

ACTING: REALISM I

Developing a Process for Creating a Character for the Stage **Spring 2023**

THEA 3050.001 and THEA 3050.301 (Lab)

Mondays and Wednesdays 9:00a – 11:20a

RTFP 127

3 Units

Professor Bob Hess

Office: RTFP 222

Office Hours Mondays 1:00p – 2:00p, Wednesdays 11:00a - 12:00p, or by appointment

For Class Correspondence: ActingRealism@aol.com

I. PREREQUISITES

Prerequisites for THEA 3050 Acting: Realism I include THEA 1050 Acting: Fundamentals, THEA 2051 Theatre Voice I, and THEA 2351 Theatre Movement I.

Students majoring or minoring in Theatre who have received a grade of “C” in any of the prerequisite courses, even if they are transferring that course in, will be required to audition for consideration for enrollment in THEA 3050 Acting: Realism I.

Any student who receives a grade of “C” or lower in this course will be allowed to repeat it one more time. Should the student repeat the course and receive a grade of “C” or lower, the student will be dismissed from the Acting Concentration.

II. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Exploration of various acting methods for investigating the creation of a character, including processes and exercises that iconic teachers associated with these approaches have employed. Formulation of an individual process for creating characters grounded in psychological truth, using texts from the contemporary theatre. Discovery of what works best for the individual actor’s needs, with an emphasis on skill demonstration in class performances.

III. COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Application and reinforcement of the concepts introduced in the Theatre Voice I class of understanding the vocal instrument, relaxation, breath, and support (capacity and recovery), dynamics, vocal variation (pitch, tempo, rhythm, quality), projection, placement, articulation, characterization, and connection of the vocal life of a character to its emotional life.
- Application and reinforcement of the concepts introduced in the Theatre Movement I class of understanding the physical instrument, relaxation, physical freedom, commitment, and connection of the physical life of a character to its emotional life.
- Application and reinforcement of foundational concepts in the creation of a character introduced in Acting Fundamentals:
 - Objective
 - Action
 - Obstacle
 - Expectation
 - Long-term and Short-term Circumstances
 - Personalization, Specificity, and Endowment
 - Vocal, Physical, and Emotional Life of a Character
 - Text and Subtext Analysis
 - The “Magic If”
 - “Commenting” or “Telegraphing”
 - Sense Memory and Emotional Memory
 - Reinforcement of Technical Elements of Stage Blocking (stage directions, upstaging, countering, etc.)
- The specific study, using both lecture and exercises, of the HISTORY and CONTENT of a number of iconic methodologies to assist in the process of creating a character, including the works of Konstantin Stanislavski, Lee Strasberg, and Uta Hagen.
- Continue to use challenging scene work from texts grounded in psychological Realism and the application of the concepts from newly-taught methodologies for the purpose of:
 - Further investigation of text for its language, structure, and content, along with the possibilities all of these things offer the stage actor as far as vocal, physical, and emotional life.
 - Continuing deep, thorough analysis of characters.

- Further engagement in the process of “presence” and “focus” in a scene, listening and responding truthfully to both verbal and non-verbal stimuli.
- Nurturing the actor’s ability to invest emotionally in a scene on a truthful, believable level.
- Reinforcing work from all the foundational courses as far as elimination of personal habits and tensions (including constant reliance on default mannerisms, gestures, and vocal habits) that impede the creation of a character and embodiment of a physical, vocal, and emotional life that differ from that of the actor.

IV. CONTENT OF MATERIAL

Please be advised that this class contains the development of texts and actions that may be considered offensive to some. You may encounter literary 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. If there is any issue with this, please reach out to the professor privately.

V. TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The course will be taught through a combination of lectures 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 the work for a particular scene. Any student with concerns about being touched must notify the instructor immediately following the first class meeting. A request for any sort of physical touching will always be discussed beforehand and only occur with permission.

VI. 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. Students are also requested not to enter or leave the classroom while a student is

performing or being critiqued. 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 OFF your phones, iPads, and laptops before class begins. Remove headphones. If you turn devices on at break, you must turn them off again before we resume. During presentations and work sessions, students will all place their phones in a designated area to avoid the temptation. It is very distracting and disrespectful if a student's cell phone rings or vibrates during class, or if a student sends, receives a notification of (or reads) text and Facebook messages, or if a student studies for other class work. A director or stage manager in a professional rehearsal will call you out on this big time. So let's set a tone for the level of respect and focus in the class.

If you prefer to TAKE NOTES on an iPad, laptop, or cell phone, this is acceptable. You must inform me in advance and understand that I will be extremely displeased if I see you sneaking alternate uses of the device in between the note taking. I am quite aware how easy it is to do that. This is a major pet peeve of mine.

