



(Acting Masks, c. 100 BCE)

### **THR: Acting I: A Fundamental Approach to the Craft**

Tues/Thurs: 9:00-10:50 a.m.  
Murphy Hall 209

Dr. Peter Zazzali  
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00-4:30 p.m.  
pzazzali@ku.edu

#### *COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES*

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The late Uta Hagen claimed a “respect for acting” by devising techniques “to make a character flow through [oneself].”<sup>1</sup> Such is our goal for this basic acting class. Students will undertake a system of exercises to ascertain a technique for “using themselves” to truthfully create a character in telling a story. Within a laboratory environment, they will develop an expressive physical and vocal instrument as well as the ability to analyze a text towards building a character, exploring given circumstances, and identifying objectives, obstacles, and actions. Students are expected to treat their work and each other with respect and professionalism at all times.

Though this is a performance class, it is designed to encourage an intellectual examination of the discipline of acting. Readings and writing assignments will provide a theoretical supplement to the practice of the craft. The course will particularly investigate how learning to act can serve and support professional and personal endeavors that transcend conventional métiers relative to performance. In keeping aligned with KU Core Goal #3, you will gain a rich background of knowledge in theatre and acting that can be integrated with what you are learning in other areas of study. As such, students will develop skills that include interpersonal communication, speaking and listening with

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<sup>1</sup> Uta Hagen, *Respect for Acting* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 9.

intention, critically thinking and writing, empathically identifying with others, and cooperatively and creatively addressing challenges. This skillset forms the basis for what will result in a transformational learning experience for each student.

### REQUIRED COURSE READING

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**At the Bookstore:** *Free to Act: An Integrated Approach*, Mira Felner (New York: Pearson, 2004); *Respect for Acting*, Uta Hagen (Macmillan, 1973)

Supplementary texts to be provided on Blackboard (BB)

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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**Attendance:** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. You must be on time and prepared to work for all sessions. This is an ensemble-oriented course that requires everyone's mutual support. If you are absent or arrive late you compromise not only your own experience, but that of your classmates as well. If you must miss a session, please notify me beforehand, if at all possible, and if you are missing a day on which you are supposed to present your scene you must also alert your partner in advance. If you fail to show up on a day you are scheduled to present without prior notification, you will lose credit for the assignment. After the second absence your final grade will be lowered one third of a level (e.g., a B becomes a B-).

**Preparation:** You must come to class prepared to discuss the reading(s) and ready to present whatever exercise or scene has been assigned for a given session. This means that you will be spending time outside class rehearsing and completing various homework assignments. This class addresses and develops your critical thinking skills as much as it does your creative learning. Therefore, you will undertake numerous formal and informal written assignments in conjunction with the course readings and performance work. You are expected to complete all assignments by their due dates.

**Participation:** You are expected to fully participate in all projects and exercises. This includes keeping up with the course readings and participating in both class and online discussions, the latter of which will be facilitated by Blackboard. A mid-semester evaluation will be given to you, most of which will be determined by your commitment and participation to/in our working process.

**Professional Decorum:** The nature of an acting laboratory is ensemble-oriented. Thus, we all must demonstrate mutual respect and support, which means remaining conscientious of one another. Please be sure to turn off your cell phones before entering class. Also, there is absolutely no eating or drinking during class (water is allowed), and "side-bar" discussions are frowned upon. When a classmate is working before the group they deserve our full support, encouragement, and attention. Adherence to these considerations counts towards your participation grade.

**Attire:** Much of our work will be physical, as every class will commence by warming up our bodies and voices. Therefore, you are required to come dressed in loose clothing that does not restrict your movement. To be exacting, the following are prohibited: jeans, hard-soled shoes such as heels or boots, large jewelry, hats/caps, dresses or skirts, and shorts. Sweat pants, a simple tee shirt without logos, and/or dance attire are examples of what to wear. Having said this, you will be changing into suggestive dress according to the characters you create in your scene work. Sufficient time will be allotted after the warmup activities for you to efficiently change into your character clothes as needed.

