

SUL ROSS STATE UNIVERSITY
THEA 5304.002 ADVANCED ACTING - IMPROVISATION

FALL 2026
Monday/Wednesday
2:00pm – 4:50 pm
Studio Theater

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1 -1:50 pm M/W @ Mocap Soundstage
and
1-1:50 pm T/TH@ Mocap Soundstage
on a walk-in basis. Or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

All acting is reacting. In order to react, you must listen.

But for a scene to take place, something has to happen, right? Otherwise you've just got a bunch of actors on the stage all...listening...to each other. In most cases, the playwright takes care of this by writing objectives and dialogue for the actors to follow – the action of the scene is known before you ever enter the scene, and you (ideally) have rehearsed your dialogue, blocking, and action.

But in improvisation, there is no script. No one knows what's going to happen next.

So you walk out onto a blank stage knowing nothing. If you don't listen, you can't know how to react. But if you don't do *something*, your partner has nothing to react *to*. This bit of circular logic is the central conflict in improvisation – what I like to call the beautiful art of making stuff up.

The goal of this class is to place you, the actor, so squarely “in the moment” that you'll always know exactly how to react to your scene partner, whether you are working with a script, or, as we say in improvisation, “without a net.”

You'll be spending most of your time on stage in ensembles of seven or eight, and together we'll explore this thing called “improv.”

THEATRE PROGRAM STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course is designed to meet one or more of the student learning outcomes applied to all Theatre majors. The graduating theatre student will demonstrate:

SLO 1: The student will develop the ability to express themselves creatively through appropriate theatrical performance and/or design.

SLO 2: The student will develop the ability to employ analytical and critical thinking skills through directing, playwriting, theatre history and script analysis, to work creatively and collaboratively with actors and technicians in mounting laboratory theatrical productions.

SLO 3: The student will develop the ability to demonstrate and apply standard industry requirements to all aspects of technical production.

Marketable Skills

Strong oral and written communication skills.

Strong analytical skills.

Strong teamwork and collaboration skills

Marketable Skills Dissemination Strategy:

Through a combination of coursework and laboratory work, i.e., theatrical productions, our students will gain the opportunity to explore and develop all three program marketable skills. Specifically, students will learn how to analyze scripts and communicate their findings via written assignments. They will also be encouraged to support their analysis orally through classroom discussions. Theatrical productions will provide the opportunity for actors and technicians to problem solve and work collaboratively, developing strong teamwork skills.

REQUIRED TEXT

Improvise. Scene from the inside out Napier, Mick, 2015.

Meriwether Publishing Ltd; Second edition

ISBN-13: 978-1566081986

ISBN-10: 156608198X

Improvisation at the Speed of Life: The TJ and Dave Book

By TJ Jagodowski, David Pasquesi, and Pam Victor

Publisher: Solo Roma, Inc (April 1, 2015)

ISBN-10: 0977309339

ISBN-13: 978-0977309337

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- 1) Your positive attitude is the difference between success and failure in art, in life, and in this class.
- 2) You will be on time. Which means, at minimum, five minutes before start of class.
- 3) You will be on your feet EVERY class. Dress to move in clothes you're willing to sacrifice – you'll be on the floor, in the air, carrying each other, etc. What this means, practically:
 - a. Men: No shorts. Take a shower.
 - b. Women: if you wear a skirt or dress, wear bike shorts underneath.
 - c. BOTH: NO flipflops, NO open toes, NO high heels. No loose jewelry. Tie your hair back and get it out of your face.

- 4) Come to class ready to play. If that means getting up an hour before and guzzling coffee, do that.
- 5) Refer to Mick Napier's "Advice and Guidelines for improvisers" *Improvise*, Napier, pp 88-97.
- 6) **YOU CANNOT PASS THIS CLASS WITHOUT REGULAR ATTENDANCE. IF YOU ARE ABSENT SIX TIMES, I WILL DROP YOU WITH AN "F."**

PREREQUISITES

Whatever theater classes are required to qualify for Advanced Acting status – see catalog or Prof. Marjie Scott if necessary.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this class, students will:

- Demonstrate a working vocabulary of terminology of improvisation
- Demonstrate beginning mastery of long-form improvisation
- Articulate the skills needed for a successful improvisational scene.
- Evaluate and critique improvisational work from the standpoints of both art and craft.
- Synthesize the elements of improvisational work as they apply to scripted acting.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

- 1) Terminology / Definitions Quiz
- 2) Mid-Term Paper
- 3) Full participation in class discussion / critique
- 4) Final Performance

Materials Required:

None

CLASS DATES: Assignments and Deadlines

Note that these dates and the details of each class are subject to change at the instructor's discretion, as class progress warrants.

Date	TOPICS/ACTIVITY	READING
8/24	Syllabus. Expectations. What is improvisation? Group mind exercise – Read Mick's <i>Advice to Actors</i> aloud and discuss.	
8/26	Trust Us, This Is All Made Up	TJ & Dave Part 1 – pp 4-22 by 9/4

