

Acting: Fundamentals

THEA 1050 3 Credits

Course Syllabus Spring 2017

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: 11:20-Noon 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 Expectation:

Students are expected to participate fully in classroom/lab setting. THEA 1050 requires much 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 Objectives

- ★ **To develop an understanding of basic acting techniques.**
- ★ **To develop and sharpen concentration, focus and confidence.**
- ★ **To cultivate an awareness of the actor's instrument.**
- ★ **To develop means of body/mind/spirit integration and alignment.**
- ★ **To develop a critical awareness of performance.**
- ★ **To develop critical feedback skills.**

★ To explore truthful human expression.

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: Acting and Self

Unit Two: Analysis and Investigation

Unit Three: Putting It All Together

****Course Calendar lists all assignments, projects and point values.**

Grading:

A 1300-1200

B 1199-1099

C 999-899

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.

After three absences your grade will drop one full letter grade. Each additional absence will continue to lower your grade.

After the 5th absence the student will be administratively dropped by the professor from the course, resulting in a "W" or possibly "WF", depending upon when in a semester the student is removed from the class. **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

Two tardies equal one 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:

You and your scene partner(s) are expected to have, at the minimum, 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 insure 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 (March 5th) 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.

Departmental Policy:

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

Withdrawing from this course:

Should you choose to drop this course, you must initiate the drop and acquire all of the proper signatures and paperwork. If that process is not completed, you will be subject to a WF or an F at the close of the semester

UNT Theatrical Productions: Spring 2017:

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.

Americans with Disabilities Act Notice

"The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking 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 an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of 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 accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323."

Student Obligations to Academic/Production Work

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

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 Everyday 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.