

THEA 4310 Acting for the Camera: Fall 2025 // Wednesday 2:00PM to 5:50PM

Instructor: Nick Cutelli (he/him)

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Office Hours: Upon Request

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The exploration of camera acting and audition technique in order to prepare the student for the diverse opportunities in the medium, with an emphasis on building confidence with the camera, expanding acting range, and preparing for the profession.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Demonstrate basic on-camera acting performance techniques for a diverse range of projects
- Analyze the demands of screenplay and media script analysis and apply those observations to their performances
- Interact with and take direction from a film medium director
- Practice audition technique (including prepared auditions, cold reads, and taped submissions)
- Demonstrate a comprehension of basic camera and industry terminology and protocol
- Observe and discuss the lessons of existing on-camera performances from film and television and allow that to inform their own work
- Critique and offer feedback for both their own on-camera performances and those of their class colleagues
- Document information about the process of seeking agency representation, as well as other forms of marketing, promotion, and professional conduct.

By the end of this course, students will have a solid foundation in on-camera acting and a clear understanding of the professional expectations that await actors working in film, television, and commercial media. The focused work on improvisation, character development, and camera technique will help students expand their emotional range, increase their confidence, and develop a repeatable, personalized approach to acting on camera.

CLASS REQUIREMENTS:

Space/Equipment to film submissions for class

Assigned Text: Students will not be required to purchase books as PDF copies of assigned readings will be available through the instructor. All text used will be available on Canvas, One Drive, or hard copy.

Optional Text:

Long Form Improv Mastering the Scene - <https://a.co/d/79c3Dbi> - On Amazon

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater : A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1963.

Napier, Mick. *Improvise : Scene from the inside Out*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004.

ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY

Punctual attendance is critical for your success in the course. Thus, students are expected to be present and punctual for all classes.

The following policy is consistent with all acting courses in the department:

- Students are allowed no more than a total of TWO excused (2) absences during the semester for any reason.
- Students are considered tardy if they arrive for class no more than 30 minutes late. Arriving more than 30 minutes late for class is considered an **absence**.
- Students are expected to attend class for the duration of the period. Leaving class before then is considered an **absence**.
- An occurrence of tardiness for the class FOUR (4) times is the equivalent of ONE (1) **absence**.
- A total of THREE (3) absences means that the highest grade the student can earn in the class is an F.
- If the student accrues the fourth absence AFTER the last date on which a student may withdraw, that will result in a lowering of one letter grade in the class. If yet another absence occurs in that time period, this will result in a lowering of yet another letter grade.

Any student with an issue in the area of attendance and/or punctuality will be referred to the Acting Faculty for guidance.

The policy is not negotiable, as that would constitute holding one student to a different standard than all students in all acting classes.

If a student's absences have resulted in a grade with which they are not pleased, they may choose to withdraw from the class.

The professor's roll is the official record of absences and tardiness. At any point, the students are welcome to check the grade roster on Canvas to be sure that their attendance/punctuality record is accurate.

KEEPING IT REAL...

I am very aware that the unexpected comes up in life, and many times it is beyond your control. The attendance policy of acting classes in the Department of Dance and Theatre at UNT is set up to ALLOW for those occasional issues that may come up (illnesses, deaths in the family, emergencies, traffic, car trouble, unavoidable commitments, weather, etc.). All of these things could occur to you during the semester (even a couple of times). Please DO NOT ask for further leeway on this, because there is none. The leeway for these unexpected occurrences is already BUILT IN to the attendance policy. Do not ask me if there is any extra credit you can do to make up for excessive absence. Do not ask me to "work with you" on this issue. Changing the policy for you means that it must, in the interest of fairness, be changed for students in all acting classes. There is NO NEED to bring me a doctor's note when you are sick. If you tell me you were ill, I absolutely believe you.

The attendance policy already allows for the fact that you might get sick and miss a class or two as a result. However, there have to be limits, particularly since your absence may have an impact on a fellow actor. If you are ill and/or absent excessively, it means you are missing the actual content of the course. You are seeking to be a professional actor—get used to the fact that you simply have to BE THERE, and you have to be there ON TIME. Once you have used up the two excused absences (or the allowed amount of tardiness), I will treat absence and lateness as the INDUSTRY will treat them. It is important that you are aware of this before undertaking the challenge of the course.

