



The Rules

Theatre Sports can be surprisingly technical when you look into all the rules and terms for different things - but in general, if you stick to these overall 5 rules, you should be able to create fun and exciting scenes.

- **I will react to the offers I'm given**

Accepting offers, moving the scene forward, making stuff happen

- **I will create stories worth caring about**

Interesting characters with personalities and objectives, stories with tension and gravity to them

- **I will always make others look good ahead of myself**

Not hogging the scene, showing chivalry, making sure everyone gets a turn

- **I will be brave and positive, even when I fail**

Pushing on if something falls flat or if you get embarrassed, not 'killing' the scene

- **I will put the theatre in theatre sports**

Or: Have fun!

Key Words

An **Ask-For** is an open offer made at the beginning of the performance, asking for the audience to suggest a:

- Occupation/hobby
- Object
- Non-geographical location
- Relationship between 2 (or more) people
- Anything else you can think of!

The **Absurdity Curve** is the general flow of the story you should aim for. The story starts off fairly normal, and as it progresses, it goes up the curve and gets more and more ridiculous.

Chivalry means not clinging to your own ideas, status, or life (as a character) - it's daring to give up control. Allow yourself to be changed by other players, be happy to be forced to change.

Truthfulness is when a situation is recognizable to the audience. People naturally laugh when they something is familiar, so keeping things truthful is pretty powerful.

Wimping is accepting offers but refusing to do anything with them, deflecting it back to the other players instead of making active decisions.

Yes, And is the base of good improv. It is accepting an offer made by another player and *building* on that offer.

Warm-Ups

These are games you can usually play with a whole class. It will get students prepared to think on their feet, and ideally get them past the barrier of nervousness that prevents us from saying the first thing that comes to mind. Some of these are more physical than others, some will involve everyone at once, others will focus on 2 - 4 people at a time, some will really challenge the brain and some will simply help students to learn each other's names. It's always good to start a drama lesson with a warm-up to get people focused and ready for their class.

Unless stated otherwise, everyone participates in these. Usually participants will be in a circle or a line, but some games require them to sit in an audience and tag in when a player 'dies'.

Cross Circle

Perfect game to learn each other's names.

Everyone starts in a circle. One person (A) starts by calling another person's name (B). At that point, A starts walking towards B. Before A gets to B, B needs to call another name (C), so B frees their spot in the circle, for A to take. C then needs to call yet another name and start walking, so B can take C's spot.

One Duck

Everyone is in a circle. We are going to say a pattern, one word per player, going clockwise.

It goes like this:

One Duck, two Legs, Quack

Two Ducks, four legs, Quack Quack

Three Ducks, six legs, Quack Quack Quack

And so on, till someone misses.

Variations

Try with an insect instead of a duck (6 legs per insect), or a spider (eight legs) and invent a sound the insect might make.

Fruit Basket

All players but one sit on chairs in a circle, one person in the middle. The person in the middle calls out a category or some description that might apply to some or all of the other players. E.g. all women, all blondes. When called, if a player matches the description, they must leave their chair and find another chair. The person that doesn't find a chair becomes the next in the middle. When 'Fruit Basket' is called, everyone changes chairs.

Exaggeration Circle

All players are in a circle, or a long line. One player starts a little gesture, with or without a little sound. The next player takes it over and makes it bigger, continuing until the last player does the whole thing to the extreme.

Free Association

This is the classic association exercise. Ask players to say the first thing they think about when hearing (or seeing, feeling, smelling or tasting) anything another player provides. It should be stressed that anything is valid, as long as the association is based on what the previous player has offered.

Free Association Lines

Yet another way to play association games. Place all players on 2 lines facing each other. One player starts walking to another player in the other line. Just before they get to that other player, they throw them a word. The receiver starts crossing the line towards someone else, and the first player takes their place in the line. The receiver now becomes the thrower, throwing the first word they can think of to another player, who then starts walking, and so on.

Variations

Try with 2 or more walkers at the same time. Many new players tend to find it easier to freely associate when there are multiple as they feel less 'on the spot' and they don't really have the time to get in their heads.

Dissociation

This game can be done individually around in a circle, or you can have one player do it in front of the class. Players say as many words that have nothing to do with each other until they start associating. Restart as soon as you've got an association.

Example: cat, deodorizer, house, green, grass. Here we restart, because the grass is obviously associated with green.

Front Desk

We play a scene, set in the lobby of a hotel. One or more players play the receptionist(s) and the others play guests arriving or checking out, bell boys, repairmen, you name it. Players construct the environment together - as soon as a door, a plant, a desk or whatever is 'placed' by any player, all other players should respect it.

If participation is low, encourage everyone to 'line up' to see the receptionist(s).

Rhymes

The scene played in verses. The idea is that the first player offers a line, and the second player rhymes with that. Then the second player offers another line, with which the first player needs to make a rhyme. Players that hesitate or forget to rhyme 'die' are replaced by other players. You can have these players either line up or sit in an audience and tag in when they're ready.

