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THTR 220A.02: Acting I

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Acting I - THTR 220A - 3 Credits - McGill 125

Instructor – John Kenneth DeBoer
Office – McGill 212B

Email – john.deboer@umontana.edu
Office Hours – MWR 1-2 PM

Section 01 - MW 11:00 – 12:20
Section 02 – MW 12:30-1:50

TA – Tasha Conti
TA – Matt McDaniel

Aim

Acting I is for any student with a background or interest in the craft of acting, especially those considering a career in the performing arts (theatre, music, dance, film & television, broadcasting). This studio class is intended to cultivate the early skill sets necessary for advanced training as a professional actor: observation, imagination, concentration, improvisation, and character. It is a core requirement for all students majoring in theatre and introduces the art of acting as a process integral to collaboration and production both onstage, on camera, and behind the scenes.

By the end of the semester you must...

- Demonstrate a sense of professionalism and enthusiasm for the theatre and the craft of acting;
- Understand the fundamentals of the actor's process in the studio, rehearsal, and production;
- Cultivate an understanding of the total organism involved in the acting process
- Explore the actor's relationship with self, with the text, with the physical environment, and with other performers; and
- Begin to develop an appreciation for the artistic process necessary for independent and collaborative engagement with every performance undertaken or viewed.

Textbooks and Required Materials

- *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* by Melissa Bruder, Lee Michael Cohn, et.al. (available for purchase in bookstore)
- A basic actor's "rehearsal kit" consisting of a suit jacket and hard-soled dress shoes for those identifying as men and a floor length skirt and character shoes for those identifying as women. You may want to have a set of both!
- Access to [Moodle](#) and the ability to read PDF files of assigned readings and scenes.
- Tickets to *As You Like It* and *Peter and the Starcatcher*. Theatre majors are entitled to one ticket via their "majors card." All declared Majors will receive a "majors card" from Erin McDaniel in the first weeks of the semester. General Education students must purchase tickets at the UMArts Box Office in the PARTV Building. Plan ahead and purchase your tickets before the night of the show.

Attendance and Promptness

Acting is participatory: there is no way to learn without doing, no adequate substitute for a missing partner, and no way to “make up” missed experience. School policies will be enforced strictly. You may present documentation for two excused absences without affecting your final grade. **Further excused absences and any unexcused (undocumented) absences will drop your final grade one-third of a letter.** If an illness should cause you to miss class to the point of failing, pursue a withdrawal so that the course can be reattempted once you have recovered.

Arriving late for class disrupts the learning process of your fellow students. Tardiness in excess of 10 minutes will be considered a complete absence. Every two instances of tardiness—of whatever duration—will equate to one absence for grading purposes. I reserve the right to declare a “no lateness” policy should the need arise. Briefly put, if the door to the class is shut and you are not inside you are absent: no exceptions. Likewise, be sure to visit the rest room before class. Leaving class during exercises or performances for a non-emergency is very disruptive.

Acting and Design courses may include officially scheduled, unsupervised rehearsal or studio time where attendance may or may not be taken. Students enrolled in these courses are not to schedule other activities during this dedicated time for independent work and collaboration with project and scene partners.

Teaching Assistant

We have a wonderful teaching assistant with us this semester. The TA will be present during all activities and is available to supplement instruction and feedback should the need arise. Please pay the TA the same level of attentiveness and respect that you show to me.

Grading Scale and Breakdown

A	100 – 90%		
B	89 – 80%	Participation:	40%
C	79 – 70 %	Performances	40%
D	69 – 60%	Writing/Quizzes:	20%
F	59 and Below		

Participation

You will receive a daily participation grade to evaluate your engagement with the work undertaken that day. Your participation will be assessed on the following scale:

- 4** The student was actively participating in class, well prepared, and positively engaged with the material and fellow classmates.
- 3** The student was late.

- 2** The student was unprepared, disruptive, or disrespectful, or absent
- 1** The student was absent but had the courtesy to notify the instructor prior to missing class. Please note, notification does not necessarily constitute documentation and your final grade may still be dropped.
- 0** The student was absent and provided no notification or documentation.

A solid work ethic is expected so high marks should be the norm. Poor work will stand out. Students receiving low marks for participation should meet with me to discuss resolving the problem.

Skill Assessment

Your performance and growth grades are my evaluation of how your skills have developed over the course of the semester:

- A Superb Acting.** The student has transcended the level of craft they brought to the course, mastered the intellectual preparation, and has begun to play imaginatively “in the moment.”
- B Good Skills.** The student has mastered the intellectual preparation necessary to move on to more advanced skills, made some basic advances in craft, but is not yet playing fully “in the moment.”
- C Fair Work.** The student is prepared intellectually for the work, and is making progress with some skills, but stronger choices could be made and more practice is necessary.
- D Poor work.** The student has not or is not prepared for the work and it is painfully obvious to both the student and audience.
- F Failure.** The student has not or is not prepared at all, has made no specific choices, and is wasting theirs and the audience’s time.

Hopefully you will develop the skills necessary to begin playing “in the moment.” However, participation is often not enough. You are expected to show some growth in artistry by the semester’s conclusion and achieve the outcomes laid out in the syllabus.

