



Introduction to Improv Class – Synopsis

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.

Note #1: Short form games will be introduced throughout the 8 weeks with links to that each week’s focus. Short form games based in two person scenes will be the backbone of students’ showcase as the games provide a bit of a safety net for players. These Short Form games enable students to learn, practice and display long-form skills with the safety net of the described game.

Note #2: In 101, students are learning the basics together. Teachers should work to confine their notes to issues addressed in this curriculum. Similarly, teachers, to the extent possible, should work to give notes that apply to the group as a whole and should work to minimize giving too personal notes, as students haven’t grown enough as improvisers to be critiqued as individuals yet.

Week 1 – Confidence and Support

Collaboratively building something out of nothing on stage requires *Confidence* and *Support*. An improviser needs to be able to make bold choices and to stand by those choices. An improviser needs to accept and embrace each other’s choices. Make your fellow player “look good” should be an improviser’s guiding principle.

Key Teachings:

- Learning improv requires a safe environment where players can trust each other and feel comfortable trying and failing
- Collaboratively building something out of nothing on stage requires *Confidence* and *Support*. An improviser needs to be able to make bold choices and to stand by those choices. An improviser needs to accept and embrace each other’s choices.
- “Yes, And” is the basis of improv – I accept what you do and build my contribution on top of yours.
- Let the audience see *you* to give them the ability to connect with you and ultimately root for you.

Week 2 – Listening

If we hope to collaboratively create something out of nothing we need to ensure we hear each other’s contributions.

Key Teachings:

- We have to commit to ensuring we HEAR and ARE HEARD – listen and project.



- 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.
- Being aware of our physical positions in relation to one another is a critical component of hearing and being heard
- We have to listen and *retain* so we can return to and heighten established information.

Week 3 – Playing in Space

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

Key Teachings:

- Weight, volume and tension are the key characteristics of mime object 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.
- Environment is 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:

- Practicing emotion at the extremes will help become comfortable accessing emotions on stage.
- Committed emotion is all the “what” and “why” a scene needs.
- 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.
- If we agree, we can just *be*; we don't have to explain or defend.
- “How we feel about who we are, where we are and what we're doing,” and “How we feel about who our scene is, where they are and what they're doing” should be our focus in improv scenes.

Week 5 – Scenes: Committing to Feeling In-The-Moment

Our scenes are “about” how we *feel* about ourselves, our environment and our scene partner. We should not be concerned about making up a “story” in the moment, but rather we should be focused on showing the audience a moment-in-time of characters with committed emotions.

Key Teachings:

- 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*.



- Specificity breeds details – when you know what you’re feeling and what you’re feeling *about*, then our creative minds have a clear direction to explore.
- Active elements keep us physically active – 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 – More Fun With Scenes

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

Key Teachings:

- There are a bunch of standard improv tips/tricks for entering a scene in progress as a tertiary player
 - *Walk-ons*
 - *Tag-outs*
- The structure of Short Form games can help students confidently navigate two person scenes
 - *Carpool (formerly Hitchhiker)*
 - *New Choice*
 - *Space Jump*
 - *Four Corners*
 - *Freeze*
 - *Foreign Dubbing*

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

Introductory/General Notes:

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.

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.

Ensure that everyone participates. Encourage hesitators to go for it. Insist that stage hogs dial it back. Focus aggressive students on agreement and characters that like each other. And remind everyone that in improv there is only what "is"; there are no mistakes. The only reason to improvise is to have fun.

While the emphasis in teaching should be on having fun over becoming perfect improvisers, students expect a *class*, not recess. Connect exercises with learning.

Note: *There are a lot of exercises listed; choose which ones you want to teach, adding your own where necessary.*

Another Note: *Short form games will be introduced throughout the 8 weeks with links to that each week's focus. Short form games based in two person scenes will be the backbone of students' showcase as the games provide a bit of a safety net for players. These Short Form games enable students to learn, practice and display long-form skills with the safety net of the described game.*

The Most Important Note: *In 101, students are learning the basics together. Teachers should work to confine their notes to issues addressed in this curriculum. Similarly, teachers, to the extent possible, should work to give notes that apply to the group as a whole and should work to minimize giving too personal notes, as students haven't grown enough as improvisers to be critiqued as individuals yet.*

Class Rules:

- 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.



- Be respectful – be physically gentle and appropriate with one another; strive not to offend or to be offended.
- Come to class physically prepared to participate – you want to wear clothing that will enable you to do whatever anyone else does on stage.
- 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. One day they’ll find their own way to improvise, but this day they’re learning from their instructor.
- Participate and provide others the opportunity to participate. Be mindful of being a stage hog; be mindful of hanging back.
- 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)
- Have fun.