COMMUNICATION

Information regarding the course will be distributed in class, via email (which is to be checked regularly—YOUR responsibility), Canvas, or messages from a class assistant. 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.

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 their 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. Likewise, 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.

VII. TEXTS

REQUIRED TEXTS:

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

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

Gionfrido, Gina. *Becky Shaw*. ANY ACTING EDITION.

Lindsay-Abaire, David. *Rabbit Hole*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006. ISBN # 978-1-55936-290-0 OR ANY ACTING EDITION

****You will also need a notebook of some kind for recording observations and class notes. You must have a hard copy edition of the script on which you can take notes and record blocking, not a digital copy.**

VIII. GRADING

Your grade for the semester will be determined by your accrual of the number of points (out of 100) achieved in various aspects of PERFORMANCE SKILLS, WORK ETHIC, and ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

CLASS EXERCISES

Our methodologies will be accompanied by various exercises to be done in class, and these are worth FOUR POINTS each. Failure to complete an exercise or a lack of preparation will result in a loss of some or all of those points.

SCENE STUDY

The class will complete several finished performances of scenes to be presented in class, with students doing several passes on each of these. All of these performances must be completed in order to pass the course, and students can earn a maximum of 16 POINTS for each scene, based on the evaluation of the final pass.

For some of these performances, I will make myself available to you for private coaching to assist in blocking (since this is a class in ACTING and not directing), text work, and performance skills on your scene. Students must be OFF BOOK for passes done in front of the class. Rehearsals with your partner are your responsibility, and all scenes have an expectation of SEVEN (7) hours total for each scene, spread out over several weeks. A scene which is clearly not ready to be performed because the actor has not learned lines and blocking will be stopped, as 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 rehearsal space using the Booked app. Make sure that times and places are clearly decided upon. Once a rehearsal is set, you must be there, as the other actor is affected by your punctuality and presence.

IMPORTANT! If any actor encounters problematic absence, lateness, or poor work ethic with a partner, you must contact me 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 or after the fact to inform me of a problem, it will be too late, and BOTH actors in the scene will be given the consequence. Take responsibility for your own performances by making me aware of any difficulties you are experiencing.

Rehearsal set pieces, costumes, hairstyles, sound cues, and props, as needed, are also 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.

The assessment of the final pass of your scene will be based on eight factors, each of which carry a weight of ONE - THREE points each toward the total point value of 16 points:

PREPARATION (3 points):

- Scenery, props, costumes, hairstyle, and possibly even minor technical effects (such as sound cues) as demanded by the scene
- Staging and lines solidly delivered *as the author wrote them*, free of paraphrasing, ad libs, hesitation, or prompting.
- **REQUIRED REHEARSALS (7 hours)** completed

VOCAL SKILL (2 points):

- Well-supported sound, free of tension
- Heard and understood
- Vocal quality consistency with the character and not just the actor's own personal vocal life
- Shows variety in pitch, rhythm, and dynamics
- Effective use of the words

PHYSICAL SKILL (2 points):

- Physical presence and movement consistent with the character
- Physicality that is relaxed and free of the actor's own personal tensions and habits
- Physical life that is connected the intentions and responses of the character

UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF THE TEXT (1 point):

- Full understanding of the content of what the character is saying, sometimes subtextually
- Full understanding of what the words actually mean (and how they are **PRONOUNCED**)

INTENTION & OBJECTIVE (2 points):

- Connection to objectives and tactics and how they change through the arc of the scene
- Movement with genuine DESTINATION and PURPOSE

BELIEVABILITY & EMOTIONAL TRUTH/INVESTMENT (2 points):

- Connection to the emotional life of the character on a truthful level

- Becoming the character as opposed to just “acting” it
- Thinking like the character
- Spontaneity in performance as opposed to a rehearsed, recited, or rote performance

CONNECTION TO THE OTHER ACTOR (2 points):

- genuine, truthful listening and responding
- cue pick up (and overlap, if requested)
- effective use of “earned pauses”

TAKING DIRECTION & APPLICATION OF CONCEPTS (2 points)

- Application of the concepts learned in the curriculum
- Taking the direction given by the professor in rehearsals and applying it to the final performance.

SELF CRITIQUES

At the completion of all scene study, the actor will submit via email a self-critique of honest, thoughtful reflection about the work and what they have learned from it. These are to be submitted by 5:00p on the Sunday following the final pass of the scene (in the case of the last scene, the Friday of Finals Week). These are worth FIVE POINTS each. The choice not to submit the self critique by the deadline is a choice to forfeit these points.

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 an 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 in succeeding on these. A student who receives a grade of B or better on any of these quizzes will receive THREE POINTS per 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 two written assignments related to the work in the class worth FOUR POINTS each. While they are not assigned a numerical grade, each of these written assignments must be completed to a satisfactory level of content and depth, as determined by your instructor, in order for the student to be given credit for them. 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 by the due date, it may be submitted at the next class meeting, with the student will receiving half-credit for the written assignment. After that date has passed, the student will forfeit credit for the work.

THESE WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS MAY NOT BE SUBMITTED BY EMAIL UNLESS SPECIAL PERMISSION HAS BEEN GIVEN BY THE PROFESSOR. IF YOU ARE ABSENT FROM CLASS THE DAY A WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT IS DUE, YOU MAY TURN IT IN THE NEXT TIME YOU ATTEND CLASS WITHOUT PENALTY.

ATTENDANCE & 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 UNT Department of Dance and Theatre:

- Students are allowed no more than a total of THREE excused (3) 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 before the class concludes is considered an **absence**.
- An occurrence of tardiness for the class FOUR (4) times is the equivalent or ONE (1) **absence**.
- A total of (4) absences means that the highest grade the student can earn in the class is an F. *If, however, a student accrues that fourth absence AFTER we have begun scene work in the class, they do have the option, rather than leaving their classmate without an acting partner, to drop one letter grade instead. That would mean that a B would then be the highest grade they could earn in the class. If another absence occurred, they would drop an additional grade, and a C would be the highest grade possible. An additional absence would mean that the highest grade the student could earn would be an F.*

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

The policy is not negotiable, as that would constitute holding one student to a different standard than all other students in all acting classes. Any student with an issue in the area of attendance and/or punctuality should direct their concerns to the Head of the Acting Faculty.

The professor's roll is the official record of absences and tardiness. The attendance/tardiness record can be found on Canvas. Students are also welcome to check with the professor to make 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 and EXCUSE 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 and consistency, 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 will likely 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 young professional actor—get used to the fact that you simply have to **BE THERE**, and you have to be there **ON TIME** if you wish to keep the job.*

OVERVIEW OF POINT VALUES FOR COURSE WORK

READING QUIZZES	4 quizzes @ 3 points each	12 points
PLAY QUIZZES	3 quizzes @ 3 points each	9 points
SCENE STUDY	3 scenes @ 16 points each	48 points
SELF CRITIQUES	3 self critiques @ 5 points each	15 points
RESPONSE PAPERS	2 papers @ 4 points each	8 points
CLASS EXERCISES	2 exercises @ 4 points each	<u>8 points</u>
		100 points

ONCE YOUR POINTS EARNED FOR THE SEMESTER ARE DETERMINED, THAT NUMERICAL GRADE CORRESPONDS TO A LETTER GRADE FOR THE COURSE AS FOLLOWS:

A	90 or higher
B	80 – 89
C	70 – 79
D	60 – 69
F	59 or below

IX. EXTRA CREDIT

There is NO extra credit available in the class. 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. 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 had completed the work in excellent standing up to a certain point and then had to suddenly leave school for some personal reason, such as an illness or family emergency. 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 for the student to request an INCOMPLETE is April 8, 2023.

XI. 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 April 7, 2023.

XII. CLASS CANCELLATION

Because I continue to work as a professional actor in the Resident Company at the Dallas Theater Center and with a broadcast agent (and am expected to do so by the UNT Department of Dance and Theatre as part of my tenure track), I may occasionally have to cancel class for projects on which I am working—sometimes on short notice. In all cases I will try to find a substitute from the UNT Acting Faculty to cover the class. If I am not able to do this and need to cancel a class meeting, you will be notified by both text and email. While I am teaching, I turn down more work than I accept---teaching is my first priority. However, conflicts are sometimes unavoidable, especially due to re-shoots and clients with whom I have ongoing contracts. If I completely cancel class at any point *with no advance notice*, you will each be given a “free” absence. For example, if you have accrued two absences in class, you would then have only one.

XIII. LAST DAY OF CLASS/FINAL EXAM DATES

The last regular class meeting is Wednesday, May 3. The Final Exam will take place on Wednesday, May 10 from 8:00a – 10:00a. I am very sorry for the early hour. This is a fixed time provided to us by the university and is not something over which I have control.

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XIV. POST MORTEM

After our Final Exam, an informal *post mortem* discussion to reflect on the semester's work will POSSIBLY be conducted at an off campus location, but only if 75% or more of the students are interested and available to attend. Attendance at this *post mortem* is NOT mandatory and will have no effect on the student's grade.

XV. 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.

XVI. 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.

XVII. 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.

XVIII. 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.

XIX. 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.