

FUNDAMENTALS OF ACTING
TD 303—Unique#26661—Spring 2026
Class Meeting Times: Mon/Wed 2:00-3:30 pm
Classroom: Winship B.202
Based on syllabi by Giana Blazquez Bultman and Claire Derriennic

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Instructor: Walker Zupan (he/they)
Office: Winship B.202
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Phone: 585-857-1394
Office Hours: by email appointment

About the Instructor

Hi! I'm Walker Zupan – a third year grad student in the Drama and Theater for Youth and Communities MFA program. Please call me Walker. I use he and they pronouns. I'm from New York City and moved to Austin for graduate school. I'm a performer, director, dramaturg and theatre educator. I'm particularly interested in working with young people to create original plays centered on the questions and stories they care most about.

Course Description

This course introduces the skills, practices, and habits of mind of stage acting. You will explore the primary job of an actor: *living truthfully in imaginary circumstances*. We will begin to develop the actor's basic tools – voice, body, imagination, and critical analysis – through a range of assignments – group theater games, devising, script analysis, monologue performance, and scene work. We will explore what it means to be a member of an ensemble, create a character and build a performance. No previous experience is necessary!

Course Goals

This course challenges students to explore how acting engages the mind, body and spirit. Over the course of the semester, students will:

- Collaborate as a supportive member of an ensemble
- Play theater games
- Devise and perform a physical story
- Select, analyze, rehearse, and perform “open scenes,” with simple dialogue open for interpretation
- Select, analyze, rehearse, and perform contemporary monologues
- Select, analyze, rehearse, and perform ensemble scenes
- Practice giving and receiving constructive feedback
- Reflect on personal and group progress in rehearsal and performance contexts
- Have fun, be creative, and build confidence as performers

Assignments at a Glance:

Participation- 20%

Leading a warm up - 5%

Physical story - 15%

Open scenes- 15%

Monologues- 15%

Ensemble scenes- 15%

Semester reflection- 15%

Seeing a performance- 5% extra credit per performance

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance and Participation

Due to the collaborative, hands-on nature of this course, your attendance and participation are vital to both your success and the success of your classmates. It is my hope that you attend and actively participate in each class session.

You will receive daily participation credit for coming to class on time, prepared, and ready to work. Preparation means being memorized if needed, contributing to class discussion in a way that feels appropriate to you, and collaborating with your peers with a supportive, “yes, and!” mentality. I recognize that participation looks different for everyone and honor that yours may shift, day to day.

You may miss two classes, unexcused, without losing any points. After that, I will deduct 2 points from your overall participation grade for the course for each subsequent unexcused absence. Any absences beyond the permitted two may also result in a final grade

drop by half a letter grade (i.e. an A becomes an A-). However, please know that grades affected by absences will be considered on an individual basis.

If you anticipate being absent, please send me an email and I may excuse your absence depending on the circumstances.

Absences for Religious Holidays.

Per UT Austin policy, please notify me of your upcoming absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss an assignment to observe a holiday, you will be given the opportunity to complete the missed work for full credit.

Late Work

Due dates are in place to help YOU. If you anticipate missing a due date for ANY REASON (including an overloaded assignment schedule, mental and physical health needs) please reach out and ask for an extension **in advance** (as much as you are able) which I will grant on a case-by-case basis. I understand that life happens. If you do not communicate your need for an extension beforehand, I will dock 10% of your grade for every 24 hours that the assignment is late.

Academic Honesty:

Students who violate University rules on academic misconduct are subject to the student conduct process. A student found responsible for academic misconduct may be assigned both a status sanction and a grade impact for the course. The grade impact could range from a zero on the assignment in question up to a failing grade in the course. A status sanction can include a written warning, probation, deferred suspension, suspension, or expulsion from the University. To learn more about academic integrity standards, tips for avoiding a potential academic misconduct violation, and the overall conduct process, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website.

If you are struggling to complete an assignment or have a question about how to cite your sources, please reach out to me for support.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) statement:

All assignments should be fully prepared **by you**. Submitting assignments generated by artificial intelligence (AI) systems such as ChatGPT, Bing Chat, Claude, Google Bard, or any other automated assistance for any course work is **not permitted**. Using AI tools such as Grammarly or other text editors to check the grammar and spelling of text written by you is permitted. Violations of this policy will be treated as academic misconduct. If you have questions about what constitutes a violation of this statement, please let me know.

