

# FUZZY IMPROV

Lesson 101-04



## **Playing from Emotion / Character**

## To Do:

### NAME TAGS

CHECK IN WITH TEAMMATES – Have you ever faked an emotion or emotional reaction? Please tell us about it.

### 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.

Note: Gx (where x is the page number) near 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 near the topic indicates materials that I have added.

# HAVE FUN!

## **4.0 Warm-Up exercises:**

**Build energy, concentrate energy and emphasize the importance of emotion .**

**Stretch:** warm up muscles.

**Crazy Eights:** to get the blood flowing.

**21:** exercise hive mind.

**Word Association:** Encouraging quick thinking and LISTENING.

Stand in a circle.

TM1 says a word,




TM2 quickly says the first word that comes to mind in response. The exercise continues around the circle

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

## **4.0 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!** G28-9

*Lessons:*

- **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** - You can **start with emotion** and build the details of our character around that. **Or you can start with a detail** and build an emotional character from there.
- **Agree;**  Don't negotiate the world of your scene.  If you agree, you can just be, you don't have to explain or defend.
- Continue scenes by **heightening reactions** – Focus on how you feel about who you are, where you are and what you're doing, Focus on how you feel about who your TM is, where they are and what they're doing.
- **React without words until the words come.** React without regarding 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 for the scene even if you don't have a motivation in mind.** Just react emotionally.  Don't over-think an easy win. **You don't need motivation. You just need commitment to the moment.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

**CACOPHONOUS CIRCLE OF EMOTION:** show how you feel . G28

*Lessons:*

- **Emotions affect your relative distance** – TMs pull back from the circle with emotions like “afraid,” “shy,” etc. They move in with more aggressive emotions.
- **Heightening doesn’t mean volume** – As TMs are pushed toward emotional heights their inclination may be to get louder. You can get intense without getting too loud or shrill for the audience to be willing to listen.
- **Emote like no one’s watching or judging.**
- **Sometimes people struggle with emotions**, and that’s okay – **But improvisers must emote.** You don’t need motivation. You just need to **appear to feel.** Committed emotion is an improviser’s base. Exhibit the highest and lowest feelings on stage, practice emotion at the extremes to become comfortable in that space.

**CACOPHONOUS CIRCLE OF EMOTION, the game –**

- I will give you an emotion.
- Here’s a list of emotions commonly experienced:
  - **Happiness:** Joy, excitement, contentment, love, amusement, gratitude.
  - **Sadness:** Grief, disappointment, loneliness, melancholy.
  - **Anger:** Frustration, resentment, irritation, rage.
  - **Fear:** Anxiety, nervousness, worry, panic, terror.
  - **Surprise:** Awe, shock, amazement, bewilderment.
  - **Disgust:** Contempt, revulsion, annoyance.
  - **Neutral/Calm States:** Serenity, relief, peace, mindfulness.
- The TMs all physically and verbally express emotion. You don’t need words – just make an emotional sound.
- When I say a different emotion, you change your emotion.

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

*Suggested Exercise:*

### **EMOTIONAL CASCADE –**

*Lessons:*

- **Push past comfortable** – Being vulnerable enough to share big emotions can be hard, but you must trust each other and this class is a safe place to “go big.” Support each other with applause.
- **Being bored or unaffected is hard to heighten** – Care.
- **Exude the emotion physically** - sadness can be sitting with head in hands and weeping.

### **EMOTIONAL CASCADE, the game –**

- TMs in a circle.
- **TM1 starts with an emotional reaction, any emotional reaction.** It doesn't need to be verbal. It can have words, but they should be minor.
- **TM2 repeats that emotion – at LEAST hitting same level if not heightening it.** Then play continues around the circle, with each TM heightening the emotional reaction.
- When it gets back to TM1, they also must heighten their emotion.
- **Then TM2 can start a brand-new emotion, and the cascade goes again.**

**4.2 Emotional Context: Committed emotion is all the “what” and “why” a scene needs.** Emotion can add/change the meaning of our words and heighten the depth of our scenes. G29

*Suggested Exercise:*

### **EMOTIONAL NURSERY RHYME**

*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.**

### **EMOTIONAL NURSERY RHYME, the game:**

A source of [Mother Goose rhymes](#) Also, see below. HD

- Around a circle, a TM **recites a common nursery rhyme with an emotional filter.**
- The next TM does the same nursery rhyme, **further heightening the same emotion or trying on a new emotion.**
- Repeat with different nursery rhymes.

