

The Portable Acting Coach

ACTORS TRAINING GROUND
TANNER LAGASCA

EDITED BY TANNER LAGASCA AND JENNIFER L. ANDERSON

The Portable Acting Coach

ACTORS TRAINING GROUND

FOREWORD.....	11
<u>CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED</u>	15
BEFORE YOU BEGIN.....	16
KEEPING A JOURNAL.....	18
STAGE DIRECTIONS.....	20
STAGE TERMINOLOGY.....	22
<u>CHAPTER 2: THE BASICS</u>	27
ACTING OVERVIEW.....	28
OBJECTIVE/INTENTION.....	29
OBSTACLE.....	31
TACTIC.....	33
ULTIMATE VERB LIST.....	35
RELATIONSHIP.....	39
STATUS.....	41
TRUST.....	43
LISTENING.....	45
<u>CHAPTER 3: BEYOND THE BASICS</u>	47
RELAXATION AND THE GREEN LIGHT.....	48
THE MAGIC “IF”.....	53
THE MOMENT BEFORE.....	55
MOMENT-TO-MOMENT.....	58
EMOTIONAL TONES.....	61
EMOTIONAL CHART.....	62
ARCS.....	63
ENDOWMENT.....	68
SUBSTITUTION.....	70
SENSE MEMORY.....	73
EMOTIONAL RECALL.....	77
<u>CHAPTER 4: VOICE</u>	81
VOICE OVERVIEW.....	82
WARMING UP THE VOICE AND EXERCISES.....	83
RELAXATION.....	84
POSTURE AND ALIGNMENT.....	87
RESPIRATION AND POSITIONING.....	92
PHONATION.....	95

SUPPORT	98
REGISTRATION	100
RESONANCE.....	102
ARTICULATION.....	104
ADDITIONAL VOICE EXERCISES	110
ARTICULATION WARM-UP	111
YOUR 20-MINUTE VOCAL WARM-UP.....	114
CHAPTER 5: SPEECH	115
THE ART OF SPEAKING	116
RHYTHM AND TEMPO	117
UTILIZING PATTERNS OF SPEECH.....	120
FREEING THE VOICE THROUGH SINGING	124
PITCH EXERCISES AND DRILLS.....	125
HONING SPEECH THROUGH LISTENING SKILLS.....	128
ADDITIONAL EXERCISES	129
GLOSSARY OF MUSICAL TERMS.....	130
INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET	137
REGIONAL, NEUTRAL & STANDARD AMERICAN.....	139
REMOVING A REGIONAL DIALECT	141
QUICK DIALECT REFERENCE GUIDE	142
CHAPTER 6: MOVEMENT	145
MOVEMENT OVERVIEW	146
LEADING.....	147
WEIGHT.....	149
LABAN	153
WARM-UP: BASIC STRUCTURE.....	155
WARM-UP EXERCISE #1 - RELAXATION	157
WARM-UP EXERCISE #2	163
WARM-UP EXERCISE #3	168
WARM-UP EXERCISE #4: - THIRTY-MINUTE WARM-UP	172
MASSAGES.....	175
CHAPTER 7: CREATING A CHARACTER.....	181
CHARACTER ANALYSIS OVERVIEW	182
CHARACTER ANALYSIS – FROM A PLAY	183
CHARACTER ANALYSIS – NOT FROM A PLAY	185
THE NINE QUESTIONS	187
OBSERVATIONS.....	189
SLICE OF LIFE	192
ANIMAL WORK	194
MEET YOUR ANCESTOR	199

PORTRAIT EXERCISE.....	201
PRIVATE MOMENTS.....	203
LOSS AND BETRAYAL	205
CHARACTER ANALYSIS SHEET	206
CHAPTER 8: PUTTING IT TOGETHER	207
RESEARCH.....	208
JUSTIFICATION AND ACTION.....	209
MONOLOGUES	212
SCENES	221
CHAPTER 9: AUDITIONS	231
AUDITIONS OVERVIEW.....	232
SCHEDULING AN AUDITION (AGENT OR AGENCY).....	233
SCHEDULING AN AUDITION (CASTING NOTICE).....	234
PREPARING FOR THE AUDITION	235
WHAT TO WEAR.....	242
HEADSHOTS.....	246
RESUMES.....	248
ARRIVING AT THE AUDITION	251
ENTERING THE AUDITION SPACE	253
PRESENTING YOUR AUDITION PIECES	255
CALLBACKS AND COLD READINGS.....	259
AFTER THE AUDITION.....	261
CHAPTER 10: REHEARSALS AND PERFORMANCES.....	263
THE FIRST READ-THROUGH	264
MAKING CHOICES.....	266
THE REHEARSALS.....	267
THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR	268
WORKING WITH A DIRECTOR.....	269
THE ROLE OF THE STAGE MANAGER.....	271
TECH WEEK	272
THE PERFORMANCES.....	273
CHAPTER 11: SHAKESPEARE	275
SHAKESPEARE OVERVIEW	276
RHYTHMIC PATTERNS.....	277
SCANSION.....	282
SCRIPT DETECTIVE	283
EXPLORING SHAKESPEAREAN VERSE.....	284
LEARNING TO SCAN THE TEXT	286
PHYSICALIZING THE TEXT	293

