



Georgia  
Thespians

# Improv Challenge

## Event Handbook

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**Improv Challenge** is an educational program that combines thespians from troupes to participate in a series of improv games! Students will practice these games with their “home” troupe, and then be placed on teams with students from other troupes who have also been playing the same games. A strong improv student will embrace the opportunity to work on familiar games with peers they are meeting for the first time.

Each troupe must submit five students who have been working on the games; teams will be scored by the *Improv Challenge* judges. **For the event, the five players from each troupe are broken up and placed on a new team consisting of five students from five different troupes.**

Participants must learn the slate of games prior to arriving at Georgia Thespian Conference. These are the games that will be adjudicated at conference. Troupe teams are expected to practice these games and learn their rules to the best of their abilities. Instructions for how to play these games are listed in this guide.

Students will compete in a preliminary round during Session 1, and then a cut will be made, and the final teams will compete in the finals will be played during Session 3. All eliminated players will automatically get tickets to be in the audience of the finals.

## Event Registration

To register, simply request five tickets for the IMPROV CHALLENGE SESSION 1 PRELIMS and IMPROV CHALLENGE SESSION 3 FINALS once the ticket window opens. **An entry must consist of five and only five students.** This way we can evenly divide students up on different teams. **PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU PUT THE SAME NAMES IN FOR EACH SESSION.** School teams will be registered on a first come, first served basis. Because of the size of this event and the time frame in which it runs, **we can only accept the first ten teams.** Once the slots for a track are filled, you will no longer be able to register for the event.

## Teams

Each participating school shall register a team of five players. Directors will need to provide each team member's name at registration.

**For the event, the five players from each school are broken up and placed on a new team consisting of five students from five different schools.** At the beginning of the preliminary round, each team will have 10 minutes in their assigned area to warm up, and meet one another for the first time.

The final list of participating *Improv Challenge!* teams will be released in February prior to conference. If you need to make a change to your team list after you have submitted your entry form, you must email [improv@gathespians.org](mailto:improv@gathespians.org) with your school name, the name of the student being replaced, and the name of the student filling that spot. ***The last date to do this is Wednesday, February 10th, 2027. Trying to substitute players after date, and especially at conference, is very difficult. Please be aware that Thespy callbacks can interfere with Improv Challenge scheduling, and having students do both can be difficult. Please try as best as possible to only select students for the Improv Challenge that do not have a Thespy Callback.***

## **Scoring**

Teams will be judged according to the following criteria:

- Each team's ability to play together as a cohesive unit. Unless otherwise noted, the games in this event are to be played by all members of the team. Team participation and each individual's ability to participate in a way that helps build something unique and as a team is essential. This includes being able to give and take focus in a way that is polite and helps to share the stage without railroading or overshadowing one another.
- Ability to play each game within the allotted time limit.
- Following the rules and parameters of the specific game.
- Playing at the top of their intelligence, which means no inappropriate language, jokes or actions. **Students who use inappropriate humor will be removed from the round and their team will begin the game again with a new prompt and reduced time.** Students who continue to use inappropriate humor will be removed from the competition.

Each team will receive a certain number of points from the judges for each criterion above; teams with the highest scores will move on to successive rounds of the competition.

## **Preliminary Round Competition Structure**

The Improv Challenge Preliminary Round will take place at the Goldstein Theater at GMC during Session 1 at Jr. Thespian Conference. Players will check in at the doors, and then find their new team members at locations given to them at check in. They will have 10 minutes to meet their team, play a group warm up game, and come up with a creative introduction in which they quickly (60 second) introduce themselves and share their team name.

### **Introduction**

- Each team will have one (1) minute to perform their introduction. Judges will score each introduction for creativity, efficiency, and collaboration.

### Round 1

- One games will be chosen at random; all teams will play the chosen game this round.
- They will have up to two minutes to complete this round.
- The top seven teams will be announced.

### Round 2

- One of the remaining games will be chosen at random; all teams will play the chosen game.
- They will have up to three minutes to complete this round.
- The top five teams will be announced and move on to the Championship Round on Saturday.

**NOTE:** Because of the fast-paced nature of this event, with so many performances during the Preliminary Rounds, the structure of the Preliminary Rounds is subject to change depending upon time available during the event. Times available for teams to play games may be shortened if necessary.

## **Championship Round Competition Structure**

The five remaining teams from the Preliminary Round will compete in the Championship Round. This round will also be at the Goldstein Theater. Students will have 10 minutes with their team to review their intro, warm up, and practice games.

### Introduction

- All teams will present their team names using a **different** introduction that is different from the preliminary rounds introduction.

### Round 1

- Teams will play two games that were not played during the Preliminary Rounds.
- They will have up three minutes per game to complete this round.
- The top three teams will be announced.

### Round 2

- Teams will play the final game.
- They will have 3-5 minutes to complete this round.

**NOTE:** The structure of the Championship Rounds competition is subject to change depending upon time available during the event. Times available for teams to play games may be shortened if necessary.

**At the end of the three rounds, the top two scoring teams will be announced! The 1st and 2nd place teams will receive medals!**

## **Competition Games**

Multiple games will be used during the competition. Teams selected to compete will need to learn the rules of the games and view the video samples. All competitors are expected to know the rules of the games before the event, having practiced them with their home team.

