

# TD 303: Fundamentals of Acting

Fall 2015

Course Unique #: 25310 • Meeting Time: Mon/Wed/Fri 9:00am – 10:00am • Location: 2.180

**Instructor: Briana Bower**

Office: B.122

Office Hours: Mondays 11:00pm – 1:00pm and by appointment\*

\*the best way to make an appointment is to contact me via email.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Welcome to Fundamentals of Acting! This course provides an introductory exploration of the basic principles of acting. No previous experience is necessary. In this course, we will develop the actor's basic tools – voice, body, imagination, play, and critical text and performance analysis. We will explore how we can use these tools to truthfully embody imagined characters, stories, and circumstances. Through active engagement in a wide range of theater games, improvisation, collaborative performance-making, writing exercises, and in-depth storytelling and scene work, we will examine what it means to be a member of an ensemble, to create a character, and to build a performance. In each activity and assignment, there will be opportunities to reflect and consider how our experiences as actors, ensemble members, and theatre makers inform our work both on and off stage. As a community we will explore; we will take risks; and we will sometimes fail. But we will celebrate our failures, and through we will support each other. Most importantly we will have fun!

## COURSE OBJECTIVES:

As we explore the fundamentals of acting, we will consider: What is theatre? What is acting? What is an actor's job, and what tools do we have to do that job to the best of our ability? How might theatre apply to our daily lives?

Over the course of the semester students will

- Explore the fundamental skills and tools required for acting on stage
- Build confidence in vocal and physical performance
- Think on their feet and in their writing
- Be present physically and mentally in individual work and work with others
- Respond critically to theatrical performances – focusing on tools/vocabulary addressed in class
- Collaboratively create performances as an ensemble
- Provide fellow classmates with constructive criticism, feedback, and support
- Reflect on their personal goals for the class and growth throughout the class
- Memorize stories and scenes and perform them during class
- Consider how the tools learned in class apply to their own lives

## TEXTS

### Required Texts:

- Bruder, Melissa. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*. New York: Vintage, 1986. Print.

Additional required readings will be posted on Canvas under "Files"

### Suggested Texts:

- Bogart, Anne. *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2001. Print.
- Bogart, Anne and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book: A practical guide to viewpoints and composition*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005. Print.
- Hagen, Uta. *A Challenge to the Actor*. New York: Scribner, 1991. Print.
- Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

All assignments unless noted otherwise in the syllabus are due at the start of the class period. Late assignments will NOT be accepted, regardless of whether you are in class or not. One week extensions may be requested for written assignments, but must be requested 1 full week before the assignment is due. Incompletes will NOT be given. Please see the Course Schedule for specific due dates.

**Written assignments that are turned in must be typed, 12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced, 1-inch margins, and have an appropriate header and 2 MLA citations. For more info on MLA format:**

**<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>**

### 1. Participation (20%)

At the end of each class, you will fill out a participation sheet and will grade your participation out of 100%. You will also write one sentence to support the grade on your participation sheet. I will collect these at the end of the class and return it the following class. If there is a disagreement, I will let you know on your participation sheet. You will receive a 0 for any day that you are absent. At the end of the semester, I will average your daily participation grades to calculate your final participation grade. The grade you and I give for each day's participation should reflect commitment and willingness in the following areas:

- Participation in class
- Punctuality and preparation for class
- Participation in discussion of assigned readings
- Respect and support for peers and instructor
- Positive attitude and willingness to take risks

**2. Letter to Future Self (5%)**

This assignment has two parts. First, print and fill out the student profile available on Canvas. This information will help me to shape the daily activities in the course specifically to this class. In addition to the profile, please write 1-2 pages (double-spaced) about your goals and intentions for the class. Why are you taking acting? Is it a required class, an interest, a curiosity? When you finish, what do you hope to have accomplished? What specific goals do you have for yourself in the class? How will you know you have accomplished them?

**3. Actor's Notebook (15%)**

Throughout the semester, you will keep an actor's notebook. This must be a paper notebook. Please bring this notebook to class every day, as we will use it for in class writing/reflection activities. In this notebook you will also document major topics, tools, and themes discussed in class and in the reading. I also encourage you to include any thoughts, observations, discoveries, or reflections concerning experiences/activities in class and personal progress throughout the class. In addition to these notes, you are required to keep a rehearsal log in your notebook.

