

Level: undergraduate intro course
Focus: acting
System: quarter
Class size: 15-20

Theater 5: Intro to Acting

Instructor: Rachel Wolfe
e-mail: rwolfe@umail.ucsb.edu

Office: TD-W 2516
Office Hours: Wed. and Thus. 3-4pm

Welcome to Intro to Acting! As the course title implies, this is an intro course. You do not need to have any previous actor training to take this course—just a good attitude and the will to learn. Our main focus over the course of the next ten weeks will be skill building and acting technique, so you will find yourselves doing more exercises than scenes. However, this course will also introduce you to some basic stage terminology, give you the critical tools to analyze actors' choices and skills in the context of a live theater performance, and prepare you for the joys and challenges of working with diverse scripts.

The heart of the actor's craft is called *mimesis*, or imitation. In order to imitate life upon the stage, an actor must master three basic skills: careful observation of life, from how you walk through mud to the exact muscles used when a person's face lights up with enthusiasm; the ability to recreate these observations using one's own body, face, and voice; and the creativity to know which of these many observations to use in what situations. These skills are in some ways inseparable from one another and will all be taught in combination throughout the course, but different parts of the course will focus more heavily on some than others. In the first part of the course, our focus will be on building awareness of the tools at the actor's disposal—the body, face, and voice—and exploring the range of imitations that they can enact. The second part will focus on honing observation and sense memory, using the actor's tools to recreate life sensations in artificial settings. Finally, the third part of the course will focus on taking this bundle of observational and imitative skills and applying them to different kinds of scripts, culminating in the performance of a final scene.

The syllabus that follows is the most important document you will receive all quarter. If you have a question about the course, please consult the syllabus before contacting me; it is likely that the answer to your question will be here. Additional copies of the syllabus are available electronically on Gauchospace.

Course Expectations:

Theater is a collaborative art form, and the majority of the content in this course cannot be taught without the presence and active participation of others. As such, **attendance in this course is mandatory!** It will not be physically possible to make up missed classwork, and many of our class projects are partner or group exercises in which others' success depends on your presence. So don't miss class! If it becomes absolutely necessary for you to miss a class due to illness or some type of emergency situation, ***let me know in advance by e-mail.*** Any missed class

for which you do not give me notice in advance will count as an unexcused absence. Absences will not be excused for any reason other than illness and emergency—for example, missing class in order to participate in a sporting event, Greek life, etc. is not a valid excuse. **You are allowed only one unexcused absence without grade penalty. After this, each unexcused absence will result in your *final grade* being lowered by $\frac{1}{2}$ grade.** Also, please be on time. Class will start promptly on the hour. **Two instances of tardiness will be considered equivalent to one unexcused absence.**

Much of this course will focus on movement, so you must come to class wearing clothes you can easily move in and that you won't mind getting dirty if necessary (no skirts). Shoes should be comfortable, supportive, and close-toed—absolutely NO heels, sandals, or flip-flops. Please do not wear jewelry other than watches and stud earrings. And finally, if you suffer from knee or elbow problems, please wear appropriate braces and pads.

Safety is my #1 priority. If you ever feel unsafe in this course, speak up! Some of our exercises will be physically demanding. If you have a previous injury or disability which prevents you from taking part in a certain activity, mention it! You are not required to take part in any activity that might put you at risk. Additionally, in putting together scenework for this course, ***you are never to incorporate any kind of physical violence.*** There are safe methods for engaging in staged slaps, shoves, falls, and combat, but it is beyond the scope of this intro course to introduce you to those techniques. For the duration of this course, **all stage combat is off-limits.** And finally, the exercises and scenework we do in this course may call for actors to touch each other. Because of this, **it is absolutely essential that every person in this room be able to trust everyone else in this room 100% to respect their personal boundaries** and never to touch them in a manner that is aggressive, unwanted, or sexual. If you are uncomfortable with the direction that your scene partner(s) are taking a scene, you always have the right to ask them to stop, and you must always respect another person's request to stop. If you ever feel emotionally unsafe, or that a scene partner is not respecting your boundaries, please come talk to me. You should never feel that you are required to remain in a situation that feels unsafe to you.

