

Introduction to Acting
THAR 120.301
Mondays & Wednesdays 10.15a-11.45am EST
Location: Annenberg rm 221

Instructor: Tai Verley
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Office Hours: by appointment

Course description:

Rooted in the acting methods of Constantin Stanislavski, but incorporating a wide variety of approaches, including improvisation, this course takes students step-by-step through the practical and necessary work an actor must do to live and behave truthfully on-stage. Building upon journal work, relaxation, vocal and physical exercise, interactive games, and ensemble building, students will learn and put into practice basic acting techniques, including sensory work, the principles of action, objectives, given circumstances, etc. The semester culminates in the performance of a memorized and rehearsed monologue, scene or scenes, most often from a play from the Realist tradition / contemporary work. This course strongly stresses a commitment to actor work, inner reflection and responsibility to one's fellow actors. Practical work is supplemented by readings / videos from Stanislavski and a variety of other acting theorists that may include Uta Hagen, Sanford Meisner, among others. Students are also required to submit short informal essays over the course of the semester in response to the readings, in-class exercises, intrapersonal work and in preparation for their final project which will incorporate journal entries, scene / monologue scoring, and character backgrounds.

Required Texts:

- Hagen, Uta. *Respect for Acting*. Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, 2008
- Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Editors: Sharrell D. Lockett, Tia M. Shaffer. *Black Acting Methods*. Routledge. 2016.

All texts are all available on Amazon (if you want your own copy), the digital Penn library OR all required reading will be available in PDF form on Canvas.

Objective: For students to have a personalized understanding of breath, grounding, ensemble work, character building as it relates to specificity of environment, circumstance, and **Play**.

Participation, Attendance and Lateness:

ACTING is about how we SHOW UP for ourselves and for each other.

Please consider that each time you come to my class — it's not just about you. It's about everyone. Your classmates are your compatriots and collaborators in this space. Each person is a vital member of the space. Therefore, this course **requires** prompt and consistent in-person attendance.

Also, please note the following, as it relates to grading:

- Students are allowed **TWO** absences during the semester. After the second absence, the individual student's grade will be lowered **one full letter grade** for each additional absence. An A becomes a B; A B- becomes a C-, etc.
- Four absences will result in automatic failure of the class.
- LATENESS TRULY IRKS ME. After you're late 3 times+, your final grade will be lessened by $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade. (A becomes A-, etc.)

Please be considerate of my and your classmates' time by notifying me in advance if you will need to miss class or if you're running late. If you plan to miss class, please submit the absence in the Courses@Penn system.

~* Given the COVID-19 pandemic and the health and safety of all, please notify me immediately if sickness occurs. Should you need to quarantine or if any other serious illness arises, how we navigate the next steps will need discussion. If you are experiencing symptoms, please get a COVID test. *~

Completion of Written Assignments:

All written assignments are due by the beginning of class. For each day the paper is late, grades will be deducted $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade. A becomes A-; A- becomes B+; and so on, so forth. Papers turned in after class has begun will be considered one day late. Papers more than a week late will not be accepted and will receive an automatic failing grade.

Grading:

Class Participation, Preparation, Focus, Imagination	15%
Informal Response Papers, including 1 show response paper	10%
Midterm Monologue & monologue breakdown:	25%
Final Presentation/Scene & breakdown:	35%
<u>Final Performance Analysis Portfolio:</u>	<u>15%</u>
Total:	100%

Course Requirements and Assignments :