Rehearsal Log: For the performance projects, you will need to take time to rehearse outside of class individually and/or with group members. After each rehearsal please log the following in your Actor's Notebook:

1. When you rehearsed and for how long
2. The goals of your rehearsal/ What you rehearsed
3. A short reflection on challenges/successes, things you discovered, and the collaborative process
4. Anything you would like me to know and/or any questions you have

Feel free to include any additional information, free writing, poetry, quotes, etc. you find and that support your learning in the class. The purpose of the notebook is to help you track your own learning process and your own experiences as an actor, so include what is useful for you!

You are required to turn in this notebook three times during the semester (dates listed on assignment calendar).

**4. Performance Attendance and Response (10%)**

Over the course of the semester, you must attend at least two performances and submit responses to them.

- One performance must be a UT Theatre Department show. The shows going up this semester are as follows:

***The Diary of Anne Frank***

A play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett

October 8-18, 2015

Oscar G. Brockett Theatre

***The Wild Party***

Music and Lyrics by Michael John LaChiusa

Book by Michael John LaChiusa and George C. Wolfe

November 20-December 5, 2015

Oscar G. Brockett Theatre

***Get Sexy. Get Consent.***

Voices Against Violence

Dates/Locations for this show will be announced via Canvas

This show is free to all UT Students

- One can be any piece of theatre you choose, though I must approve your choice before you complete the assignment. You may see two UT productions if you would like! If you are interested in exploring the Austin Theatre scene, consider looking into performances at some of the following venues/companies:
  - Bass Concert Hall
  - Rude Mechanicals/Off Center
  - Hyde Park Theatre
  - The Vortex
  - Zach Scott Theatre
  - The Hideout Theatre
  - Salvage Vanguard

You are responsible for buying your tickets ahead of time. Tickets for UT productions run around \$10-15 each for UT student tickets. Please get your tickets early because these shows do sell out!

One response will be a critical analysis paper and the other will be a creative response. You **MUST** include proof of attendance with your assignment for credit. For UT productions, an attendance slip can be obtained at the end of the production. For other shows, please include a ticket stub and program. Guidelines for the responses are as follows:

Critical Response Papers must be between 2 – 3 pages double spaced and must include:

- Date of performance attendance, title and playwright, director, venue of performance
- A **brief** summary of the plot
- Your response to least two of the following production element: lighting, costumes, set, sound, and/or staging (the movement of the characters)
- Analysis of at least two actors' performances based on the concepts we have learned about in class.
- Include two citations from readings in class to support your analysis
- All papers must be typed, double-spaced, in 12pt Times New Roman font with 1" margins on all sides. Grammar and spelling count.

Creative Responses must include:

- Date of performance attendance, title and playwright, director, venue of performance
- You may respond to this performance in any creative, thoughtful way you like. It is not a formal paper. This response might be a collage, a drawing, a poem, a journal, a news article, a song, a short film, or any other format you wish it to take.
- Spelling and grammar still count!

### **Performance Projects:**

Each performance assignment will be discussed at length and rehearsed/worked on in class. Grading rubrics and assignment details for each assignment will be distributed prior to the assignment. Brief descriptions of the performance assignments are as follows:

#### Build a Character – Object and Environment Pantomime/Gestures (10%)

Using our physical theatre tools, you will create a character and a short series of character gestures that you will perform for the class.

#### Personal Narrative (10%)

You will develop a short individual storytelling performance using a personal narrative. Using story structure and text analysis skills used in class you will script your story, and create a dynamic physical and vocal performance using the tools of the actor discussed in class. As part of your preparation you will create a story outline and summary.

#### Scene Study (15%)

You will be assigned a scene and scene partner. Together, you and your partner will work outside of class to analyze, rehearse, memorize, and block the scene. You will present the scene in class, receive feedback, then present the scene a second time. As part of your preparation, you will read the play your scene is from, and write a brief 2-page (double spaced) text analysis paper.

#### Final Performance Project – Adaptation/Devising (15%)

Students will work together in small assigned groups to adapt a piece of text to stage as a final performance. You may use movement, improvisation, music, film and audience participation. You will write a short description and reflection on the process and your experience.

### **RUBRICS**

For each assignment, you will receive a rubric detailing specific expectations. The rubric will serve as a guide and checklist as you work to complete each assignment. You will attach the rubric sheet to the front of all written work and presentation materials.

**ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE IN CLASS (except where noted).  
THERE ARE NO INCOMPLETES.**

**GRADING:**

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Participation                            | 20%  |
| Letter to Future Self                    | 5%   |
| Actor's Notebook                         | 15%  |
| Performance Response Papers              | 10%  |
| Character Physicalization/Gesture        | 10%  |
| Personal Narrative                       | 10%  |
| Scene Study                              | 15%  |
| Final Performance Project and Reflection | 15%  |
| Total:                                   | 100% |

**If you have a question about the grade you received, you must contact me within a week (7 days) after the assignment is returned.**

**This class employs the +/- grading system. Grades are calculated as follows:**

|                |                 |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| A 92.5 – 100   | A- 89.5 - 92.49 | B+ 86.5 - 89.49 |
| B 82.5 - 86.49 | B- 79.5 - 82.49 | C+ 76.5 - 79.49 |
| C 72.5 - 76.49 | C- 69.5 - 72.49 | D+ 66.5 - 69.49 |
| D 62.5 - 66.49 | D- 59.5 - 62.49 | F 0 - 59.49     |

## CLASS CALENDAR

### Week 1:                    Course Introduction/Ensemble Building

Aug. 26                    IN CLASS:    Course introduction/Class Contract/Syllabus  
**ASSIGNMENT:** Print and read syllabus, and bring it to class

Aug. 28                    IN CLASS:    Getting to know each other, Ensemble building  
**DUE:**                **Student Profile and Letter to Future Self**  
**Bring 2 personal objects to class**

### Week 2:                    The Job of an Actor

Aug. 31                    IN CLASS:    What is Acting? – The Jobs and Skills of the Actor  
 READ:                *Practical Handbook* "The Job of the Actor"  
 Bogart, "Embarrassment" on Canvas

Sept. 2                    IN CLASS:    Being in the space with others – Collaboration and Ensemble  
 READ:                Stein, "What I Mean When I Talk About Collaboration" on Canvas

Sept. 4                    IN CLASS:    Introduction to the Tools of the Actor  
 READ:                *Practical Handbook* Ch. 1 & 7

### Week 3:                    The Body and Movement

Sept. 7                    NO CLASS: Labor Day

Sept. 9                    IN CLASS:    Guest Artist – Introduction to Viewpoints  
 READ:                Bogart, "Viewpoints and Composition" pgs. 7-13 on Canvas

Sept. 11                    IN CLASS:    Movement Exploration: Space, Weight, Time, Flow, and Tension

### Week 4:                    Movement, Space, and Character

Sept. 14                    IN CLASS:    Movement and Character  
 READ:                *Practical Handbook* Ch. 3 & 4

Sept. 16                    IN CLASS:    Environment, Objects, and Pantomime Workshop  
 Discuss Build a Character Project

Sept. 18                    IN CLASS:    Environment, Objects, and Pantomime continued

**Week 5: Character – Movement and Objective**

Sept. 21 IN CLASS: Creating Character through movement  
 READ: *Practical Handbook* Ch. 10

Sept. 23 IN CLASS: Character Motivation/Objectives

Sept. 25 IN CLASS: Character Gesture Performances  
**DUE: Build a Character Project**

**Week 6: The Actor's Voice**

Sept. 28 IN CLASS: Vocal Exploration – Volume, Pitch, Timbre, Diction  
 READ: Vocal Readings posted on Canvas

Sept. 30 IN CLASS: Connecting the Vocal and the Physical Character

Oct. 2 IN CLASS: Speaking the Speech  
 Personal Narrative Assignment distributed in class  
**DUE: 1<sup>st</sup> Actor's Notebook Check**

**Week 7: Storytelling**

Oct. 5 IN CLASS: Critical Response – How to Give and Receive Feedback  
 READ: Lerman, "Critical Response" on Canvas  
**DUE: Prepare a short personal story to share in class**

Oct. 7 IN CLASS: Sharing our Stories  
 READ: Storytelling Readings on Canvas

Oct. 9 IN CLASS: Storytelling Performance Workshop/Rehearsal

**Week 8: Storytelling Performance**

Oct. 12 IN CLASS: Personal Narrative Performance/Reflection

Oct. 14 IN CLASS: Personal Narrative Performance/Reflection

Oct. 16 IN CLASS: Personal Narrative Performance/Reflection  
**DUE: Deadline for Performance Response #1 – Post on Canvas**

**Week 9: Introduction to Scene Study**

Oct. 19 IN CLASS: Scene Analysis – Introduction to Scene Assignment  
 READ: *Practical Handbook* Ch. 2 & 5  
**DUE: Personal Narrative Reflection – Post on Canvas**