**Evaluation of Performance Work:** While it is commonly assumed that evaluating acting is subjective, there will be set criteria by which each student's progress is graded. Bearing in mind that our work is process-oriented and perfection is no more sought than it is expected, growth in the following areas will ultimately determine one's progress and evaluation:

*Preparation:* Memorization of lines, actions, and blocking in conjunction with the specific requirements of the assignment; creation of physical environment and attention to details regarding one's given circumstances and character relationships

*Technique:* Demonstration of physical ease, vocal clarity/energy, emotional availability, and use of oneself as foundations for truthfully portraying a character

*Performance:* Demonstration of clear and intentional action playing in pursuit of strong objectives towards telling a story

*GRADING BREAKDOWN\**

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<b>Participation and Attendance</b>	100 points
<b>Blackboard Posts/Tweets</b>	100 points
<b>Etudes (4)</b>	400 points
<b>Hagen's Basic Object Exercise</b>	100 points
<b>Scene</b>	150 points
<b>Acting Journal</b>	50 points
<b>Term Paper</b>	100 points
	<b>1000 points</b>

**Grading Ranges:** A=900-1000/ B=800-899/ C=700-799/ D=600-699. Please note that your final score will be adjusted for excessive absence, tardiness, and other matters relative to your work in the course.

**INSTRUCTOR POLICIES**

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- I encourage you to visit during my office hours (Tuesday 3:00-4:00 p.m.) or by requesting an appointment.
  - I am always available by email and promise to respond to your messages within 48 hours.
  - Acceptance of late assignments is at my discretion, and if accepted, your grade will be penalized.

- KU Accessibility Resources (<http://www.disability.ku.edu>) coordinate accommodations and services for our students. If you have a disability for which you may request an accommodation, please contact AR as soon as possible.
- Any written work you submit must be your own. Plagiarism is in serious breach of academic honesty and will be treated according to KU policy. For more on this matter, please see [http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/instructors/guides/plagiarism\\_guidelines.sh](http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/instructors/guides/plagiarism_guidelines.sh); also <http://www.studenthandbook.ku.edu/>

### *ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES*

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**Etudes:** Borrowing from the musical term signifying a scale and/or exercise to develop basic skills, we will be practicing four “etudes” this term. Each of these exercises trains fundamental elements of your acting technique and has been organized into the curriculum with sequential logic and pedagogical intention. You will identify these etudes as essential to your craft and consistent with the course’s learning outcomes. **100 points each/400 total.**

**Hagen’s Basic Object Exercise (BOE):** In conjunction with the 4 etudes, this exercise will teach you how to simply rely on yourself as the basis for creating a performance. It will provide you with a practical opportunity to distinguish between *seeming* like a character and *becoming* one. The BOE’s goal is to give you the tools to render a three-dimensional human being who is living truthfully in the context of given circumstances towards telling a story. **100 points.**

**Scene:** The culminating performance activity of our work will consist of a short (3-5 minute) scene from David Auburn’s play *Proof*. The previously completed etudes and BOE will be the technical basis for how we approach these scenes. I will choose your partners and material. You and your partner will workshop the scene three times in class, with a final presentation scheduled for exam week. **150 points.**

### **Written Work**

**Blackboard Posts/Tweets:** In keeping with the course’s commitment to wed theory and practice, you will be responsible for regular Blackboard posts to underscore our reading assignments and class discussions. The prompts will be posted by Friday 12:00 PM, thereby giving you ample time to formulate your answer by its due date: 12:00 PM the following Monday. You are also expected to read one another’s posts. Also, we will be collaborating with another THR 106 section by sharing individual experiences through weekly Tweets. These Tweets will function as short and decisive observations, acknowledgements, and questions that arise for you and others during the course of your respective learning processes. **100 points.**

**Acting Journal:** As Mira Felner points out in our core textbook, “keeping an acting journal sharpens your thinking and enables you to experience [the work] in a consistent

and meaningful way”<sup>2</sup>. Acting is, after all, an ephemeral and immediate practice that is best understood by reflecting on its performative essence through writing. Therefore, you will be keeping a diary that documents our work in general and your process in particular. Each journal entry should be roughly between a paragraph and a page in length; if you choose to write more, that’s perfectly fine. The timing of entries should coincide with each class as a reflection of its activities. Because I will be collecting and grading your journals twice during the semester (the midterm and the final week), I recommend that you use an individual notebook for this activity. **50 points.**

**Term Paper “The Actor as Entrepreneur”:** I am interested in how you think the skills learned in this class can benefit your future both professionally and personally. For those of you interested in pursuing an acting career, this assignment will perhaps be straightforward. Nonetheless, I suspect that you will all find many of the skills and techniques learned in this class potentially applicable to other disciplines. With an entrepreneurial ethos in mind, you will all write a short 4-page paper that addresses the question: “How do the skills commensurate with studying acting apply to and/or enhance my professional goals?” I will provide specific guidelines for this assignment. **100 points. DUE APRIL 10**

*CLASS SCHEDULE (Subject to Change at the Instructor’s Discretion)*

Tuesday, January 21 (1)