CHAPTER 12: SUZUKI	295
SUZUKI OVERVIEW	296
USING TEXT	297
ICH NI SUM	298
STOMPING	300
SHAKUHACHI	302
TEN-TE-KE-TEN	304
THE WALKS	305
STATUES AND JUMPING	307
SPEECH AND FIGHTS	308
CHAPTER 13: STAGE COMBAT	309
STAGE COMBAT OVERVIEW	310
RULES OF STAGE COMBAT	311
HOSPITAL AND NON-HOSPITAL ZONE CHART	313
GENERAL GUIDELINES	314
KNAPS	316
KICKS	317
PUNCHES/SLAPS	320
GRABBING AND CHOKING	323
STUMBLES, TRIPS, AND FALLS OVERVIEW	326
STUMBLES	327
TRIPPING	329
FALLING	332
RUNNING INTO WALLS AND OTHER OBJECTS	336
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SITED WORKS	339
APPENDIX	341

FOREWORD

FOREWORD

Wouldn't it be great to have a private acting coach at your fingertips whenever you had a question or wanted to refresh your memory on a technique or exercise? That's exactly what I set out to do when I started writing this book in 2010. It contains the numerous notes I meticulously took while in school, the handouts, and the knowledge I accumulated over the years throughout my career.

This book doesn't cover all the schools of thought on acting nor every exercise actors use to hone their craft. If it did, it would be volumes upon volumes of information: too much to comprehend or take in. This book is how I teach, how I coach. And like any class, you take from it what you find helpful and discard those ideas that you don't need.

Originally I set out to preserve my notes for my own use when I needed easier access to them. As this book evolved it became more than just a book taken from notes. It turned into a book about techniques and skills that I teach in my acting classes and how I talk to my students whether in a classroom setting or in a private coaching: a book I felt would benefit other actors.

There are so many views on acting styles, which school of thought is the best, and so on, that many times we lose sight of the real goal: to produce believability in our performances whether on stage or in front of a camera. I tell all of my students, "it doesn't matter which process you use as long as it gets you where you need to go", both emotionally and truthfully.

FOREWORD

I define acting as “the art of creating reality on stage”. This statement can also be applied to film. No matter where you study acting, which techniques you use, or who you hire as your private acting coach, they all share a common bond: to get the actor to open up and share themselves truthfully with the audience and engage them for a few hours, bringing them into the actor’s world. That’s the simplicity and complexity of acting.

Actors have many obstacles to overcome when they start out: getting out of their head, over-thinking ideas, over-internalizing, body movements without purpose, stagnant or colorless patterns of speech, stage fright, lack of vocal support, lack of connection to text, character or self, the list goes on and on. Not every actor suffers from all of these fixable problems but at one time or another could face any one of them. The actor overcomes these obstacles by diligently working in class, having an acting coach, or working on sets and stages with competent actors who know what they’re doing.

Acting is “living in the moment” whether on stage or screen. An actor who isn’t “living in the moment” will not hold the audience’s attention. Their movements, speech, lines, blocking, connection to other actors, and such, will appear lifeless, false, mechanical, and pretty much uninspiring. Even if an actor doesn’t go to school because they have a gift or are labeled a “natural” it does not mean they cannot benefit from a class or coach to serve as a second pair of eyes.

This book is ideal for both the beginning and advanced actor. For the beginner, this book can serve as a stepping-stone: to whet your appetite for the wonderful world of acting. Read it.