**Week 9 cont. Introduction to Scene Study**

|         |           |                            |
|---------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Oct. 21 | IN CLASS: | Scene Assignments          |
| Oct. 23 | IN CLASS: | Script Analysis            |
|         | READ:     | Dixon "How to Read a Play" |

**Week 10: Acting with Others – Be a great scene partner!**

|         |             |  |
|---------|-------------|--|
| Oct. 26 | IN CLASS:   | Exploring the Given Circumstances      |
|         | READ:       | Your Scene Study Play                  |
|         | <b>DUE:</b> | <b>Have lines memorized by today</b>   |
| Oct. 28 | IN CLASS:   | Listening and Responding in the Moment |
| Oct. 30 | IN CLASS:   | Guided in Class Scene Rehearsal        |

**Week 11: Scene Study 1<sup>st</sup> Pass**

|        |             |  |
|--------|-------------|--|
| Nov. 2 | IN CLASS:   | Scene Study 1 <sup>st</sup> Pass             |
|        | <b>DUE:</b> | <b>Scored Scenes w. Analysis ALL GROUPS</b>  |
| Nov. 4 | IN CLASS:   | Scene Study 1 <sup>st</sup> Pass             |
| Nov. 6 | IN CLASS:   | Scene Study 1 <sup>st</sup> Pass             |
|        | <b>DUE:</b> | <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Check Actor's Notebook</b> |

**Week 12: Scene Study – 2<sup>nd</sup> Pass**

|         |           |   |
|---------|-----------|---|
| Nov. 9  | IN CLASS: | Scene Study 2 <sup>nd</sup> Pass Rehearsal    |
| Nov. 11 | IN CLASS: | Scene Study 2 <sup>nd</sup> Pass Performances |
| Nov. 13 | IN CLASS: | Scene Study 2 <sup>nd</sup> Pass Performances |

**Week 13: Intro to Adaptation and Devising**

|         |             |  |
|---------|-------------|--|
| Nov. 16 | IN CLASS:   | Adaptation and Devising Workshop – Choosing Source Material        |
|         | <b>DUE:</b> | <b>Scene Study Play Analysis &amp; Reflection – Post on Canvas</b> |
| Nov. 18 | IN CLASS:   | Devising and Adaptation  |
|         | READ:       | TBD  |
| Nov. 20 | IN CLASS:   | Exploring Story Theatre  |
|         | <b>DUE:</b> | <b>Material Selections for Final Project</b>                       |

**Week 14:           Adaptation & Devising Continued**

Nov. 23           IN CLASS:    Final Project Rehearsal/Feedback Session  
                     **DUE:           Deadline for Performance Response #2 – Post on Canvas**

Nov. 25           WORKING DAY

Nov. 27           No Class for Thanksgiving

**Week 15:           Adaptation Performances/Closure**

Nov. 30           IN CLASS:    Adaptation Final Performances

Dec. 2            IN CLASS:    Adaptation Final Performances

Dec. 4            IN CLASS:    Final Group Reflection/Closure  
                     **DUE:           Final Actor's Notebook Collection**

Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>        **DUE:           Final Project Reflection Due on Canvas by 9:30am**

## POLICIES OF THIS COURSE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

### CANVAS

You can access the course Canvas site at: <http://canvas.utexas.edu>. There you will find the syllabus, schedule, selected readings, and instructor contact information. Any digital course readings (noted in your syllabus) will be posted on Canvas under the "Files" section and within the weekly Modules.

### EMAIL

During this course, our primary means of communication outside of class will be via Email. You are required to check email daily for updates on course assignments. It is expected that you will read all emails from me within 48 hours of sending. In return, you can expect that I will respond to your emails within 48 hours of sending.

### ATTENDANCE

As we will explore this semester, acting requires an emotional, physical, and mental presence, and our success in theatre often lies in the collaborative support of an ensemble. Thus, it is required that you be present in class each day, and actively engaged in each activity to the best of your ability. Because we are an ensemble of performers and learners, your absence not only affects your learning, but that of your peers. Please plan to arrive a few minutes early, with pen and notebook, having completed all assignments for the day. We will begin class at exactly 9am and end at 9:50. Expect to give your full participation through the entire class period. Missing a day of class during which you are scheduled to present is considered highly unprofessional and may result in a "0" for the assignment. If you have an

excused absence for that class period please make an appointment to discuss how you will make up the assignment.

