

ACTING: REALISM

Developing a Process for Creating a Character for the Stage

Fall 2017

THEA 3050.002 and THEA 3050.302 (Lab)

Mondays and Wednesdays 11:00a – 1:20p

RTFP 127

3 Units

Professor Bob Hess

RTFP 222

Office Phone (940) 565-2132

Office Hours Mondays 1:30p – 2:00p, Wednesdays 1:30p – 2:30p, or by appointment

For Class Correspondence: ActingRealism@aol.com

I. PREREQUISITES

The department requires a completion of Acting Fundamentals, Voice I, and Movement I (or an equivalent of each of these courses which has been approved by the university), with a grade of C or better, before students may enroll in this course.

II. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

In this course, the actor will begin to formulate his or her own individual process for creating a role in a play grounded in psychological truth. Students will study a number of well-known, established methods for investigating the creation of a character for the stage, including processes (and some exercises) that the iconic teachers associated with these methods have employed. This exploration will provide a means by which the actor can discover what works best for his/her needs.

In addition, the culmination of the semester's work will involve the students undertaking the process of studying the text of a play grounded in psychological realism, with particular focus on understanding what information about a character the author gives to us that will serve our realistic portrayal of that character, how a writer uses language, the possibilities that language affords us as actors, and bringing a truthful portrayal of that character to the stage. The class will collectively read this play, examining it closely *from the perspective of the actor*. From there, scenes from the examined play will be undertaken for performance by the students. Actors will then, after using the information they have learned about these different approaches, gain a deeper understanding of what works best for them.

Acting Realism Fall 2017

III. CONTENT OF MATERIAL

Please be advised that this class contains the development of text and actions that may be considered offensive to some. You may encounter literary and directorial points of view that differ from your own. If you choose to take the course, you must perform the roles in which you are cast. You are required to speak the text as written and to fulfill the actions the author describes.

IV. TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The course will be taught through a combination of lecture discussing the history and content of various methods of approaching a character, exercises that are part of these methods, group discussion and analysis of text, peer and instructor observations, scene performance and critique, and written analysis of the class work and literature.

At times it may be necessary to ask the students to demonstrate or find a more appropriate physical movement or posture for a scene, to observe the instructor demonstrating a more appropriate physical movement or posture, and/or for the instructor to assist the student in developing that physical movement or posture. Students should be prepared for an appropriate degree of physical contact with other students in the context of scene work. Any student with concerns about being touched must notify the instructor immediately following the first class meeting.

V. CLASS PROCEDURES

PROTOCOL

It is critical, in a class of this nature, that you give your undivided attention and support to your classmates during exercises and presentations. Skilled observation is a key element of the course. Absolutely no cell phone usage (particularly TEXT MESSAGING), learning of lines, Internet (particularly FACEBOOK) browsing, studying for exams in other classes is allowed during the class. Students are also requested not to enter or leave the classroom while a student is performing or being critiqued.

COMMUNICATION

Information regarding class will be distributed in class, via email (which is to be checked regularly—YOUR responsibility), or text messages. Again, it is YOUR responsibility to be informed. Your instructor is ALWAYS available to you through emails or scheduled appointments to discuss any specific issues or questions you may have about the class. I can promise you a swift reply (within 24 hours) to any inquiry or comment you have.

Acting Realism Fall 2017

STANDARDS FOR WRITTEN WORK

All written work must be typed, spellchecked, stapled (NOT dog-eared), and double-spaced in 12-pt. font, with no larger than 1" margins on ANY page, including the first one.

ATMOSPHERE OF SUPPORT & RESPECT

The most critical element of the course rests in students' ability to observe closely and carefully what is going on with their own work as artists. In addition, observation of both your instructor and your peers will provide valuable insight. This requires a safe, unthreatening, nonjudgmental environment of sensitivity, honesty, support, and openness. Each student is at a different place in his or her journey as an artist. Consequently, the instructor will always phrase observations in an appropriate light for where YOU are in your growth as an artist.. Every student is expected to show exactly the same respect in their own observations. Only in building this atmosphere of complete artistic empathy, safety, and trust can we grow. We must act as a supportive company of actors to maximize our success and growth.

VI. TEXTS

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Bartlett, Mike. *An Intervention*. London: Paines Plough, 2014. ISBN# 978-1-84842-383-1

Bartow, Arthur, ed. *Training of the American Actor*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006. ISBN# 1-55936-268-5.

**You will also need a notebook of some kind for recording observations and class notes.

VII. GRADING

You will be graded in two areas:

Two-thirds of your grade will be determined by your WORK ETHIC.

