

Acting: Fundamentals

THEA 1050 3 Credits

Course Syllabus Spring 2019

Professor: Sally Vahle **Office:** RTFP 221 **Cell Phone:** 214-597-2140

Class Meets: In RTFP 127: M/W: 9:00am-11:20am

Class Email: actingfundamentals@gmail.com

Office Hours: Monday's/Wednesday's: 11:30-12:30, 1:30-2pm and by appointment

Suggested Course Text:

Bruder: A Practical Handbook for the Actor (for personal reference)

- **Other Required Material: (1) three ring binder**

Course Calendar Note:

Acting Fundamentals is a survey of information essential to an understanding of the craft of acting. As such, the course content must remain flexible if it is to address the specific needs and abilities of the students; therefore, the syllabus and course schedule are subject to change at any time. These changes are at the sole discretion of the instructor, and whenever possible will be made in writing.

Course Description

Acting Fundamentals (THEA 1050):

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

Course Objectives

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

- Understand and explain the **essence of theatre**: what theatre is, what its elements and conventions are, and what qualities are needed to make good theatre.

- Demonstrate basic **physical, vocal, and mental skills** the actor utilizes to create and bring characters to life.
 - **PHYSICAL SKILLS:** develop physical flexibility, strength and expressiveness; relaxation techniques and exercises; learn to begin to take physical risks as an actor — to free the body and get rid of “stiff” movements on stage—to connect the body to action.
 - **VOCAL SKILLS:** to cultivate an understanding of a healthy vocal instrument through relaxation and breathing techniques; to improve articulation and pronunciation habits; to cultivate a basic ability to connect the voice to action and emotion and communication.
 - **MENTAL SKILLS:** develop ability to concentrate and maintain focus, further explore and develop imagination, creativity, sensory awareness, and spontaneity as they apply to acting. Connection of impulse to action.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of **basic acting techniques** and terminology.
- Understand and use a working theatrical vocabulary (theatre jargon).
- Demonstrate excellence in work ethic by being on time, prepared and ready to focus and work at all class sessions.
- Identify the skills needed and demonstrate the ability to **communicate effectively** and **work cooperatively and collaboratively** with scene partners and classmates.
- Demonstrate the techniques of **constructive evaluation** of self and others in class and performances.

Course Expectation:

Students are expected to participate fully in classroom/lab setting.

THEA 1050 requires physical work, focus, observation, exploration of emotion and complex analysis. Students will work singly, in groups and with a partner(s).

Exercises and projects may involve close physical contact with other students.

Course Structure:

The classroom time will be divided into three primary areas:

1. **Lecture and Discussion.**
2. **Acting Exercises.** The acting exercises, exploring various acting techniques, will be done in class. Certain exercises will require preparation outside of class. Exercises will be discussed and critiqued in class.
3. **Performance Projects.** The performance projects will be derived from dramatic text and assigned to students. These projects will require work outside of class. Performance projects will be discussed and critiqued in class.

GRADING

IMPORTANT

In order to major in theater you must maintain a **MINIMUM CUMULATIVE GPA of 2.5**. Additionally, students must maintain a **MINIMUM CUMULATIVE GPA of 2.5** in order to be eligible to qualify to graduate from UNT.

You will **be graded** based on your work in these areas:

1. Class participation and preparedness
2. Quizzes
3. Email response requests
4. Written Assignments
5. Attendance and Punctuality
6. Meeting Deadlines and overall Professionalism/Work Ethic
7. Adherence to Class Policies

Your **WORK ETHIC** and the degree to which you are applying yourself as an artist to this challenging material matters! THIS will be the main factor in the grade for this course. Grades will not be based on “talent” but on discipline, preparedness, hard work, a positive attitude, respect for others, imagination, and attention to detail.

Your creative work (performance project presentations) will be **assessed** through verbal feedback and written assessment from the professor. Each student’s creative work assessments will be detailed and specific with special focus on feedback regarding your skills as an actor and how they are facilitating or detracting from your creative expression.

Course Work

Unit One: Investigation/Context

Unit Two: Analysis and Investigation

Unit Three: Creative Application

Course Calendar lists all assignments/projects, by unit, and point values.

Grading Scale:

- | | |
|----------|----------------|
| A | 100-90% |
| B | 89-80% |
| C | 79-70% |

GENERAL PARAMETERS FOR LETTER GRADES:

A grade: Work is committed, focused and sustained, with obvious growth. All assignments and deadlines satisfactorily completed on time. Student shows clear excellence in mastering the objectives of the assignment, both individually and in working with their partner. Critiques generally focus on strong aspects of the work. The work shows careful preparation and commitment.

