

SYLLABUS

COURSE #: ENG 164/ CRN 26122

TITLE: Improvisation

Course Description: This course allows students to move progressively toward a stronger understanding of long form improvisation acting theory and skills related to listening, supporting others, heightening, and taking risks. By the end of this course, students will be able to work within a cast to create full-length, fully improvised plays that incorporate spontaneous monologues and scenes with recurring characters and themes. Performers will develop skills that enable them to write, direct, edit, and act in pieces that are made up on the spot using a single audience suggestion. Particular focus will be paid to the format known as *The Harold*. Originally conceived by Del Close in the 1960's with the Compass Players in San Francisco and later developed at the Improv Olympic in Chicago with Charna Halpern, *The Harold* is widely considered the cornerstone of modern improv comedy.

Credits: 4

Semester/Year: Fall 2019

Class Day/Time/s: Thursdays; 3:25-6:05

Location: Todd 107 (Sloan Studio)

First Class: Thursday, August 29

Last Class: Thursday, December 5

Lab Days/Times: N/A

Does this course use Blackboard Learning Management? Y N

Any handouts, class readings, and web links will be posted on Blackboard. Students will engage in group discussions about assigned readings and class activities on the platform. Students will also submit assignments and receive grades via Blackboard.

Course Webpage/s: N/A

Instructor:

Contact Email: mack.megan01@gmail.com

Contact Telephone: 585-797-4627

Office Hours: By appointment

Office Location: Todd 207

Entrance Prerequisites: N/A

Course Aims & Objectives: By the end of this course, students will be able to work within a cast to create short, fully improvised plays that incorporate spontaneous monologues and scenes with recurring characters and themes. Students will develop skills that enable them to simultaneously write, direct, edit, and act in theatrical pieces that are made up on the spot.

General Course Requirements: This class meets 14 times over the course of the semester. Each class runs from 3:25-6:05 p.m. There will be no class on Thursday, November 28th due to the Thanksgiving holiday. Attendance is mandatory. Please see the Attendance Policy below for more information. Readings and reflection statements will be assigned after each class, and the last session will include a final performance in front of an audience. As students in a UR International Theatre Program class, students are required to attend both mainstage Theatre Program productions during the semester, as well as two outside arts events. Please see the Arts Explorer Initiative handout for more information.

Required Texts & Readings:

- Napier, Mick. *Improvise.: Scene from the Inside Out*, Second Edition. Meriwether Publishing, A Division of Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., 2015.

*Copies are available at the campus bookstore and on reserve at Rush Rhees Library.

Other Recommended Reading:

- Halpern, Charna, et al. *Truth in Comedy: The Manual of Improvisation*. Meriwether Publishing, 2011.
- Libera, Anne. *The Second City Almanac of Improvisation*. Northwestern University Press, 2004.
- Carrane, Jimmy, and Allen, Liz. *Improvising Better: A Guide for the Working Improviser*. Heinemann, 2006.
- Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*. Martino Fine Books, 2017.
- Bernard, Jill. *Jill Bernard's Small Cute Book of Improv*, Fourth Edition. YESand.com Publishing, 2012.

Assignments and Exams/Quizzes/Tests:

Class Participation

Participation in class is the largest portion of your grade. Each class session is worth 10 points and based on attendance, effort, and knowledge of applicable skills.

Reflection Statements

Weekly reflection statements are due by 2 p.m. the Tuesday before our next class session. They should be no less than 250 words, no more than 500 words, and typed. They should include reflections on a skill or theory we learned in class, connections with a real-life events (e.g., past experience, a production you have seen, etc.), and how you might apply this skill somewhere in your life going forward. They are worth 5 points each.

Arts Explorer Initiative

As a student in a Theatre Program class, you are required to attend BOTH mainstage University of Rochester Theatre Program performances, as well as TWO outside art events. Proof of admission and a brief reflection (no more than 250 words) of how what you saw relates to our class must be submitted by noon on the last day of class. More information is available in the “Arts Explorer Initiative” handout.