The idea is to keep the story going, so players that can't find a good rhyme that would advance the story better die, rather than screw up the story.

Only Questions

A scene is played, in which any sentence used by the players must be a question. Players that use statements instead of questions are boo-ed out by the audience (audience yells 'Die') and are replaced by other players. New players need to take over the character of the players they replace.

Notes

Although questions are quite often frowned upon in improv, in this game the idea is to build a story. That implies that any question should be giving information, and should be (implicitly) advancing on the information already available. Evidently, the next player should implicitly accept any information that was given in the previous question(s).

Challenge Games

These games generally have the purpose of teaching your students specific skills or challenging them in a particular way. Some will force them to get over the 'I feel stupid' brick wall that many new performers hit, some will challenge them to think specifically about emotion or intention in the character they create and some will remind them of story structure. Challenge games are good to introduce every now and then when you identify an issue in performances and you need to break it down to the core of the issue in a way that people can understand and enjoy.

Most of these games are very focused on making the individuals think about the scene, so most are limited to 2 players. To avoid people feeling on the spot, it's best to run multiple of these games at the same time.

Emotional Mirror

Players are in pairs, facing each other. One starts talking in gibberish, with a specific emotion (angry, happy, in love, you name it). The other instantly copies the emotion of the first player and speaks in their own gibberish. No need to try and copy the other player's gibberish and both players keep talking, no pausing is allowed. After about 10 seconds, the second player changes emotion, and the first one immediately follows them.

This game challenges players to think on their feet and push specific emotions rather than sticking with blank characters, as well as challenging them to match another player.

Sitting, Standing, Lying Down

Silly game to teach fast acting. 3 players play a scene. At any point in time, there should always be one player standing, one player sitting, and one player lying down. As soon as a sitter stands up, the stander needs to sit down. Try to justify the moves!

This game challenges players to think fast and it's good for teaching or reminding them of the importance of differing levels in a scene.

Hypnosis

Played in pairs. One player holds out their open hand, fingers upward, about 2-3 inches from their partner's face. They then start moving their hand about slowly, while their partner tries to keep their face at exactly the same distance from the hand like the hand is pulling or pushing his face about. Switch sides and partners after a couple of minutes.

Notes

This is really also an exercise for the hypnotiser, as they need to ensure that their partner is able to follow them.

This game challenges players to think about their physical movement and to work directly with someone else.

Black Box

This one is played by 2 players. One holds a (mimed) black box, which has 3 buttons, one of which is red, which controls the player; one button might be the 'jerk your leg' button. The exact functions of each button are not defined. The other player enters and asks if they can play with the box. Player 1 agrees, but adds something like "Whatever you do, don't push the red button". Player 2 begins to play with the buttons, controlling Player 1. Eventually, we explore all the buttons, including the red one. This can be anything, but it should not be preconceived. The red button might become a Mood swing button, a Start Screaming, Switch-to-Gibberish, etc.

This game challenges players to stop thinking about what they're doing and accept that they look stupid and that's fine because it's fun.

Story Story Stop

Players form a line on the stage. A title for a story and a story genre is obtained from the audience. The MC starts the game by pointing to a player, who needs to start telling the story. At any point in time, the MC can switch to another player, who needs to continue the story flawlessly, even if the switch happened in the middle of a sentence or even in the middle of a word.

Players that hesitate, or whose sentences are not grammatically correct or don't make sense, are knocked out of the game, by the audience yelling STOP. The last player left ends the story.

This game challenges players to focus on story structure and things like the **Absurdity Curve**.

Fast Food Stanislavski

Have 2 players perform a scene, perhaps give them a title or a location, but also give them a subtext for their character.

Subtexts might be:

You are a nerd

You like to make people laugh

You want to impress others

You are a nasty person

You try to be ordinary

You are an optimist/pessimist

Notes

*If you are using this in a workshop it might be a good idea to ask the players how one would behave given a certain subtext. Stress that you are looking for **truthfulness**. This is an excellent technique to find a character. You can actually use this for performance - just give yourself a subtext when you jump onto the stage and see what happens.*

This game challenges players to think about intention and motivation within their characters - and even thinking about a character in the first place is a good starting point for some people.

Performance Games

These are your main games, usually the favourites - ideally you'd be able to perform one of these games for an audience. They're fun games that might teach you something about performing or might just give you a laugh, but regardless they're great to keep up even if improv and theatre sports aren't your focus. There's a variety of different types of games here.

Unless the instructions say otherwise, these games have 4 players each. You may want to ask for an '**Ask-For**' to start off the scene, but some games will have plenty to go off by themselves. The standard time for most games like these is 3 minutes, and that's the time limit for competitions, but if it goes over or under that time, good philosophy is that the story of the scene is infinitely more important.