Title IX:

The University encourages affected individuals to promptly report incidents of sex and gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence, and stalking. To file a report: <https://titleix.utexas.edu/file-a-report>

Please be advised that I am considered a “responsible employee” at UT. As such, I am not a confidential resource and am required to report any incidents of sexual harassment or assault to the UT Title IX Coordinator.

If you would like to have a confidential conversation about sexual misconduct, please contact the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center. You may also call Austin SafePlace 24/7 at (512) 267-SAFE (7233).

CLASS TEXTS

All texts will be available on Canvas except for the plays you choose your monologues and group scenes from. Because those choices are individual, you will need to purchase those plays or find someone to borrow them from on your own. Please reach out to me if you feel like you need help finding where to purchase or borrow plays from!

****Readings are subject to change****

- Bruder, Melissa. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*. Vintage, 1986.
- Caldarone, Marina and Maggie Lloyd-Williams. *Actions: The Actors' Thesaurus*. Drama Publishers, 2004.
- Jory, John. *Tips: Ideas for Actors*. Smith and Kraus, 2000.
- Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater*. 3rd ed., Northwestern University Press, 1999.

ASSIGNMENTS**Course Assignments**

Assignment descriptions and rubrics can be found in Canvas. All assignments will also be submitted via Canvas. Assignments are due by 2:00 pm on their due date (the start of our class). Written assignments must be typed, 12-point font, double spaced, 1-inch margins, and have an appropriate header and MLA citations.

Evaluation and Grades

While enthusiastic participation is crucial to your success and enjoyment of this course, I recognize, again, that everyone participates differently. You will be evaluated based on your thoughtful reflections, attendance, effort, and willingness to try new things, not on the “quality” of your in-class performances.

Grading Scale:

A 100-93	B+ 89-87	B- 82-80	C 76-73.	D+ 69-67	D- 62-60
A- 92-90	B 86-83.	C+ 79-77	C- 72-70.	D 67-63	

Assignment Details:**Participation (20%)**

Your active participation over the course of the semester is crucial. Please come to class on time and ready to play to the best of your ability! Wear clothes that you can move in, and communicate access needs to Walker as they arise.

Leading Warm Up Game (5%)

For five points, you will choose and lead a warm up game, alone or in pairs. We will sign up for time slots early in the semester.

Physical Storytelling (15%)

In groups of four, you will devise a 5-7 minute performance that tells a story using only bodies (no words, costumes, or props!) These performances can be based on existing stories, such as fairy tales, or be an original story created by the group. Each member of the group will also submit a performance “script” detailing the blocking/staging of the performance.

Open Scenes (15%)

In groups of two or three, you will analyze, annotate, and perform an “open scene.” Students will work with a partner to identify and create given circumstances for a simple scene where the details are open for interpretation. You will be assessed on your successful performance of the scene, and your submission of an annotated script and character analysis.

Monologues (15%)

You will choose a one-minute monologue from a full-length contemporary play to work on individually. Students will read the full play, analyze their character and given circumstances, and perform their monologues for the class. You will be assessed on your successful performance of the monologue, and your submission of an annotated script and character analysis.

Ensemble Scene (15%)

In the scene work unit, you will work in pairs or small groups to choose a scene from a full length contemporary play. Students will collaborate to read the full play, analyze their characters and given circumstances, block their scene, and perform their scenes for the class. Scenes should be no longer than ten (10) minutes in length. You will be assessed on your successful performance of the scene, and your submission of an annotated script and character analysis.

Semester Reflection (15%)

At the end of the semester, you will turn in a short written reflection. Alternatively, you may complete a creative reflection. You will be evaluated based on citing specific examples from your experiences in class to support your statements, and reflecting on your growth as an actor over the course of the semester.

Creative Semester Reflection:

Creative responses will be graded using the same rubric as written responses - be sure that claims you make in your responses are supported by specific evidence examples from our classroom experience.

Options for creative responses include:

A three-minute video or audio response with a works cited page

A piece of visual art with a short artist's note explaining what the piece represents

A five-minute scripted dialogue with a works cited page

Extra Credit (5% per performance)

For extra credit, provide proof that you attended a theatrical performance! Some performance options will be listed on Canvas and announced in class.

INCLUSIVITY STATEMENTS AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Land Acknowledgment

Our class will meet on Indigenous land. I would like to pay my respects to the Carrizo & Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Caddo, Tonkawa, Comanche, Lipan Apache, Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, Tigua Pueblo, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas, here on Turtle Island.