B grade: The basic fulfillment of all requirements is met with some growth. Student shows strong competence in fulfilling objectives of the assignment. Critiques generally focus primarily on strong areas of work, with several specific areas of improvement suggested for subsequent work. The work is strong, has been well prepared and shows good potential for improvement.

C grade: Student satisfies the requirements of the assignment. Critiques generally focus on weaker areas of work, with stronger aspects identified and reinforced. The objectives in this work are considered obtainable by any student at this level of training. Students generally have some difficulties with memorization; sense of staging and ability to meet self generated deadlines (rehearsals with scene partners, etc...). This work generally needs further preparation and attention.

D grade: Student produces minimum requirements for project, which generally includes presentation of work. Critiques focus on lack of preparation, lack of understanding of assignment and unwillingness to give maximum effort. This work may have significant memorization problems, poor attitude displayed in class resulting in a below average performance. This work needs much more preparation and commitment.

***The grading standard is C= average, B= very good, **A= excellent class work, deadlines met, all written work is turned in and excellent and excellent participation and attendance.**

ATTENDANCE

Theatre is a collaborative art. Since so much of the process of learning about acting involves interacting with your peers in class, attendance is mandatory. The great majority of work for this class happens during class time. Each student is expected to be here for every class---just as you are expected to show up at a job when scheduled to work or attend every rehearsal and performance when cast in a play. The work you do in each class creates the foundation for every class that follows. Exercises, presentations, discussion, cannot be made up.

If you accumulate 3 absences your grade will drop one full letter grade. Each additional absence will continue to lower your grade.

If you miss class 5 times you will be administratively dropped by the professor from the course, resulting in a "W" or possibly "WF". **This rule is not negotiable.**

If you have missed 5 classes, you have missed too much in class work time. Should this occur, you will be notified that the process is taking place. If you are dropped from the class you will need to re-take the course another semester.

Tardiness

2 tardies = 1 absence.

Tardiness is a TERRIBLE habit for actors. It makes us less marketable, will quickly destroy your reputation, and result in you not being cast. If you have a tendency to be late, work on losing that tendency this semester.

Consider this:

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

I am very aware that things come up in life. Leeway for unexpected occurrences is built into the attendance policy—you are allotted three absences. There are no "excused absences" available (unless you are involved in a departmental/university related activity).

Here is a breakdown of what is expected—as applicable to each particular project—of my definition/expectation of each in class "pass" or presentation. Engaging in these "steps" as an actor, helps you cultivate work ethic and a working process.

"FIRST PASS" REQUIREMENTS: (students may be asked to be "off-book" for first pass.)

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

“SECOND PASS” REQUIREMENTS:

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

“FINAL PASS” REQUIREMENTS:

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

Other Relevant Class Information and Policies:

Rehearsal Etiquette:

[Applicable to assigned Acting Exercises, Monologues and Scene Work.]

You and your scene partner(s) are expected to have, a minimum of TWO rehearsals on your own before your first pass and two more before your second pass. Presenting a scene to us that you have not rehearsed enough is disrespectful and a waste of the class's time, and will simply not be allowed. YOU will be expected to organize your own rehearsals outside of class and find your own rehearsal space. You may reserve rehearsal space in the Theater office. Make sure that times and places are clearly decided upon. Once a plan is made, you must be there, as other actors are affected by your presence. **If any actor encounters problematic absence or lateness with a partner, please contact the instructor immediately.** I absolutely understand that a lack of preparation may be the fault of one actor and not the other, so MAKE ME AWARE IMMEDIATELY if there is a problem in this area. If you wait until the actual day of your performance, ALL actors in the scene will be given the deduction. Take responsibility for your own performance by making the professor aware of any difficulties you are experiencing. Rehearsal set pieces, costumes, and props, as needed, are YOUR responsibility.

SCENE STUDY/PERFORMANCE PROJECT PROCEDURES

In large acting classes, as unfortunately we must conduct; we have precious little time together. To ensure the best possible use of that time, let's clarify what we need to accomplish for each in-class rehearsal. It is extremely difficult to coach your acting when the full play has not been read and understood or when dialogue is not memorized. Thus, it is essential that this homework be completed before coaching begins. Also unfortunately, because of the tight schedule of the class if you miss a class presentation no make-up date is guaranteed.

If a scene is not prepared sufficiently for in-class coaching and work time we will move on to another scene instead. Your in-class work time scheduled for that particular day will be forfeited and will very likely not be re-scheduled due to our limited class time

Mid-Semester Meetings:

At the mid-point of the semester. I will meet with each student individually to discuss class progress and other pertinent information. Each student will receive a mid-semester written assessment/observation of their work, as well as a mid-term point total.