Little Jack Horner sat in the corner,  
Eating a Christmas pie;  
He put in his thumb, and pulled out a plum,  
And said, oh! what a good boy am I.

There was an old woman  
Lived under a hill;  
And if she's not gone,  
She lives there still.

## Mother Goose Rhymes: HD

Diddlty, diddlty, dumpty,  
The cat ran up the plum tree,  
Give her a plum, and down she'll come,  
Diddlty, diddlty, dumpty.

To market, to market, to buy a plum cake,  
Home again, home again, market is late;  
To market, to market, to buy a plum bun,  
Home again, home again, market is done.

Jack Sprat could eat no fat,  
His wife could eat no lean;  
And so between them both,  
They licked the platter clean.

Jack and Jill  
Went up the hill,  
To fetch a pail of water;  
Jack fell down  
And broke his crown,  
And Jill came tumbling after.

Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep,  
And can't tell where to find them;  
Leave them alone, and they'll come home,  
And bring their tails behind them.

Little Tommy Tittlemouse,  
Lived in a little house;  
He caught fishes  
In other men's ditches.

Goosey, goosey, gander,  
Where shall I wander?  
Up stairs, down stairs,  
And in my lady's chamber:  
There I met an old man,  
Who would not say his prayers;  
Take him by the left leg,  
Throw him down the stairs.

**4.3 Emotional Matching: If you agree, you can just be; you 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. G30**

*Suggested Exercises:*

### **CARPOOL**

*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 you agree, you can just *be*, you 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.**

**CARPOOL, the game:** Driver is picking up friends, not strangers. Use Improv's accepted props of 4 chairs as the car. Remember, the car has doors, windows, controls etc.

- TM1 starts driving a car, **expressing a self-contained emotional perspective** ("I love the South").
- TM2 enters the scene, entering **with their own emotional perspective** ("The South scares me").
- **TM1 immediately embraces TM2's perspective**, and you come into agreement, heightening the perspective you now share with additional details supporting that perspective ("Oh, my god, look at all the shrimp and grits!").

**(Continued on next page.)**

## **Continuation of Carpool, the game:**

- **TM3 enters the car with a new emotional perspective** ("I think Mississippi's beautiful"). **TM1 & TM2 immediately accept and embrace this new perspective.**
- **If you have more than 4 TMs, when the TM5 enters the car TM1 is bumped out and TM 4 takes the wheel. Everyone shifts seats. Repeat till all TMs have played.**
- **Note: Assume you know each other.** Do not spend time getting to know one another. You KNOW each other's patterns of emotional reactions, so you can quickly elevate a scene by boldly sharing your feelings.

## **Variations:**

### **CARPOOL** variations



- **BUS STOP:** TMs mimic and heighten each other as they add themselves to a Bus Stop environment. TMs can leave by 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 In mass. Quick, collective agreement is key.

**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. The path to an emotional perspective can 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

*Suggested Exercises:*

**CHARACTER WALK** - Exploring how simple choices make you feel.

*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 and diving into the decisions you have already made.

**CHARACTER WALK, the game:**

- TMs **walk around the space as themselves**.
- **I give prompts** which TMs make choices from: (see Progression below).
- **Once you have embraced the prompt**, I will ask, “**How does what you’re doing make you feel?**”
- You can make **emotional noises** (ex: [sigh], [growl], etc.) and/or make **SCES** to express how you feel about what they’re doing.
- Then **reset** and return to walking around the space as yourselves again.
- Repeat.

**See next page for prompt progression.**

## Character Walk Prompt Progression: G31

- **Change your rate** – speed up, slow down
- Walk with a **different body part** pushing forward.
- Walk like **someone you know**.
- **Make a sound**.
- imagine **active elements on stage**. **What** feelings do these cause?
- Decide what **the atmosphere** is around you (e.g., raining, cold, hot). How do you feel about it?
- **Grab an imagined object** from the air, decide what it is. How do you feel about it?
- **Engage in a repeatable action** (e.g., “chopping wood”). How do they feel about it?
- Take on **an emotional perspective** and let it affect you physically. Find a positive emotional feedback loop that heightens the emotion and effect.
- Now **speak in your character’s voice about your emotional state**.


