

PSPK-107/TPST 107
IMPROVISATIONAL SPEAKING
Summer 2020

M/T/W/R 12:00-2:00 PM
Davis Center for Performing Arts 036
Professor Rob Jansen
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“Improvisation is not so much a creation of something out of nothing as much as it is the creation of something out of everything—everything one has been taught, everything one has experienced, everything one knows.”

~Bob Kulhan, *Getting to Yes And*

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the theory and practice of improvisation in connection with public speaking. Over the semester, we will learn the basic techniques of improvisation and how to apply them to communication and collaboration in a variety of settings. Through participatory exercises and group activities students will explore tools for improvisation in relation to ensemble building, listening, playfulness, creativity, and leadership skills. Based on the foundational “Yes, and...” principle of improvisation and approaches to storytelling, the course is designed to develop the ability to respond to unexpected speaking situations in clear, impactful, and engaging ways. Additionally, we will examine specific case studies demonstrating how improvisation has been utilized to affect the way people and organizations work in areas as diverse as business, science, education, government, healthcare, and non-profit sectors. Students will be asked to apply improvisational approaches to their own areas of study and personal interests through course readings, workshops, discussions, assignments, and class presentations.

Course Objectives:

Over the course of the semester students will learn to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the theory and practice of improvisation.
- Employ improvisation techniques in organizing, developing, and delivering formal presentations, group discussions, and impromptu speaking opportunities.
- Develop awareness of one’s own communication style.
- Demonstrate an ability to create and collaborate with groups of people.
- Enhance critical thinking and listening skills through improvisation exercises.
- Apply improvisational approaches to individual areas of study/personal interests.

DAILY CLASS STRUCTURE:

This will be an active class. Students should come to class wearing clothes they can comfortably move in, as we will often engage in physical, vocal, and ensemble based exercises. It will also be an analytical class, so students should come prepared to take hand-written notes. Students will be expected to participate fully in any number of exercises, games, discussions, writings and explorations every class period. Come prepared to move and ready to play!

REQUIRED TEXTS:

IMPROV WISDOM by: Patricia Ryan Madson

APPLIED IMPROVISATION: Leading, Collaborating, and Creating Beyond the Theatre edited by: Theresa Robbins Dudeck & Caitlin McClure

Course Expectations and Requirements:

PARTICIPATION: Students are expected to attend classes regularly and be on time. Classes will start precisely on time, so students should come early in order to be ready to start. Students are expected to come having read assigned readings and/or having done assigned tasks. Students are expected to fully engage in class conversations: asking questions and sharing thoughts and feelings. Students are expected to participate in all exercises and games with full concentration and intent. Failure to do any of these things on a consistent basis will lower your participation grade. If you arrive late or leave early to class this will lower your participation grade.

DISCUSSION BOARD: Throughout the semester you will be required to maintain a journal on Discussion Board charting your observations on communication topics and responses to readings. You will be required to write a response connected to each class (250 word minimum/4 entries a week) starting with the very first day of class. Each class has a journal entry prompt listed in the course calendar. Students may also include observations from that day's class or outside observations connected to their growth and understanding of the art of communication.

Each journal entry on Discussion Board should include at least 1 quote from that week's reading.

PRESENTATION PROJECTS: Throughout the course, you will have to present a number of presentation and improvisation projects. Classes we will focus on developing improvisational techniques; such as: "Yes, And", ensemble building, authenticity, leadership, co-creation, and listening skills. Each individual student will create some of the projects whereas groups in collaboration will generate others. Some of the projects will require extensive preparation outside of class whereas other projects will be created in the moment. As each project is different and some are developed in class, they will be further explained as the semester progresses, as will the grading procedures for each.

FINAL PROJECT: The final project will essentially be an individually lead presentation, where each student will share how improvisation can be used in a specific subject or area of interest. You will develop a topic from another academic discipline, preferably from your major or from another course you have taken or are currently

taking. You will share with the class how improv could be applied to this area of study and lead the class through some improv exercises in connection with your topic. Further details of the final project will be discussed as the semester progresses.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Personal Communication Goals: Identify 3 goals you hope to accomplish by the end of the semester. These goals might be about vocal articulation, developing your presence in front of an audience, word choice, preparation, posture, developing your voice, gesture, speech organization, overcoming fear, communicating authentically, etc. Identify areas of communication that feel important to you. For each goal write a few sentences that detail what achieving your goals look like.

Midterm Analysis: A 2-page self-assessment of your progress with your communication goals set at the beginning of the semester and where you would still like to develop further in the course.

Portfolio Review: A 3-4 page self-evaluation on the student's journey in the course and how well each student achieved the goals they set for themselves throughout the semester. This should include successes, areas for improvement, and plans moving forward. The Portfolio Review should explore how improvisational speaking skills and techniques has changed you as a communicator.

GRADING:

The following is a general guideline for how your grade will be determined. It is not an exact science. Poor attendance will badly hurt your grade, whereas a positive attitude and demonstrated improvement and commitment throughout the course will strengthen your grade.

Presentations	25%
Participation	25%
Journal	10%
Written Assignments	10%
Final Project	15%
Portfolio Review	15%
TOTAL	100%

A Students participate fully and openly in all warm ups and exercises. They make significant and impactful contributions to class discussions and group work making strong connections to course readings. They set strong personal communication goals at the beginning of the semester and diligently pursue them throughout the course. They work to improve personal communication & improvisational skills, as well as, support others in the course to contribute to an overall positive classroom environment. They

complete all work on time with intellectual rigor and creativity, while taking risks to continually push themselves.

B Students participate fully and openly in all warm-ups and exercises. They contribute original ideas to class discussion and group work, but with less frequency and nuance than “A” students. They complete all work carefully but may not offer as deep insight, creative innovation, reference to course readings, or mastery of material as an “A” student.

C Students participate in warm-ups and exercises, but are sometimes distracted or not fully committed. They occasionally participate in class discussion and group work, but fail to make connection to course readings. They complete the majority of the assigned work and meet the stated requirements of the assignments.

D Students attend class infrequently and participate minimally in class discussion and group assignments. They meet the bare minimum on assigned work and/or group work.

F Students do not show up to class consistently and do not complete assignments.

Some behaviors that will adversely affect this component of your grade:

- Being unprepared
- Not listening
- Not taking notes
- Text messaging/checking e-mail, etc. in class

Grading Scale: A(93-100); A-(90-92); B+(87-89); B(83-86); B-(80-82); C+(77-79); C(73-76) C-(70-72); D+(67-69); D(63-66); D-(60-62); F(0-59)

Policies:

1. Each presentation and assignment is due on the date and time stated on the syllabus. A presentation may be made up based on professorial approval. If a makeup presentation is granted the grade will be lowered one letter grade for each class day late. Also, it may need to be scheduled outside of class. For each day an assignment is handed in late, beginning the day following the due date, the grade will go down 1/3 of a letter grade. (Original grade: A. Late Day 1: A-, Day 2: B+, Day 3: B, etc.) Days counted towards a late grade include all days of the school week and weekends.
2. After TWO absences, you risk failing the course. Attendance is mandatory. If you miss a class be sure to email your professor BEFORE that class to let me know you will not be in attendance. This course is The Art of Communication and being in communication throughout the semester will be taken into consideration in your final participation grade. Moreover, you are expected to come prepared to participate in the class discussion. Your active participation is essential to the success of this class. Being late three times constitutes one absence. However, if you arrive more than fifteen minutes late you will be automatically considered

absent.

3. **Religious Observances:** I realize that some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during this academic term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please come speak with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.
4. **Cellular Phones, Food, and Laptops:** Please do not bring food to class, and please remember to turn off cell phones or other electronic devices. As this is a communication course the use of all electronic devices should be kept to a minimum.
5. **Student Disability Resource Center:** Georgetown University complies with the regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and offers accommodations to students with disabilities. [Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center \(Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; before the start of classes to allow their office time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.](#)
6. **Academic Honor Principle:** All students are bound by the Georgetown University Honor Code (<https://scs.georgetown.edu/resources-current-students/academic-resources/honor-code/>) **Honor policy violation sanctions may range from a student failing the specific assignment to the student failing the entire course. In more severe cases an already conferred degree may be revoked, or a student may be expelled from the program.**