1. Please come to class wearing stretchy, comfortable clothes that you can move in. How we move and perceive movement is a huge aspect of this class! Anything that impairs your ability to show a full range of movement is not welcomed. Therefore, jackets, hats, large jewelry should not be worn in class. (Trust me, I love hoop earrings too! Take them off.)
2. **Cell phones MUST be OFF or in AIRPLANE-MODE.**
3. There is no gum allowed and no eating. Your stomach can wait the class' allotted hour and a half. Water is permitted and recommended!
4. Masks are optional (but encouraged) while on campus. If you want to wear a mask in this class, I support you in your decision. Please note that a significant amount of acting requires the acknowledgement of facial gestures. Especially in situations of performance, masks may need to come off. For this classroom, The COVID SAFETY of ALL must have a system of accountability. That said, we will agree on a set of Classroom Community Values, to which everyone will abide. Please RESPECT and ACKNOWLEDGE my and each other's SAFETY wishes. Please do NOT come to class if you are feeling poorly. And please communicate with me before missing my class.
5. Active participation in class means being ready to discuss all assigned readings, participation in all in-class work (vocally, physically, emotionally), and giving active and engaged feedback to other students when watching them perform. Please RESPECT everyone's work by providing eye contact and maintaining attention. Please be sure to bring a copy of the reading with you on the day it is due. Please also be sure to bring a notebook and a pencil/pen / computer.
6. We all are responsible for cleaning up the studio after class is done. **All must be involved.**
7. There will be several small assignments that you will complete throughout the semester. These are short exercises that you will work on at home and present to the class. These assignments serve as an opportunity to try things on your own outside of the classroom, present your work to the class, and then get feedback from everyone. Timely completion of these is imperative, as we will be using them for in-class work the day the assignment is due. Late work is not accepted. Descriptions of these assignments will be discussed in class and posted to Canvas.

8. Throughout the semester, you will also be required to write several 1 page RESPONSE PAPERS. These papers are an amazing opportunity for you to reflect, question and expound upon what we have been working on and how your perspectives have changed or remained consistent. **These may be as informal or formal as you like, but they should be in the following format — double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, with one inch margins.** Papers are due by the beginning of the next class.
9. It is also your responsibility to see ONE full theatrical show IN PERSON during the course of the semester. **This will NOT be chosen by me.** You can check www.theatrephiladelphia.org for dates/times/show names and more information on all shows in the Greater Philadelphia area that are happening during the school year. After you've seen the show, you must submit ONE RESPONSE PAPER with your reaction to the piece -- details will be given on CANVAS. You can turn in that assignment anytime after you've watched the piece — like other response papers, it can be informal. There is a final due date for this assignment (noted on CANVAS and in this syllabus) but this response paper can be submitted at any time before the due date.
10. For your midterm, you will be assigned a monologue that you will memorize, develop, rehearse, and perform. It will be your responsibility to locate and read this play outside of class. For your midterm, you will also turn in a scored copy of your monologue. The scored monologue and its performance will determine your midterm grade. ****You are required to attend all MIDTERM monologue presentations. Failure to attend will result in your final grade lowering by a full letter.**
11. Memorization is a necessary evil — Make time for yourself. Improvised or paraphrased work through lack of memorization shows a lack of respect for the playwright and your fellow company members. You will be allowed to be on book (paper in hand) for one/ two working days in class. After that, you are responsible for knowing all words in the piece.
12. Your final examination / presentations are up to you — you can be assigned a scene from a play and a scene partner OR you will be assigned another monologue to perform. (We will discuss after midterms what you want to do.) It will be your responsibility to locate and read the play from the excerpt (scene or monologue) outside of class. In addition to working in class, you will be required to rehearse outside of class alone OR with your assigned partner. Rehearsal time should be no less than 2 hours a week. ****You are required to attend all days of scene presentations. Absence on any FINAL PRESENTATION days will result in your final grade lowering by a full letter.**

Care:

It is important to me that you have the resources you need to be able to focus on learning in this course – this includes your mental health and well-being, taking care of your day-to-day needs (food, mindset, shelter), and the necessary academic materials.

Please contact <https://caps.wellness.upenn.edu/> for student counseling and mental health support.

Any student who needs help affording the course materials, please contact the Penn First Plus office: pennfirstplus@upenn.edu.

Students can also contact their Financial Aid Counselor or Academic Advisor about these concerns.

Kindness & Balance:

Life is a constant stream of new and unpredictable situations. Unexpected change can bring up many emotions such as sadness, anxiety, frustration, fear, loneliness and grief. If you are feeling any of these emotions, please know that I am as well.

This class will touch on those emotions. It will present them to you singularly or to others and all of that can be frightening.

Let's all give each other some grace and allow for exploration with a bit of frivolity, whilst also recognizing that this is an academic environment. Let's try to balance the space together.