Final Performance

The culminating project for this course is a class performance. This will take place during our last class session on December 5th. You are REQUIRED to bring at least TWO audience members, so please plan accordingly. The final performance is worth 20 points and will be based on participation, effort, knowledge and use of the theories and skills presented in class, and your audience members’ attendance. More information on your performance will follow as the semester progresses.

Final Reflection

A final reflection statement is due by 2 p.m. on Monday, December 9th. As with previous reflection statements, your final reflection should be no less than 250 words, no more than 500 words, and typed. This final statement should focus on your overall experience in this class and how you might apply what you learned in the future (it doesn’t have to be in the theatre!). This assignment is worth 15 points.

Recommended Attire: Please dress comfortably in clothes that facilitate movement. This may include crouching, jumping, sitting, crawling on the floor, dancing, etc. This is improvisation, so plan on doing anything you can imagine yourself doing! Please avoid wearing open-toed shoes or sandals, hats, heavy boots, excessive jewelry, anything that may cause injury to yourself or others, and anything that may expose something you do not want exposed. You will be moving around on stage in front of an audience.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is mandatory. Improvisation is a group art form in which team members develop group mind. Your presence is critical to the development of that group mind and the success of this class. Most of your grade for this course is based on participation and effort. Any unexcused absences will lower your grade. If you need to be absent for any reason, please make arrangements with me in advance. Last minute emergencies will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Please do not be late for class. Your fellow improvisers are counting on your contribution to the group mind.

In addition to improvisation being a group art form, this is a performance class. Interrupting or stealing focus from the work of your peers is disrespectful and will not be permitted (this extends to the use of electronic devices in class). If you have to be late, please be respectful and enter at a time that will not disrupt the work on stage.

Grading:

Class Participation: 130 points (10 points per class – excluding the final class)
Reflection Statements: 65 points (5 points per reflection statement)
UR Theatre Program Mainstage Performances: 10 points (5 points per performance)
Outside Arts Events: 10 points (5 points per performance)
Final Performance: 20 points
Final Reflection: 15 points

LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT ACCEPTED

Grading system: Please see the attached “Class Grading System and Procedures” handout.

Academic Support Services:

- Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/
- Writing, Speaking and Argument Program: <http://writing.rochester.edu/>

Academic Honesty:

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. More information is available at: www.rochester.edu/college/honesty.

Disability Resources:

The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the Office of Disability Resources at: http://disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall.

Credit Hours:

This course follows the College credit hour policy for four-credit courses. This course meets once weekly for a total of three academic hours per week. The course also includes rehearsals/solo work/group activities/attending performances that account for approximately one academic hour per week.

Content/Weekly Outline or Schedule:

DATE	#	ACTIVITY	DUE
8/29/19	1	<p>Introduction to Improvisation</p> <p><i>“Know that you are right. Know that you are good. Know that you knew how to do this when you were six years old, other stuff just got in the way. Play.” – Jill Bernard</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review syllabus • What is improv? • A brief history of improv • Terminology • Understanding the Harold • The rules... • Let's play! • Discussion 	
9/5/19	2	<p>Environment and Object Work</p> <p><i>“Objects in a scene are there to help lead a player who feels stuck. They should prompt the improviser to discover, rather than invent.” – Charna Halpern</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • What is environment? What is object work? • Why use object work? • Discovery vs. invention • Object work tips • Warm ups • Let's play! • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier -- Ch. 1-3 • Reflection Statement #1 (due Tuesday, 9/3, at 2 p.m.)
9/12/19	3	<p>Character Work 1</p> <p><i>Play touches and stimulates vitality, awakening the whole person - mind, body, intelligence and creativity, spontaneity and intuition. – Viola Spolin</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • What defines a character? • Defaults vs. discovery • Character work tips • Warm ups • Let's play! • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier -- Ch. 4-5 • Reflection Statement #2 (due Tuesday, 9/10, at 2 p.m.)

