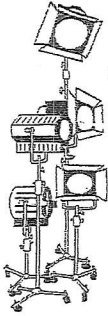


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Improvisation

Improvisation, or improv, is a type of acting done without a script or rehearsal. An actor or group of actors is given a situation and sometimes characters, and they act it out spontaneously, making up the dialog and action as they work their way to a solid conclusion. Part of what makes improvisation enjoyable to the audience is that they know and appreciate that the performance they are enjoying is being created especially for them.

There are several different types of improvisational games and activities actors can practice to improve their skills, and the number of scenes and types of characters is infinite. However, before you start, you need to know some of the basic ideas that make spontaneous scenes successful.

- **Define your character.** Take the director's instructions and do a quick character analysis before taking the stage: How do I walk and talk? How old am I? Do I have any odd habits?
- **Be a good listener.** Listen to the other actors on-stage, because their lines are your cue lines, and if the scene lacks good teamwork, it will not be a success.
- **Know where you are.** Is your character at the mall, the zoo, the beach, or any other place that would enhance the scene? If there is not enough time to establish the location before beginning, work it into the skit as close to the beginning as possible. Then the imaginary location can become a part of the scene, giving the actors more to go on.
- **Know the conflict.** Almost all scenes (improvisational or scripted) revolve around a conflict, and if improvisational actors are not clear on what it is, their scene will be confusing to the audience.
- **Pay attention.** Whether playing a game or improvising a scene, remember the instructions: If there is a goal (and there almost always is), keep the goal in sight.
- **Establish relationships.** If relationships are not established by the teacher or director, clarify them early in the scene. This will help to clear the path for the conclusion.

- **Include plenty of action.** Because the audience expects little scenery or props, the actor has it within his power to "pretend" to possess anything he wishes! Good actors can use pantomime to make the audience believe they see a light saber or giant clown shoes.
- **Try to keep the scene in the positive rather than the negative.** Avoid using responses such as "no." They bring the scene to a sudden halt, whereas responses in the positive, "yes," keep the scene moving toward the goal and tend to be more funny. Work with your partners instead of *against* them.
- **Every improvisation must have a conclusion,** but when you are on the spot, it can seem pretty hard to do. Many improv troupes use bells and buzzers to end scenes that actors cannot seem to end on their own. You do not want to be buzzed out every time, so practice ending your own scenes.



Students improvise a scene.

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