

Pacific Singers & Actors Workshop Acting Guide for Instructors

Definition of Acting:

Living truthfully under imaginary circumstances

ACT = **(A)**ctivate, **(C)**onnect, be a living **(T)**hing

Acting is about Actions, Intentions and Obstacles. It is about creating a world that a student can step into and respond truthfully to what is happening.

Goal: to encourage students to become active in their bodies so they are energized and ready to accept a given circumstance. Once **activated**, we want them to **connect** to their scene partner/monologue or world (discussed in detail under Preparation section), and finally, to be a living **thing**, i.e. a human being responding truthfully in a given situation.

Contents

- Week-by-week acting exercises
- Acting tools, techniques and prompts
- Improvisation games: purposes and rules

Week-by-Week Acting Exercises

Acting Requires Preparation

Acting is about preparation, responding truthfully, and practice.

What is Preparation?

Preparation is what an actor does before beginning a song, scene, or monologue. During preparation students are encouraged to make themselves “available” and “leave themselves alone.” If you are available and you leave yourself alone with no expectations and not playing for a result, you allow feelings to be expressed truthfully in order to become a character who is a living human being.

The following week-by-week guide provides students with techniques, tools, exercises and habits that enable them to make solid, clear, bold, and personal choices. The choices they make will enable them to learn preparation to begin and then perform a song, scene or monologue.

WEEK 1

Improv game: sound toss

Purpose: to promote listening and involvement of all students

Introduce Concept:

Yes, and . . .

Acting and improvisation exercise: You’re The Expert

Purpose: to promote listening, accepting, freeing the mind, being present and human and responding to the environment without self-editing

Prompt:

- Remind students of the definition of acting, which is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances.

WEEK 2

Improv games: one-word story, review sound toss and introduce elimination

Purpose: to have fun, free your mind, stop thinking, listen, respond without self-editing, be present in the room

Introduce Concept:

Get A Bigger Hammer

Overdo everything physically and verbally, e.g. suggest the student is in front of people who do not speak English

Acting exercise: States of Being (SOB)

Purpose of acting exercise: to express what and how you are feeling, awareness of feelings and choices, awareness how each SOB influences how you express a line.

One student pulls a “State of Being” (SOB), or emotion, out of a bag without showing it to anyone else. They then express the SOB by inhaling and then saying, “Hey, buddy! that’s my bike!” or “Hey, man! Throw me the ball!” The rest of the students then guess the SOB.

Prompt:

- If students are unable to guess correctly, encourage the student to “get a bigger hammer” whereby they intensify the emotion physically or verbally. If still not guessed correctly, ask another student to join the first student and try it together.

WEEK 3

Improv games: numbers game with elimination, sound toss, three-line scene

Purpose: concentration, eye contact, freeing your mind, listening, responding quickly

Introduce Concepts:

Circles

Introduced during singing warmup and song review

Circle 1 – To yourself

Circle 2 – To your scene partner

Circle 3 – To the audience

Circle 4 – To the universe

Prompts:

- There's no way you can do Circles without feeling something emotionally.
- You can go back and forth among and between Circles and sometimes “get a smaller hammer.”

Intentions and Action Choices

Acting exercise: I Want to Get What I Want

Purpose: to understand how Intentions/SOB/choices can be used to get what you want; introduces concept of Intentions (coming into a scene wanting something) and choices, i.e. how will I express what I'm feeling and what action will I take? See explanation of game starting on P. 15.

NOTE: Without the students' knowing it, they are experiencing the Two Questions to be introduced in WEEK 5: Who am I talking to? Why am I saying this now?

WEEK 4

Improv games: group juggling, foreign cinema

Purpose of foreign cinema: to have fun, be present, listen and respond truthfully. This introduces scene work without feeling the pressure of being in a scripted scene.

Acting exercise: Introduce the Two Questions: Who Am I Talking To? Why Am I Saying This Now?

Purpose: to encourage use of imagination where students imagine various people they may be talking to and various reasons why they may be saying this now.

Prompt: Answer the question “Why Am I Saying This Now?” by asking the following:

- a. What just happened?
- b. Did somebody just say something to you to make you speak?

Introduce Concept:

Prep Your World

This is an introduction to the student’s creating his/her world that he/she will walk into and respond truthfully to (creating obstacles, imagining what just happened, awareness of SOB).

Remind students of the prior weeks’ exercises: **SOB, I Want to Get What I Want, Circles**. The first two exercises provide clear examples of answers to the **Two Questions**.