One-third of your grade will be determined by your PERFORMANCE SKILLS.

WORK ETHIC (2/3 of your course grade)

Your grade in this area is determined by your achievement in SEVEN areas: In-class Exercises, Performance Projects, Quizzes, Written Assignments, Attendance, Punctuality, and Adherence to Class Procedures and Policies.

Acting Realism Fall 2017

Your numerical grade in the area of WORK ETHIC will be determined by the number of POINT DEDUCTIONS you acquire during the semester. Students may inquire at any point in the semester as to the number of deductions they have accrued to that point. It is up to YOU to stay on top of this. I will NOT send updates as you accrue points or drop to a lower grade. These POINT DEDUCTIONS are determined as follows:

IN-CLASS EXERCISES

All methodologies studied will be accompanied by various exercises to be done in class. A lack of preparation for a class exercise will result in a HALF-POINT deduction and forfeit your pass at that exercise.

PERFORMANCE PROJECTS

The class will complete several performances, both solo and duo, of material from varied sources. Your work with a partner from an assigned play will actually be used as the Final Exam of the class. Both solo and duo performances must be completed in order to pass the course.

One aspect of your grade on these performance projects will be determined by the work ethic with which you approach it. For some of these projects, it is likely that I will make myself available to you outside of regularly scheduled class time for assistance in blocking and text work on your scene, since this is a class in acting and not directing. For duo scenes, you and your partner are expected to have had at least ONE rehearsal on your own (not in class) prior to your private coaching session. After the private coaching session, you and your scene partner are expected to have, at the minimum, TWO rehearsals on your own before your first in-class pass and two more before your final pass. A scene which is clearly not ready to be performed because the actor has not learned lines and blocking will be stopped, and you (and your partner, in the case of a duo) will forfeit that private coaching session or in-class performance, which will result in ONE **FULL** POINT deduction. Presenting a scene to us that you have not rehearsed is a disrespectful waste of the class's time. YOU will be expected to organize your own rehearsals outside of class and find your own rehearsal space. You reserve space in the office. Make sure that times and places are clearly decided upon. In the case of a duo, once a plan is made, you must be there, as the other actor is affected by your punctuality and presence. **If any actor encounters problematic absence, lateness, or poor work ethic with a partner, even if just on an exercise, you must contact the instructor immediately.** I absolutely understand that a lack of preparation may be the fault of one actor and not the other, so PLEASE MAKE ME AWARE IMMEDIATELY if there is a problem in this area. I cannot help you if you do not let me know. If you wait until the actual day of your performance to inform me of a problem, BOTH actors in the scene will be given the deduction. Take responsibility for your own performances and exercises by making the professor aware of any difficulties you are experiencing. Rehearsal set pieces, costumes, hairstyles, and props, as needed, are YOUR responsibility. In particular, one of the major lessons the course teaches us is that appropriate wardrobe and props for the character you are playing in the scene are critical to the truthful creation of that scene.

QUIZZES

Students are expected to complete all reading assignments connected with the course. You will frequently be quizzed about the content of the assigned reading. These quizzes are not particularly difficult (you will even be given some introductory lecture about the material in preparation), and a student who has thoughtfully read the text and reviewed class notes will usually not have any difficulty at all passing them. A student who does not receive a B or better on any of these quizzes will receive a ONE HALF POINT deduction. An actor needs to have a command of language, so spelling and grammar ARE addressed here, although grammar and spelling will not be the reason you do not pass a quiz. If you are not in the habit of reading carefully and thoroughly for content, this is a good time to improve that skill. Actors **MUST** be able to understand and interpret text on a very deep level (both for concrete facts and inferences).

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Students will be given a handful of written assignments related to the work in the class, the majority of which involve simply articulating your own response to a particular exercise. Thorough, thoughtful observation of your work is critical, possibly at a deeper level than you have ever experienced before. While they are not assigned a numerical grade, each of these written assignments must be completed to a satisfactory level of content and length, as determined by your instructor. You may be requested by the professor to make revisions or expand your ideas more thoroughly and re-submit the work at the next class meeting. If a student does not turn in a written assignment at the due date, he or she will receive ONE HALF POINT deduction, and an additional ONE HALF POINT deduction, for every class period that passes until the assignment is turned in.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS MAY NOT BE SUBMITTED BY EMAIL. IF YOU ARE ABSENT FROM CLASS THE DAY AN ASSIGNMENT IS DUE, YOU MAY TURN IT IN THE NEXT TIME YOU ATTEND CLASS WITHOUT PENALTY. I WILL NOT WAIT AROUND AFTER CLASS FOR YOU TO PRINT A PAPER FOR ME OR ALLOW YOU TO LEAVE CLASS TO PRINT A PAPER. PROBLEMS WITH YOUR PRINTERS ARE YOURS TO SOLVE.