In recognition of the ongoing and cumulative challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples in Central Texas and globally, we call upon The University of Texas at Austin:

- To repatriate the ancestral remains held by the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory to their Indigenous descendant communities and Native lands.
- To commit to the active recruitment and material support of Native American and Indigenous students, who currently comprise fewer than 0.2% of UT Austin's student body.
- To support the transition of the Program in Native American and Indigenous Studies into a Center.
- To establish a protocol of research and study on Tribal or Native lands, and to foster an ethics and practice of engaged scholarship, with and for Indigenous peoples and communities, locally and internationally.

Disability Statement:

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations, please contact Disability and Access (D&A). Please refer to D&A's website for contact and more information:

<http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

If you are already registered with D&A, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

Personal Pronouns

I will gladly address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by the gender pronouns you use (she/he/they/ze, etc).

You may change your name on the roster using the following resources: [Updating your "Chosen Name" and Gender Marker with UT](#)

RESOURCES

Counseling and Mental Health Services:

Your well-being is paramount in this class, and beyond it. Please let me know if any aspect of this course is negatively impacting your physical or mental health.

For immediate support:

Visit the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC): 512-471-3515 | cmhc.utexas.edu

Other Resources

- UT Outpost (free on-campus food pantry and career closet): <https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/utoutpost.php>
- School of Social Work Food Pantry <https://socialwork.utexas.edu/food-pantry/>
- Central Texas Food Bank <https://www.centraltexasfoodbank.org/>
- University Health Services: <http://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/>
- Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>
- Sanger Learning and Career Center: <http://lifelearning.utexas.edu/>
- Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>
- Career Exploration Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/careercenter/>
- Division of Recreational Sports: <http://www.utrecsports.org/>

COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	READING/ASSIGNMENTS
WEEK 1		
Monday 1/12	Welcome Course overview Community agreements	
Wednesday 1/14	What is acting? Ensemble-building	DUE Student Profile Form
WEEK 2		
Wednesday 1/21	Ensemble-building Awakening to impulse	READ "The Job of the Actor" and "Technique Outline," <i>A Practical Handbook for the Actor</i> , pp. 8-10.
WEEK 3		
Monday 1/26	Ensemble-building Awakening to impulse	READ The Viewpoints Book pgs. 7-13 & 19-20

Wednesday 1/28	Why do we play theater games? Games: Objects	READ "Creative Experience," <i>Improvisation for the Theater</i> , pp. 3-9. OR WATCH The first 20 minutes of Inventing Improv
WEEK 4		
Monday 2/2	Games: Setting and Action	READ: "Movement in Space," <i>Tips: Ideas for Actors</i>
Wednesday 2/4	Games: Characterization, Relationship, and Story	READ: "The Myth of Character," <i>A Practical Handbook for the Actor</i> , pp. 74-75 "Character through Relationship" <i>Tips II</i> , pp 127
WEEK 5		
Monday 2/9	Introduction to physical storytelling	READ: "Physical Action," <i>A Practical Handbook for the Actor</i>
Wednesday 2/11	Physical storytelling	
WEEK 6		
Monday 2/16	Physical storytelling	
Wednesday 2/18	Physical storytelling performances	DUE: Physical storytelling script
WEEK 7		
Monday 2/23	Text analysis	READ:

		"Analyzing a Scene," <i>A Practical Handbook for the Actor</i>
Wednesday 2/25	Open scenes	READ: "How to Action the Text" <i>Actions: The Actor's Theasaurus</i>
WEEK 8		
Monday 3/2	Open scene rehearsal	
Wednesday 3/4	Open scene rehearsal	
WEEK 9		
Monday 3/9	Open scene performances	DUE: Open scenes characters analysis and annotated script.
Wednesday 3/11	Choosing a monologue	READ: Guide to Finding a Monologue
SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
WEEK 11		
Monday 3/23	Choosing a monologue Monologue analysis	DUE: Bring in your monologue today, having already read the play!
Wednesday 3/25	Monologue analysis + rehearsal	
WEEK 12		
Monday 3/30	Monologue rehearsal	
Wednesday 4/1	Monologue rehearsal	
WEEK 13		
Monday 4/6	Monologue performance	DUE: Monologue character analysis and annotated script.
Wednesday 4/8	Choosing an ensemble scene	

WEEK 14		
Monday 4/13	Scene analysis	
Wednesday 4/15	Scene analysis & rehearsal	
WEEK 15		
Monday 4/20	Ensemble scene rehearsal	
Wednesday 4/22	Ensemble scene rehearsal	
WEEK 16		
Monday 4/27	Final scene presentations Celebration & reflection	DUE: Ensemble scene character analysis
Friday 5/1		DUE: Final Written or Creative Reflection