GUIDELINES FOR THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Should online meetings of the class ever occur, it is expected that every student will practice virtual etiquette that is respectful to the class, the professor, and other students during these sessions. Adherence to appropriate virtual etiquette is factored into the student's grade. This includes the following:

- Log on at least a minute or two early; do not be surprised if you are counted late if you are not logged on to the virtual class when it starts.
- Do not attend class if you are unable to participate actively. Do not join the virtual classroom just to ignore it or walk away from it. If the instructor realizes this has occurred, your participation will be penalized, and you may be counted absent.
- Do not attend virtual class from your bed. While this is a virtual space, it is still a classroom. You will find it easier to pay attention, learn material, and complete your course work if you are seated at a table or desk.
- If you use a profile picture in virtual classroom, it should be a classroom-appropriate photo.
- Mute yourself unless you are making a presentation to the class or the instructor is seeking questions/comments from the class. For users in virtual classroom, the space bar acts as a quick unmute—press it down to speak on mic, then release the space bar to mute yourself again.
- You are expected to enable your video and remain on camera while class is in session, unless directed otherwise by the professor.
- Dress as if you are coming into a regular class.
- Make sure to illuminate your face with natural or artificial light so the instructor and others can see you clearly.
- Make sure there is nothing distracting or inappropriate in the background of your video feed.
- Try to avoid having other people enter and exit your frame to avoid distracting your classmates and instructor.
- If seeing yourself on camera distracts you, right-click on your own video feed in virtual classroom and choose HIDE SELF VIEW. This setting allows your instructor and classmates to see you, but you will not see yourself.
- Be careful when sharing your screen. You do not want your personal email, documents, or images to be displayed accidentally.
- Be aware everyone can see your messages in chat unless you have chosen to send the instructor a direct message. Private messages to other students are disabled to avoid distractions during class.
- Do not attend virtual class while operating a vehicle or doing anything else in which attending the virtual class at the same time may negatively impact your safety or the safety of others.
- Do not attend class in an unauthorized public space where others will see/hear the class. Your privacy and the privacy of your classmates is federally protected.
- If you know that you are unable to attend a class meeting, contact the instructor in advance to receive a recording of the class that you can watch later.
- Do not share the web URL for our virtual classroom class with anyone outside of class. If class is “virtual classroom bombed” because you shared the link, administration will be notified and will enact sanctions up to and including removal from the course and possible expulsion from the university.
- If the class is “bombed,” the instructor will first attempt to mute and boot the unwanted person from the meeting. If this is not possible or fails to stop the disruption, the instructor will end the meeting, create a new meeting link, and email it to you in short order.

STUDENT OBLIGATION TO ACADEMIC/PRODUCTION WORK

Dance & Theater 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 main responsibilities of each student is to identify carefully 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.

ACCOMMODATION FOR DISABILITIES

The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation: reference Public Law 92-112—The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

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 PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING (SPOT)

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. For additional information, please visit the SPOT website at www.spot.unt.edu or email spot@unt.edu.

The Department of Dance and Theatre also offers face-to-face SPOT evaluations, if the student wishes. Ask your professor for details if you wish to pursue that option.

ACCEPTABLE STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom, and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr.

ASSIGNMENTS:

All assignments' due dates and descriptions are listed in the syllabus. Assignment due dates are unlikely to shift for any reason. Late assignments must be discussed with the instructor before the due date. If there is no communication about a late assignment, the student will receive an automatic 0.

Please note that for each film project, students will be provided with a script or storyboard and will be required to prepare an on-camera character map to guide their performance and present to the class.

