

TD 303: *Fundamentals of Acting*

Spring 2020

Unique Number: 25570

T/TH 8:00-9:30a, Winship 1.134

Instructor: Laura Epperson

Email: laura.mw.epperson@gmail.com

Pronouns: she/her/hers

Office: Winship B.122

Office Hours: Tuesday 9:15-10:00a

Wednesday 12:30-1:30p

**The best way to meet with me is to make an appointment by talking with me after class or sending an email with dates/times you are available.*

Course Description and Objectives

This course explores foundational theories, methods, and practices of acting. Through a variety of embodied and reflective exercises, we will expand the ways in which we use our voice, body, and affective impulses to express meaning and nuance. We will practice analyzing text and performance as we examine how choices about action/objectives and stakes/obstacles create dynamic characters and relationships. This course invites play and brave risk-taking as we explore how listening, movement, and improvisation create opportunities for character (and human) connections. Our classroom will mirror that of a rehearsal room, relying heavily on partner/group work, personal and collective accountability, and a process over product mindset. With multiple performance opportunities throughout the course, we will engage with a range of scripts, performance styles, and acting techniques.

This semester we will...

- **Explore** the actor's tools of voice, body, and imagination.
- **Build** confidence speaking and performing in front of an audience.
- **Engage** with acting and performance from a critical lens.
- **Analyze** scripts and staging from an actor's perspective.
- **Practice** giving and receiving constructive feedback
- **Collaborate** on a wide range of tasks through a variety of methods.
- **Connect** the skills practiced as actors to other professions.
- **Reflect** on our individual artistic and creative processes.

And of course, as this is a performance-based class you will **perform**

- a **narrative story**
- an **open scene** with one partner
- a **monologue** with a specific character point of view
- a **contemporary scene** with a partner

Canvas and Communication

This course uses Canvas and email for communication. Please check your email and Canvas regularly for updates on course assignments. On Canvas, you will find the course syllabus, schedule, assignments, readings, and instructor contact information. You can access Canvas at <http://canvas.utexas.edu>. **All assignment will be submitted on canvas** unless otherwise noted by the instructor.

Course Materials

All required readings, videos, and other materials for this course will be available on Canvas. Daily/weekly readings will be organized in the “Modules” section and organized by the date they must be completed.

Recommended Resources for Further Inspiration

- *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* by Melissa Bruder
- *Actions: The Actor’s Thesaurus* by Marina Caldarone & Maggie Lloyd-Williams
- *All the Lights On* by Michelle Hensely
- *And Then, You Act* by Anne Bogart
- *Black Acting Methods* by Sharrell Luckett & Tia M. Shaffer
- *Letters to a Young Artist* by Anna Deveare Smith
- *On the Technique of Acting* by Michael Chekov
- *The Actor and the Target* by Declan Donnellan
- *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It For Life* by Twyla Tharp
- *Steal Like an Artist* by Austin Kleon

Overview of Course Grading and Assignments

Assignment Evaluation

Evaluation rubrics for all assignments will be posted on Canvas.

Assignment	Points
Participation	25
—Attendance and Approach (30 classes x0.5pt each)	—15
—Self-Evaluation #1, Due Thur 3/12	—5
—Self-Evaluation #2, Due Thur 5/7	—5
Performance	50
—Storytelling, Perform Thur 2/6	—10
—Open Scene, Perform Thur 2/27	—10
—Monologue, Perform Thur 3/26 or Tue 3/31	—10
—Contemporary Scene, Perform Tue 4/21 or Thur 4/23	—10
—Final Showcase, Perform Tue 5/5	—10
Reflection	25

—Ongoing Reflective Practice (30 classes x0.5pt each)	—15
—Performance Response, Due Tue 4/14	—10
TOTAL	100

Grading System

A 100-93	B+ 89-87	B- 81-80	C 76-72	D+ 69-67	D- 61-60
A- 92-90	B 86-82	C+ 79-77	C- 71-70	D 67-62	

Course Assignment Descriptions

PARTICIPATION

To state the obvious... if you are not present in class you cannot participate. To state the perhaps less obvious... if you are not present in class, our entire ensemble is different and diminished. YOUR PRESENCE MATTERS.

Attendance and Approach (0.5 pt possible for each class meeting = 15 pts total)

Class begins at 8:00am and ends at 9:15am. You are able to earn up to a half point (0.5) each class for your attendance and approach. Attendance is evaluated on whether you are present in class. Approach is evaluated based on your individual ability, attitude, and progress based on overall class interaction, active participation, readiness, self-discipline, awareness and respect of others and the space, curiosity, exploration, and a genuine work ethic. The expectation is that you will always play to the highest of your intelligence and respect the instructor and your classmates as we take risks and engage in the challenges of our work together.

