



B-PH131: Acting 1A: A Fundamental Approach to the Craft

Mon/Thurs: 10:30am-12:00 pm; Tues: 1:00pm-2:30pm

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The late Uta Hagen claimed a “respect for acting” by creating techniques “to make a character flow through [oneself].”¹ Such is our goal for this basic acting class. You will undertake a system of exercises to ascertain an approach for “using themselves” to truthfully create a character in telling a story. Within a laboratory environment, you 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. You are expected to treat the work and each other with respect and professionalism at all times.

Though this is a performance class, it is designed to encourage a theoretical examination of the discipline of acting in support of our practice. Readings and writing assignments will support your work in the studio. Moreover, our work aligns with techniques you will be developing in voice and movement classes towards integrating your instrument into becoming a fully expressive artist in mind, body, imagination, and speaking.

REQUIRED COURSE READING

Available for Purchase Online: *Free to Act: An Integrated Approach*, Mira Felner (New York: Pearson, 2004); *Respect for Acting*, Uta Hagen (Macmillan, 1973); *An Actor’s Work*, Konstantin Stanislavski, ed. Jean Benedetti (Routledge 2008)

Supplementary texts to be provided on Learning Portal

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

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. You must be on time and prepared to work for all sessions. Please be sure to swipe your card at the door before entering each session. 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.

Preparation: You are expected to arrive at 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. 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. You will also be responsible for sourcing any props, costume pieces, or related materials to facilitate the completion of assignments.

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 no eating or drinking during class (water is fine). When a classmate is working before the group, they deserve our full support, encouragement, and attention. Let's work as a team in the best sense to ensure everyone's learning.

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

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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 train 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. **20% overall grade.**

Hagen’s Basic Object Exercise (BOE): In conjunction with the 3 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. **20% overall grade**

Scene: The culminating performance activity of our work will consist of a short (3-5 minute) scene from Alfian Sáat’s play *Homesick*. 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 Week 12. **40% overall grade**

Acting Journal: As Mira Felner states, “keeping an acting journal sharpens your thinking and enables you to experience [the work] in a consistent and meaningful way.”² 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—similar to Stanislavski’s Tortsov. Each journal entry should be roughly between a paragraph and a page in length; if you choose to write more, that is perfectly fine. The timing of entries should coincide with each week as a reflection of its activities. **10% overall grade**

Discussion and Readings: Monday’s classes will be dedicated to theoretical texts that support our practice on the floor. You are expected to complete the reading assignments for each session and be prepared to discuss them. **10% overall grade**

CLASS SCHEDULE (Subject to Change)

WEEK 1

Activity: Course overview and expectations; Acting as an artistic discipline; “Using Oneself”; Assign BOE

Read: *Respect for Acting (RFA)* 11-34, 81-94; *An Actor’s Work (AAW)* 6-16

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

WEEK 2

Activity: Finding a state of centeredness; Physical ease and relaxation to access a creative state; BOE

Read: *Free to Act (FTA)* 13-36; *AAW* 119-134

WEEK 3

Activity: Harnessing the actor's energy towards a point of focus (the target); Concentration and attention; Etude #1

Read: *FTA* 55-70; *AAW* 86-118

WEEK 4

Activity: Experiencing as opposed to "showing"; Etude #1

Read: *AAW* 60-85, 152-194

WEEK 5

Activity: Actions, "Magic If," and given circumstances; Etude #2

Read: *AAW* 37-59; *FTA* 138-143; *RFA* 158-164, 184-191

WEEK 6

Activity: Embodying action; Etude #2

Free to Act, pp. 37-54; *AAW* 351-380

WEEK 7

Activity: Listening/communicating with a partner; Etude #3

Read: *FTA* 93-106; *AAW* 229-257

WEEK 8

Activity: Objectives and obstacles; Psychophysical Action; Etude #3

Read: *AAW* 273-291; *RFA* 174-183

WEEK 9

Activity: Approaching the play; **Alfian Sáat's** *Homesick*

Read: *RFA* 147-157; *Homesick*

WEEK 10-12

Activity: *Homesick*