<b>Class Topic</b> Course overview and expectations; Acting as an artistic discipline; Studying acting to enrich one’s professional and personal life
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Thursday, January 23 (2)

<b>Class Topic</b> Guest Artist, Eliza Bent
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Tuesday, January 28 (3)

<b>Class Topic</b> Building our ensemble and creating a trustworthy and safe creative environment
<b>Class Assignment</b> <i>Free to Act</i> , pp. 71-75 (Developing Trust Through Physical Sharing)

Thursday, January 30 (4)

<b>Class Topic</b> Understanding Acting and what an actor does; Assign Etude #1
<b>Class Assignment</b> Benedetti, <i>The Actor in You</i> (BB)

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<sup>2</sup> Mira Felner, *Free to Act* (New York: Pearson, 2004), 7

Tuesday, February 4 (5)

**Class Topic**

Finding a state of centeredness; Physical ease and relaxation to access a creative state;  
Begin workshopping Etude #1

**Class Assignment**

*Free to Act*, pp. 13-36; Etude #1

Thursday, February 6 (6)

**Class Topic**

The actor's voice/speech as dramatic action; Etude #1

**Class Assignment**

*Free to Act*, pp. 37-54; Etude #1

Tuesday, February 11 (7)

**Class Topic**

Harnessing the actor's energy to a point of focus (the target); The actor's warm-up; Conclude Etude #1; Assign Etude #2

**Class Assignment**

*Free to Act*, pp. 55-70; 84-86; Etude #1

Thursday, February 13 (8)

**Class Topic**

Listening/communicating with a partner; Begin workshopping Etude #2

**Class Assignment**

*Free to Act*, 93-106; Etude #2

Tuesday, February 18 (9)

**Class Topic**

Understanding the character's given circumstances; Etude #2

**Class Assignment**

*Free to Act*, 107-120; Etude #2

Thursday, February 20 (10)

**Class Topic**

Understanding character objectives, obstacles, and actions; Conclude Etude #2; Assign Etude #3

**Class Assignment**

*Free to Act*, 121-131; *Respect for Acting*, 174-183; Etude #2

Tuesday, February 25 (11)

**Class Topic**

Defining a character's physical surroundings/environment; Creating the 4<sup>th</sup> Wall;  
Begin workshopping Etude #3

**Class Assignment**

*Respect for Acting*, 106-111; 124-125; Etude #3

Thursday, February 27 (12)

**Class Topic**

Using Psychophysical Action to build a character; Etude #3

**Class Assignment**

*Free to Act*, 138-143; Benedetti, *The Actor in You*, “Actions and Objectives,” (BB); Etude #3

Tuesday, March 4 (13)

**Class Topic**

Conclude Etude #3

**Class Assignment**

Etude #3; Assign Etude #4

Thursday, March 6 (14)

**Class Topic**

Etude #4

**Class Assignment**

Etude #4; **Journals due**

Tuesday, March 11 (15)

**Class Topic**

Conclude Etude #4; Assign Hagen’s Basic Object Exercise

**Class Assignment**

*Respect for Acting*, 81-94; Etude #4

Thursday, March 13 (16)

**Class Topic**

Building an ensemble; Creating together as a team

**Class Assignment**

Benedetti, *The Actor in You*, “Creating Together,” (BB)

Tuesday, March 25 (17)

**Class Topic**

Building a character through oneself; Basic Object Exercise

**Class Assignment**

Basic Object Exercise

Thursday, March 27 (18)

**Class Topic**

Experiencing versus showing; Basic Object Exercise

**Class Assignment**

Basic Object Exercise

Tuesday, April 1 (19)

**Class Topic**

Conclude Basic Object Exercise

**Class Assignment**

Basic Object Exercise; Assign Scene and partners

Thursday, April 3 (20)

**Class Topic**

Building a character, text analysis and making choices; Begin analyzing David Auburn's *Proof*

**Class Assignment**

Free to Act, 192-206; *Proof* (BB)

Tuesday, April 8 (21)

**Class Topic**

Scoring the scene; identifying beats and tactics

**Class Assignment**

*Free to Act*, 175-191

Thursday, April 10 (22)

**Class Topic**

Scoring *Proof* scenes by identifying beats and tactics

**Class Assignment**

Share copies of scored scenes to discuss as a group; **“Actor as Entrepreneur” paper due**

Tuesday, April 15—May 8 (23-30)

**Class Topic**

Workshop *Proof* scenes

**Class Assignment**

Workshop scenes; **Journals due May 6**

Exam Week

**Final Exam**

Present scene; Discuss “Actor as Entrepreneur” paper;

General wrap up and completion of course