To earn full approach points, each class period you should practice:

- Punctuality and preparation
- Actively engaging in exercises and games
- Sharing and listening in discussions and peer performance feedback
- Incorporating feedback into in-class performance work
- Accountability to guidelines established in class community contract
- Respect and support for peers and instructor
- Positive attitude, curiosity, and willingness to take risks

Again, attendance and participation are essential not only for your own learning and growth, but for the learning and growth of the whole class. I expect each person will be present for all class meetings, except in the case of the following excused absences: illness (documentation from a physician if missing more than one session), personal/family emergencies, professional obligations (give at least 2 weeks notice), and religious holy days (give 14 days notice, per UT policy). If you exceed 3 unexcused absences, you and I will meet to discuss your attendance challenges and consequences for absences moving forward. Excessive absences may result in a meeting with your advisor and/or a lowered final grade.

You will miss points for all missed in-class assignments or activities and these generally cannot be made up. **In-class performances cannot be made up.**

You are encouraged to exchange contact information with at least two people in class. If you miss class, contact these folks to catch up on what you missed.

Self-Evaluations (2 evaluations x 5 pts each = 10 pts)

Due Thur 3/12 and Thur 5/7

Twice during the semester, you will be asked to write a 50-100 word assessment of your participation and growth throughout the course. Specific prompts and criteria will be posted to Canvas.

PERFORMANCE

This is a performance based class. 50% of your grade will come from in-class performances that range from two minutes to five minutes. Two of these performances will be done individually and two will be performed with one or more partners. There will be a significant amount of time to rehearse these performance within the class and time will be needed to rehearse/prepare outside of class. You will primarily be graded for effort and growth. Detailed assignment sheets and grading rubrics will be provided throughout the semester for each of the performance assignments. More information concerning specific expectations for each assignment will be provided before each is due, but here's a quick overview.

Storytelling Performance (10 pts)

Perform Thur 2/6

We'll begin by exchanging short personal narratives. We'll analyze what makes a story compelling and then experiment with structure, style, length, tone, and perspective. We will collaborate together to develop and refine our stories in class. A rubric will be provided to guide your focus in this performance and will be based on stage presence, volume, articulation, and audience connection. You must rehearse with a partner a minimum of one (1) time outside of class.

Open Scene Performance (10 pts)

Perform Thur 2/27

Text becomes dramatic when it is embodied in physical action. Our second unit will focus on the marrying of physical and vocal choices to pre-written text. We'll stage two-person scenes with simple, ambiguous dialogue utilizing physical and vocal exercises invented by contemporary theatre practitioners. After having the opportunity to engage with a number of these exercises you and a partner will choose one of the exercises to expand upon and refine into a short performance. A rubric will be provided to guide your focus in this performance and will be based on objectives, stakes, tactics, and relationships. You must rehearse with a

partner a minimum of one time outside of class. You and your partner are expected to be fully memorized.

Monologue Performance (10 pts)

Perform Thur 3/26 or Tue 3/31

During this unit, we'll explore techniques for developing characters that are highly imagined and distinctly realized. With in-class support, you will choose and perform a 2-3 minute monologue. You will read the play from which the monologue has been taken and complete a character analysis exercise. You will perform the monologue twice in front of the class, once as a "workshop performance" and once as a final performance. After your workshop performance, you will receive peer and instructor feedback to implement into your final performance. A rubric will be provided for reference and will be based on articulation, stage presence, volume, connection, clear objectives, stakes, tactics, and relationships. You must rehearse with a partner at least two times outside of class. You are expected to be fully memorized for your final performance.

Contemporary Scene Performance (10 pts)

Perform Tue 4/21 or Thur 4/23

As an ensemble, we will explore script and scene analysis. Then, you and a partner will perform a scene from a contemporary script. This scene will be assigned to you with some input from you and your partner regarding your goals for this course. Scene partners will perform their scene twice for the class. You are expected to have a detailed familiarity with the play text, both the scene you perform and the full script. You will individually complete script and character analysis for your play. You and your partner will collaborate to make specific staging or "blocking" choices in the scene. You will provide any props, furniture, costume pieces or other physical items needed for your scene. You and your partner are expected to be fully memorized for your final performance. You must rehearse with your scene partner a minimum of three times outside of class. A rubric will be provided for reference.

Final Performance Showcase (10 pts)

Perform Tue 5/5

For our final project in class, you will select, refine, and present a 5 minute piece of performance that you feel best showcases your work over the semester. You may choose to revisit your story, your monologue, or your contemporary scene. In addition to your showcase performance, you will write and submit a reflection response to your work and your learning in class. More information will be provided to you in a detailed assignment write-up.