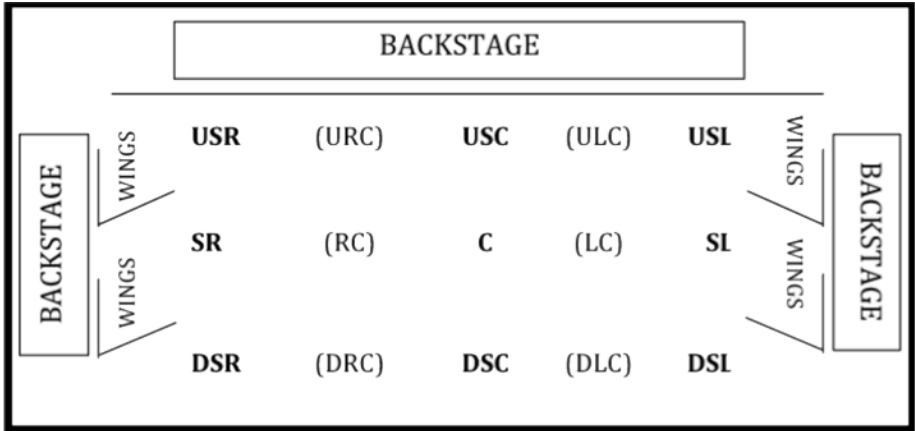
FOREWORD

Absorb it. It is not meant to replace a theatre education but to inspire you to act. Continue to read different types of books on acting until you find the right style for you.

For the advanced actor, it can serve as a refresher course: to remind you of techniques and tools you may have forgotten along the way. Use it as a quick reference guide when you need a push in the right direction. It is also perfect for the acting teacher or coach needing a handy reference guide when teaching.

As I stated earlier, this book is a culmination of the notes I took, the experience I've gained, and the lessons I've learned. It is meant to help you and inspire you. The chapters on Shakespeare, Suzuki, and Stage Combat are meant to be an introduction and not to replace a class, book, or training that specializes on these subjects.

I hope you find this book useful in developing or refreshing your acting skills and that it helps you appreciate the art of acting and creating life on stage.



USR – Upstage Right	SR – Stage Right	DSR – Downstage Right
URC – Up Right Center	RC – Right Center	DRC – Down Right Center
USC – Upstage Center	C – Center	DSC – Downstage Center
ULC – Up Left Center	LC – Left Center	DLC – Down Left Center
USL – Upstage Left	SL – Stage Left	DSL – Downstage Left

House – The area where the audience sits

Wings – The side areas off the main stage area

Backstage – The area behind the stage

Also, remember that there are strong and weak points on a stage. Knowing these basic principles will help give you a stronger presence on stage and also prevent you from being upstaged by another actor either unintentionally or deliberately.

Downstage is stronger than Upstage.

Center Stage is stronger than Stage Right/Left.

Stage Right is stronger than Stage Left.

OBJECTIVE/INTENTION

Objective and intention are interchangeable and mean the exact same thing. These two words will be used throughout the book. Objectives or intentions are the driving force for every character. Each and every one of them, down to the smallest role has a purpose on stage. Their purpose drives them throughout the play. It doesn't matter if they are there for the entirety, are in one scene, have one line, or no lines. All of the characters have one thing in common. They want something. Your job as an actor is to discover what it is they want.

Objectives can be put into three categories: Super Objective, Main Objective, and Immediate Objective. The Super Objective is what a character wants throughout the entire play. The Main Objective is what a character wants throughout a scene. The Immediate Objective is what the character wants right now within the scene. Learn and understand the difference between these three categories and be careful not to confuse them with each other.

Let's look at *Oleanna* by David Mamet. John, a teacher at a University, wants to secure his tenure and is in the process of buying a house. His wife, (who John talks to on the phone but is never seen), is worried about losing the house and his ability to gain the tenure. His super objective is to resolve the crisis in his life

In the opening scene, Carol, a student who is having problems in John's class, approaches him at his office while he's on the phone trying to calm his wife. His main objective in the scene is to reason with Carol and help her understand so he can get back to his super objective. As the scene continues, he struggles to make Carol comprehend what he is talking about. His immediate objective changes within the scene; acknowledging her concerns, defending his teaching ability, reasoning with Carol, all in attempts to complete

THE MAGIC “IF”

There are moments when an actor may have a difficult time reaching an emotional level. They may struggle connecting with a partner, connecting with their text, identifying with their character’s situation, or maybe, not being able to relate to what the character is experiencing. We find ourselves trying the same things within the scene, or unable to come up with other ideas. When these moments occur the actor can use the magic “if.” The word “if” is a powerful tool used by the actor to engage their imagination and help them to connect to problems that they are struggling with in their process.