Each student reads his or her monologue or scene answering the Two Questions. Instructor may also select a SOB, Action/Intention/Want (annoy, scare, humor, threaten, irritate, brag, phony sweet talk, tantrum) from the list of Actions/Intentions/Wants and have student use it for his/her scene or monologue. If appropriate, combine a SOB and Action/Intention/Want. Remind student that there are numerous choices for how to perform the piece.

Prompt:

- Encourage students to not do it the way they think it should go.

WEEK 5

Improv game: sound toss

Purpose: to respond quickly with first idea that enters your mind

Acting Exercise: Say It, Sing It with awareness of breath

Each student speaks the first four lines of a chosen song using SOB or intention. Once a strong emotion is established, the student then sings the first four lines of the song. If the student drops the emotion before beginning the first line of the song or does not carry it through, have him/her start again. Remind students to breathe before they start. If students are apprehensive about doing this alone, they may do it in duos or small groups.

Additional Acting Exercise (after snack): Subtext

Introduce Concepts:

Words and Acting are NOT related, BUT words are very important.

Prompts:

- Acting is the expression of the emotions you are experiencing; the “words” or script can be said using any emotion.
- The answer to the Two Questions can help you find your subtext.

Subtext

Using scenes/monologues, each student states what they are really feeling before every line of the scene or monologue.

Purpose of acting exercise: to learn to be aware of how they are feeling and express a specific emotion.

Prompts:

- Words and acting are not related but words are very important.
- Get a bigger hammer.
- Choose a Circle for your inhale.
- Your Subtext can help you find your Intention.
- What is your SOB?

WEEK 6

Improv games: Freeze Tag if small group or one- or two-word story with pointing and elimination or three-sentence scene

Purpose: to promote listening, observing, being physical and spontaneity. They must use the principle of “Yes, and...”; to encourage students to make big physical gestures in Circle 3 and Circle 4 and encourage an honest response to their scene partners.

Acting exercise: Physicalize It!

Introduce Concepts:

Characters

Physicalizations

Each student performs his or her monologue or scene using intense physical gestures (jogging, skiing, playing tennis, on a roller coaster, running from a wolf). See Physicalizations List for more examples. Instructors may also introduce characters (elderly people, astronauts in space, four-year-olds, people who have trouble hearing) to help students physicalize.

Purpose: to learn to use action to find the aliveness/realness/honesty of a song, scene or monologue by having the actors focus on the Physicalization or character and not on themselves.

WEEK 7

Improv games: instructors' choice based on what is working well with the students

Purpose: to have fun and stop thinking

Acting exercise: Preparation

Introduce Concepts:

Projection of the voice

Purpose: to encourage students to project their voices in their songs, scenes and monologues

Prompts:

- This should be done for every element in class (16 Shakedown, improv games, etc.)
- Instructors should model throughout class.

Preparation

Purpose: to practice preparation. Preparation is what an actor does prior to entering stage. It summarizes all the exercises we have been practicing, e.g. what's my SOB? What's my Intention? What do I want? What just happened that made me feel this way? What is my character? What Circle am I feeling at the start?

Student creates a short statement or question reflecting his/her SOB by answering the Two Questions. This statement should lead the student to naturally say the first line of his/her song. Student says the statement 3 times loudly then speaks the first line of the scene or monologue. The he/she repeats the process, continuing the scene or monologue keeping the intention alive/without dropping the intention.

Prompts:

- Circles
- Physicalization

Examples:

- I hate you.
- You hurt me.
- How could you do this to me?
- Help me.
- Stop it.
- Leave me alone.
- I love you.
- I wish you loved me.
- I need you.

-I want to remember.
-I wish I were happy.

WEEK 8

Improv games: instructors' choice based on what is working well with the students. If class is large, keep games short to allow more time for the rest of class.

Acting exercise: Practice Making Strong Choices

Divide students into smaller groups (round robin with instructors) and continue to experiment with all choices (SOB, Intention, Circle, Subtext, Physicalization, character, etc.)

Purpose: to help students discover there are many ways to do their pieces using all the acting tools practiced in previous weeks.

Introduce the concept of Obstacles: See "List of Obstacles." Examples: What's in your way? A librarian? Time constraint? Clean up a mess in one minute before mom gets home? Consider adding a third person to a scene or a scene partner into a monologue to be a character who is an obstacle.

HINT: See **Acting Tools/Techniques/Prompts** below for ideas to activate or change scene or monologue.

