

Acting: Fundamentals THEA 1050.004 Course Syllabus Fall 2026

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Office Hours: T/Th 1-2 pm and by appointment

Required Course Text: Bruder: *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*

NOTE: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Course Description

Acting Fundamentals (THEA 1050): Introduces students to fundamental principles, theories, and techniques of acting. Through the use of theatre games, exercises, and character/script analysis students will experience and begin to build a foundation of the physical, vocal, emotional, and technical preparation required of one who is seriously considering acting as a profession or becoming a teacher of acting. In this course, students will become familiar with basic theatre terminology and protocol. Working in groups, with partners, or singly, students will explore their dramatic and theatrical potential through study and application of basic acting techniques as put forth by Constantin Stanislavski and other major performance theorists and will use reputed theatre texts to gain working knowledge of the research and analysis required in preparation for a performance.

Students majoring or minoring in Theatre who have received a grade of "C" in this course, even if they are transferring it in, will be required to audition for consideration for enrollment in THEA 3050. Any student who receives a grade BELOW a "C" will be allowed to repeat the course one more time. Should the student repeat the course and receive a grade BELOW a "C" again, the student will no longer be able to continue in the Acting Concentration.

If the student has indeed earned a C in one or more of the three foundational Acting courses and an audition is required for enrollment in the Acting; Realism I course, these auditions will take place on the Monday afternoon of the week preceding the first day of classes. Students will be contacted by the Acting Faculty in advance to confirm their audition appointment, but they need to be prepared, based on their academic performance, for an audition of two contrasting one-minute monologues in order to retain enrollment in the Acting: Realism I course and the Acting Concentration.

Course Expectation

Students are expected to participate fully in classroom/lab setting. THEA 1050 requires much physical work, focus, observation and at times, exploration of emotion and complex analysis. Students will work singly, in groups and with a partner(s)—at times, exercises and projects will involve close physical contact with other students.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- Understand and explain the essence of theatre: what theatre is, what its elements and conventions are, and what qualities are needed to make good theatre.
 - Demonstrate basic physical, vocal, and mental skills needed to be a successful actor on the stage.
- o PHYSICAL SKILLS: develop physical flexibility, strength and expressiveness; relaxation techniques and exercises; learn to begin to take physical risks as an actor — to free the body and get rid of “stiff” movements on stage—to connect the body to action.
- o VOCAL SKILLS: to cultivate an understanding of a healthy vocal instrument through relaxation and breathing techniques; to improve articulation and pronunciation habits; to cultivate a basic ability to connect the voice to action and emotion and communication.
- o MENTAL SKILLS: develop ability to concentrate and maintain focus, further explore and develop imagination, creativity, sensory awareness, and spontaneity as they apply to acting. Connection of impulse to action.
- Demonstrate an understanding of basic acting technique and terminology.
 - Demonstrate knowledge of effective improvisational techniques.
 - Understand and use a working theatrical vocabulary (theatre jargon) so that we all may speak the same language as those in “the business.”
 - Demonstrate a basic commitment to theatre by being present, on time, and giving full attention, energy, and creative input at all class sessions.
 - Identify the skills needed and demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively and work cooperatively with an ensemble.
 - Demonstrate the techniques of constructive evaluation of self and others in class and performances.

UNT ACTING TRACK COURSE TERMINOLOGY

OBJECTIVE: The term used to indicate what the character wants in the scene, most actively applied when the character wants something from another character or

characters. Characters may definitely have PRIMARY AND SECONDARY OBJECTIVES. Also referred to as INTENTION.

ACTION: The things the character says or does in the scene, typically in order to achieve their objective. Also referred to as TACTICS or STRATEGIES.

OBSTACLE: The things that are in the way of the character attaining their objective. These can involve people, certainly, but also more abstract things like age, time, illness, status, personal insecurity, physical impediments, character flaws, etc.

DESTINATION (PRIMARY & SECONDARY): The concept put forth in the teaching of Uta Hagen that a character is always going FROM somewhere TO somewhere else for a reason. The PRIMARY DESTINATION reflects the character's overriding purpose in a scene (say, to make dinner). The SECONDARY DESTINATIONS are all the little stops along the way in order to achieve the PRIMARY DESTINATION (coming in the door with groceries, putting the groceries away, setting the table, turning on the oven, etc.) Hagen uses the concept to make the movement of the actor specific and to avoid wandering aimlessly without purpose.

EXPECTATION: The concept that a character in a scene always enters with an expectation of what will happen. This is almost never realized as the character envisions it.

LONG-TERM CIRCUMSTANCES: The long-term events that lead up to a scene. This includes the full back story of the character's history as well as the plot points that have led to what is going on right now.

SHORT-TERM CIRCUMSTANCES: Something that has occurred recently or even right before the scene starts. It has just started raining. My character is late. My character just tripped and fell before coming onstage. My character has just won the lottery. My character has just lost a child. These typically activate certain behaviors. Sometimes referred to as "THE MOMENT BEFORE."

SPECIFICITY: The actor fills in the realistic details of time of day, place, age, relationships, point of view—all of the details that reality would bring with it.

PERSONALIZATION: The task of the actor to invest in their relationship to the circumstances and surroundings of the scene in order to make them personal and real. The pictures on the wall are MY pictures. These clothes are MINE. The actor in the scene is my mother. Basically, this underscores the concept that I am living someone else's life and telling someone else's story. Some will use the term ENDOWMENT to mean, "I give the qualities to imaginary things (like the props in a play or fellow actors) that they would have in real life (a glass of milk that is sour, for example)."

VOCAL LIFE: How a character uses both speech and sound. This would typically be at least somewhat different from the actor's personal vocal life.

PHYSICAL LIFE: How a character exists in their own body—how they move, sit, stand, walk, relate to objects and space, etc. Typically, this would be at least somewhat different than the actor's personal physical life.

EMOTIONAL LIFE: How the character thinks, feels, responds and reacts--their point of view, typically based on circumstances. This should, of course, be somewhat different from that of the actor.

TEXT: The words of the play, which offer many clues and opportunities for exploring the truth of the character and the language that the author offers the actor. The text must be mined for details and specifics in order to serve the work. The character's history and relationships are here, as well as clues to their vocal, physical, and emotional life. The part of rehearsal where the actor and the cast take the text apart for its possibilities is often called **TEXT WORK** or **TABLE WORK**. **SUBTEXT** Information that is not overtly stated in the text, but which is able to be inferred—what is “beneath the words.” For example, a character may be saying one thing, when they mean the opposite or something more than just what the words are saying. “I can’t go” could have a subtext of either “I am angry because my mother will not let me go” or, “I am frightened to leave the house.”

COMMENTING: An actor shows the audience what something **LOOKS LIKE** as opposed to actually **BECOMING OR DOING** that thing. The actor shows the audience what it looks like to be sad as opposed to investing emotionally in the sadness of this scene. The actor demonstrates the behaviors of a person who is hot as opposed to endowing themselves with the actually feeling of heat. Often called **SHOWING** or **TELEGRAPHING**. It could also mean a subconscious reveal of what the actor thinks about the character they are playing. “I personally think my character is a monster, so I do not allow myself to truthfully relish the nasty things I am doing as he or she actually would.”

“MAGIC IF”: Stanislavski’s concept in which with actor uses the imagination to envision themselves truthfully in a certain set of circumstance. The actor is obviously not the King of England, but can use their imagination to ask, “What IF I were the King of England?”

SENSE MEMORY: An actor uses his own personal sensory responses as a means of getting in touch with the ones needed for a play. The room is supposed to be extremely cold. Since the temperature onstage is not actually cold, the actor uses their personal memory of the sensation of being extremely cold and brings that to the play.

EMOTIONAL MEMORY: An actor uses the feelings and responses to his own personal memories and **TRANSFERS** their performance of the character. For example, my character loses their spouse. In preparing for the role, I use my own emotional memory of extreme loss to activate my character’s feeling of loss.

Course Structure: The classroom time will be divided into three areas:

1. Lecture/Discussion
2. Acting Exercises. The acting exercises, exploring various acting techniques, will be done in class. Certain exercises will require preparation outside of class. Exercises will be discussed and critiqued in class.

3. Performance Projects. The performance projects will be derived from dramatic text and assigned to students. These projects will require work outside of class. Performance projects will be discussed and critiqued in class:

Grading Criteria:

The grading in this class is, unavoidably, somewhat subjective. Your grades for each individual unit of study as well as specific assignments within each unit will be based on both how much concentrated effort you have devoted to the process of your learning and your work and what you have ultimately achieved. There are concrete goals that the student can strive to meet in pursuing a particular grade.

Important Information Related to Evaluation:

- All written work will be submitted to me on specified due dates. Written work must be word-processed. Performances will not be graded without assigned written work. AI-generated work, in whole or in part, will receive a grade of 0.
- Please note that the major portion of your overall grade in this course is participation. This means attend every class and participate fully!
- If it is thought that students are not reading material in a timely manner the professor may choose to give pop quizzes and/or assign essays.
- Performance Projects will each have a number of components that will be covered in graded homework assignments. This grading, when applicable to the project, will cover: Paperwork; Script Analysis; Character Preparation; Knowledge of Material; Memorization; Justification of Choices; Use of Techniques Learned in Class; Effort, Focus, Concentration; Cooperation with Scene Partner; and Ethics.