- **SLATE**
 - Your slate is your professional introduction—often the first thing casting directors see in a self-tape audition. This short video should clearly and confidently present who you are, while demonstrating strong camera presence and awareness. It's not about performing a character; it's about being authentically you and showing a little of your personality that matches the tone of the project you're auditioning for.
- **COMMERCIAL #1**
 - This assignment challenges you to create a compelling character and tell a short story using only one line of dialogue and a strong reaction to a product. You'll use improvisation to shape the character's personality and show how the product impacts their point of view—all while staying natural and camera-ready.
- **COMMERCIAL #2**
 - For this assignment, you'll deliver a direct-to-camera product description using a corporate-style marketing script. The focus is on creating a strong, engaging character who can bring life, clarity, and personality to otherwise straightforward material. Your goal is to make the copy feel natural, compelling, and uniquely your own—while staying true to the tone of the brand, but also using improv to add texture to the performance to give it “character ownership.”
- **MOS #1 - Focused in intimate**
 - In this dramatic, dialogue-free scene, you'll tell a complete emotional story using only your face and eyes. The performance will be filmed in extreme close-up, emphasizing subtlety and inner life. Your challenge is to create a clear, compelling moment where the audience understands what your character is experiencing—without saying a word.
- **MOS #2 - wide physical comedic**
 - This assignment focuses on comedic physicality. Filmed in a wide shot, you'll use your full body to express a character's reaction to a surprising or absurd situation—with no dialogue. Timing, movement, and clear emotional shifts are key. The goal is to create a funny, visual story that plays well without sound, much like a physical comedy beat in a commercial or sitcom.
- **PSA - Straight into camera**
 - In this assignment, you'll deliver a direct-to-camera monologue designed to inform, persuade, or inspire action on a social issue. Your challenge is to approach the material with sincerity, clarity, and emotional connection, making the message feel authentic—not performative. Whether serious or uplifting, the goal is to present a grounded, believable character who genuinely cares about the cause.
- **FILM MONOLOGUE**
 - You will perform a film or TV monologue in two distinct versions, both shot in an over-the-shoulder framing to mimic a standard on-set setup. The first version will be a faithful interpretation of the script, focusing on clarity, emotional truth, and connection. The second version will allow for added character texture—bringing in improvisational nuance, instinctual choices, and subtle adjustments to deepen the character's voice and presence. This exercise develops your ability to personalize material while working within professional camera constraints.

- **FILM SCENE (Partnered)**

- You will perform a scripted two-person scene from a film or television show, shot in a standard over-the-shoulder/reverse coverage style. This assignment emphasizes listening, reacting, and maintaining emotional continuity across takes. You'll rehearse with a partner and perform two versions: one grounded and true to the script, and a second that incorporates improvisational character texture and moment-to-moment exploration. This mirrors how actors are expected to bring something fresh to each take while staying within the structure of a professional set.

- **FINAL**

- Your final project is a four-part solo scene submission that demonstrates your complete on-camera process—from audition to performance—
- This final assignment draws on all major techniques covered in the course, including improvisation, script analysis, MOS storytelling, and monologue delivery.
 - You will submit the following:
 - **Audition SLATE**
A SLATE and the answer the following question. "Who am I as an on camera actor?"
 - **Storyboard of the shots in your scene**
A professional clean storyboard that clearly shows the camera angles you will be using in your scene.
 - **MOS Sequence** (1 minute)
A short, non-verbal moment performed in wide and close-up framing. This shows the character in a natural setting or emotional moment leading into the monologue—using only physical behavior, facial expression, and timing.
 - **Monologue** (45 Seconds)
A fully performed scripted monologue that represents the emotional or narrative arc of the character. This should feel like a natural continuation of the MOS moment. Monologue must include at least 2 different shots.
 - **Reflection** (Separate File Submission)
A (1–2 page or video blog) reflection

- **SELF CRITIQUES (6 Total)**

- Throughout the semester, you will complete five self-critiques, each submitted after key assignments. These critiques are your opportunity to reflect on your process, preparation, instincts, and on-camera performance. Each self-critique should be submitted before the following class session and will be guided by specific prompts provided on Canvas. You'll be asked to evaluate your character choices, emotional clarity, technical execution (framing, sound, lighting), and overall growth. Honest, thoughtful reflection is the goal—not perfection. This can be written or video blog.

- **TERMINOLOGY QUIZ**

- This quiz will test your knowledge of basic on-camera terminology, industry language, and set protocol. Understanding terms like "eyeline," "MOS," "mark," "slate," and "coverage" is essential for navigating auditions and professional film sets with confidence and clarity. The quiz will be short and straightforward, designed to ensure you're familiar with the vocabulary we've used throughout the course. Think of it as part of your toolkit for being a prepared and professional on-set actor.

BREAKDOWN:

SLATE	5pts
COMMERCIAL #1	5pts
COMMERCIAL #2	5pts
MOS #1	5pts
MOS #2	5pts
PSA	5pts
FILM MONOLOGUE	5pts
FILM SCENE	10pts
FINAL	23pts
SELF CRITIQUES (6x2pt)	12pts
TERMINOLOGY QUIZ	10pts
PARTICIPATION	10pts
Total:	100 Points

GRADE TABLE:

A- 100-90

B- 89-80

C- 79-70

D -69-65

F - 65 or below

SUBMISSION EXPECTATIONS

Your work in this course will be evaluated not only on performance quality but also on your professional preparation and engagement. Each assignment should reflect thoughtful, technical, and creative effort. Submissions will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- **Level of Preparation**
Proper setup for camera work, including lighting, sound, framing, reader (if needed), and use of required materials (e.g., USB drive or digital upload). Outside rehearsal time is expected.
- **Memorization**
Lines should be fully memorized unless otherwise specified. Memorization allows for deeper character exploration and more truthful performances.
- **Clarity of Given Circumstances & Text Analysis**
Your performance should reflect a clear understanding of the character's situation, emotional arc, and objectives, even when the script is minimal or abstract.
- **Application of Technique**
You should demonstrate your ability to integrate and explore the techniques and concepts discussed in class, including improvisational tools, physicality, emotional connection, and camera awareness.