WEEK 9

Improv games: instructors' choice

Acting exercise: Reminders!

Make Big Mistakes!

Take Risks!

Screw It Up!

Be Willing To Be Wrong!

Don't Play It Safe!

HINT: See **Acting Tools/Techniques/Prompts** below for ideas to activate or change scene or monologue.

WEEK 10

Repeat WEEK 9 for the final run-through during the first half of class.

The second half of class is the presentation for family and friends. Encourage the students to go for it, to take their time, enjoy everything they have learned and to remember to be present.

Acting Tools/Techniques/Prompts

Acting Definition Reminder: **Living Truthfully Under Imaginary Circumstances.**

What's your **SOB**?

Inhale **Circle 3 or 4** before you feel and then express a big emotion.

What do you **Want**? Say it out loud.

What's your **Intention**? Say it out loud.

Use **Circles!**

Who are you talking to?

Why are you saying this now?

What just happened? Did somebody ask you a **question** to make you open your mouth?

Can you make it as important as **life and death**?

Why **can't it wait**?

What's my **Subtext**? Say it out loud before EVERY line.

Are you making a **strong physical choice**? Add this to first line.

Are you making a **bold character choice**?

Do you need to **get a bigger hammer**?

Do it standing **Back To Back**. Promotes listening.

Is there an **Obstacle**?

Take 3 beats before every line. This enhances listening and getting in touch with subtext.

Do a task: Throw a deck of cards in the air and have each student find a specific suit while doing scene. Hide an object in the room and have them try to find it while doing scene or monologue. Tie shoes. Fix something. Stack the chairs.

Play **Sit, Stand, Lie** with scene. Each student must sit, stand, or lie with every line. They cannot both be doing the same thing at the same time. They must find a way to make the choices make sense. Do not let them go on if choices are random and disconnected

Act the piece **without words**. Song with piano only – no words.

Say **“Um”** before every line. This makes the actor present and appears to be finding the words for the first time.

Do it with **eyes closed**.

Add a scene partner to monologue if student is having difficulty.

Do it **standing on a chair**.

Say the **last word** of scene partner’s line **BEFORE** you say your line.

Punch/emphasize the **Verbs**.

Make one student **High Status** (policeman, teacher, King).

Do **something you do in private** (washing dishes, brushing your teeth, folding clothes) while you do monologue.

Have students **stand across the room from one another** as far apart as possible.

Have one student **make an entrance through a door**.

Improvisation Games: purposes and rules

ACT = (A)ctivate, (C)onnect, be a living (T)hing

Physical Game (Activate): To free the mind and body

16 Shakedown: Every class begins with 16 Shakedown. One student is chosen to lead. Leader stands in the middle of the circle, chooses a word for the group to yell at the end and says “16 Shakedown, ok, go!” Everyone shakes right arm, then left arm, then right leg, then left leg 16 times. Then repeat process eight times, then four times, then two times and one time. Students should count out loud and everyone calls out chosen word at end.

This exercise energizes and activates the body and bring the students’ focus into the room.

Improvisation Games (Connect):

Improvisation games help students learn how to be able to “leave themselves alone” which will enable them to respond truthfully in a scene or monologue. Students need to “make space” in their minds and bodies so they can respond humanly and truthfully.

Games enable students to connect and work together as a group, free their minds, learn to accept anything coming their way, concentrate, and have fun!

Prompts:

- There is no right or wrong answer.
- The obvious response/answer is usually the funniest.

Games that promote spontaneity and clearing of the mind

Sound Toss – Standing in a circle, one student makes a sound and makes eye contact with another student and throws that sound to them. That student catches the sound, repeats it out loud, makes up a new sound and throws that to another student by making eye contact and so on. Once the game is learned, encourage students to go faster. Option: encourage focus by playing elimination whereby a student is eliminated if he/she pauses or incorrectly accepts or throws a sound.

Numbers Game – Similar to Sound Toss but using numbers. Standing in a circle, each student counts off starting with one. Once each student has a number, any student starts by saying his/her number and then another number (limited to the number of students). That student repeats his number and says a new number, and so on. Once the game is learned, encourage students to go faster. Option: encourage focus by playing elimination whereby a student is eliminated if he/she pauses or incorrectly say a usable number. Elimination requires remaining students to count off with new numbers.