ATTENDANCE

Missing the class is, in effect, missing out on the course itself. The work simply cannot be made up independently, so it factors in heavily. Your first absence from class will result in ONE FULL POINT deduction. A second absence will result in a ONE AND A HALF POINT DEDUCTION. And a third absence will result in a TWO POINT DEDUCTION. To demonstrate how strongly I feel about this, I will credit everyone in the class ONE FULL POINT for any class for which I do not show up. If I do it a second time, I will credit you all ONE AND A HALF POINTS. A third time, TWO POINTS. This does not include a class where I have a substitute or give you advance notice that we will not be meeting on a particular day.

A student who enters the class more than 30 minutes late can still attend, but they will be counted absent, unless permission has been granted by the instructor in advance.

Acting Realism Fall 2017

There is also an overriding policy as to the limits of how many times a student may be absent from class before being dropped from the course. (See Item VIII, *ABSENTEEISM POLICY*, for specifics.)

PUNCTUALITY

Tardiness is a DREADFUL habit for actors to acquire. It makes you less marketable, will quickly attach itself to your reputation, and result in you not being cast (or ever being fired!). A student who arrives after class has begun (promptly at 11:00a) will receive ONE HALF POINT deduction. A student who leaves class before dismissal (regardless of the reason) will receive ONE HALF POINT deduction. If you have a tendency to be late, let's work on losing that tendency this semester. To demonstrate how strongly I feel about this, I will credit everyone in the class ONE HALF POINT every time I am late for class. This is, of course, not applicable to any class where a guest artist or substitute is covering for me or a late start has been planned in advance.

ADHERENCE TO CLASS PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

The class will require that you, from time to time, bring certain materials with you that are necessary for an exercise or scene, such as particular scenery, props, or costume pieces (particularly FOOTWEAR). Coming to class without the necessary materials to do the work will result in a ONE HALF POINT deduction. This includes REHEARSALS done in class or privately with the professor.

I will be communicating with you a great deal through email this semester to clarify the specifics of assignments and affirm deadlines. YOU are responsible for checking for these emails. You will even be notified, for a time, by text that you have an email to read. A handful of the emails will even ask for a confirmation response because of the importance of the content. If you do not respond by to an email requesting a response by midnight on the night before the next class, you will receive a ONE HALF POINT deduction. Email communication is extremely frequent in our business. You HAVE to be responsible and proactive about staying on top of it.

Finally, focus is pivotal in the success of your growth this semester, so the class atmosphere must be as maximally conducive to that as possible. You are to turn your phones, iPads, and laptops OFF before class begins. If you turn them on at break, you must turn them off again before we begin. During presentations and work sessions, students will all place their phones in a designated area to avoid the temptation. If a student's cell phone rings or vibrates during class, or if a student sends, receives a notification of, or reads a text message, Facebook message, or email during the class (breaks not included), this will result in a ONE HALF POINT deduction. A director in a professional rehearsal may not be as nice about it.

If you prefer (or need) to take notes on an iPad, laptop, or cell phone, this is acceptable. But understand that I will be extremely displeased if I see you sneaking alternative uses of the device in between the note taking. I am quite aware how easy it is to do that. You have been warned.

Acting Realism Fall 2017

OVERVIEW OF WORK ETHIC POINT DEDUCTIONS

ONE HALF-POINT DEDUCTION

Not being prepared for an exercise

Tardiness

Turning in written assignments late (and each late day accrues an additional half point)

A grade below B on a Reading Quiz

Cell phone going off or use of cell phone during class

Lack of responsiveness to email communication requesting a response

Lack of materials for a performance presentation, such as costumes or props

ONE-POINT DEDUCTION

First absence

Not being prepared for performance presentations (inability to get through the scene)

ONE-AND-A-HALF POINT DEDUCTION

Second absence

TWO-POINT DEDUCTION

Third absence

At the conclusion of the course, your deduction points will be totaled and your WORK ETHIC grade for the course will be as follows:

<u>DEDUCTIONS</u>	<u>NUMERICAL GRADE</u>
0 points	100
.5 – 1 points	98
1.5 – 2 points	95
2.5 – 3 points	92
3.5 – 4 points	90
4.5 – 5 points	85
5.5 – 6 points	80
6.5 – 7 points	75
7.5 – 8 points	70
8.5 – 9 points	65
More than 9 points	60

PERFORMANCE SKILLS (one-third of your course grade)

Your grade (on a scale of 0 – 100) in this area is determined by your achievement in EIGHT areas: Preparation, Vocal Skill, Physical Skill, Understanding of the Text, Intention/Objective, Believability/Emotional Truth, Connection to the Other Actor, and Growth/Application of Concepts on a Final Exam scene. Here is a general overview of the eight areas of focus:

PREPARATION (10 points)

This area involves having necessary and specific scenery, props, costumes, hairstyle, and possibly even minor technical effects (such as sound cues) necessary for the scene in order to enhance the performance. It also includes the degree to which staging and lines have been solidly learned *as the author wrote them*, free of paraphrasing, ad libs, hesitation, and prompting.

VOCAL SKILL (10 points)

The actors should be using his vocal instrument properly with well-supported sound, free of tension. This also notes the degree to which the actor is able to be heard and understood, as well as the vocal quality of the actor and its consistency with the character they are playing.

PHYSICAL SKILL (10 points)

The actor's physical presence and movement in the scene should be truthful and completely in synch with the character they are playing, while also relaxed and free of the actor's own personal tensions and habits. The actor's physicality should reflect the intentions of the character.

UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEXT (10 points)

The actor's performance of the role should reflect that they grasp the content of what their character is saying—what the words actually mean (and how they are PRONOUNCED) as spoken by the character.

INTENTION/OBJECTIVE (15 points)

The actor must be connected to and clear in objective throughout, not only from moment to moment, but in terms of the overriding objective of the entire scene.

BELIEVABILITY/EMOTIONAL TRUTH (15 points)

The actor must be connected to the emotional reality of the character on a truthful level. This is the primary goal of the entire course, and one of the most difficult—the truthful engagement of the emotional life of a character.

CONNECTION TO THE OTHER ACTOR (10 points)

If another character (or even the audience) is being addressed in the scene (which is even true in a solo performance), the actor must make a strong connection through genuine, truthful listening and responding.

GROWTH/APPLICATION OF CONCEPTS (20 points)

This evaluates if the student is indeed using the concepts learned in the curriculum and applying them to his or her work. This includes how well the student has taken the direction given by the professor in rehearsals and applied it to the final performance..

****ONCE YOUR SCORES FOR WORK ETHIC AND PERFORMANCE SKILLS ARE DETERMINED AND AVERAGED, THAT NUMERICAL GRADE CORRESPONDS TO A LETTER GRADE FOR THE COURSE AS FOLLOWS:**

- A 90 or higher**
- B 80 – 89**
- C 70 – 79**
- D 65 – 69**
- F 64 or below**

VIII. ABSENTEEISM POLICY

Absenteeism has an effect on the WORK ETHIC grade of the student (as noted in the above description of how the WORK ETHIC grade is determined), but there must be limits to just how many absences a student can have before being dropped from the roster of the class. Students are allowed *no more than THREE* absences from class. If a student is absent a **FOURTH** time from class, they will be dropped from the roster by the professor. This is the attendance policy of the class. It is not negotiable.

*****I am very aware that the unexpected comes up in life, and many times it is beyond your control. The grading system is set up to ALLOW for those occasional issues that may come up (illnesses, deaths in the family, emergencies, traffic, unavoidable commitments, weather, etc.). All of these things could occur to you during the semester (even a couple of times), yet you could still earn an A in the course. DO NOT ask for further leeway on this, because there is none. The leeway for these unexpected occurrences is already BUILT IN to the grading system. There is NO NEED to bring me a doctor's note when you are sick. If you tell me you were ill, I believe you. The grading system 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. If you are ill and/or absent excessively, it means you are missing the actual content of the course.***

Acting Realism Fall 2017

The only absences which would not be counted toward your total would occur if you were involved in a departmental production-related activity that took place DURING CLASS. This is extremely rare.

If a student accrues a fourth absence AFTER work has begun on the last scene presentation of the semester, they will not be dropped from the course, as this will have a negative effect on their acting partner. The absences will, however, continue to accrue points at two points per absence. It will likely be difficult for this student to achieve a grade above a C, as their WORK ETHIC grade would be no higher than 75.