SCHEDULE:

*This schedule is subject to change // *All Self Critique Due Dates are in **BOLD**. **

Class 1 – Syllabus and Intro - August 20th

In Class:

Intro and Syllabus review. Introduction to the Spolin-Close method of acting. Review the actors slate.

Discussion Questions:

What is the differences between the theatre and film worlds? How does the actors responsibilities change?

What is an actor trying to convey in a slate?

How does the slate change in relation to the audition project given circumstances?

Homework:

Actor SLATE's

Class 2 – Slate and the Commercial Character - August 27th

Due: Actor SLATE's

In Class:

Present Slates, terminology lecture, and introduction to the world of commercial acting. The approach of creating a strong character for the camera through a character map.

Discussion Questions:

Who is the main character in commercial acting?

What is the character energy in commercial acting?

Why is character important in a commercial?

What is the story that the character tells in a commercial?

Homework:

Actor Slate SELF CRITIQUES

Class 3 – Commercial Rough Drafts - September 3rd

Due: Self Crit #1 Due on SLATES

In Class:

Terminology Quiz

Commercial 1 & 2 Script/Storyboard Review

Commercial Character rough draft studio work

Discussion Questions:

What was your path to your character choices?

Homework:

Film Commercial 1 & 2

Class 4 – Commercial Presentation and intro to MOS Camera Acting - September 10th

Due: Commercials 1 & 2

In Class:

Present Commercial Projects and discuss

Introduction lecture to Motor Only Camera acting and the internal monologue telling a story with your eyes.

Discussion Questions:

What is the relationship between the actors script and their body? What is the disconnect?

How does your face and body communicate story differently when there's no script?

Homework:

Commercial - SELF CRITIQUES

Class 5 – MOS Studio Work Day - September 17th

Due: Self Crit #2 Commercials

In Class:

MOS 1 & 2 Scripts/Storyboards Review / MOS 1 & 2 studio rehearsal rough draft work

Discussion Questions:

Why does silent acting have a stronger presence on camera verses stage?

How is stillness used effectively in MOS acting?

If your MOS scene had been scored with music, what kind would you choose?

Homework:

Film MOS 1 & 2

Class 6 –MOS Project and the intro to the PSA - September 24th

Due: MOS 1 & 2

In Class:

Present MOS projects and discuss

Introduction lecture to PSA's

Discussion Questions:

What makes a PSA performance feel authentic instead of preachy or staged?

How do you personally balance emotional truth with delivering a message?

What challenges did you face trying to connect with the material in a PSA format?

What kinds of real-life PSAs do you remember watching, and why did they stick with you?

Homework:

MOS 1&2 SELF CRITIQUES

Class 7 – PSA Studio Work Day - October 1st

Due: Self Crit #3 MOS

In Class:

Assign PSA Script/Storyboard / PSA studio work day

Discussion Questions:

If your character wasn't scripted but was based on a real person affected by this issue, how would that shift your approach?

What kind of responsibility do actors have when portraying serious subjects?

How can improvisation help in preparing a PSA performance?

Homework:

Film PSA

Class 8 – PSA Presentations and on to the monologue - October 8th

Due: PSA

In Class:

Present PSA projects and discuss

Intro lecture to the Filmed Monologue the detailed script verses the vague.

Discussion Questions:

How does a PSA differ from a commercial audition in tone, energy, and objective?

What professional challenges do actors face when delivering real-world advocacy messages on camera?

How does the industry handle socially sensitive topics? What responsibilities do actors have in those moments?

Homework:

PSA SELF CRITIQUES

Class 9 – Monologue Studio Day - October 15th

Due: Self Crit #4 PSA

In Class:

Assign Monologues Scripts/Storyboards / Monologue studio work day

Discussion Questions:

What's the biggest difference between performing a monologue for stage versus camera?

How do you keep a monologue feeling like a real conversation, even though no one is responding?