9/19/19	4	<p>Character Work 2</p> <p><i>That which is not yet known comes out of that which is not yet here. – Viola Spolin</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • Advancing characters: Game of the Scene and Heightening • Warm ups • Let's play! • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier -- Ch. 6-7 • Reflection Statement #3 (due Tuesday, 9/17, at 2 p.m.)
9/26/19	5	<p>Justification</p> <p><i>"If everyone justifies everyone else's actions, there are no mistakes." – Charna Halpern</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • Why justify? • Warm ups • Let's play! • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier -- Ch. 8 • Reflection Statement #4 (due Tuesday, 9/24, at 2 p.m.)
10/3/19	6	<p>Honesty/Truth in Comedy</p> <p><i>"The truth is funny. Honest discovery, observation, and reaction is better than contrived invention." – Del Close</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • What is truth in comedy? Why is vulnerability valuable? • Vulnerability Circle • Warm ups • Let's play! • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier – Ch. 9 • Reflection Statement #5 (due Tuesday, 10/1, at 2 p.m.)
10/10/19	7	<p>The Game of the Scene</p> <p><i>"I think we're fighting a losing game!" – Lucy Ricardo</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • What is the Game of the Scene? Examples? • Discovery vs. invention • Warm ups • Let's play! • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier – Ch. 10 (choose three exercises) • Reflection Statement #6 (due Tuesday, 10/8, at 2 p.m.)

10/17/19	8	<p>Introduction to The Harold</p> <p><i>“The Beatles called their haircut Arthur, so I’ll call this Harold... Probably my most significant contribution and it’s got that stupid name.” – Del Close</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • Understanding the Harold... • Warm ups • Openings (set vs. organic) • Two-person source scenes/WWW’s • Games 1 (set vs. organic) • Second Beat • Games 2 • Third Beat • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Provided by instructor • Reflection Statement #7 (due Tuesday, 10/15, at 2 p.m.)
10/24/19	9	<p>Advancing the Harold</p> <p><i>“There are two kinds of scenes. Slice of life: ‘Let’s see what’s happening with the Johnsons,’ and ‘Sh-t just hit the fan at the Johnsons!’” – Susan Messing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • Discussing heightening • Discussing editing • Warm ups • Let’s play! • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Provided by instructor • Reflection Statement #8 (due Tuesday, 10/22, at 2 p.m.)
10/31/19	10	<p>Advanced Scene Work and Form Exploration 1</p> <p><i>“When the audience isn’t laughing, that doesn’t mean that they’re not fascinated.” – Susan Messing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • Warm ups • The Harold/The Bat • The Armando • The LaRonde • The Movie • The Deconstruction • DIY Harold • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier – Ch. 10 (choose three exercises) • Reflection Statement #9 (due Tuesday, 10/29, at 2 p.m.)

11/7/19	11	<p>Form Exploration 2</p> <p><i>“Improvisation is the art of being completely O.K. with not knowing what the f--- you’re doing.” – Mick Napier</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • Warm ups • The Harold/The Bat • The Armando • The LaRonde • The Movie • The Deconstruction • DIY Harold • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier – Ch. 10 (choose three exercises) • Reflection Statement #10 (due Tuesday, 11/5, at 2 p.m.)
11/14/19	12	<p>Form Exploration 3 and Rehearsal</p> <p><i>“There are no mistakes, only opportunities.” – Tina Fey</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • Warm ups • The Harold/The Bat • The Armando • The LaRonde • The Movie • The Deconstruction • DIY Harold • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier – Ch. 10 (choose three exercises) • Reflection Statement #11 (due Tuesday, 11/12, at 2 p.m.)
11/21/19	13	<p>Rehearsal</p> <p><i>“Through spontaneity we are re-formed into ourselves.” – Viola Spolin</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of last week • Warm ups • Let’s play! • Notes/Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier – Ch. 10 (choose three exercises) • Reflection Statement #12 (due Tuesday, 11/19, at 2 p.m.)
11/28/19	--	NO CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Napier – Ch. 10 (choose three exercises) • Reflection Statement #13

			(due Tuesday, 11/26, at 2 p.m.)
12/5/19	14	<p>Rehearsal and Final Performance</p> <p><i>“Follow the fear.” – Del Close</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm ups • Rehearsal • Let’s do a show! • Notes/Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Reflection Statement (due Monday, 12/9, at 2 p.m.)