Whenever you use “if” you put yourself, not your character, in the question. You use it like this: “What would I do if I...?” or “How would I feel if I...?” By using these phrases or any phrase regarding “if”, you let go of any preconceived notions or mental blocks you may have. You are free to explore. You are allowing yourself to be put in your character’s position and react naturally. Once you have explored what you are trying to achieve with the magic “if”, you can return to your character and ask questions pertaining to them.

When asking yourself as your character, do not use your character’s name. This will place you outside of your character. Instead continue using the pronoun “I” but remember you are asking it as your character not as yourself. If you find that you are still having a hard time identifying with your character using “if” refer to CHAPTER 7: CREATING A CHARACTER – CHARACTER ANALYSIS SHEET. Once you have fleshed out the essences of your character, try using the magic “if” again.

As an example let’s look at “John”, an actor who has been cast as Richard III. While excited about the role, he is unable to identify with the disability that Richard has and, as a result, finds that he is unsure of the choices to make in regards to the physicality

ARCS

Arcs describe the path that a storyline or character makes during the course of the play. Where a character begins at the start of a play is most likely very different from where they end. It is important as you are working on your character to find their main arc. Just like a main objective, the main arc will chronicle the path of the character and refers to their emotional journey.

In conjunction to main and immediate objectives, there are also main and immediate arcs for characters in scenes and monologues. These can be found in the beats of dialogue. However, unlike objectives or tactics, arcs can cover many objectives and tactics within many beats of a scene.

As an actor, you should map out these arcs. I'm not saying to orchestrate and control these arcs but use them as a guide to where the character is emotionally heading. There can be arcs in monologues and dialogue. There can be one main arc for a scene but that scene may contain many mini-arcs within itself.

I like to measure the arc of a character from the time they enter a scene until the time they leave. This can be anywhere from one page to an entire act. However, when your character leaves the scene, the arc does not end. It continues, unseen by the audience. When they re-enter the scene, the arc either continues where it left off or reflects what might have happened off-stage to the character.

Arcs will either go up or down, depending on what is happening in the monologue. For example, if your character suddenly breaks down after remaining calm throughout your monologue, the emotional state is one of despair. That doesn't mean they wail, moan, and cry loudly. It could be a moment of realization for them.

An arc is created when the emotional level increases or decreases. The top of the arc is the highest level before the energy or

RELAXATION

Having a relaxed body is just as important to your voice as is the ease of breath. It is conducive to performing at your best. Remember to always breathe and check in with your body for any unneeded tension. Instead of using your muscles to physically adjust any tenseness in your body, use your breath to release and ease the tension. When doing any relaxation exercise lying down, don't drift off and fall asleep. Stay focused at all times.

LAVA

Lie down flat on the floor. Imagine your body being filled with hot lava. Take nice even breaths in through the nose and exhale through your mouth. Once you have established a relaxed rhythm of breathing, imagine that your body is being filled with lava.

Starting at your toes, imagine it filling your ankles, calves, knees, thighs, buttocks, stomach, back, chest, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, and head. Go slowly starting at your toes and ending at your head.

As you are imagining your body being filled with the lava, allow your body to sink into the ground. Your breathing should remain steady and unforced. Allow your body to maintain the feeling of this thick liquid filling every space.

Continue breathing and then, starting at your toes and working up in the same order, imagine that the hot lava is cooling down. As it does, it becomes hard and non-pliable. As the lava hardens, imagine your body sinking deeper into the ground.

Once you have maintained the hardened lava in your body, allow it to form back into its original form using the same order of body parts. Once the hardened lava has been transformed back into a hot liquid, allow it to stay in your body and then, starting at your head and working down, replace the hot, heavy lava with a light, airy

RHYTHM AND TEMPO

The dictionary defines rhythm as “the systematic arrangement of musical sounds, principally according to duration and periodic rests.” and tempo as “the speed of which a passage of music is played.” Keeping this in mind, the way we speak on stage should also include rhythm and tempo. If the rhythm and tempo of your speech remain the same every time you speak, you will sound monotonous, lifeless, and emotionless, losing the ear of the audience. In addition, you will also lose the flow of text, intention, tactic, relationship, and status, basically everything that brings life to your character: a very deadly state for an actor to be in on stage.