Assignments

All assignments, quizzes, and handouts will take place on Moodle this semester. You are expected to check the web daily. All written work must be properly formatted, typed, and submitted as a PDF document by the beginning of class on the date due. I will not accept paper copies. If Moodle is down, use email as your alternate submission option.

This semester you will read selected texts by various renowned acting teachers. You will take an online quiz for each reading assignment and post a reflection to Moodle. Even though this is writing in an online forum, use of professional language and university level writing is required. Points will be deducted if you do not adhere to the highest standards of composition and citation.

Assignments may be turned in late for partial credit. Performances must take place on the date noted in the schedule or assigned in class by the instructor. Due to a tight schedule and limited class time, they may not be made up without prior permission from the instructor.

Production Attendance

You are required to attend all School of Theatre & Dance theatre productions and attend the “All-School Responses” on the following dates (the Monday after the show closes). Attendance will be taken at the talkbacks and we will have an in-class discussion if time permits.

Tentative Class Schedule and Important Dates

There are four phases of this class. Consider this a rough and tentative schedule for the semester.

Weeks 1-5	Topic 1: The Possibilities of Play Improvisation, Mindfulness, and Authenticity
Weeks 6-10	Topic 2: The Actor in Production Rehearsal and Stagecraft
Weeks 11-15	Topic 3: An Actor’s Work Building a Character, Monologues, and Auditions
Final Exam	Wednesday December 10, 8-10 AM Final Performances

Electronic Resources

In this class, we will embrace technology. Email is the required method of communication for the course. Please check your university email and Moodle frequently.

If you have course materials stored on your device, set it to “Airplane Mode” so that the functionality is limited to stored data retrieval. Silence and stow other unneeded electronic devices. I will have my phone on vibrate in case an emergency message is sent by the university. If accessing the web becomes necessary, inform me that you are doing so for the benefit of the entire class.

If your devices beeps or rings accidentally during class, please silence it as **quickly as humanly possible**. Don't be embarrassed, just turn it off and all will be forgiven. Having said that anyone caught messaging or frivolously surfing the web will be dismissed immediately from class, resulting in a complete absence for the day. **I'M NOT KIDDING.**

Beyond Acting I

THTR 220 is a core requirement for the BA and BFA Theatre and a prerequisite course for students interested in pursuing the Bachelors of Fine Arts with a specialization in Acting. Students are admitted to the BFA via an audition during the second year of study and upon completion of the following foundational courses:

THTR 210 – Voice & Speech I
THTR 211 – Voice & Speech I
THTR 221 – Acting II
THTR 294 – Professional Skills
THTR 315 – Physical Performance I
THTR 316 – Physical Performance II
THTR 320 – Acting III
THTR 321 – Acting IV

The skills learned in these courses are necessary to pursue more advanced training in Acting. From the School of Theatre & Dance Handbook, Page 24: “The successful completion of advanced courses requires that students synthesize and utilize the fundamental skills acquired during prior training outside of class time. Independent preparation and rehearsal is expected so that advanced concepts can be pursued in the studio. Students who fail to demonstrate proper preparation for advanced work or monopolize studio time addressing fundamental issues of skill will be graded accordingly and may be asked to withdraw from the course. Instructors will address the skills necessary for completing advanced work in the studio at the beginning of each advanced course.”

Personal Comfort

The study of acting often requires the instructor or peers to touch each other or be in close proximity. We all have bad days when we do not want such contact. Feel free to bow out of a particular exercise if you are having a “Wounded Warrior” day. However, frequent sitting out is a sign that you might not be ready to advance in your training.

Sacred Space

In order to foster an appropriate environment for our work, we will treat the studio as a sacred space. Please remove your shoes and socks upon crossing the threshold into the classroom and store your belongings neatly. If you arrive early, use this time for reflection, stretching, sweeping the floor, and organizing any furniture scattered about. Be mindful of any rehearsal furniture designated for a School production that may be using the space and treat it with respect. When class has ended, restore the room.

Return any furniture to its designated area and retrieve all belongings that you brought with you to class. There is no overnight storage allowed and the safety of your belongings is not guaranteed.

Extra Credit

There is no extra credit available in this course.

Procedure/Policy

You are expected to abide by the following School regulations. There is no eating, drinking, or gum chewing during class. Please let me know in writing if you have a medical exception to this policy. Water in a capped container is acceptable. Absolutely no weapons, real or fake, are allowed in the classroom.

There is inherent risk involved in many Theatre classes, as they are very physical in nature. Please proceed through class and rehearsals with caution. Always be mindful of your personal safety and the safety of others. Students participating in classes, rehearsals, and performances do so at their own risk.

Due to safety considerations, at **no** point during a student's time spent in class or serving on a production (in any capacity) should non-enrolled persons be guests of that student **without my consent**. Presence of such unauthorized persons in a class, shop, or any backstage/off-stage area will negatively affect a student's grade.

Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php.

School of Theatre & Dance *Student Handbook*

All Theatre & Dance students must have an in-depth knowledge of the practices and procedures outlined in the School of Theatre & Dance *Student Handbook*. The *Handbook* is available online at <http://www.umt.edu/umarts/theatredance/About/handbook.php>.
is available online at the link above.

Disability Services for Students (DSS):

If you have a disability for which accommodations are needed please provide me, in writing, your official DSS accommodation letter. Please visit the website linked above for more information.