Where is your eyeline during this monologue? How does that choice affect the viewer's connection to you?

How do you adjust your energy and physicality for the frame you're in (close-up vs medium shot)?

Homework:

Film Monologue

Class 10 –Monologue Presentation and now onto Partner Scenes - October 22nd

Due: Filmed Monologues

In Class:

Present Monologues and discuss

Intro lecture to 2 person filmed scenes

Discussion Questions:

How do you think working with a scene partner will change your process compared to solo work?

What are the new challenges when sharing a scene on camera (blocking, eye lines, continuity)?

How can you keep your instincts alive while staying in frame and hitting technical marks?

What does “listening on camera” actually look like? How can you tell if you’re doing it authentically?

How will your approach to improvisation shift now that you have another actor influencing the moment?

Homework:

Monologue SELF CRITIQUES

Class 11 – Partner Scene Studio Day - October 29th

Due: Self Crit #5 DUE- Film Monologue

In Class:

Assign Partner Scripts/Storyboard // Partner Scene studio work day

Discussion Questions:

What new challenges or discoveries came up?

Did you and your partner try any improvised moments during rehearsal? What did you discover from that?

How can improvisation help actors stay flexible during multiple takes on set?

Were there any moments where your scene went in a new direction because of your partner’s choices?

Homework:

Film Partner Scene

Class 12 - Partner Scene Presentations - November 5th

Due: Partner Scene Presentations

In Class:

Present Partner Scenes and Discuss

Lecture about Self Tape Auditions

Discussion Questions:

What’s the biggest difference between preparing for a self-tape and an in-person audition?

How does that difference affect your performance energy or choices?

How many takes did you record before you felt satisfied?

What made the final take feel “right”?

Homework:

PARTNER SCENE SELF CRITIQUE

Class 13 – Self Tape Auditions and Improv Auditions - November 12th

Due: Self Crit #6 Partner Scenes

In Class:

Self Tape Improv auditions work shop - When you get an audition and there isn't a script to work with.

Guest Lecturer: Talent Agent Sarah Rhodes from Mary Collins // Final Project Review

Discussion Questions:

What tools from our improvisation work helped you succeed in this moment?

What was your first instinct when you were told there was no script?

Homework:

Start working on your Final Project

Class 14 – Final Project Studio Day - November 19th

In Class:

Work on Final Projects and present outlines

Discussion Questions:

How does your MOS moment emotionally set up the monologue that follows?

What choices are you making physically to show that connection without using words?

What makes your self-tape audition feel unique to *you* as an actor?

Are you making bold, instinctual choices that casting would remember?

How are you using improvisation to discover or deepen your character across all three pieces?

Has anything unexpected emerged from this process?

Does your character feel consistent across the audition, MOS, and monologue?

If not, what adjustments can you make to unify your performance?

Homework:

Complete Final Project

Class 15 Final Project Due - December 3rd

Due: Final Project

In Class:

Present Final Projects and Discuss each student will get 15 minutes // Discussion The on camera actor as the film maker

Homework:

None

Class 16 Final Project Post Mortem and Industry Day - December 10th

In Class:

Continue discussions on final projects

Lecture on the industry of film/tv/commercial and student Q & A.

Discussion Questions:

What do you think casting directors are really looking for in a self-tape or live audition?

How can actors stand out while still serving the script and the brand?

How does the process of being cast in a commercial differ from film or television?

What do each of these mediums prioritize in performance style, presence, or “look”?

What are some common myths about working in film/TV/commercials—and what’s the reality?

Where do those myths come from, and how do they affect how actors train or prepare?

What are the professional expectations for actors on set?

What does being “set ready” look like beyond memorizing lines?

How important is typecasting, and how can actors use it to their advantage?

What “types” do you think you might get cast as right now—and how can you stretch beyond that?

What’s the role of improvisation in the professional on-camera world?

Have you seen examples of unscripted moments becoming key parts of commercials or scenes?

How does social media, personal branding, and self-promotion affect on-camera careers today?

What’s your comfort level with promoting yourself as a working actor?

What are the biggest challenges new actors face in breaking into the industry—and what skills or habits can help overcome them?

How do things like rejection, networking, and day jobs factor into the reality of the work?

How can actors continue to grow and train while pursuing on-camera work?

What tools, communities, or routines help keep actors sharp?

What do you want your career in this industry to look like—and what small steps can you take now to start building that path?

What are you doing today that your future self will thank you for?

Homework: Have an amazing end of the semester.