

# Drama 10: Introduction to Acting

Fall 2018; T/R 4:30–6:45 PM

Location: Aidekman 75

Instructor: Reza Mirsajadi

Email: [rmirsajadi@gmail.com](mailto:rmirsajadi@gmail.com)

*office hours by appointment*

## Course Description

This course offers students an introduction to the fundamental techniques of acting for the stage. Students will learn the essentials of creative collaboration, working to build trust, develop presence, and embrace risks. Exercises in observation and response as well as harnessing the expressive potential of the body and voice will develop theatrical skills that have practical value in any professional circumstance. This class aims to promote greater vocal control and oratorical technique, audience awareness, active listening, quick reflexes, and strong, centered and motivated movements, qualities that translate into effective communication onstage and off. We will explore the fundamental tools of an actor's craft through physical exercises and explorations, improvisations, voice work, devised performance, and scripted scene work. Focus will be placed on translating analyses of character and text into rich, playable actions on the stage. Students will prepare performances of selected monologues and scenes as the culmination of our work throughout the semester.

## Course Objectives

- to increase self-awareness and observation skills
- to embrace risk-taking
- to develop creativity and nurture imagination
- to develop flexibility and adaptability
- to increase confidence in public speaking
- to develop and apply the body as a communicative instrument
- to develop active listening skills and empathy
- to create and foster a sense of ensemble

## EXPECTATIONS

Our class must be a place where everyone feels safe and supported. We will be responsible for each other in this environment. Collaborative group work is integral to the craft of acting, and I expect you to approach it with a generous spirit and exercise maturity, responsibility, respect, and a willingness to take risks.

### **Participation:**

A great deal of the learning in this course takes place in the classroom. To participate effectively, you must be present and on time for class. Be advised, however, that participation is more than simply showing up for class. To receive full credit for participation, you must be prepared to engage in classroom exercises, reflect on your experiences with them, ask questions, offer thoughtful feedback to your fellow performers, listen actively to others, and contribute positively to the classroom community.

### **Attendance:**

Because work in class determines the major part of the grade, regular attendance is required. Learning about acting is experiential and builds on continuous exercises, therefore it is impossible to make up for classes missed.

- Excused absences are allowed for medical reasons with a signed slip from a doctor, and for religious holidays. For religious holidays, the student **must notify the instructor IN ADVANCE** and make arrangements for making up the work.
- Only ONE non-medical-emergency absence is allowed. If you must miss a class, let me know as soon as possible. Students may not miss performance or workshop days.
- Every absence without a valid excuse lowers the part of the grade devoted to attendance/participation by half a grade (e.g. from A- to B+ or from B to B-).
- A student who has more than THREE ABSENCES, **excused or unexcused**, will be advised to drop the course.
- **Absolute punctuality is required.** Lateness detracts from the concentration of other students. Two times late to class will be counted as one unexcused absence and will have the same effect on your grade as detailed above.

### **Attire:**

Clothing should be loose and comfortable — appropriate for somewhat intense physical exercises and for lying or sitting on the floor. Tight or low-riding pants, skirts, flip flops, and high heels should not be worn except in scene work as appropriate. Feel free to embrace the sweatpants side of you!

### **Rules for Classrooms:**

- NO food or drink is allowed in the classroom. **Bring water!**
- **NO phones or computers in class.** They should be turned off (*not* to vibrate). Acting requires focus and presence in the moment, so any distractions should be out of sight and out of mind.
- You may reserve the DR 10 classroom through the Arena Box Office for rehearsal and preparation of assignments. Classrooms in the basement of Aidekman are often available at night and on weekends. For these there is no

system for reservations, so there is a risk of being bumped by scheduled rehearsals or courses. Consider reserving spaces in advance!

### **Safety:**

A large part of an acting class requires an ability and willingness to get in touch with yourself in an intimate, personal way and to affect others. That said, you have the right to say no to any form of interaction that feels inappropriate to you at any time. Simply notify me of your reaction, so that the proper steps can be taken to maintain the integrity of the class. You are expected to identify ongoing or new physical difficulties to me and to refrain from any class activity, at no risk to your grade, which you believe will be damaging to your body. Due to the unpredictable nature of the class, there is a chance that “triggering” moments may occur for individuals. If this occurs, feel free to take any necessary measures to ensure your mental health.

### **Special Learning Needs and Physical Limitations:**

I expect you to notify me immediately of any new or ongoing learning difficulties or physical safety issues, and to refrain from any class activity that you believe will be harmful (at no risk to your grade).

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

Assignments are due by the start of class on the date stated; they cannot be made up unless there has been an excused absence, upon the discretion of the instructor. For every week day (not class day) an assignment is late, the grade for the assignment will be reduced by one full letter.

### **Performances:**

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Monologues and scenes will be workshopped in class, but at least 4-6 hours of rehearsal outside of class are expected for each final presentation.