Alphabet Game

This is a scene consisting of 26 lines of dialogue. The first line starts with a given letter (say 'R'). The reply to that line must start with an 'S', and so on, until the whole alphabet has been covered. After 'Z' comes 'A'.

Players that hesitate, or use the wrong letter 'Die', and are replaced by another player. The replacement needs to take over the character of the player they replace. You can play this game with 2 actors at a time or 4, with everyone else lining up for their turn.

Notes

*Urge players not to 'stick' to the game - if you can't think of a good sentence to advance the story, it's better to just 'die' than to screw up the story (see **Chivalry**)*

American Idol

This is a spoof of the format of (American) Idol, the TV show in which new singers are discovered. One player is the host, another is the bad judge, and 2 others are candidates. Both candidates introduce themselves (or are introduced by the host) and then sing their song based on an audience suggestion. The host could also introduce what they will be singing.

The judge then tears them apart.

Blind Musical

Ask the audience to (or preprepare) simple sentences on slips of paper. Hand each player 2 or 3 slips (they're not allowed to read them yet). Play a scene or series of scenes. Players draw slips of paper at random, and every time they do, they start a song that starts with the sentence on the slip. Try to integrate the info on the slips into the story, of course!

Variations

Leave the slips of paper on the stage for players to pick up.

Bong, Bong, Bong

4 players, 3 stand with their ears covered, backs turned to the scene. The 4th player gets as a suggestion a common expression. The idea is that this player has 1 minute to communicate this suggestion to the 2nd player, using only mime and Gibberish. Number 2 then communicates (what he has understood) to number 3, who does the same to number 4. At the end yell Bong Bong Bong and have players 2, 3 and 4 explain what they thought they understood.



Before the show ask the audience to write simple sentences on slips of paper. Those go in a big bucket. A scene is played, and at random moments the players don't just invent a line of dialogue, but use a line off a piece of paper drawn from the bucket. Anything said is accepted, heightened and integrated.

Commercial

A group is given a product (existing or non-existing). They need to act out a commercial for that product.

Depending on the age of the students, you can give different times for preparation.

Variations

You can do this as a radio commercial.

Helping Hands

The scene is played by 4 players, playing 2 characters. Each character consists of one player, who does the voice, holding his hands behind his back. Another player stands behind player 1, and provides the 'hands'. The story should be a give-and-take between voices and hands.

Hesitation

In this game, a scene is played, in which at any time, any player may 'hesitate', and ask the audience for help. Anything provided by the audience must be justified and incorporated.

Examples:

“James, hand me that (signs the audience for a word) -- Lollypop.”

“Ah, I was sailing the 7 seas in my Newspaper. Yes, Newspaper, finest vessel ever built by Martians!”

Invisibility

A scene in which one of the characters is invisible to the audience. Characters act and behave as if this invisible character is visible to them.

Variations

One player off-stage provides the voice for the invisible character.

Jeopardy

Have the players close/cover their ears. Then ask the audience for questions and answers.

Examples would be:

What is the colour of an American school bus? Yellow.

What is dyslexia? Not being able to make words out of letters.

Write down the answers, not the question. Then give the players an answer and let them come up with questions that might be answered correctly by that answer.

It's kind of like 'What would the worst/silliest/funniest question be that could have this answer?'

New Choice

A scene is played. Whenever the MC calls 'new choice', the player that is doing something/saying something needs to say/do something else.

Notes

Doing 'something else' is quite often interpreted as doing/saying the opposite of what you did before. One can be more creative, e.g. repeat what was said in a different emotion. If you use this as an exercise on Spontaneity the trainer can call 'New Choice' quite often (very frustrating for the players, but they will come up with stuff they never would have thought of before). The disadvantage of this is that the story/characters tend to get lost. Use sparingly for performance.

Press Conference

You can involve the whole room with this game, or just choose a handful of people as 'journalists' and one to leave the room. While that player has left the room, the audience provides the name of a famous or historical person. The 'absent' player will give a press conference, but they do not know who they are. The 'journalists', (other players/audience) ask questions that should provide indications to who the mystery guest might be. The game ends when our player guesses who they are.

Notes

The 'journalists' should really play journalist characters. They can take photographs, or have a fight about who gets to ask the next question.

Variations

Instead of a famous or historical person, choose an expert. The game is over when the 'expert' figures out what he or she is an expert in.

Space Jump

4 players, one starts miming an everyday activity or routine. The MC calls 'Space Jump' and the first player freezes. A second player builds another scene based on the frozen position of the first player. The other 2 players enter the same way. Once players 3 and 4 are in, when 'Space Jump' is called again, player 4 must find a way to naturally leave the scene and players 1, 2 and 3 transition back to the previous scene based on their new positions. And so on backwards.

The players must continue and ideally wrap up their scenes as they go backwards through their scenes, including player 1.