- More than **3 unexcused absences** is considered excessive and unacceptable. If you accumulate more than three unexcused absences your final grade will drop by one half-letter grade for each consecutive absence (i.e. an A- to a B+, a B+ to a B and so on). Because a large percentage of your grade is based on participation you should look at this policy not as if you are "allowed" 3 absences, but rather that your attendance in class is expected every class period.
- Please DO NOT arrive to class late. Three (3) late arrivals (that is, not being in the room and ready to go when class starts at \_\_\_\_am) or early dismissals (that is, leaving before class is over at \_\_\_\_am) equals one absence.

Absences may be excused for the following reasons:

- Illness with a doctor's note. You must bring the note to the first class after your absence.
- Documented University obligation approved one week (three class sessions) in advance.
- Holy Days: In accordance with UT policy, you must provide notice 14 days in advance if you plan to be absent from class for an approved religious holy day. This notification should be in writing – either as a note or an email. Please see the UT catalogue for more information on excused absences.

It is **your responsibility** to get notes, assignments, and any other information from a classmate before the next class. In the event of an absence, please contact a classmate for class notes and information concerning any upcoming assignments. If you know you are going to be absent, please turn in the assignments before the class you are going to miss.

## OUR WORK SPACE

Acting requires a community in which each member is fully present. NO electronics (phones, computers, tablets, iPods, etc.) will be permitted in class. Please put them away before class begins and DO NOT take them out until class is over. You are expected to be fully present- physically and mentally- during each class member's performances. No food, gum, or candy is permitted. Beverages are okay. If you have an issue that will prevent you from following any of these policies, please let me know before class begins.

## PARTICIPATION, RISK, & PHYSICAL CONTACT

Acting requires a safe space in which we as artists may feel comfortable taking risks, expanding our understanding of ourselves and of others. I expect you to come to class willing to be open emotionally, mentally, and physically to the best of your ability. Most importantly, I expect you to respect yourself, respect others, and respect the space and community we create together. Additionally, please know that by their nature, the activities of this course may require some physical contact between actors or by me. Please let me know if you have any concerns about this. In general, stay fully present, be aware of your surroundings, and respectful of others and we will work together well.

## **ATTIRE**

The classroom will be an active and dynamic space where you will be moving, standing, jumping, rolling, running, and sitting on the floor—a lot. Please wear sturdy footwear and clothing that allows for movement. Inappropriate clothing is not an excuse to not participate. Not participating in class because of inappropriate clothing will result in one class absence.

## **UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HONOR CODE**

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

## **SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY**

Students who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. I DO NOT tolerate it. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ASK me. You may also contact the Dean of Students, or find information online at [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis\\_what\\_is.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_what_is.php)

## **ACCOMMODATIONS**

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice), 232-2937 (video phone), or consult their website at <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/index.php>. Please notify me as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, course packets are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).

## **COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH:**

UT students are offered confidential counseling services for \$5 per session from UT's Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC). The CMHC also offers Stress Recess, meditation, and telephone sessions, along with many other services. To access these services, visit: <http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/whatwedo.html>

## **BEHAVIOR CONCERNS ADVICE LINE (BCAL)**

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

## **EMERGENCY EVACUATION POLICY**

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors.

Do not re-enter a building unless you're given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

## **GENDER & SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT, AND VIOLENCE**

You have the right to be safe at UT. If you are not safe, we encourage you to let somebody know. The University is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discriminatory conduct based on gender. As required by Title IX, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex in its education programs and activities, and it encourages any student or non-student who thinks that he or she has been subjected to sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault/violence, interpersonal violence (including domestic and dating violence), stalking, or sexual misconduct by another student, member of the faculty or staff, or campus visitor or contractor, to immediately report the incident to any of the individuals persons or offices listed below. Title IX covers all gender orientations, identities, and expressions.

Institutional Title IX Coordinator <TitleIX@austin.utexas.edu>

University Compliance Services

2.206 UT Administration Building (UTA)

512-232-3992

Deputy Title IX Coordinator for Students <equity@austin.utexas.edu>

Student Emergency Services

Office of the Dean of Students

4.104 Student Services Building (SSB)

512-471-5017

Voices Against Violence, a program of UT's Counseling and Mental Health Center, offers further resources:

<http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/index.html>

## **SYLLABUS**

In the spirit of my own scholastic honesty, large portions of this Syllabus are stolen from amazing fellow teachers. As I am learning and growing as a teacher and facilitator, I too reserve the right to learn and grow and make changes to the course syllabus as we move through our time together.