8/31	Scenes	
9/2	Scenes	TJ & Dave Part 2 – pp 26-52 by 9/13
9/7	LABOR DAY – NO CLASS Find a union member. Thank them.	
9/9	Scenes and montage theory	TJ & Dave Part 2 – pp 53-83 by 9/25
9/14	Intro Harold	
9/16	Openings	TJ & Dave Part 3 – pp 94-120 by 10/2
9/21	Group scenes	
9/23	Group scenes	
9/28	Harold	TJ & Dave end Part 3, start Part 4 – pp 121-156 by 10/11
9/30	Harold	
10/5	Harold	TJ & Dave Part 3 – pp 157-200 by 10/18
10/7	Scenes	
10/12	Group Scenes	
10/14	Harold	
10/19	Harold	
10/21	Harold	
10/26	Short Form	
10/28	Short Form	
11/2	Scenes – Taking care of yourself	Read “Improvise” by Mick Napier
11/4	Scenes – Taking care of yourself	
11/9	Harold	
11/11	Harold	
11/16	Harold	
11/18	Harold	
11/23	Harold	
11/25-27	THANKSGIVING – enjoy your food coma.	
11/30	TBD – Contingency Day	
12/2	TBD – Contingency Day	
12/XX	FINAL EXAM: TBD FINAL EXAM: TBD	

GRADING

Assignments are valued as follows:

1) Quiz	5%
2) Midterm Paper	25%
3) Participation and attendance	40%
4) Final Performance	30%

Grading Criteria:

A = Exceptional. Demonstrates mastery of material beyond expectation. Professional quality of work. Highest level of scholarship.

B = Above average. Demonstrates mastery of material. Work is of better-than-expected quality, but not quite professional. High level of scholarship.

C = Average. Demonstrates proficiency with material. Work is of amateur quality. Ordinary level of scholarship.

D = Below Average. Less than proficient with material. Work shows errors, careless mistakes, or is just plain wrong. Poor scholarship.

F – Failure. Material incomplete. Work grossly negligent or incomplete. No evidence of scholarship present.

LATE PAPERS

Deadlines are an inescapable part of responsible, professional, adult life. Late papers will lose a letter grade for each day that the paper is late.

If you discover, *a week or more in advance*, that you have multiple deadlines converging on the same day, you may request a change in deadline. Such a change may be granted at the instructor's discretion. Once the deadline has passed, it's too late to ask for exceptions. Manage your time and deadlines wisely.

TARDINESS / ABSENCE POLICY

Attendance is 40% of your grade. That's the difference between an "A" and a "D"...or a really easy way to earn an "F."

TARDINESS

Class BEGINS EXACTLY AT THE APPOINTED TIME. It is your responsibility to be prepared to begin BEFORE the class starts.

Three instances of tardiness is equivalent to one absence. See below for the class absence policy.

THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO DENY ENTRY TO STUDENTS WHO ARE NOT PRESENT AT THE START OF CLASS* – ON THE HOUR. **PLAN ACCORDINGLY**. ON-TIME is EARLY!

*Exceptions will be made only for those with classes located in RAS whose end time makes on-time arrival impossible.

Punctuality is essential in this business. Tardiness will not be tolerated.

Absence Policy, from the Sul Ross State University 2012-2014 Course Catalogue:

CLASS ATTENDANCE

Regular class attendance is important to the attainment of the educational objectives of the University. Each instructor will keep class attendance records, and the instructor's policy on class attendance will be explained at the beginning of the semester or term.

The instructors will drop a student from a course when the student has a total of nine absences. A student will be dropped for excessive absences in remedial courses after nine absences.

An absence is defined as non-attendance in fifty minutes of class; for example, non-attendance in a one and one-half hour class will constitute one and one-half absences and non-attendance in a three hour class will constitute three absences. An absence because of participation in an official University activity is considered to be an authorized absence.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Libraries

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library in Alpine. Offers FREE resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more by visiting the library's website, library.sulross.edu. Off-campus access requires logging in with your LoboID and password. Librarians are a tremendous resource for your coursework and can be reached in person, by email (srsulibrary@sulross.edu), or phone (432-837-8123).

The Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC) Libraries at Uvalde, Del Rio, and Eagle Pass. Offer additional access to library spaces and resources. Del Rio, Eagle Pass, and Uvalde students may also use online resources available through SWTJC website, library.swtjc.edu. The SWTJC Libraries serve as pick-up locations for InterLibrary Loan (ILL) and Document Delivery from the Alpine campus.

Academic Integrity

Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. A scholar is expected to be punctual, prepared, and focused; meaningful and pertinent participation is appreciated. Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to: Turning in work as original that was used in whole or part for another course and/or professor; turning in another person's work as one's own; copying from professional works or internet sites without citation; collaborating on a course assignment, examination, or quiz when collaboration is forbidden.

Classroom Climate of Respect

Importantly, this class will foster free expression, critical investigation, and the open discussion of ideas. This means that all of us must help create and sustain an atmosphere of tolerance, civility, and respect for the viewpoints of others. Similarly, we must all learn how to probe, oppose and disagree without resorting to tactics of intimidation, harassment, or personal attack. No one is entitled to harass, belittle, or discriminate against another on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, national origin, or sexual preference. Still we will not be silenced by the difficulty of fruitfully discussing politically sensitive issues.

Commitment to Students

I aim to create a learning environment for my students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, socioeconomic class, age, nationality, etc.). I also understand that the crisis of COVID, economic disparity, and health concerns, or even unexpected life events could impact the conditions necessary for you to succeed. My commitment is to be there for you and help you meet the learning objectives of this course. I do this to demonstrate my commitment to you and to the mission of Sul Ross State University to create an inclusive environment and care for the whole student as part of the Sul Ross Familia. If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT STATEMENT

SRSU Disability Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. Alpine students seeking accessibility/accommodations services must contact Mary Schwartze Grisham, M.Ed., LPC, SRSU's Accessibility Services Coordinator at 432-837-8203 (please leave a message and we'll get back to you as soon as we can during working hours), or email mschwartz@sulross.edu. Our office is located on the first floor of Ferguson Hall (Suite 112), and our mailing address is P.O. Box C-122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas, 79832.