**4.5 No Pressure Initiations: Starting a scene can feel like a hard 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're doing/holding, etc.)and build the rest of the scene by investing in that .**

*Suggested Exercises:*

**ANNOYANCE-STYLE SCENE STARTS - (Inspired by training at The Annoyance Theater in Chicago.)**

*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 you can get to emotional perspective the better, but don't feel any pressure to start there. All you need to start is anything.**

**ANNOYANCE-STYLE SCENE STARTS, the game:**

TMs form a line across the back of the stage.

- *I call out TM1.* TM1 immediately take the stage and **“takes 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.**
- I call out TM2 who also enters on stage . (Cont. next pg.)

## **ANNOYANCE-STYLE SCENE STARTS - (cont.)**

- TM2 “takes care of themselves” with a choice. TM2 can **choose AGREEMENT – it’s both the easiest and most satisfying choice – or not.**
- In additional rounds, TMs take lines back and forth based on their prior choices, adding details and heightened reaction.
- We will run through this several times, building confidence that all TMs will take care of themselves right out of the gate and, eventually if not at once, get to emotion.

**4.6 Trusting Emotion Over “Sense”:** You don’t need to “know your motivation” before emotionally reacting. Find motivation through commitment to emotion. Make scenes “about” your characters’ patterns of emotional behavior . G33

*Suggested Exercise:*

**4 SQUARE EMOTIONS:** take on the emotion assigned to each square.

*Lessons:*

- **Just feel** – You don’t even need words, just make and repeat an emotional sound.
- **Imagined objects can trigger our emotions** – Use location. Imagine an object in each quadrant that brings on that quadrant’s emotion.
- **Focus on reactions over conversations** – conversation will cloud each quadrant’s emotion. Commit to just reacting, the scene will flow smoother.
- **Emotion can propel you** – Use the stage space! Leap into the same quadrant as your TM as you feel “love.” Put distance between your TM as you explore “fear.”

**4 SQUARE EMOTIONS, the game:**

- Divide the playing space into **4 quadrants. Each quadrant is given an emotion** – they should all be very different.
- TMs 1 & 2 take the stage.
- **A Location** is suggested to you. TMs start a scene.
- Each TM starts in different quadrant. Each feels according to their quadrant’s emotion.
- At your discretion, move **between quadrants, changing your emotion as you move through different areas.**

**See 4 SQUARE EMOTIONS Best Practice** next page.

## 4 SQUARE EMOTIONS Best Practice:

- Establish yourself in each quadrant, **focusing more on objects/location than on your partner.**
- As the scene progresses, **transition between quadrants faster.**
- **Push emotions as the scene progresses**, make bold emotional reactions the moment you move into a new quadrant.

## 4.6 Trusting Emotion Over “Sense” continued: G33

*Suggested Exercise:*

**GIBBERISH TALK SHOW** - TMs express emotion in an unknown language. (PATRICK GASKILL’S “GIBBERISH” – Inspired by training at The Annoyance Theater in Chicago.)

*Lesson:*

- Language is not needed when expressing emotion.

**GIBBERISH TALK SHOW, the game:**

- **I will start speaking only in gibberish.**
- I set up 3 chairs and **mime** that students should form an audience, and three TMs should join me on stage.
- **I Interview each TM** in gibberish. Do not be emotionally flat. **Draw an emotional reaction from within.**
- I take **questions from the audience** as we **play out a talk show**. Play up emotions and reactions from the audience.

**GIBBERISH SCENE STARTS** - TMs initiate scenes with emotion and in an unknown language.

*Lesson:*

- Language is not needed to initiate a scene.

**GIBBERISH SCENE STARTS, the game:**

- Through mime, I explain that TMs should line up on both wings and do layup scenes.
- You are encouraged to remember object work, emotions, moving in space, etc.
- I will call scene with "SHHUH!" A TM from the left and right wing enter and initiate a scene, and so on till all TMs get to play.

## **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 trigger an emotion:** What “things” in your life do you love? Hate? Be aware of interacting with those things in real life and how 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 TM put on a rich character that you were compelled by.

**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](http://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 are *Fight, Flight and Freeze*.

*Fear Expression # 1, FIGHT!*

Example, **THE BLOCKER**.

*The BLOCKER refuses to go along with a reasonable request.*

The Blocker typically fears a lack of control or the unknown. Rather than going along with a reasonable (or possibly even exciting) request from a TM, the improviser reflexively declines, which tends to block a scene's forward momentum and fun.

Improv's warm-up exercises and games can help us overcome freezing on stage.

**\*Aging is a biological function, honor the journey and who you are.\***

— Cameron Diaz



[Photo Info](#)

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