about yourself and your scene partner should be your focus in improv scenes.

★ Establish an emotional perspective, heighten the emotional perspective through reaction to active details, and edit – That’s scene.

💀 You want to avoid negotiation, conflict and the tepid, talked out “discovery” that stagnates scenes’ growth.

- Being DYNAMIC is awesome – Making sharp choices is fun! –
- Bold moves in different directions leverages a strength of clowning.
- Unsure of what to do next? Do more of what you were doing –
- Do not give up your thing – Commitment avoids justification –
- Reactionary statements avoid negotiation – Questions that often bog down scenes.
- Heightening avoids conflict – Bored? React! – Lost? Repeat! –
- Be affected - Feel first, understand second (if ever) – Never feel trapped by your choice

101-06 FUN with GAMES

6.0 Objective for this session: to get more experience in initiating and building out scenes with emotion

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

The cause-and-effect relationship between “When this happens” then “that happens” can focus your choices and connect you with the audience.

In Short Form, the mechanics of the “game” are told to the audience by the Host.

The rhythm at which a game's mechanics are played helps pace the scene and build it toward an edit.

- Go bigger –and MORE DETAILED
- Build a progression on top of your initial choice.
- Flipping – You can always flip a game on its head (“I love you” / “I hate you”).

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.

- Allow everyone to lead –
- Complement – work collaboratively, with contributions that support and accept each other by default.
- Contrast – set expectations first; then will breaking them be meaningful. Let contradiction remain. There's no need to resolve or explain every contradiction.
- 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. – Follow the same general arc as the original scene: keep certain lines of dialogue the same. What changes from one iteration to another should continue to change and heighten.

6.2 Playing With Expectations (continued):

- Pacing – Each iteration can get faster and/or more energetic. Once expectations are set, find the button. Find the one line (a quip), then edit.

6.3 Collaborating With Confidence:

The audience knows you are “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 factual knowledge about the subject matter. The audience wants to see TMs “confidently in it together.”

- Commit to Trying – ★ Play to the height of your intelligence.
- Duologues – 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. They love “Transformations” where a TM’s physicality on stage is transported to a different world

- Focus on Personal and Scenic Endowments over plot/justification.
- No hesitation.
- Confidence sells.
- Accept what you are given.
- Make big physical choices.
- Vary it up.

6.5 Heightening Characters and Relationships over Plot:

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

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 forward. When you see your opportunity, enter the scene as another character. Focus on heightening what is happening between the initial characters – **HEIGHTEN WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN ESTABLISHED**. Serve the scene in progress.

- The scene is not about you / Walk-OFF You are a tertiary character; the scene's not about you. Do not strive to be the focus of the scene. Do your bit then walk off.

Canadian Walk-Through, 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.

What happens- A TM walk through the scene, adding one line (quip) or a gesture before exiting. Continue walking off stage. Practicing Canadian walk-throughs teaches restraint, timing, and how to contribute without hijacking the scene.

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

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

- Focus on heightening TMs’ reactions.
- Be a bigger version of the previous TM.
- Wherever You’re Taken, Trust it.
- The more Tag-Outs the funnier.

SPLIT SCREEN, 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.

What Happens- Scene 1: TMs 1 and 2 are in the initial scene. • 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 • Let each set of TMs take the focus for their dialogue. • Elevate the situation.

- Elevate themes.