

SYLLABUS

COURSE #: ENG 164 TITLE: Improvisation

Course Description:

This introductory 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 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 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

Class Day/Time/s: R/3:25-6:05

First Class: August 30

Lab Days/Times: N/A

Labs begin: n/a

Location: n/a

Semester/Year: Fall/2018

Location: Todd /Room 107

Last Class: December 6

Last Lab: n/a

Does this course use Blackboard Learning Management? Yes

If yes, explain how Blackboard will be used:

Supplemental Readings

Web-links

Class Discussions

Journal Submissions

Grades

Course Webpage/s [if applicable]: n/a

Instructor:

Contact Email: jftimprov@gmail.com

Office Hours: By appointment

Contact Telephone: 773-682-7577

Office Location: TBD

Entrance Prerequisites [if applicable]: 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.

Required Texts & Readings:

Available for purchase:

Halpern, Charna, et al. *Truth in Comedy: the Manual of Improvisation*. Meriwether Pub, 2011.

Other Recommended Reading:

Arnett, Bill. *The Complete Improviser: Concepts, Techniques, and Exercises for Long Form Improvisation*. Bookbaby, 2016.

Besser, Matt, et al. *The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual*. Access and Diversity, Crane Library, University of British Columbia, 2017.

Carrane, Jimmy, and Liz Allen. *Improvising Better: a Guide for the Working Improviser*. Heinemann, 2006.

Gwinn, Peter Campbell., and Charna Halpern. *Group Improvisation: the Manual of Ensemble Improv Games*. Meriwether Pub., 2007.

Halpern, Charna. *Art by Committee: a Guide to Advanced Improvisation*. Meriwether Pub., 2006.

Hines, Will. *How to Be the Greatest Improviser on Earth*. Pretty Great Publishing, 2016.

Jagodowski, T. J., et al. *Improvisation at the Speed of Life: the TJ & Dave Book*. Solo Roma Inc., 2015.

Napier, Mick. *Behind the Scenes: Improvising Long Form*. Meriwether Publishing, 2015.

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

Scruggs, Mary, and Michael J. Gellman. *Process: an Improvisers Journey*. Northwestern University Press, 2008.

Spolin, Viola, et al. *Theater Games for the Lone Actor*. Northwestern University Press, 2001.

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater: a Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*. Martino Fine Books, 2017.

Vaillancourt, Paul. *The Triangle of the Scene: a Simple, Practical, Powerful Method for Approaching Improvisation*. Self Published?, 2017.

Assignments and Exams/Quizzes/Tests [if applicable]:

- **Class Participation**

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

- **Reflection Journals**

Weekly reflection journals are due by Noon on the Wednesday 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 event (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 University of Rochester Theatre mainstage 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 handed in by Noon on the last day of class. More information is available on the “Arts Explorer Initiative” handout.

- **Final Reflection**

Your final reflection is due by Noon on Monday, December 10. Like your previous reflections, your final reflection should be no less than 250 words, no more than 500 words, and typed. However, this final reflection should focus on your overall experience in this class and how you might apply what you learned in the future (hint: it doesn't have to be in the theatre). This assignment is worth 20 points.

- **Performance**

The culminating project for this course is a class performance. This will take place during our last class session on December 6. 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. More information on your performance will follow as the semester progresses.

Recommended Attire [if applicable]:

Please dress comfortably in clothes you can move around in. 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-toe

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. Again, you will be moving around on stage in front of an audience.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is mandatory! Improvisation is a group art form. That is, you create art by committee through the development of a group mind. Your presence is critical to 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, you are expected to make arrangements with me in advance. Last minute emergencies (verifiable illness, verifiable death, accidents, etc.) will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Also, please do not be late for this class! Actors learn punctuality as a necessity, not a virtue: Being on time means being five minutes early. 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 extremely disrespectful and will not be tolerated (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 class.

Grading:

Class Participation:	130 points (10 each)
Reflection Journal:	60 points
U of R Mainstage Performances:	10 (5 each)
Outside Arts Events:	10 points (5 each)
Final Reflection:	20 points
Performance:	20 points

*****LATE ASSIGNMENTS ARE NOT ACCEPTED*****

Grading system:

A: Exceptional performance/written work/examination/quiz scores. Impeccable attendance record and enthusiastic class participation . Full , enthusiastic and comprehensive completion of all lab duties including voluntary extra effort and significant displays of initiative and responsibility

A-,B+: Very good written work and quiz score. Impeccable attendance record and enthusiastic class participation. Full, enthusiastic and comprehensive completion of all

lab duties, displaying initiative.

B,B-: Good or above average written work and quiz score. Good attendance record. Above average performance of labs and related activities.

C+,C: Average written work and quiz score. Imperfect and/or uncooperative attendance of classes, labs and related duties.

C-,D+: Poor written work Poor class and/or lab attendance. Uncooperative attitude and lack of initiative.

D,E : All others. Don't go there.