### **Silent Film Project**

In small groups, you will create a **3-4 minute**, silent, movement-based scene that tells a story. Like the silent movie clips shown in class, it should riff on some aspect of the physical environment (a set of stairs or a tree, for example). The goal here is to see how much you can communicate through movement — characters? conflict? relationships? Your scene can be comic or not, realistic or not, but it must have a narrative thread.

### **Monologue Performance**

Each student will memorize and perform a **2-3 minute** monologue in front of the class. Monologue selections must be approved by the instructor. Students must read the entire play from which the monologue is derived.

### **Devised Performance**

In small groups, students will use the moment work techniques developed in class to create a devised piece (**approx. 5 minute**) which will be performed for the class. This is not a script-writing project, but an opportunity to harness your creativity and find the expressive potential of theatrical elements in the world around.

### **Scene Performance**

As a final project, you will work with a partner to memorize and perform a **6-8 minute** scene taken from a complete play. Scene partners will be assigned by the instructor, and scene selections must be approved in advance. ***Students must read the entire play from which the scene is derived.***

### **Readings:**

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In addition to reading the play texts of your monologue and scene, I will distribute a few other readings throughout the semester. These will be posted on Canvas, and are to be read thoroughly so that we can discuss them in class on the date the reading is due. I also expect for your journal entries each week to reflect upon the readings for the respective classes!

### **Written Work:**

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#### **Three Character Analyses**

We will go over two separate approaches to conducting character analyses: the first-person narrative and the questionnaire. You will write a first-person narrative character analysis for your assigned character from *Our Town*, submit a questionnaire character analysis for your monologue performance, and choose between the two approaches for your final scene. For these analysis assignments, you will need to read the entire play from which the monologue or scene is taken.

The approach to the analyses will be covered in class in detail. Each analysis is due in class on the first day of the respective workshop (**Sept. 20, Oct. 25, Nov. 8**).

#### **Monologue and Scene Score**

While working on your monologue and final scenes, you will work with the text to create a “score” marking not blocking but intentions, beats, playable actions, and other notes to help your scene work stay specific and intentional. The scene scores will be handed in with your performances (**Oct. 25, Sept 4**), though we will workshop them together.

**Be prepared to show scene scores rough drafts during your workshop slots.**

*The approach to the analyses and the scene score will be covered in class in detail.*

#### **Two Production Critiques** (2-3 pages each)

Over the course of the semester, you are required to attend and critique two productions including:

1. ***Violet*** (Oct. 25-27 and Nov. 1-3 at 8:00 pm) in Balch Arena Theater
2. **One professional production** off-campus.

*Ticket stubs for each must be stapled to the front page of the production critique.*

These critiques should NOT be summaries of the plays. Rather, they should be thoughtful reflections on the acting, movement, and vocal choices you observed. The critique should be *descriptive* and *reflective*: not a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” judgment, but a consideration of the choices the actors and director made, and why and *how* those choices did or did not work.

The critiques are due in class **the week following the date on the ticket**. It must be turned in by the last day of class

**Weekly Journal** (two entries per week)

Each student will keep an actor’s journal that will be typed up and emailed to me (rmirsajadi@gmail.com) once a week.

- Each email should contain two journal entries — one for each class.
- The journals should be sent in the body of the email, NOT as an attachment. **Please put “Acting Journal” and the Week Number in the subject line.**
- Each week’s journals are **due via email on Fridays by 6:00 pm**.

Each journal entry should include **a log of class exercises for that class day**, along with **your response**. The journal is primarily for self-reflection, observation, and constructive criticism, so your response should be personal and revelatory. Your journal is your place to record impressions, observations, and reactions to class activities and readings, as well as any other thoughts on work for the course. It is also your space to ask questions or express any concerns.

At various points in the semester, you may be given specific prompts for your journal entries. I am the only person who will read your journal.

Please be sure to save your weekly emails to protect your grade from any glitches in the system. It is also suggested that you save each selection in a Word document so you have all of the semester’s journal entries compiled in one place.

**Warm-up Exercise:**

Each student is required to bring in a unique warm-up exercise or theatre game with which to lead classmates during the opening of one class session. The exercise may serve as either a vocal or a physical warm-up, or both. Think carefully about how to organize and lead the warm-up, and the way in which your particular warm-up helps your peers to prepare for our work together! Sign-ups for the date you will lead your warm-up exercise will be on the second day of class. For ideas, search “acting warm up exercises” on Google.

**Monologue and Scene Selection:**

Monologues and scenes should be chosen carefully—I will provide a list of plays to consider, and I am more than happy to help with your selection.

- Each student (for monologues) or group (for scenes) must submit a photocopy of the monologue or scene to the instructor — it must include the play’s title and author.
- Your weekly journal can reflect upon your reasons for choosing both the monologue and the scene. What about it attracted you? What connection do you feel to this

character and situation?

- ***Your selection must get my approval*** before you begin your analysis and memorization. Feel free to set up an office hour meeting, speak with me after class, or shoot me an email to get approval. Monologues must be approved by **September 13**, and scenes must be approved by **October 23**. Start looking early!