COMMUNICATION:

I have created an email address exclusively for this class---please direct all electronic correspondence with me to this address: actingfundamentals@gmail.com. If your email address changes during the course of the semester it is your responsibility to provide updated information to me. If you need to reach me concerning something urgent please call my cell phone at 214-597-2140 to speak with me, text me, or leave a message.

PLEASE! Get in the habit of checking your email everyday before the **morning of class** for last minute communication from me.

Because I continue to work as a professional actress and am expected to do so by UNT and the UNT Department of Dance and Theatre, I will occasionally have to cancel class for projects I am cast in—sometimes on short notice. Always check your email the night before class. While I am teaching I turn down more work that 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.

A few things I'd like you to consider:

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

General Class Information:

Wear comfortable clothing that allows you to:

- Fully stretch and move your whole body.
- Comfortably lay on the floor.
- Breathe without restriction.
- To walk naturally. (I.e. no flip-flops, high heels, cowboy boots, bulky heels, etc...).
- It's unavoidable---at times the floor in 127 gets dusty and dirty. Don't wear clothes that you're concerned about keeping especially clean. This may mean you bring your clothes "for the day" with you and wear warm-ups to class.

I encourage you to bring a sweatshirt or sweater with you---the temperature in the theater building fluctuates.

Other:

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

OTHER:

UNT Theatrical Productions: Fall 2018:

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

2018-2019 UNT Theater Season Info:

<http://danceandtheatre.unt.edu/upcoming-season-productions>

COURSE INCOMPLETE

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. 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.

WITHDRAWING FROM THEA 1050

Should you choose to drop this course, YOU must initiate the drop before the deadline and acquire all proper signatures and paperwork. A student who is dropped from the course *by the professor* will receive a grade of “WF”. Please see the “Important Dates” list at the end of the syllabus for more information about dropping a class.

Departmental Policy

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

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.

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.

Spring 2019 Important Deadlines

Deadline	Regular Aca- demic Session	3W1 Winter Ses- sion	8W1	8W2
Classes Begin	Jan 14	Dec 17	Jan 14	Mar 18

Martin Luther King Jr. Day (no classes; university closed)	Jan 21	N/A	Jan 21	N/A
Census	Jan 28	Dec 18	Jan 22	Mar 25
Beginning this date a student may drop a course with a grade of W by completing the Request to Drop Class form and submitting it to the Registrar's Office. See link for complete instructions Dropping a Class .	Jan 29	Dec 19	Jan 23	Mar 26
Last day for change in pass/no pass status	Feb 22	Dec 20	Feb 1	Apr 5
Mid-semester	Mar 8	N/A	Feb 8	Apr 12
Spring Break	Mar 11 - 17	N/A	N/A	N/A
Last day for a student to drop a course.	Apr 1	Jan 7	Feb 18	Apr 22
Beginning this date, a student who qualifies may request an Incomplete, with a grade of I.	Apr 8	Jan 8	Feb 18	Apr 22
Last day to withdraw (drop all classes). Grades of W are assigned.	Apr 19	Jan 7	Mar 1	May 3
Pre-Finals Days	May 1 - 2	N/A	N/A	N/A
Last Regular Class Meeting	May 2	Jan 10	Mar 7	May 9
Reading Day (no classes)	May 3	N/A	N/A	May 3
Final Exams	May 4 - 10	Jan 11	Mar 8	May 10
End of term	May 10	May 10	May 10	May 10

Recommended Reading

Highly recommended texts:

Allen, David. Stanislavski for Beginners. Writers and Readers, Ltd, 1999.
This comic book is out of print but is still one of the best breakdowns of Stanislavski System out there. If you can find it cheap...GET IT!

Recommended Texts/ Bibliography

Ball, William. A Sense of Direction , Drama Publishers, 1984.
Boal, Augusto. Games for Actors and Non-actors , Routledge, 1992.
Bruder, Melissa et al. A Practical Handbook for the Actor, Random House, 1986.
Cameron, Julia, The Artist's Way, Tarcher/Putnam, 1992.
Chekhov, Michael. On The Technique of Acting, Harper-Collins, 1991.
Goffman, Erving. The Presentation of Self in Everday Life, Doubleday, 1959.
Hagen, Uta. Respect for Acting. Macmillan, 1973.
Harrop, John and Sabin Epstein. Acting with Style . Prentice-Hall, 1982.
Silverbert, Larry. The Sanford Meisner Approach , Smith and Kraus, 1994.
Spolin, Viola. Improvisation for the Theatre, Cemrel, 1975.
Stanislavski, Constantin. An Actor Prepares , Routledge, 1989.
Stanislavski, Constantin. Building a Character, Routledge, 1989.
Stanislavski, Constantin. Creating a Role, Routledge, 1989.
Wangh, Stephen. An Acrobat of the Heart. Vintage, 2000.