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:

Please see: www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/undergraduates.html

Disability Resources:

Please visit: www.rochester.edu/college/disability/

Content/Weekly Outline or Schedule:

DATE	#	ACTIVITY	DUE
8/30	1	Making Contact: Introduction to Improv <i>"Improvisation is the art of being completely O.K. with not knowing what the f--- you're doing." - Mick Napier</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Syllabus • A Brief History of Improv <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Viola Spolin – Theater Games ○ The Compass Players <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ David Shepard/Paul Sills ▪ Second City ○ Del Close <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Committee ▪ The early Harold 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improv Olympic (iO) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The modern Harold • Ground Rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>DO NOT</u> try and be funny! ○ Take the Note ○ Honesty and Vulnerability ○ Safe Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take risks ▪ Take care of yourself ▪ Take care of each other • Terminology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Short Form vs. Long Form ○ Group Mind ○ Rule of 3's ○ <u>Truth In Comedy</u> • The Basics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Truth ○ Listening ○ Ground Reality ○ Yes, and... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ agreement ▪ heightening ○ Play! Have Fun! 	
<p>9/6</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>Building Group Mind –</p> <p><i>“If we treat each other as if we are geniuses, poets and artists, we have a better chance of becoming that on stage.” - Del Close</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support & Trust – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agreement ○ Take care of yourself ○ Take care of others • Patterns • Themes • The Suggestion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There are no bad suggestions ○ The ask ○ Inspiration and the Audience • Story Telling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Personal Monologues ○ Character Monologues ○ As a group • Object Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Halpern – Ch. 1-4 • Journal Entry 1 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Setting & Character <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specifics ▪ The Power of Silence <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>	
9/13	3	<p>The Beginning</p> <p><i>“There are no mistakes, only opportunities.” - Tina Fey</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Openings & Games <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Openings versus games <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Openings create content to be mined ▪ Games reflect/heighten what has been established ○ Established Openings ○ Organic Openings ○ Variations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thematic ▪ Commentary ▪ Tangential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading: Halpern – Ch. 5 - 8 ● Journal Entry 2 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)
9/20	4	<p>Intro to Harold</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"> ● 3-Line Scenes (everything you need is here) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Initiations ○ Responses ○ Seal the Pattern ● 2-Person Source Scenes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bring a Brick <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be willing to drop it ▪ Bricks are gifts ○ Listen ○ Know What You Know ○ Ping Pong <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discover the W's ▪ React ○ The Game of the Scene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading: Halpern – Ch. 9 - 12 ● Journal Entry 3 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What's interesting or odd ▪ What is the scene about 	
9/27	5	<p>You Can Be Somebody!</p> <p><i>"Through spontaneity we are re-formed into ourselves." - Viola Spolin</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Characters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Thin Veil <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Know what you know ▪ "The more you know, the more you can make fun of." – Del Close ○ Inside Out ○ Outside In ○ Nice is boring. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make bold choices ▪ Kill the judge in your head ▪ Paying the tax 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal Entry 4 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)
10/4	6	<p>Mining The Opening –</p> <p><i>"A truthful, reasonable, and clearly played scene will hold the audience's attention." – Bill Arnett</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openings to 1st Beats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Take it far away (the beginning is the end) ○ Don't be literal. Suggestions inspire. ○ 3 Different Beats ○ Theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal Entry 5 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)
10/11	7	<p>Next Steps –</p> <p><i>"If the whole is to be Art, the parts must not try to be." – Del Close</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second Beats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Avoid Narrative ○ Heighten: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Theme ▪ Commentary ▪ Tangential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal Entry 6 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Setting ▪ Character ▪ The Game ▪ ? ○ Time Dashes ○ Edits ○ Walk-ons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Just add, don't distract ▪ Walk-throughs 	
10/18	8	<p>Crossing The Streams –</p> <p><i>“Anyone can make the simple complicated. Creativity is making the complicated simple.” - Charles Mingus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third Beats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seal the pattern ○ Connect the Beats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Never force connections ▪ Not everything connects ○ 1/3 Harold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal Entry 7 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)
10/25	9	<p>Putting It All Together –</p> <p><i>“If everyone justifies everyone else’s actions, there are no mistakes.” - Charna Halpern</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Complete Harold <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Set Openings and Games ○ Organic Openings and Games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal Entry 8 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)
11/1	10	<p>Take Off the Training Wheels –</p> <p><i>“Play touches and stimulates vitality, awakening the whole person – mind, body, intelligence and creativity. Fear freezes you.” - Viola Spolin</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced Forms Sampler <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Deconstruction ○ The Lazy Susan ○ The Movie ○ The Living Room ○ Conversational Improv • DIY Harold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal Entry 9 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)
11/8	11	The Rehearsal Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal Entry 10

		<p><i>“Is what we’re doing comedy? Probably not. Is it funny? Probably yes... What we do is too enchanting to be quantified.” - Del Close</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Directors/Coaches ○ Deconstructing versus Notes 	<p>(due by Noon on Wednesday before class)</p>
11/15	12	<p>The Rehearsal Process</p> <p><i>“The only safe thing is to take a chance.” - Elaine May</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deconstructing versus Notes ○ Making adjustments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Journal Entry 11 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)
11/29	13	<p>The Rehearsal Process</p> <p><i>“The only rule is that there are no rules.” – Del Close</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deconstructing ○ Notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Journal Entry 12 (due by Noon on Wednesday before class)
12/6	14	<p>Last Class – Performance</p> <p><i>“After an improviser learns to trust and follow his own inner voice, he begins to do the same with his fellow players’ inner voices. Once he puts his own ego out of the way, he stops judging the ideas of others – instead, he considers them brilliant, and eagerly follows them!” – Del Close & Charna Halpern</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Warm-Up ● Show ● Notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Final Journal Entry (due by Noon on Monday, December 10)

Other Information: