

Craft of Acting I

THTR 220

UMBC Department of Theatre, Fall 2011

Mon & Wed 1:00 – 2:50 pm, Rm. FA 318

Prof. Nyalls Hartman

Office FA 339

Office Hrs. T & R - 1:00 – 2:00

Other Hrs. by Appointment

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Craft of Acting 1

This course is designed to provide a foundational working knowledge of the craft of acting. Through the use of exercises, analysis, self-exploration, and improvisation, the actor will establish and build an understanding of and connection to the actor's task. As acting is a process that requires a thorough working knowledge of the actor's instrument, we will explore both the inner and outer terrain of the actor – the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual bodies through a combination of approaches to the craft of acting.

Our goals for the course are:

1. to establish a demonstrable understanding of the intellectual and physical aspects of the actors task;
2. to hone the actor's instrument and establish a demonstrable routine for the continued practice of technique toward mastery;
3. to develop a process for enabling the essential movement from 'self' to character.

As these are our goals, self-introspection, connection to dramatic action, and control of the bodies are the foundations on which this course is designed. As adult acting students, you are expected to be open and willing to investigate the many sides of the self that naturally arise in the development and understanding of character and actions in the re-creation of life and life issues. Further, you are expected to respond to the exploration of your fellow actors as they explore and develop their process and technique during the course. As this exploration is a vital and foundational part of the process of acting, you will be graded on the level of your dedication to and depth within which you undertake this work; high-level energy, focus and commitment are required throughout the duration of every class.

Craft of Acting I is a studio/laboratory class and as such is designed to investigate the reproduction of life and diverse life issues. As acting students you are reminded that actors do not live as themselves in a play or a scene, but rather portray characters that demonstrate a multitude of life behaviors. Since good acting requires an honest reflection of life (language, thought, and action), it is possible that material may arise in class that might approach your personal sensibilities, morals, or religious convictions. As acting students you are expected to actively undertake and engage in character behaviors, choices, actions, and language as required by the specific world, characters, or life contained in a play, scene, or exercise—even if contrary to personal ethical, moral, or religious convictions. If a student believes that, as actors portraying characters, they will be unable to perform actions that conflict with their personal convictions, I recommend they drop this course and, if majors, give serious consideration to pursuing a different career choice.

Students should also be aware that as a studio/laboratory class, Craft of Acting I requires the utilization of the physical body and therefore body training. Techniques for mastering the

physical instrument, as they are being taught, involve 'hands-on' guidance from the instructor. This physical contact is essential for proper training and will be undertaken only as needed for correction, pointing, and growth of the student's technique. Respect to and for the student's personal space will always be present and all contact will be undertaken with the utmost professional integrity.

This course compliments and builds on your work in Vocal Training I and Movement for the Actor; it is critical that you do well in all three courses in order to major in acting at UMBC.

Our study will include:

- Exercises for unlocking the actor's creative imagination; concentration; relaxation of the body, mind, and emotions;
- Exercises in technique- the art of doing; talking and listening, sensory recall, preparation, rehearsal techniques, etc.;
- Improvisation to experience dramatic structure and freeing the impulses of the actor;
- Building a common vocabulary of acting terminology and stage geography.

Course Requirements

1. Decorum- Professional behavior is expected at all times. You are expected to come to class promptly and regularly, prepared to work, solo or in a group. You will be called on to work, demonstrate, or otherwise offer your creative input for your own benefit and the benefit of the entire class. Likewise, you are expected to give your fellow performers your individual and respectful attention when they are called upon to show their work. All students must be prepared to show their work and ready to discuss and/or respond to the ideas and plays presented on a daily basis. Those students ready to participate and engage in class discussions, ready to take risks, show their work, or otherwise attempt to demonstrate conceptual acting ideas, will- simply stated- be the ones getting and doing the work. Unprepared students and students who are not actively engaging in the course will likely fail the class.
2. Dress Code- For the most part you are expected to wear non-restrictive clothing that accommodates easy movement and personal comfort while undertaking the exercises- something you can lay upside-down in. Therefore, no skirts or dresses. Nothing too baggy or too tight and you should be able to see your ankles. (Yoga pants and short sleeve shirt is ideal). Shoes will be left in the entry section of the studio and you will be expected to work in bare feet. Watches, and all jewelry must be removed; no exceptions. **It is expected that all students will be properly dressed and ready for class before class begins.** I strongly suggest bringing a full bottle of water to every class (no other food or drink permitted).
3. Attendance policy- **Attendance is mandatory.** Students are expected to attend all classes. To even have to state this seems ludicrous. The likelihood is that if you intend on missing classes, you will fail this course. After 2 official or un-excused absences, your final grade (based upon the average of the whole of your work) will be lowered one full letter grade. For each subsequent absence your grade will be lowered another full letter grade. Students missing 6 classes will receive a failure for the course. Absences on the day of your presentations will

count as double. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to obtain class notes and assignments from fellow students. **Punctuality is also mandatory** and is absolutely critical in the acting studio. Class begins promptly at 1:00 pm. Students are expected to be properly dressed and ready to begin class at the top of the hour. If you arrive after class has begun, you must sit out and observe until invited to participate. Three late arrivals will equal one absence. Habitually late students will be locked out of the classroom and receive an absence for the day.