The principles behind speaking on stage use the same principles as singing. Rhythm is the pattern of your speech and tempo is the speed at which you speak. Without getting too much into music theory, I will explain rhythm and tempo using a 4/4 time signature. This means that there are 4 beats to a measure.

In basic music theory when using a 4/4 time signature, you have an eighth note (1/2 a beat), quarter note (1 beat), half note (2 beats) and a whole note (4 beats.). Clap your hands in a slow but constant rate. The rate of speed at which you are clapping is the tempo. Now to explain rhythm, on the 1st clap say one, 2nd clap say two, 3rd clap say three, and 4th clap say four. This represents a quarter note because each number being said represents one clap (or beat.) The rhythm established is one sound on every clap.

Now clap again at the same speed and this time say the word “one” for the duration of the first two claps and the word “two” for the duration of the second two claps. This represents a half note since each word is taking two claps (or beats) instead of one. Now, clapping at the same speed as last time, I want you to say the word “one” for the duration of the four claps. This represents a whole note since you are saying one word on four claps (or beats.) Finally, clap

OBSERVATIONS

This is a great character development exercise because it's one of the few acting exercises that you can do outside of the house. You will need your journal, a pen, and about an hour to devote to this character development exercise.

Take your journal and go to a public place (park, museum, mall, zoo, etc.), anywhere that has a lot of people around and hopefully where you can sit and observe. The best part about this exercise is that all you do is watch people and notate their characteristics. This particular exercise will help to develop your observation skills in your daily life. Every time you do an observation, push yourself to be specific and detailed.

In an inconspicuous position, watch the crowd until you spot someone that draws your attention. Write down everything that you notice about this person. Nothing is too specific for this exercise. Ask yourself these questions as you observe them.

1. How are they dressed?
2. How tall are they?
3. How much do they weigh?
4. How do they interact with other people?
 - a. Eye contact
 - b. Leaning in or out
5. How is their posture?
 - a. Are they elongated?
 - b. Are they slouched?
 - c. Do they look relaxed?
 - d. Do they look stressed?

RHYTHMIC PATTERNS

The unique feature of Shakespeare's writing as well as other contemporaries of his time was the style of writing. It was a combination of verse and prose. Verse is written in rhythmic fashion and prose is not. Each line of a verse contains a set number of syllables called a meter. Shakespeare uses patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables to create the rhythm of the meter. The unstressed syllable is marked with a \cup and the stressed is marked with a $/$.

Shakespeare primarily wrote ten syllables (or five sets of two syllables) for his metrical lines. When a meter is written with five sets of two syllables, or ten syllables in total, it is called a pentameter. Each pair of syllables is called a foot. This means that there are five feet in every pentameter. Each foot in the pentameter contains two syllables. The placement of the stressed and unstressed syllable in the foot will dictate what kind of rhythmic meter it is. Let's take a look at the basic kinds of rhythmic patterns Shakespearean verse can have.

IAMBIC

When all five feet in a pentameter contain an unstressed syllable in the first foot and a stressed syllable in the second foot we call that an iambic pentameter. This is the rhythmic structure of which all of Shakespearean verse is based. Let me reiterate: an iambic pentameter is when the first part of the foot is unstressed and the second part of the foot is stressed.

In order to figure out what kind of rhythm is being used, we mark the text with the stressed and unstressed symbols. We call this scansion. The rhythm of iambic pentameter looks like this with the scansion.

KICKS

Note: When doing a kick, start in ¼ real time. Also, make sure you and your partner are ready. Give eye contact and give a good prep moment, either visually or verbally.

STANDING

1. Actor A stands with hands cupped at chest level about 1 - 2 feet from chest.
2. Actor B places foot into the cupped hand. Repeat until completely comfortable where hand will be and where to place the foot.
3. A kicks B with foot landing in cupped hand. B reacts to the force of the kick.

KNEELING

1. A is on ground with either one knee up or both knees on ground. Hands are cupped in the same position as the “standing kick.”
2. B places foot into the cupped hand. Repeat until completely comfortable where hand will be and where to place the foot.
3. A kicks B with foot landing in cupped hand. B reacts to the force of the kick, falling backwards. This kick is used to simulate being kicked in the face.

DOUBLED-OVER KICK

1. A leans over, making sure balance is good and knees are slightly bent.
2. B places foot into the cupped hand. Repeat until completely comfortable where hand will be and where to place the foot.
3. A kicks B with foot landing in cupped hand.