

## **THTR 110 Introduction to Acting**

Spring 2017

Room: PAHB 102 TRS

Tues & Thurs 1:00 – 2:15 pm

Prof. Nyalls Hartman

Office PAHB 354

Office Hours: T & R 11:00 – 12:00

Other Hrs. by Appointment

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### **Introduction to Acting**

This course is designed to provide a beginning working knowledge of the acting process and is intended for the non-major. Through exercises, analysis, self-exploration, and improvisation, the student will build a foundational understanding of basic acting tools. As acting is a process that requires a thorough knowledge of the actor's instrument, we will explore both the inner and outer terrain of the actor (physical, mental, and emotional).

Our goals for the course are:

1. To develop and demonstrate an understanding of basic acting tools;
2. To develop and demonstrate self-confidence in a performance setting;
3. To develop and demonstrate the ability to listen attentively and respond authentically;
4. To develop and demonstrate basic collaborative skills as they relate to the creation of theatre.

Introduction to Acting is a studio/laboratory class and as such is designed to investigate the reproduction of life and diverse life issues. As adult 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 adult 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, gender, sexual, and/or religious convictions. If for any reason a student believes that, as actors portraying characters, they will be unable to perform actions that conflict with their personal convictions, they should speak with the professor immediately so we can pursue alternatives—including, but not limited to, the possibility of taking the course at another time with another instructor.

Students are expected to respond openly to the exploration of their fellow actors as they learn basic acting techniques during the course. As pursuit of authenticity of “character” is a vital and foundational part of the acting process, you will be graded on the level with which you undertake your work; high-level energy, focus and commitment are required throughout the duration of every class.

Students should also be aware that as a studio/laboratory class, Introduction to Acting requires the utilization of the physical body and therefore body training. Techniques for learning the physical instrument as they are being taught may at times involve ‘hands-on’ guidance from the instructor. This physical contact is essential for proper training and will be undertaken only as needed for the growth of the student’s learning and 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.

UMBC's Department of Theatre's teaching philosophy follows the statement of the Department of Drama at University of California Irvine:

"In drama, the actor becomes a medium as well as a creator of art. Stage life, which may involve actions such as touching, laughing, crying, kissing, dancing, flirting, threatening, dueling, and/or fighting, is not something the actor merely mimics, but necessarily experiences in and with his or her own body and mind. The ancient maxim of Horace, 'in order to move the audience, the actor must first be moved himself,' is as valid today as when Horace stated it two thousand years ago: stage performance involves not only the externals of body and voice, but also the internals of longings and emotions.

Effective teaching in the drama disciplines, therefore, may often involve physical and/or emotional interventions that can be demonstrative, suggestive, and/or challenging. This has been true as long as theatre has existed."

In the UMBC Department of Theatre we view theatre training as a collaborative process, involving shared responsibilities. The central role of the instructor is to support students in this work. The theatre faculty will always do their best to clarify the intention of the work. However, it must be understood that acting is a psychophysical process and that intellectual understanding is not always the key factor. Students have a responsibility to enter the training process with a spirit of spontaneity, inquiry and a sense of discovery. If a student is ever confused about the intention of an exercise or a direction, the faculty encourage her or him to bring that particular concern to their attention as soon as possible. Students will never be penalized for questioning the process. Open discussion is a vital component of life in a university; it strengthens the relationship between faculty and students, actor and director.

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, preparation, rehearsal techniques, improvisation, etc.;

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, and 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. Unprepared students and students who are not actively engaging in the course will likely fail the class.
2. Dress Code: Non-restrictive clothing that easily accommodates movement and maintains personal comfort while undertaking the exercises—Something you can lay upside-down in and not expose your body parts. Therefore, no skirts or dresses. Nothing too baggy or too tight and I should be able to see your ankles. (Yoga pants and short sleeve shirts are 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 hanging or big jewelry must be removed; no exceptions. **It is expected that all students will be properly dressed and ready for class before class begins.**

3. Attendance policy: **Attendance is mandatory.** Students are expected to attend all classes. 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. The likelihood is that if you intend on missing classes, you will fail this course. 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 or early departures will equal one absence.
  
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.  
  
In addition, students are expected to come to class daily with a notebook 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.
  
5. Acting Class Reflection Papers – You are required to reflect upon your journey as an actor twice during the semester: once prior to Mid-term and once at the end of the course. The reflection papers might include but not be limited to your reactions to class material, exercises, understanding of ideas on acting and approaches, social observations, and observations about your own work and the work of your fellow actors. You may use the reflection to address frustrations, inspirations, questions, or challenges and/or thoughts regarding your development as an actor. Acting Class Reflection Papers are to be no less than three pages in length and utilize *Times New Roman* 12 pt. font, at 1.5 spacing. Guidelines for Acting Reaction Papers are attached. Note: It is recommended that you journal your progress through the course and review your notes or thoughts from class nightly.
  
6. Theatre Production Attendance/Acting Reaction Papers- Students must attend both (2) UMBC Theatre productions presented this semester and turn in an Acting Reaction Paper for each production attended. Papers are to be no less than three pages in length and utilize *Times New Roman* 12 pt. font, at 1.5 spacing. Guidelines for Acting Reaction Papers are attached and production information can be found below. Students are responsible for securing their own tickets through the Department's ticketing process.
  
7. Midterm Monologue/ Emblem Exercises (Practical and Written).
  
8. Physical Action & Objective Exercises (Practical and Written).

9. 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.

Department Productions- The two department productions occurring this semester are *Suddenly Last Summer* by Tennessee Williams and *The Mail Order Bride* by Charles Mee. 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) 455-2917 or check the website at Theatre.umbc.edu.

*Suddenly Last Summer* by Tennessee Williams  
Directed by Hannah Kennedy  
March 20 – April 2, 2017

*The Mail Order Bride* by Charles Mee  
Directed by Eve Muson  
May 4 – 7, 2017

### **Grading Policy**

1. Acting Reflection Papers (15%)
2. Theatre Reaction Papers (15%)
3. Undertaking of Exercises– Concentration, Body Work, Focus, Commitment, Energy, Attitude, and Participation (20%)
4. Mid-term Scenic Objective Exercise (25%)
5. Final Project (25%)  
Final scenes and objective exercise are broken down into 3 units:  
Written work, rehearsal time, and performance.
6. Attendance Policy- As it effects your final average

Grading scale:

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

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 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 also 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/ssv](http://www.umbc.edu/ssv) 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](http://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.

## Introduction to Acting - Course Timeline

**WEEK 1**            **Syllabus – Introductions**

**WEEK 2 – 5**      **Concentration, Observation, & Energy Exercises**

February 16            No Class

**WEEK 6 – 9**      **Acting is Doing: Given Circumstances & Scenic Objective Exercises**

March 16              1<sup>st</sup> Reflection Papers Due

March 21 & 23        No Class – Spring Break

March 28 & 30        Midterm Scenes Performed

March 30 – April 2    *Suddenly Last Summer*

**WEEK 10 – 12**   **Talking & Listening**

April 4                *Suddenly Last Summer* Reaction Papers Due

**WEEK 12 - 15**   **Scene Work, Analysis, & Scoring the Role**

April 20              Scene Work in Class

April 27              Memorize Lines

May 2 – 11            Present Scenes in Progress

May 4 – 7             *Mail Order Bride*

May 9                 *Mail Order Bride* Reaction Papers Due

**WEEK 16**        **Final Scene Presentations**

May 16                Last Day of Class – 2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection Papers Due

**FINAL EXAM**   **TBD**   **Wednesday May 17<sup>th</sup> 1:00 – 3:00**

**Tuesday    May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1:00 – 3:00**

\*\*\*\* 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.

Introduction to Acting – Acting Reaction Paper Guideline

For each of the two Department productions, student should write an acting reaction paper no less than three typewritten pages in Times New Roman 12 pt. font with 1.5 spaced lines. Your objective is to tell me about the production you saw and specifically what stuck you about the quality of acting and what happened to you while you were watching. I do not need to know the plot as I will have seen the play.

You can address any of the following: How it was performed? Did you believe the actors or not? Were there moments that really took you in or that made you feel deeply inside? Did you think the actors were highly skilled or just walking through the role? What were one or two elements of the acting (in an actor) where you observed strong physical commitment, or strong emotional commitment? Where in your body did you feel the play? (What was the relative tension in your body and where was it—stomach, legs, jaw, etc.). Did you find yourself mentally, physically, or emotionally involved?

In writing, chose the moment or moments that occurred in the play and that let you expand honestly about the questions above.

Some tips: If you go with friends, enjoy yourself, but let them know you have an assignment so that you can focus while watching, beginning 5 minutes prior the start of the play and for 5 minutes following. Bring a notebook/journal so that you can jot quick notes during intermission and at the end of the play. Do not write during the performance—experience the performance, and take a few moments following to write any immediate thoughts. Later on in the evening, expand on your original thoughts or commit to paper how you think about what you experienced after having reflected upon it.

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Student Name  
Course # & Name  
Instructor's Name  
Date

Name of Production  
Date

Acting Reaction Paper # – (Name of Show)

Start of first line.....

Introduction to Acting – Acting Class Reflection Paper Guideline

Acting Class Reflection Papers – You are required to reflect upon your journey as an actor twice during the semester: once prior to Mid-term and once at the end of the course.

To assist you in writing the reflection papers, you are required to keep a journal mapping the development of your thoughts during the duration of the course. It is recommended that you to journal your progress through the course and review your notes or thoughts from each class nightly. (Your journal entries will become the source material for your acting reflection paper.)

Entries should include but not be limited to: reactions to class material, class exercises, understanding of ideas on acting, social observations, and observations about your own work and the work of your fellow actors. You may also use the journal to record frustrations, inspirations, questions, and challenges, and/or thoughts as they arise and are aligned with your development as an actor. I'm never going to see your original journal, but, if you are diligent and thoughtful, each entry should be dated and you should have written at least one short entry after each class meeting.

The reflection papers should summarize, in some manner, your journal entries (up to that point) and focus on an element of your learning, whether it is your experiences with and reactions to class material, exercises, understanding of ideas on acting, and observations about your own work and the work of your fellow actors. You may also use the reflection to address frustrations, inspirations, questions, or challenges and/or thoughts regarding your development as an actor.

Acting Class Reflection Papers are to be no less than three pages in length and utilize *Times New Roman* 12 pt. font, at 1.5 spacing (the heading should be single spaced).

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Student Name  
Course # & Name  
Instructor's Name  
Date

Reflection Paper #

Start of first line.....