Week 1 – Confidence and Support

Objective: Collaboratively building something out of nothing on stage requires *Confidence* and *Support*. An improviser needs to be able to make bold choices and to stand by those choices. An improviser needs to accept and embrace each other’s choices. Make your fellow player “look good” should be an improviser’s guiding principle.

1.0 Introduction: Introduce the class and yourself

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

NAME THUMPER – Going around the circle, each person (teacher included) associates their name with an action or adjective – “Punching Patrick,” or “Pouting Patrick.” 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. *You can introduce them to the starting chant – Everyone pats their thighs. You say, “I’m going to say, What’s the name of the game?”, and you’ll say, “Thumper.” Do it. You say, “I’m going to ask, Why do we do it?”, and you’ll say, “To*



get warmed up.” Do it. You say, “I’m going to ask, how do we do it?”, and you’ll say, “Fast!” Do it.

1.1 Acceptance: Moving forward begins with “yes.” Momentum builds with enthusiastic acceptance. Improvisers need to embrace each other’s contributions without hesitation or judgment.

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 say something about themselves and/or their day to which the rest of class enthusiastically responds, “Awesome!”

Lessons:

- **Acceptance is fun** – don’t waste time judging; the audience wants to see you enjoying one another

1.2 Boldly Go: Get out there. What matters most is that an improviser enters stage when needed. We can make any contribution work through commitment. Believe in yourself and just get out there.

Suggested Exercises:

MONOLOGUE HOT SPOT – Players stand in a circle. One player enters the center and begins telling a true, personal story. In no particular order, players enter to take the place of the player in the center to tell their own story. **Don’t have to wait for the person to finish their story. Encourage players to have their story inspired by the story before it.**

Lessons:

- **Hesitate and miss your connection** – While players should be encouraged to inspire their moves based on what preceded it, players that wait too long over-thinking their move’s connection is going to miss their chance to enter.
- **Just start** – A player needn’t know all the words to the song or how the story is going to end to enter the circle. Just get out there and start, and commit to continuing confidently.



- **Focus outward and support your fellow player** – don't be in your head thinking about what you're going to do while a player is standing in the circle suffering through what they're doing.

FREEZE – 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 s/he wants to replace and s/he 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:

- **Confidence sells** – Don't worry about making "sense" with your stage picture. Whatever you do *confidently* appears purposeful.
- **Acceptance 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.**
- **Patterns?** Where applicable, point out where they heightened characters and details with patterns – agreeing / repeating, heightening emotions, details, characters and relationships.
- **Vary it up** – The last scene was low energy? Go high energy! The last scene as about children? Be old people!

I.3 "Yes, And": 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.

Agreement is the improviser's mantra: "Yes, And." It's not Yes "cereal" And "aliens." Yes, "This porridge is cold," And "it's been sitting on the counter for a week."

We can't share one mind, but we can make it look like we do if we're each making a concerted effort to unify all that's been laid down in a collective direction. Through agreement we can minimize the amount of "stuff" on stage which facilitates focused collaborative building.

Suggested Exercises:

"YES, AND" STORY – Everyone stands in a circle. A player starts a story: "Billy loved his turtle." Starting with the player to the initiator's left, the group builds the story sentence by sentence, literally saying "Yes, and..." to begin each contribution: "Yes, and Billy and his turtle did everything together."



Lessons:

- **Collaborate** – a group all heightening a few ideas will reach greater heights than will a group of individuals all focused on their own ideas.
- **Think back, not forward** – the story doesn't need to get anywhere it just needs to explore where it is. Instead of thinking "What's next," think "How can I elaborate on what was just said?"
- **Callback as Acceptance** – referencing what has already been established can be more than any one player's hilarious new idea. *Make each other look good* by embracing each other's details.

"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 his/her initial object; then that second player begins a new "I see a [blank]."

Lessons:

- **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 who's tusks work as chop sticks 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.



- o **Share the air** – Hesitators, contribute! Stage hogs, give someone else a chance!

TWO LINE OFFER AND “YES, AND” SCENES – students form two lines, one on either side of the stage. The player at the head of the stage left line enters stage and makes an emotional statement about who they are, where they are or what else is on stage (“I love being a lumberjack”/“I hate this museum”/“That’s a scary rock”). The player at the head of the stage right line enters and delivers a “Yes, and…” statement (“Yes, and killing trees is awesome”/ “Yes, and the art looks and smells like poop”/ “Yes, and it just moved closer to us”). That’s it. Then the players move to the end of the opposite line.