## GRADING

Participation (attendance, effort, and involvement)	30%
Final Scene (development, progress, and collaboration)	15%
Final Monologue (development and progress)	15%
Devised Performance (collaboration, creativity, response)	10%
Character Analyses (creativity, insight, thoroughness)	10%
Production Critiques (thoughtfulness, clarity)	10%
Weekly Journals and Assignments	10%

### General criteria for grades (A, B, C, D) in the course:

- A      Achievement beyond expectation based on initial ability level  
         Outstanding, truly superior work in the course  
         Achievement of basic skills and/or demonstration of a basic level of talent  
         Special/extra contributions to the ensemble nature of the class
- B      Some level of excellence in work for the course  
         Thorough completion of ALL of the work at a high level of quality  
         Maintenance of a good standard of work with consistency or improvement
- C      Satisfactory completion of MOST of the work  
         Acceptable (yet mediocre) quality of work for the course
- D      Spotty completion of assignments  
         Unsatisfactory quality of work

Please note that NO incomplete grades are allowed in DR 10

## KEY DATES

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|---------|---|
| Sept 13 | <b>Submit Monologue Selection</b>             |
| Sept 18 | Silent Film Performances                      |
| Sept 20 | <b><i>Our Town</i> Character Analysis Due</b> |
| Sept 27 | Monologue Workshop Day I                      |

Oct 2	Monologue Workshop Day II
Oct 4	Monologue Workshop Day III
Oct 9	NO CLASS
Oct 18	Moment Workshop Day I
Oct 23	Moment Workshop Day II ( <b>submit final scene selection</b> )
Oct 25	Monologue Performance Day I ( <b>submit monologue character analysis, monologue score</b> )
Oct 30	Monologue Performance Day II
Nov 1	Devised Performance Day I
Nov 6	Devised Performance Day II
Nov 8	Scene Workshop Day I ( <b>submit scene character analysis</b> )
Nov 13	Scene Workshop Day II
Nov 15	NO CLASS
Nov 20	Scene Workshop Day III
Nov 22	NO CLASS
Dec 4	Scene Performance Day I ( <b>submit scene score</b> )
Dec 6	Scene Performance Day II

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

You are expected to be familiar with all of the University's policies governing student conduct. Website links are below. If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact your professor or the appropriate resource in Student Affairs.

THE UNIVERSITY'S HANDBOOK ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

<http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/publicationsandwebsites/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>.

THE UNIVERSITY'S POLICY ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT:

<http://oeo.tufts.edu/policies-and-procedures/sexual-harassment-policy/>

Sexual harassment violates the dignity of individuals. It is a form of discrimination that violates federal and state laws and is prohibited at Tufts University. Sexual Misconduct also violates the dignity of individuals and may be a form of discrimination based on sex or gender pursuant to federal Title IX regulations. Sexual misconduct includes stalking, sexual exploitation, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. Tufts is committed to providing an

education and work environment that is free from sexual misconduct including sexual harassment. The University works to prevent and address sexual harassment and sexual misconduct through educational programs, training, and complaint resolution. Tufts encourages all members of the University community to report any concerns or complaints of sexual harassment and/or sexual misconduct. Managers, supervisors and other agents of the University are required to respond promptly and appropriately to allegations of sexual misconduct including sexual harassment that are brought to their attention.

#### AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT:

<http://oeo.tufts.edu/policies-and-procedures/americans-with-disabilities-act/>

#### ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES AND/OR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES:

<http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/codeofconduct/healthaccommodations.asp>

#### **Services for Students with Disabilities**

The goal of this program is to enable the full integration of students with documented physical or learning or emotional disabilities into the life of the university. Support services are provided for both temporary (i.e. due to an accident, surgery, hospitalization) and permanent disabilities. The Academic Resource Center provides students with disabilities support so that they may achieve their academic potential. Students with documented learning disabilities or other special needs receive specific accommodations (such as extended time on tests), as needed. Students are required to submit their documentation, including test results, from a qualified professional, to the Coordinator of Undergraduate Education for Students with Disabilities, for review. Upon approval, the Coordinator will be available to arrange the appropriate accommodations and offer assistance in strengthening study skills and developing compensatory strategies. For more information, please visit the Academic Resource Center or contact Linda Sullivan, Director of Disability Services, Dowling Hall.

#### THE UNIVERSITY'S RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE POLICY

<http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/handbook/campus/religious.asp>

Students are encouraged to observe their religious holy days, and instructors and coaches are asked to facilitate observance by allowing absence from classes, practices, and competitions for this purpose.

Instructors and coaches should avoid scheduling exams, oral reports, or other mandatory class participation, practices, and competitions on university-recognized holy days. Some departments have established policies to address this issue. Check your syllabus or consult your professors or coaches about conflicts.

Notice: This listing reflects major holy days that occur only when Tufts has regularly scheduled classes for the day during the academic semester. For all other holy days, please refer to <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/index.htm>