4. Successful completion of all performance deadlines, all readings, and assignments. There are several assignments due throughout the semester (see attached schedule of due dates). All assignments must be completed, ready to be utilized for class, and turned in on the due date at the beginning of class. No emailed submissions will be accepted and no extensions will be given. Students are expected to complete assigned readings thoroughly, having read each assignment, and have a copy with them in class on the day it is due. Your ability to discuss the reading thoughtfully and have notes from the reading will attest to completion of the assignment. As additional assignments will be given out daily in class and as syllabus time-lines naturally adjust themselves during the course, the student is responsible to keep account of and in time with both the syllabus and daily class assignments. A good actor is a prepared one. Late work is not acceptable. If you are not turning in work, you will likely fail the course.
5. Journal- You will be required to keep a journal mapping the development of your thoughts during the duration of the course. Journal entries should be recorded daily, carried with you, and brought to class daily. Entries should include but not be limited to, reactions to class material and readings, class exercises, understanding of ideas on acting and approaches, social observations, and your work and the work of your fellow actors. You may use the journal to record frustrations, inspirations, questions, challenges to yourself and/or stream-of-consciousness thoughts as they arise and are aligned with your development as an actor/artist. Each entry must be dated and be at least one full page in length. You will not be graded for spelling, grammar or organization. However, your writing must be legible. Journals are to be kept separate from class notes and are to be handed in twice during the semester for comments and grading; once before midpoint and once at the end. All journals will be returned to you on the final day of class. Full credit will be given to journals with entries that are thoughtful and complete (i.e. no missing days).

In addition to keeping a Journal and keeping it with you, students are expected to come to class daily with a notebook (separate from your Journal) and writing implement in order to take notes, keep record of course instruction, and handouts. It is recommended that students review their notes from class nightly.

6. Mid-semester Conferences- Each student will meet with me for a mid-semester conference. We'll discuss your overall progress and goals, as well as specifics related to your work in the course. I will pass out sign-up sheets around the 6th week of classes. You are also encouraged to drop by my office hours, make an appointment, or contact me in my office at any time during the semester to discuss any ideas, concerns, or questions about your acting work.
7. Theatre Production Attendance/Acting Reaction Papers- Students must attend both (2) UMBC Theatre productions presented this semester and at least one (1) professional production outside of UMBC and turn in an Acting Reaction Paper for each production attended. Papers are to be three pages in length and utilize *Times New Roman* 12 pt. font. Guidelines for Acting Reaction Papers will be given out in class during the semester.

8. Midterm Monologue/ Emblem Exercises (Practical and Written).
9. Physical Action & Objective Exercises (Practical and Written).
10. Final Monologue / Audition Prep- In preparation for the Spring auditions, all students must find/develop and prepare a new audition monologue. Monologues will be presented in class November 28th & 30th.
11. Final Project (Practical and Written). In the final few weeks of the semester, you and an assigned partner will prepare a project for class presentation.

Grading Policy

1. Journal Entries (15%)
2. Acting Reaction Papers (15%)
3. Undertaking of Exercises– Concentration, Body Work, Focus, Commitment, Energy, Attitude, and Participation (20%)
4. Mid-term Monologue Exercise (20%)
5. Physical Action & Objective Exercises (10%)
6. Final Project (20%)
 - Final scenes and objective exercise are broken down into 3 units:
Written work, rehearsal time, and performance.
7. Attendance Policy- As it effects your final average

Grading scale:

90-100	A	65-70	D
80-89	B	0-64	F
70-79	C		

A = Exceptional ability. Always thoroughly prepared. Extremely focused. Shows substantial evidence of required outside practice and discipline. Excellent written assignments. Always works hard.

B = Above average to average ability. Prepares for class and assignments - at times thoroughly. Shows evidence of required outside practice discipline. Above average written assignments. Works hard.

C = Average ability. Preparation average or inconsistent. Inconsistent evidence of required outside practice and discipline. Lacks consistent focus. Average written assignments. Average work.