Assignments:

Play Reviews: You will be required to see three plays for this class. These plays include *Equivocation*, *The Arabian Nights* (both being put on by the Department of Theater and Dance), and *Metamorphoses* (at the Ensemble Theater downtown). Information on all of the shows can be found on the last page of this syllabus. For each play, you are to write a 5-paragraph acting analysis, to be turned in by e-mail no later than 5 p.m. on the due date, analyzing the ways in which the actors utilized (or failed to utilize) the techniques we have been learning in class. Please make the filename of the electronic document **your own name**, not THTR5analysis.docx or any other such generic filename. Late reviews will be graded down one full letter grade per business day they are late. You will be given more specific guidelines on the writing and structure of these later in the course. ***Please note that you are NOT allowed to substitute another play or a movie version in lieu of seeing these specific productions.*** As such, I would advise you to plan on seeing these plays early. That way, if something comes up and you are unable to attend on the night you planned, there will be further performances that you can go to later. Don't bet your grade on not getting a flat tire when you go to see the performance on closing night! Also, please note that since there are no books for this course, you should consider

the money you spend on tickets to these shows as being in lieu of your usual spending on textbooks. There is one opportunity for extra credit in this category—you may see and write on one extra show (the Department-sponsored One-Acts).

Midterm: The midterm for this course will consist of two parts: a multiple-choice exam on the vocabulary introduced in the course and a solo performance consisting of your observation and recreation of the mannerisms of one of your classmates. Near the beginning of the quarter, we will draw names out of a hat for who will be observing whom. The object of the assignment will be to reproduce as accurately as possible a few basic movements, such as how that person walks, sits, and stands. This is NOT an invitation to mock or to present a caricature, the object will be to faithfully reproduce. For this section of the midterm, you will be graded on the astuteness of your observations, your ability to utilize the techniques we have studied in class, and the amount of detail put into the performance. **Your grade will never be based on anything as vague as “acting talent.”**

Final Scene: Your final exam will consist of a 2-4 person scene taken from a published play that you will select and perform for the class with your scene partner(s). These scenes should run between 10 and 15 minutes, be memorized, and involve all the partners equally (playing a walk-on character with one line does not constitute a final exam). You will have some limited in-class time for rehearsal, but **the majority of your preparation for the final should be done outside of class.** As with the midterm, you will not be graded on “talent” but on your ability to apply the concepts and techniques we have learned throughout the quarter. If your group decides to use costumes and props in the final performance you may, but they are not required. However, a cautionary note: **alcohol, drugs, or weapons of any kind may NEVER be brought to class as props, even if the scene calls for them.** You can still do such a scene perfectly well with mime, iced tea in place of whiskey, cardboard cutouts instead of knives, etc. The focus is on your acting, not the accoutrements.

In-Class Exercises and Assignments: The majority of the work we do this quarter will take place in the classroom. Sometimes you will be asked to do some simple out-of-class prep work for an in-class assignment (such as “bring a notebook and pencil to the next class session” or “spend the next couple of days walking on non-paved surfaces and note how you walk across them”). All in-class assignments and the prep work necessary to enact them will count toward your “attendance, participation, attitude, and contribution to the ensemble” grade. You will not be graded on how well you take to a specific exercise or task, but rather your positive or negative attitude going into it and your willingness to do the work, whether in-class or prep work. As stated above, these assignments cannot be made up if you miss class.

How your grade will be calculated:

- Attendance, Participation, Attitude, and Contribution to the Ensemble (40%)
 - We have 20 class sessions this quarter worth 5 points each, for a total of 100
 - Days you come to class on time, stay the whole time, participate in all the activities, and volunteer / help out your teammates / enthusiastically contribute get you 5 points.
 - Days you come to class but miss one of the elements above get you 4 points.
 - Days you come to class but miss two of the elements above get you 3 points.

- Days you come to class but miss three of the elements above get you 2 points.
- Days you technically attend class but do none of the above get you 1 point.
- Days you miss class (unexcused) get you 0 points.
- Excused absences will result in 3 points awarded for the missed day.
- Midterm (written exam and performance) (20%)
 - Written exam = multiple-choice vocabulary test (25 questions worth 4 points each)
 - Performance (letter grade, based on rubric to be distributed two weeks before the test)
- Written Acting Analyses (3 at 5% each for a total of 15%)
 - Letter grade, instructions and rubric to be distributed separately
- Final Scene (25%)
 - Letter grade, instructions and rubric to be distributed separately

DUE DATES

Friday, April 18—*Metamorphoses* analysis due

Wednesday, April 30 / Thursday, May 1—MIDTERM

Friday, May 9—*One-Acts* analysis due (optional / extra credit)

Wednesday, May 21 / Thursday, May 22—group choices for final due

Friday, May 23—*Arabian Nights* analysis due

Wednesday, May 28 / Thursday, May 29—scene choice for final due

Friday, June 6—*Equivocation* analysis due

Monday, June 9 / Tuesday, June 10 (12pm-3pm)—FINAL SCENES