

HUMA1157 (Tentative Course Syllabus)

Fall 2026

Introduction to Acting and Public Speaking

INSTRUCTOR: Professor Isaac Droscha

PHONE: 2358 7768 EMAIL: droscha@ust.hk

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Acting, improvisation, and public speaking are artforms at the core of many arenas of communication and human striving. Whether it is the performance that moves the hearts and minds of the audience, on stage or on screen, or the theatre of a boardroom meeting, a wedding toast, or a university lecture, the foundational skills of acting and public speaking come into play. In this course students will receive an introductory exposure to the history and techniques of modern acting and public speaking, including elements of improv, and learn how they can be used to enhance other activities as well as promote a self-awareness and mindfulness.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

On completion of the course, the students will be able to

- describe the history and development of modern acting
- understand the interrelationship between body, voice, and communication
- understand the techniques and exercises for acting and public speaking
- analyze the structure of scenes and speeches
- critique a performance
- coordinate team activities
- give and take direction and constructive criticism

COURSE MATERIALS

Course materials will be available on CANVAS. See attached for an incomplete list of materials from which readings and exercises will be selected.

PERFORMANCES:

The course will contain three in-class performances that focus on three different genres: improv, scene work, and public speaking. The performances will be assessed on the use and application of skills and techniques learned in class.

SELF-TAPES:

Students will need to make three self-tapes during the term in preparation for their performance. This will also give them an opportunity to learn and practice the skills of audition technique. These will be graded based on fulfilling the criteria of the rubric.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

Attendance will be taken throughout the term after the add-drop period. You may miss two classes without penalty, but starting from your third absence, one percent will be deducted for each absence (10% maximum deduction). Students are expected to participate in all activities and exercises and will be assessed as such. Students with certain restrictions or disabilities will receive a modified form of the exercise.

Components Percentage Nature of Assessments

Performance 1	25%	Group improv Performance (10min)
Performance 2	25%	Presentation of a Scene with partner (5min)
Performance 3	25%	Solo Speech/Presentation (5-10min)
Self-tapes	15%	Self-tapes made throughout the term
Attendance & Participation	10%	Class attendance and participation

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

If you are being dishonest in the course, the penalty is an F for the COURSE.

Cheating:

1. a) If you look at other students' papers or materials (ex. notes) during exam or test.
2. b) If you claim credit for other students' work in group projects.

Plagiarism: If you copy sections from a source without referencing it.

Excerpt from <http://www.ust.hk/vpaa/integrity/>

“If you are discovered cheating, however minor the offence, the course grade will appear on your record with an X, to show that the grade resulted from cheating. This X grade stays with your record until graduation. If you cheat again and "earn" another X grade, you will be dismissed from the University. In serious cases, your department may ask the Student Disciplinary Committee to look at the case. The Student Disciplinary Committee can require you to do campus community service; take away your eligibility for a degree with honors, or scholarships and prizes; suspend you from the University, or simply dismiss you right away.”

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:http://www.ust.hk/vpaa/conduct/good_learning_experience.pp

Reading List:

(selections will be chosen from the following sources, though not exclusively)

Adler, Stella and Kissel, Howard. *The Art of Acting*. Applause Books ; Sales & distribution, Hal Leonard Corp., 2000.

Benedetti, J. (1998). *Stanislavski and the actor*. Routledge.

Berkun, Scott. *Confessions of a Public Speaker*. 1st edition, O'Reilly, 2009.

Berry, Cicely. *The Actor and the Text*. Rev. ed., Virgin, 1993.

Berry, Cicely. *Your voice and how to use it*. Harrap, 1975.

Bogart, Anne. *And Then, You Act Making Art in an Unpredictable World*. Routledge, 2007.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre*. Edited by Silberman, Marc et al., Third edition., Bloomsbury, 2014.

Butler, I. (2022). *The method : how the twentieth century learned to act*. Bloomsbury Publishing, Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Meridian Books, 1956.

Carnegie, Dale. *The Art of Public Speaking*. Project Gutenberg, 2005.

Chubbuck, Ivana. *The Power of the Actor : The Chubbuck Technique*. Gotham Books, 2004.

Freytag, Gustav. *Freytag's Technique of the Drama*. Edited by MacEwan, Elias J., Scott, Foresman and company, 1894.

Gallo, Carmine. *Talk like TED : The 9 Public-Speaking Secrets of the World's Top Minds*. St. Martin's Press, 2014.

Hagen, U. (1991). *A challenge for the actor*. Scribner's.

Hagen, U. (2009). *Respect for Acting* (2nd Edition). Wiley.

- Ingleson, D. (2022). *Stanislavski training and mindfulness - being in the moment*. *Stanislavski Studies*, 10(2), 161–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2022.2094103>
- Johnstone, Keith. *IMPRO : Improvisation and the Theatre*. Faber and Faber, 1979.
- Marshall, Madeleine. *The Singer's Manual of English Diction*. G. Schirmer, 1953.
- Meisner, Sanford and Longwell, Dennis. *Sanford Meisner on Acting*. 1st ed., Vintage Books, 1987.
- Rodgers, Janet B. and Armstrong, Frankie. *Acting and Singing with Archetypes*. Limelight editions, 2009.
- Silverberg, Larry and Meisner, Sanford. *The Sanford Meisner Approach*. 1st ed., Smith and Kraus, 1994-2000.
- Spolin, Viola, et al. *Theater Games for the Lone Actor*. Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater : A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*. 3rd ed., Northwestern University Press, 1999.
- Spolin, Viola. *Theater Games for Rehearsal : A Director's Handbook*. Northwest University Press, 1985.
- Stanislavsky, K. (2003). *An actor prepares* (E. R. Hapgood, Trans.). Routledge.