Variations:

- Players can drop “yes, and” as long as they still embrace and build on each other’s contributions
- Players can have more than one line each

Lessons:

- **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.

1.4 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.

Suggested Exercises:

CAFÉ SCENES – Two players sit in chairs facing each other. They are to have a conversation as themselves, trying not to worry about 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.
- **No questions** – questions are invitations for information; statements *are* information. 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*.
- **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.)
- **Be vulnerable** – honest reactions are endearing; be endearing instead of calculating

CONVERSATION PARTY – Players stand on stage in multiple groups of two or three people. Players are “at a party” as themselves, speaking as themselves to other who are also themselves. The teacher conducts focus from one conversation to the next.

Lessons:

- **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.
- **React** - 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.
- **Connect** – don't just sit in your head waiting for your next turn to speak, *listen* to what's going on around you, let it seep in and affect you.
- **Juxtapose** – we don't have to discuss our differences or negotiate out one “truth.” A party group who loves cats standing next to a group that loves dogs doesn't need to engage in a fight. The audience sees both groups and wants both heightened next to each other.



Week 2 – Listening

Objective: If we are creating together we need to ensure we hear each other’s contributions. Focus out to hear. Project out to be heard.

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

NAME THUMPER

CONDUCT A STORY / STORY, STORY DIE – The group stands on stage and tells one story as a group, with the teacher acting as conductor, pointing to the player that should speak. Students have to be listening to each other to prepare to take over the story and paying attention to the conductor to know when to start and stop – taking over each other’s sentences and/or syllables. As the rounds progress, Instructor should jump back and forth more aggressively between players. In “Story, Story, Die,” players who have upset the game’s rhythm should enact a solo scene wherein they are killed by an object of the audience’s choosing. **Note: Potential Class Action Game**

Lessons:

- LISTEN

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 the physicalizations should all be different here 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 his/her choosing];" say, "Big Booty, Number Five." Then Number Five says, "Number Five, Number [of his/her 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 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. The next player observes that action and attempts to recreate it EXACTLY in turning to the player to their left.

Progression:

- Do it once through. Then immediately 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*.
- Call out people that are in their head and not focused outward
- Call attention to what makes them laugh – straight repetition, embracing something “accidental”
- Call out when someone tries to force the evolution for a laugh – this will happen after they get comfortable with a few “successes” under their belts

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.

PHRASE PASS – Like Action Pass, but with a sentence.

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 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.

Variations:

- 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

2.4 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. 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?



Week 3 – Playing In Space

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

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

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.

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:

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



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

- **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**
- **If something’s not clear to you, don’t avoid it, feel the responsibility to make it clearer for everyone else**

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 space ship, 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.

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.

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 s/he is 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 s/he’s doing or says something that could be seen in his/her 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 addresses 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.

BIOSPHERE – 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.

Lessons:

- **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.
- **MORE PHYSICAL THE BETTER** – players having to quickly accept the new atmosphere and change their physicality is part of the fun



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, 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.

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

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**



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, s/he also has to heighten her/his 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 care 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 another hitchhiker.

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.

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.**

ONE PERSON SCENES – Groups of 5 or 6, line up along an "assembly line conveyor belt." Have them mime *something* coming down the line. When you say, "Go," someone will voice an opinion unrelated to their activity (ex: *I'm loving Game of Thrones; I wish I was in Hawaii, etc.*) which everyone else will agree with and heighten through repetition. Their miming is just an activity for their hands; it is NOT what the scene is about.



Lessons:

- **The clearer the *emotional* perspective the better** – if you don't think it's clear, clarify it by heightening the emotion
- **Like 21, don't rush to speak** - You have something to do with your hands. You also have an emotional perspective to fill your face with.
- **Agreeing to the *emotion* is more important than heightening the details with words** – remember an enthusiastic “yeah” will always be funnier than a rambling monologue
- **There are no questions in agreement**
- **Share the air space** - Put periods at the end of your sentences.
- **Agree despite “sense”** - If someone has a tumor, each person can have a tumor. If someone's pregnant, each person can be pregnant.

Variations:

- If an emotional perspective is heightened to its apex, the group can follow another emotional perspective, but push them to explore the heights before changing.
- Various locations: Retail store employees, firemen waiting for a call, construction workers, NASA Mission Control, etc.