REFLECTION

Critical reflection is a key aspect of both art-making and learning. With the following assignments, I invite you to develop your own reflective practice as an (emerging) artist.

Ongoing Reflective Log (30 daily class logs x 0.5 pt each = 15 pts total)

Due each class meeting at 8am

In lieu of keeping a formal Actor's Journal, you will track your out-of-class engagement and reflection through an ongoing log posted to Canvas on each class meeting by 8am. While your log must be submitted on Canvas for grading, you are welcome and encouraged to use a physical notebook/journal to capture your questions, inspirations, and thoughts throughout the semester. If you prefer to keep a physical journal you may take a picture of the appropriate pages for each log submission.

The structure and specifics of each log will vary and may include:

- Description of and reflection on class rehearsals and performances
- Questions and takeaways from class readings, videos, etc
- Description of and reflection on outside rehearsals
- Creative responses to work in and out of class

These deliverables will be graded based on completion, as such no late or incomplete submission will be accepted. A detailed description of each log, including its requirements for completion, will be posted to canvas at the end of the previous class (i.e. Tue log assignments released @ 9:30a on Thur; Thur log assignments released @ 9:30a on Tue).

Performance Attendance and Response Paper (10 pts)

Due Tue 4/14

You are required to see one live theatre performance for this class. You will either write a response or develop a creative response to this performance.

You may fulfill this requirements by attending on the UT Theatre & Dance department production. Please visit <https://theatredance.utexas.edu/calendar> for a list of current/upcoming productions and ticket information. You may also fulfill this requirements by attending a performance within the Austin Theatre community. Included in the back of your syllabus is an incomplete list of theatre companies in and around the Austin community. **Please plan ahead which performances you will be attending, and purchase or reserve tickets early as shows may sell out.** I would highly recommend you find a performance date that works with your schedule and book your tickets EARLY. Many venues offer student discounts or rush ticket sales. Don't let this assignment sneak up on you!

When you choose a theatre production you are interested in attending and writing about for the requirements of this course, please notify me of the theatre you will be attending and the title of the live performance you will be attending.

You will submit your performance responses to Canvas. A detailed assignment description and rubric will be provided for Critical and Creative Responses. Below is a brief overview of each possible response structure.

Critical Response papers should include

- 2 -3 pages, double spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman, 1" margins
- Date of performance attendance, title and playwright, director, and venue of the performance
- A brief (3-4 sentences will do) synopsis of the play
- Your response to the following prompts
 - What stood out to you from the performance and why?
 - Discuss at least one of the following production elements: lighting, sound, set, costumes, staging (i.e. the movement of the actors). How did this element enhance the production?
 - Analyze at least two actors' performances based on the concepts we have been learning about in class.
 - Did you enjoy your experience watching this performance? Why or why not?

Creative Response should include:

- Date of performance attendance, title and playwright, director, and venue of the performance
- You may respond to the performance in any creative, thoughtful way you like. This does not have to be a formal paper. Your response might take the form of a collage, a drawing, a poem, a news article, a song or audio piece, a video, or any other format you wish to use.
 - If you choose a format that takes the form of a hard copy (i.e. a collage), please turn it in as both a hard copy AND find a way to document it to submit on Canvas.
- A brief (4-5 sentences will do) typed description of what your creative response is. Please include in your description an explanation of the specific choices you made in determining your artistic medium, and how your response is connected to and inspired by the performance you attended.

Course Policies

Respect

In this course we will work closely together. I expect you to respect yourself, respect others, and respect the space and community we create together. Disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated and may result in loss of participation points and removal from class for the day.

Identity

We will engage with multiple perspectives and may address sensitive topics. In registering for and staying in this course, I ask that you agree to listen and hear other people's perspectives and engage in ideas that you do not necessarily agree with. This course may deal with questions and ideas about identity and representation; however, we will **NOT** debate anyone's identity, or discuss the authenticity of anyone else's identity. We will actively respect the way everyone in our community identifies and treat them the way they prefer to be treated.

Physical Risk and Consent

Please know that by their nature, the activities of this course may require some physical contact between actors or by the instructor, as well as moderate elements of physical risk. Always ask for and receive consent before touching another person. In general, stay fully present, be aware of your surroundings, and respectful of others and we will work together well. Remain conscious of your physical abilities and feel free to sit out of an activity that presents discomfort or harm. It's helpful if you notify the instructor of any limitations before the course or after class if you decide to pass on an activity. The instructor and players within a scene or activity reserve the right to stop that scene or activity if at any moment they see potential danger to a player's physical safety or their emotional safety.