D = Average to below average ability. Preparation inconsistent to poor. Little to no evidence of required outside practice or discipline. Doesn't work very hard. Turns in some work.

Additional Course & Student Information

The “Actual” use of any alcoholic beverages, any drugs or drug paraphernalia, guns, knives, or nudity, is forbidden. Props, for the portrayal of such activities, if necessary, will be suggested with a similar substitute. All other actions are to be real and realistically utilized. The smoking of tobacco products in class, if necessary, is permitted only during an actual scene.

It is recommended that students are allowed to bring a bottle of water to every class; no other food or drink is permitted). As it gets quite heated in the studio, students may find a small towel useful.

Cell Phones/Electronics – Cell phone use is not permitted in the classroom or during any class activity. Phones and other electronic devices are to be turned completely off (not just silenced) the moment you enter the studio and must remain off during the class period. Likewise, personal computers and text messaging are prohibited in the classroom or during any class activity. Students utilizing the phone or messaging during class will be asked to leave the classroom and will receive an absence for the day. Messaging during an exam will be considered an act of academic dishonesty.

Special Needs – Students who experience stress or other difficulties during exams may arrange to have special examinations through the office of Student Support Services. Students needing special accommodations in order to accommodate specific testing / learning needs should contact Student Support Services located in the Academic IV Building: B-Wing, Room 345 or online at www.umbc.edu/sss or over the wires at (410) 455-3250. Students utilizing Students Support services are responsible to inform the faculty member at least one week in advance of each test so that appropriate arrangements may be made.

Students who experience stress or other difficulties and find themselves in need of talking with someone regarding personal issues, trouble adjusting to the challenges of college life, anxiety, depression, or concerns about course work, social life, or the everyday pressures of being a college student are encouraged to contact University Counseling Services located in the Student Development & Success Center or online at www.umbc.edu/counseling or over the wires at (410) 455-2472.

Academic Honesty – Students are expected to abide by all policies of conduct as specified within University policy.

UMBC Honor Code statement:

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC’s scholarly community in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include suspension or dismissal. To read the full policy on academic integrity, consult the UMBC Student Handbook, Faculty Handbook, or the UMBC Policies section of the UMBC directory.

Department Productions- The two department productions occurring this semester are *OTMA* and *The Laramie Project*. Spread the word! Bring your friends & neighbors! Bear in mind that some performances are during the day. For specific times, contact the theatre box office at (410) 455-2476.

OTMA by Kate Moira Ryan

Directed by Eve Muson

October 20 – 23

The Laramie Project by Moises Kaufman & Tectonic Theatre Project

Directed by Nyalls Hartman

December 1 – 4 & 8 – 11 (You must see it by Dec. 4th)

For your professional production attendance, any production at one of the following area theatres is acceptable for the professional performance response paper (for others – including out-of-town shows – please secure instructor approval in advance):

Arena Stage

Baltimore Theatre Project

Center Stage

Everyman Theatre

Folger Theatre

Rep Stage

Round House Theatre

Single Carrot Theatre

Studio Theatre

The Woolly Mammoth Theatre Co.

Washington Shakespeare Theatre

Craft of Acting I – Course Timeline

WEEK 1 Syllabus – Course Outline – Introductions

September 1 – Fall Auditions
September 2 – Fall Call Backs
September 6 – No Office Hours

WEEK 2 – 5 The Actor’s Instrument – Energy, Concentration & Focus

September 5 – No School – Labor Day
September 28 – Recommended Outside Performance Paper Due Date
September 29 – No Office Hours

WEEKS 5 – 9 Self as Subject Exercises/ Monologues

October 20 – No Office Hours
October 24 – OTMA Reaction Papers Due
October 26 – Journals Turned In
November 2 – Midterm Meetings
 Look for New Monologues

WEEK 10 – 13 Objective Exercises – Given Circumstances – Physical Action Exercise

November 21 – Physical Action Exercise Assignment Due

WEEK 13 2nd Monologues / Mock Auditions –

November 28 – Mock Auditions
November 30 – Mock Auditions
November 30 – Final Scene Assignments

WEEK 14 Contentless Scenes

December 5 – Laramie Project Papers Due
December 5 – Spring Auditions
December 6 – Spring Call Backs
December 7 – Journals Turned In

WEEK 15 Final Scene Presentations

December 12 – Last Day of Class
 Final Scene Presentation
 Last Day to Turn in Outside Performance Papers
December 16 – Official Final – 1:00 pm. (Friday)

**** A prepared actor anticipates their deadlines.****

Students should keep in mind that syllabus dates often change as the class moves through the course work. Adjustments to the timelines will be addressed by the instructor daily in class. Students are responsible to keep up to date with syllabus changes.