IX. EXTRA CREDIT

There is NO “extra credit” available in the class (except, for example, the very unlikely possibility outlined in *ITEM X Juries*). Please do not inquire if there is some “additional work you can do to boost your grade.” Your grade is based on the criteria set forth in this syllabus.

X. JURIES

For some students in the class, the duo scene work used in your final exam will also be performed the preceding week as a JURY presentation for the faculty professors of performance. Based on the aforementioned PERFORMANCE SKILL criteria, the jury will collectively give each student’s jury performance a “PASS,” “PASS WITH CONSIDERATIONS,” or “NOT PASS” evaluation. In order to enroll in the upper level ACTING classes in the department (Shakespeare, Acting Styles, Acting for the Camera, and Musical Theater), a student must receive a “PASS” or “PASS WITH CONSIDERATIONS” from the jury. If a student receives a “NOT PASS” from the jury, it means the performance professors feel the student needs to repeat the Realism class for reinforcement of skills before going on to more advanced training. A student may repeat Realism class ONE TIME only. If a student takes the class twice and does not receive a “PASS” or “PASS WITH CONSIDERATIONS” from the jury the second time, the department will meet with the student to discuss his best course of study from that point.

The “PASS WITH CONSIDERATIONS” rating means that, although there may be some specific areas for the actor that need extra attention (such as articulation issues or physical tension), their overall achievement warrants continuation to upper level classes. The considerations that the jury has noted will be outlined in the results that the student receives.

In addition to a “PASS” or “PASS WITH CONSIDERATIONS” from the jury, a passing grade of C in the course itself is also necessary for admission to upper level acting classes.

Jury results will be made available to the student before the end of Finals Week. Students receiving a “PASS WITH CONSIDERATIONS” will be scheduled a time to speak with the lead acting instructor of the department for jury feedback. Students receiving a ”PASS” may also request such a meeting, but it is not mandatory.

No numerical grade is given by the professor on the jury performances. They do not factor into the course grade in any way.

****PLEASE NOTE**

The jury evaluation only affects entry into upper level ACTING classes. It has NO BEARING on a student’s ability to take the upper level DIRECTING class. A passing grade of C in the class alone allows entry into the upper level DIRECTING course.

Not all students are required to complete the jury process. If a student does not seek enrollment in upper level acting courses, is graduating from UNT at the end of the current semester, or has a degree plan that predates implementation of the jury process at UNT, he/she will not need to participate in the jury. A student with a degree plan that predates the implementation of the jury process will need only a C or better in the class to advance to the upper level acting classes.

Circumstances MAY possibly lead to a situation where an uneven number of students are required or wish to participate in the jury process. In this case, one student (preferably one who does not need to do the jury) will be asked to participate in assistance to another class member. The professor will select that student, and appropriate extra credit of ONE FULL POINT in the WORK ETHIC point total will be given for the student who offers this help to their colleague, should this occur.

XI. INCOMPLETES

Only under extraordinary circumstances that suddenly render the student unable to continue the classwork will an INCOMPLETE be given. Please see your instructor if you feel you may qualify for a course grade of INCOMPLETE. Circumstances have come up in the past which made this appropriate. This has usually involved a scenario where a student has completed the work in excellent standing up to a certain point and then has to suddenly leave school for some reason, such as illness. The terms for making up the INCOMPLETE are negotiated between the student and the professor, and these terms must be signed by both parties and submitted to the departmental office for approval. The earliest date to request an INCOMPLETE is Monday, November 13.

XII. WITHDRAWAL

Should you choose to drop this course, YOU must initiate the drop before the deadline and acquire all proper signatures and paperwork. The last day for the student to elect to drop the class with a grade of “W” is Friday, October 6. A student who is dropped from the course *by the professor because of attendance* will receive a grade of “WF.” After Wednesday, November 22, a student who is dropped or withdraws from the class will receive an “F” in the course.

XIII. LAST DAY OF CLASS/FINAL EXAM DATES

The last day of class is Wednesday, December 6. FINALS will most likely be held at 10:30a on Wednesday, December 13. Because of the length of the class, the university offers us two slots during which our final exam can occur (the other on the preceding Monday, December 11, at 10:30a). The precise date will be confirmed later in the semester, but the later date is more likely in order to give students more rehearsal time.

After our Final Exam, a relaxed *post mortem* discussion luncheon to reflect on the semester’s work will POSSIBLY be conducted at an off campus location, but only if a minimum of twelve or more students are interested and available to attend.

XIV. STUDENT OBLIGATION TO ACADEMIC/PRODUCTION WORK

DT 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.

XV. 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.

XVI. 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.

XVII. 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.