If you are scheduled to work on a given day and you are not prepared to work effectively and make good use of your in class coaching time, you will be asked to step down and we will move on to the next performer. Class time is everyone's time—coming to class unprepared, unable or unwilling to work is unfair to everyone.

- If you miss a class when you are scheduled to perform you will receive ZERO POINTS on the assignment. The project cannot be “made up”. Only excused medical or emergency absences will be tolerated and evidence of such must be submitted in order to have the opportunity to make up the missed work.

Here is a breakdown of what is expected of you as you present your scenework— as applicable to each particular project. Engaging in these “steps” as an actor, helps you cultivate work ethic and a working process.

FIRST ROUND:

1. Script analysis ready for oral defense. Receive suggestions for future research. 2. Verbally demonstrate your play/scene analysis in class. 3. Give an informed and impassioned reading. You are expected to show: a. beginning character analysis,
2. beginning physical and vocal characterization,
3. knowledge of all words and meaning of phrases,
4. use of the language,
5. ability to mean what you say,
6. awareness of builds, topping and cutbacks and
7. emotional commitment to the actions and objectives.

SECOND ROUND:

1. Demonstration of a fully memorized script.
2. Demonstration of 70% performance commitment to the character, “given circumstances” and style of the play.

“FINAL PASS” REQUIREMENTS:

1. Demonstration of a fully memorized script.
2. Demonstration of performance level physical and vocal characterization.
3. Demonstration of performance level emotional commitment to the situation
4. Demonstration of performance level playing of actions and bold choices.

Attendance

The great majority of work for this class happens during class time. Each student is expected to be here for every class---just as you are expected to show up at a job when scheduled to work or attend every rehearsal and performance when cast in a play. The

work you do in each class creates the foundation for every class that follows. Exercises, presentations, discussion, cannot be made up due to the simple fact that the class schedule is so packed full of graded activities and the amount of work that is to be accomplished in a semester's time. The one exception to this is if an absence is due to a documented medical issue. Furthermore, I hope you will come to see that acting is a social art, requiring you to participate collaboratively. In order to learn the skills of collaboration, you've got to be here.

Tardy/Attendance Policy Details

Tardy Policy:

One of the "golden rules" of the theatre and a basic expectation of behavior for everyone involved in production is that all participants are ready to work ON TIME. This is also an expectation in this class. Three tardies equal one absence.

Absence Policy:

You may receive three excused absences for official UNT related business, family emergencies, or illness. If you are ill, you must have a note from the doctor stating which days you were not allowed to attend any classes. • If you are involved in any special school function which may require you to miss a class please inform the professor ASAP. • Absence for a religious holiday is permitted with at least one week's notice. • After accumulating two unexcused absences the professor may exercise the option to administratively drop a student from the class.

Consider this:

An actor's professional work ethic begins in the classroom. If you have trouble being accountable to yourself and showing up for any class, perhaps you should consider a different profession....the "independent contractor lifestyle" is probably not your thing. Being on time is being 5 minutes early.

A few things to consider:

- Be supportive of your classmates. Remember you are part of an ensemble. The energy and perspective you bring to each class will impact "the whole". Each day we meet, consider how you are contributing to the class. • Reject jadedness and cynicism. • Beginners are on a quest. There are no stupid questions. Ask anything. • Do not expect perfection---embrace the concept of process. • If you are feeling fear or an unusual physical/emotional sensation allow it to resonate and breathe. This work will challenge you in these ways and ask you to go places you maybe never have. • Consider this class the perfect environment to take chances and risks....dive in! If you don't get to the place you shoot for, go for it again. • Be inquisitive.

General Class Information: Wear comfortable clothing that allows you to: • Fully stretch and move your whole body. • Comfortably lie on the floor.

Other: • Please turn off cell phones when you get to class. • Do not engage in other course work when you are in this class. • All students are expected to come to class prepared and to be focused on the day's work---even on days you are not scheduled to perform/work! • Please use common sense when it comes to hair, jewelry and piercings. Make sure your hair is out of your way. When it comes to jewelry, less is more in this class and if you have a piercing that could get ripped out or hurt a partner, take it out. If your tongue is pierced, please remove the tongue jewelry while in this class....it affects your speech and will be in your way in this class.