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). Teacher asks additional questions to flesh out the characters. “How does what you're doing make you feel?” is the core question. Call on students to share in character-voiced statements 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 change elements of their personal walk to see how it affects 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 the class...
 - Decide what the atmosphere is around them (ie. 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 (ie. “chopping wood”); how do they feel about it?
- Having started them with one of the above directions, the Instructor then asks questions to flesh out the character. Basically “if this, then what”; for example, how do you feel about the action you’re doing, or how does that desire affect your walk? If you started with a noise, how does that noise inform your feeling?
- 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 out 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.



Week 5 – Scenes: Committing to Feeling In-The-Moment

Objective: Our scenes are “about” how we *feel* about ourselves, our environment and our scene partner. We should not be concerned about making up a “story” in the moment, but rather we should be focused on showing the audience a moment-in-time of characters with committed emotions.

Making choices about how we feel and then committing to those emotions is how we progress a scene.

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 build – 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**

EMOTIONAL CASCADE CIRCLE

5.1 Active 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:

PERSONAL ENDOWMENT CIRCLE – One by one around a circle, each player engages an emotion and makes explicit what it is that is evoking that emotion.



Example:

- I love this cat
- I hate pulling weeds
- Des Moines, you're impressive
- I'm proud of my shoes
- I'm afraid of my face
- I'm sad I have no friends

Lessons:

- **Specificity breeds details** – when you know what you're feeling and what you're feeling *about*, then our creative minds have a clear direction to explore.
- **Active elements keep us physically active** – it's much harder to sit still when you love *this* cat than to sit in a chair and talk about loving cats.
- **Don't wait to be joined before making a choice** - We don't *need* anyone else. You're never alone on stage, even if you're the only improviser not on the wings; you have a world to explore and to react to.
- **Feel!** – Push that emotion through your words, actions, body and face; show us how you feel

We also have our scene partner to endow and react to. *The danger is when improvisers rely only on their scene partner – as they only other tangible presence on stage.*

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.

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 soul
- 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 hog-tied 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.

5.2 Initiation Lay-Ups: Our “What” is emotional reactions to active elements. Commitment and repetition are the only “why” we need.

“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:

ENDOW AND HEIGHTEN LAY-UPS – 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. 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:

- **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. Players heighten what they initiate. Have players decide BOTH how they feel about “I” and “You” – engaging an active endowment about themselves AND about their scene partner. *The instructor can call “Scene” whenever s/he chooses.*

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 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.”



Week 6 – More Fun With Scenes

Objective: Students get more experience initiating and building out scenes with emotion with the help of 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.

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

SCENE INITIATION LAY-UPS

6.1 FREEZE into TAG-OUTS and WALK-ONS: Students get to learn FREEZE as a short form game and then learn TAG-OUTS and WALK-ONS as ways to heighten characters in a scene.

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 s/he wants to replace and s/he 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.
- **Acceptance 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.**
- **Vary it up** – The last scene was low energy? Go high energy! The last scene as about children? Be old people!



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 his/her 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.

6.2 Short Form Scenes: Have students practice initiating and building two person scenes within the context of Short Form games.

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.

Lessons:

- **Go bigger** – A player does not HAVE to change his/her emotional perspective with each “New Choice.” S/he 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”)
- **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.

SPACE JUMP – One player engages a physical scene based on the audience’s suggestion of a “chore” like doing laundry, raking leaves, etc. A second player enters, signifying a new scene. This player sets up a new scene taking Player One – and the physical position s/he was in - to a new place (Player One was bending down to pick up a dollar, Player Two makes them both field hands with hoes). A third player 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:

- **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 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



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**

FOREIGN DUBBING – Yes, this is the CSz foreign movie game. It's silly and fun plus it breaks apart the inflection/content/physicality thing in a cool way. 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**

BLIND SCENES – Player One starts engaged in the environment (with an action, object, atmosphere, etc.). Player Two, starting with his back to the stage, has the first line of dialogue.

Lessons:

- **No justification necessary** – 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.



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.

Running the Suggested Exercises in various combinations should help inform your set list – where you should strive to ensure everyone appears in at least three games.

Suggested Exercises:

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

CARPOOL -

FOUR CORNERS –

SPACE JUMP -

NEW CHOICE -

FREEZE –

FOREIGN DUBBING –



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, hats, or clothing with logos/etc. on them. Players, especially ladies, shouldn’t wear anything that would keep them from being able to follow and do anything any other player does.

REALLY IMPORTANT NOTE: Encourage your students to sign up for 201, but acknowledge that 201’s 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.