One Word Story – Standing in a circle and going counter clockwise, each student says one word, which adds to a story. Sentences should be grammatically correct. Encourage students to reincorporate parts of a story. Students may not use one another’s names in the story. Explain that a student may end a sentence by saying, “Period,” and then start a new sentence.

One Word Story with Pointing – Same as One Word Story but students point to the person that they want to add the next word. This encourages listening and alertness.

Two Word Story - Played as One Word Story, but each student says two words.

Conducted Story – Students line up in front of one student, the conductor. The conductor points to a student who says one word. The conductor then points to another student who provides the next word to the story. Encourage students to go faster.

Group Juggling – Without words or sounds, students make only eye contact and throw one ball to each other. Another ball can be placed in the group as long as a ball hasn’t been dropped or overthrown. Students may not throw a ball to another student until they have made eye contact. Work to get three to four balls “juggled.” This encourages eye contact, teamwork, concentration and awareness.

Build A Machine – One person gets up in front of the room and makes a physical action with his/her body. Students may also add a sound to the physical action. Students join the machine one at a time by raising their hands and being called on by an instructor. He/she connects to the machine with a different physicalization and sound. Repeat until all students are part of the machine. Instructor then says the machine is speeding up. Then instructor says the machine is slowing down until it stops working.

Enemy/Defender (Icebreaker) – All students stand up and each silently picks another student as their “Enemy” and another as their “Defender.” When instructor says “Go”, each student must keep his or her defender between themselves and their enemy. Use the entire space! Usually winds down within a minute or two. Pick new enemies and defenders and do it again.

Games that promote listening and accepting of offers

Offers are ideas given in a situation by an improv partner. The ONLY rule of improv is to always respond with “Yes, and…”

You’re The Expert – In groups of two, students are presented with an object on which they are “experts.” The first student states what it is followed by the second student saying “Yes, and …” continuing the explanation of the object. One instructor is the timekeeper ending the experts’ presentation after 1-2 minutes. Next, the experts take questions from the classmates for 1-2 minutes. Decide timing based on number of students and time available for the game.

I Want to Get What I Want – One student is given a scenario (available at pacsaw.weebly.com under “Class materials” tab) where he/she want something from

someone else, e.g. better grade from teacher, new Iphone from parent, seat on crowded bus. Another student is selected to play teacher/parent/student. Student one is given an Action/Intention/Want by an instructor (available at pacsaw.weebly.com under “Class Materials” tab), in order to try different ways of achieving his/her goal.

Freeze Tag – One student physicalizes a movement, e.g. jogging, jumping up and down, moving an arm up and down. After a few seconds, another student raises his/her hand and calls out, “Freeze!” The student who says, “Freeze!” joins the scene and makes a statement about the frozen student’s physical position. The student who froze responds with a “Yes, and…” statement. Once this comment is made, the student who froze sits down (and cannot say, “Freeze!” again until everyone has had a turn). The remaining student begins a new physical movement. After a few seconds, a new student may raise his/her hand to call out, “Freeze!” and start a new scene, and so on.

Foreign Cinema – Four students play this game. Two students are selected to be in a film scene speaking gibberish. Each of the students has another student behind him/her who is the interpreter. Student one (in the scene) says something in gibberish, and then their translator translates the line into English. Student two (in the scene) responds in gibberish, and then their translator translates their line into English. The scene continues until instructor ends game.

The Ad Game – Divide students up into groups of at least four. Each group is given a topic from which they need to originate a new product (electronics, shoes, cereal, etc.). Each group assigns a group leader to ask originating questions such as what the product is and what it does. The first answer must be accepted. Within three minutes, they must then come up with a name, slogan or jingle, spokesperson and ad. Every group member must participate in the commercial presentation. The commercial is then shown to the rest of the class. Instructor may bring four students up in front of the class and act as group leader to given an example. This game is advanced and should be done no sooner than Week Five.

Slap, Clap, Snap – In a circle, students slap, clap, and snap in rhythm while one student says “I’m thinking of colors red.” The next student says another color after the next snap. This continues around the circle and no items can be repeated.

Game that promotes awareness of how student is feeling

States of Being – One student pulls a “state of being,” (SOB) or emotion out of a bag without showing it to anyone else. They then express the SOB by inhaling and then saying, “Hey Buddy, that’s my bike!” or “Hey, man, throw me the ball!” The rest of the students then guess the SOB.

Prompt: If students are unable to guess correctly, encourage the student to “get a bigger hammer” whereby they intensify the emotion physically or verbally. If still not guessed correctly, ask another student to join the first student and try it together.