Departmental Policy: Open flame of any sort (smoking, candles, lighting matches or lighters) in scenes, monologues, improvisations or productions is not allowed. Any action of this sort must be pantomimed or cut.

Withdrawing from this course: Should you choose to drop this course, you must initiate the drop and acquire all of the proper signatures and paperwork. If that process is not completed, you will be subject to a WF or an F at the close of the semester American with Disabilities Act Notice The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

Student Obligations to Academic/Production Work

D/T students are expected to budget and organize their time and efforts in order to meet both their academic and production commitments satisfactorily and on time. The faculty and staff recognize that the academic and production assignments within the Department, as well as outside employment and other obligations, sometimes impose conflicting pressures on DT students. One of the principal responsibilities of each student is to carefully identify and monitor the commitments that comprise his/her departmental assignments and outside obligations. It is also important to keep in mind that production work and outside obligations do not constitute an excused absence from DT classes or from the completion of any required class assignments.

The SPOT evaluation of teaching is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you online at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider the SPOT evaluations to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Office of Disability Accommodation: The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student.

Departmental Theatrical Productions Fall 2026:

Each student is expected to see both Mainstage Theatre Department productions performed this semester. We will discuss productions as a class. You are also encouraged to see as many productions in the Dallas Metroplex as possible. Observation is a powerful teacher. You get a free ticket to each departmental production. It is your responsibility to reserve your ticket through the Theater Box Office.

More info at <http://danceandtheatre.unt.edu/productions-ticketpurchasing>

Professional Performances Students will receive extra credit for seeing a professional production in the DFW area and writing a review of it.

Written Work: All written assignments must be typed in a 12 point font, double spaced. Proper MLA format must be followed for all bibliographic citations. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling (especially titles of plays and playwrights) will be graded! All students are reminded that the UNT Writing Center (in Sage Hall, Room 150) is available for consultations—booking appointments earlier, rather than later, is strongly encouraged. You can email the Writing Center at writingcenter@unt.edu.

Recommended Texts,

Adler, Stella. *The Art of Acting*. Applause, 2000.

Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-actors*. Routledge, 1992. [L]
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Bogart, Anne & Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book*. TCG, 2004.

Chekhov, Michael. *On The Technique of Acting*. Harper-Collins, 1991.

Hagen, Uta. *Respect for Acting*. Macmillian, 1973.

Shurtleff, Michael. *Audition*. Bantam, 1980.

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theatre*. Cemrel, 1975.

Stanislavski, Konstantin. *An Actor's Work*. Routledge, 2008.

Course Assignments:

Personal Inventory	25 pts.
Pete and Harriet Scene Breakdown	10 pts.
Contentless Scene Analysis	25 pts.
Monologue #1 Paperwork	75 pts.
Monologue #1 Performance	75 pts.
Monologue #2 Paperwork	100 pts.
Monologue #2 Performance	100 pts.
Scene Paperwork	125 pts.
Scene Performance	125 pts.
Attendance	345 pts.

Total Possible Points 1000

Final Grade Breakdown

900-1000 pts = A

800-899 pts = B

700-799 pts = C

600-699 pts = D

below 599 pts = F

Rough Course Schedule:

8/17 Introduction, Review of Syllabus

8/19 Movement & Voice Warmups—Personal inventory introduced

8/24 Movement & Voice Warmups

8/26 Movement & Voice Warmups

Personal inventory DUE by 11:59 pm 8/30

8/31 Improv Work

9/02 Improv Work

9/07 LABOR DAY

9/09 Improv Work

9/14 Improv Work

9/16 Start Open Scenes

9/21 Open Scenes

Paperwork for Open Scenes DUE by 11:59 pm 9/22

9/23 Open Scene Presentations

9/28 Work Monologue #1

9/30 Monologue #1 1st Pass

10/05 Work Monologue #1

10/07 Monologue #1 2nd Pass

10/12 Work Monologue #1; Monologue #1 Paperwork DUE by 11:59 pm 10/13

10/14 Monologue #1 Final Pass

10/19 Work Monologue #2

10/21 Monologue #2 1st Pass

10/26 Work Monologue #2

10/28 Monologue #2 2nd Pass

11/02 Work Monologue #2; Monologue #2 Paperwork DUE by 11:59 pm 11/03

11/04 Monologue #2 Final Pass

11/09 Assign Scene

11/11 Scene 1st Pass;

11/16 Work Scene

11/18 Scene 2nd Pass

11/24, 26 THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/30 Work Scene; Scene Paperwork DUE by 11:59 pm 12/01

12/02 Scene Final Pass

Final Exam Day: TBA