- **Week 1 – Introductions and course overview / What is acting?**

- **Topic:** We discuss what this course will cover, major assessments, how they will be evaluated, and expectations for the class. We will also broadly introduce the philosophies and approaches to acting, their benefits both artistically and personally, and some of the basic exercises to begin preparing for the term.
- **Readings and exercises:**
 - What is Acting: see Bogart and Adler
 - What is public Speaking: see Carnegie and Berkun

- **Week 2 – Introduction to improv**

- **Topic:** We discuss and introduce students to the basics of improv including the foundational concepts of *Yes, and...*; *make each other look good*; and *there is no failure*. We will discuss the ideas of Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone, and introduce students to some basic improv exercises and concepts that we will continue to build on throughout the term. There will be opportunities for scene work. Students will form Improv groups.
- **Readings and exercises:**
 - Improv basics: see Spolin

- **Week 3 – Character and body work**

- **Topic:** Building on the techniques of improv we will continue to expand on how these techniques can apply to body and physical characterization. We will have an eye toward building a character from the physical first and how physical behavior can affect our perception of the character and their intentions, that is not verbal

signifiers. We will use Spolin and Johnstone with an eye towards Stanislavski.

There will be opportunities for scene work.

- **Readings and exercises:**
 - Improv Games: see Spolin
 - The meaning and purpose of Improv: see Johnstone
- **Week 4 – Auditions and self-tapes**
 - **Topic:** In the tutorials we continue to build briefly on the techniques already established and leave time for Improv practice. We briefly teach about approaches to auditions and, more importantly, how to make a self-tape. These tapes will be used to document and evaluate student progress, and they are modeled on real-world self-tapes used for industry auditions.
 - **Readings and exercises**
 - Readings and exercises: see Spolin and Chubbuck
- **Week 5 – Voice and an introduction to classical technique**
 - **Topic:** We will learn some of the basic exercises and techniques one can use to develop projection, beauty, and clarity of the speaking voice, which should be practiced until the end of the term. This will also include an introduction to diction and pronunciation and elements of classical theatre technique.
 - **Readings and exercises:**
 - Exercise for pronunciation, strength, clarity: see Berry
 - Introducing diction: see Marshall
- **Week 6 – Introduction to the method and monologues**

- **Topic:** We will learn about Method acting, its origins, influence, strengths, pitfalls, and fracturing of traditions. We look at the fundamentals of the Stanislavski method and how to apply them including, body, listening, and empathy practice. Self-tape 1 due.
- **Readings and exercises:**
 - Method: see Stanislavsky, Butler, and Benedetti
- **Week 7 – Analyzing a text**
 - **Topic:** We will learn how to approach and interpret a text: its form, what is implied, where are the beats and turns, the underlying indicators of status and power, the stakes, the definition and meaning of words, indications of character from language choice, etc. Texts will be assigned for scenes and speeches.
 - **Readings and exercises:**
 - Text analysis: see Berry and Chubbuck
 - Archetypes: see Butler and Campbell
- **Week 8 – Stanislavski and Adler**
 - **Topic:** We delve more deeply into the techniques and exercises of Stanislavsky, include character creation, voice, embodying, how to build a character, the manifestation of the self in the role, listening, etc.
 - **Readings and exercises:**
 - Body and character: see Stanislavsky and Benedetti
 - Mindfulness and self-awareness: see Ingleson
 - Method: see Adler
- **Week 9 – Hagen**

- **Topic:** We introduce alternative approaches to the method and deal with practical actualities and circumstances: physical action and distraction, goals, objectives, intentions, desires, will, etc. We explore how to construct a scene around a goal or need, the realism of tasks and mundanity, listening and distraction, etc. We will primarily rely on the techniques of Uta Hagen. Self-tape 2 due.
- **Readings and exercises:**
 - Action and acting: see Hagen
- **Week 10 – Meisner**
 - **Topic:** We introduce ourselves to another alternative technique that developed from the method and has become exceptionally popular among modern actors of stage and cinema. We explore Meisner’s approach to empathy, listening, observation, and non-verbal communication, now tangentially related to social acuity, EQ, and micro-expressions. Performance 1
 - **Reading and exercises:**
 - Meisner technique: see Meisner and Silverberg
- **Week 11 – Scene Work**
 - **Topic:** We continue to build on and apply the techniques already discussed as we approach our specific scenes and texts. Students will rehearse and perform for each other. Self-tape 3 due.
- **Week 13 – Scene Work**
 - **Topic:** We continue to build on and apply the techniques already discussed as we approach our specific scenes and texts. Students will rehearse and perform for each other. We will conduct Performance 2.

- **Week 13 – Speeches**

- **Topic:** We will conclude the class by focusing on our final speeches in preparation for our final performance assessment.

- **Final Exam Period – Performance 3 by appointment:**

- Students will register by appointment during the final exam period in small groups for a session to give their Performance 3, final speech/presentation.