Emotion

Acting asks players to step outside of their comfort zone and into a place that can be emotionally vulnerable. Acting is a deeply human and therefore emotionally charged practice. Theatre-making requires a safe space in which we as artists may feel comfortable taking risks, expanding our understanding of ourselves and of others. I will do my best to support a space in which you feel encouraged to venture into this territory in a brave and sustainable manner, but you know yourself best. Be aware and alert to emotional risk both for yourself and others. Be adventurous, but please take care. The best performance comes from truth and as an ensemble we will strive to foster an environment where honest storytelling and risk-taking flourishes.

Our Work Space

Acting requires a community in which each member is fully present. Unless explicitly stated, no electronics (phones, computers, tablets, iPods, etc.) will be need for in-class discussion and activities. 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 in-class performance. Please wear footwear and clothing that allows you to stretch, sit on the floor, move quickly and freely. No food, gum, or candy is permitted during monologue/scene rehearsal or performance, unless explicitly called for in the script. Water is encouraged. If you have an issue that will prevent you from following any of these policies, please let me know before class begins.

Personal Pronouns

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by your name and pronouns. Please advise me of your name and pronouns early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. I will always give you the opportunity to introduce yourself and to share your name and pronouns with guests who may join our class.

University Policies and Procedures

Title IX

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here:

- Student Emergency Services <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>
- Counseling http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_sexualviolence.html

Responsible Employee at UT Austin

Please note: the instructor is a Responsible Employee of UT Austin, and as such, is required to report any incidents of abuse or violence to the university. Should you choose to tell a personal story that reflects these types of incidents, the instructor will report the incident to the university. While the instructor is not a confidential resource for help, please note that she is ready and willing to help should your need for support arise during this project and throughout the semester.

Accommodations:

Students with disabilities may request appropriate accommodations from the Services for Students with Disabilities: <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/>; 512-471-6259; ssd@austin.utexas.edu; or videophone 512-471-6644). Please also set up a meeting with me to discuss how to best meet your needs in this course.

Concealed Carry Policy

As of 1 August 2016, license to carry holders (LTCH) are allowed handguns in most parts of campus. All UT policies and information around this law can be found at <https://campuscarry.utexas.edu/> (All quotations here are from that web page). The LTCH is solely responsible for following both the law and UT policy. That policy states:

“Students who do not follow UT policy are subject to discipline by the Dean of Students.” Additionally, “accidental discharge of a handgun by any ... student may be cause for disciplinary action, up to and including ... expulsion ...” That policy also states: “Although you can carry in many places on campus, you cannot carry everywhere or when engaged in activities that make carrying a handgun impossible.” This course will, at times, be one of those places. **This class will have**

class sessions where the activities will make it impossible for a LTCH both to carry legally and participate in required class work, such as in-class activities that require physical participation. A refusal to participate will be recorded as an absence for that day. If a gun is seen in class, the instructor and TA reserve the right to call UTPD. A LTCH who does not follow state law and UT policy will automatically fail the course.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If you are worried about someone who is acting unusually, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL) 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 <https://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal/>

Academic Integrity

I assume all written and creative work you submit is your own. Plagiarism is a serious offense. Use appropriate citations to give credit when and where it's due (MLA preferred). Refer to the Dean of Student's website for additional info: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/academicintegrity.php>

This Syllabus

In the spirit of my own scholastic honesty, large portions of this Syllabus are taken and adapted from a long line of fellow colleagues and teachers. As I continue to learn and grow as a teacher and facilitator, I too reserve the right to learn and grow and to make changes to the course syllabus as we move through our semester together.

Local Performance Venues and Theatre Companies to Check out!

Austin Scottish Rite Theatre: <http://scottishritetheater.org/>

Austin Playhouse: <https://www.austinplayhouse.com/>

The Backpack: <http://www.thebkpk.com/performance/>

Generic Ensemble Company: <http://genenco.org/>

Ground Floor Theatre: <https://www.groundfloortheatre.org/>

The Museum of Human Achievement: <https://ctxlivetheatre.com/venues/museum-human-achievement/productions/>

Paramount Theatre: <http://www.austintheatre.org/>

Present Company: <http://presentcompanytheatre.com/>

Salvage Vanguard: <http://salvagevanguard.org/>

Spectrum Theatre Company: <https://www.spectrumatx.com/shows>

Teatro Vivo: <https://teatrovivo.org/>

Theatre en Bloc: <http://www.theatreenbloc.com/>

The Vortex: <http://vortexrep.org/>

ZACH Theatre: <http://zachtheatre.org/>

....and many more!