Detailed descriptions of the games, video examples (if available), and suggestions for game play are found in the [Description of Improv! Games](#) section at the end of this handbook.

## **General Improvisation Tips and Strategies**

When preparing a Troupe to participate in the Improv Challenge, share these tips and strategies with your troupe.

**Agree and Accept-** once circumstance is established in a scene, stick to it! Don't kill the scene by disagreeing with the circumstances. Your character can disagree with another character, but the actors should agree on the circumstances. For example, the scene starts with two people sitting in the car. Character 1 says "I can't wait to get to the store, son", and then Character 2 says "I'm not your son, and we're going to Six Flags!" then we now have a scene headed nowhere. However, Character 2 doesn't have to say "Yes, and..." to the circumstance. Character 2 could say something like, "Oh man, I hate going to the store. You always argue with the manager." Then we have some conflict to build off of while still agreeing to the circumstances of the scene.

**Make statements-** This is another way of saying contribute to the scene. Just agreeing with the circumstances isn't enough. Build to add on to the scene. If a scene starts, and Character 1 says "It's really raining hard outside", and Character 2 simply says, "You know it" then all the pressure is back on Character 1 to continue to carry the weight of the scene. Character 2 could respond with "Yeah, they'll probably have to cancel the Arbor Day parade." Now we've moved the scene along.

**Don't Neglect Physicality-** using all the physical tools in your toolbox can add so much to your scenes. Physicality can drive characters, and make interacting and scene building so much easier. Sometimes when your brain can't think of anything, your physicality can take over.

**No Judgement-** There are no mistakes, only opportunities for new avenues. A joke might not land, your scene partners might not have completely understood what you were trying to accomplish, you might have fallen off the back of the stage. It's okay, just use it as an opportunity to explore new avenues of the scene. Keep working and keep the energy up.

**Rehearse-** Prepare for these games by practicing and playing. Give notes about what worked and what didn't, and *why* things worked and didn't work. Consider assigning 'roles' to players in the games. For example, tell one troupe member they cannot make any punchlines, only set ups. Tell another that they have to get laughs only in their responses and reactions. Tell another to intentionally block and try to kill the scenes to see how to overcome less-than-stellar scenes. Get creative in your rehearsal.

**Theatre Basics are Golden-** Improv Theatre is still Theatre. So, make Thespis proud by sticking to the essentials of great performance. Project! Cheat out! Enunciate! Listen and Respond! Hold your beats! Do all the amazing things you know to do!

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

If you have additional questions, please email [improv@gathespians.org](mailto:improv@gathespians.org).

### **What are some suggestions for students to be successful?**

- **Remember these are timed events.** This event is very fast-paced; improvisers must do their characterization, exposition, scene work, etc. with great efficiency. Teams must also allow opportunities for all team members to get in on the scenes.
- **Avoid always going for the “funny”.** While everyone wants to get a good laugh, often choices that are made simply for their humor value can be more difficult for other performers to incorporate into the scene. Remember, you look good when everyone looks good.
- **Don’t confuse chaos for high-energy.** High energy is good, chaos is not. If the audience cannot follow the scene, then they have no chance to appreciate the jokes or meaning.
- **Remember that improv theatre is still good theatre.** Project, enunciate, cheat-out, etc. The audience cannot laugh at a joke they cannot hear or understand. They cannot laugh at a reaction they cannot see.

### **Can teams get feedback on their performances?**

- The pace of the competition often makes written comments on performances impossible.

### **Can a troupe play as their own troupe instead of being split?**

- One of the main goals of the Improv Challenge is to foster interaction among troupes. By putting thespians from different troupes onto one team, new friendships and relationships are made, and the ThesCon experience goes from great to unforgettable.
- This diverse troupe representation also creates the best environment for spontaneous improvisation to happen.

## **Description of Improv! Games**

### **SportsCenter**

#### Rules

In this game, an everyday situation is performed in a scene as if it were a sporting event. Two players pantomime the scene as the “athletes”, two others are in a TV studio as sports commentators, and the final team member is an on-field reporter interviewing the “athletes” after the event.

#### Objective

Using the concepts of agreement and physicality to convey a scene.

### Suggestions

Fun can be made by asking for a replay of a particularly dramatic moment, asking for a replay with a different camera (different angle), and calling fouls or penalties on the players. Try to bring the story to a conclusion before moving on the interview portion.

## **First Line/Last Line**

### Rules

In this game, the five team members play a scene. The team is given the first line of dialogue and the last of dialogue. The team has to move the scene from the first line to the last line within the allotted time frame. The two lines of dialogue are spoken bookends of the scene.

### Objective

Using the concepts of limitations, justification, and character to convey a scene.

### Suggestions

Although the scene is for all five players, not everyone has to start or finish on stage. The scene can develop with exits and entrances.

## **Beatnik Poet**

### Rules

Two players are given a topic and create a beatnik coffeehouse style poetry session by alternating lines. The other three players perform an interpretive dance of the poem being written on the spot.

### Objective

Using limitations and physicality to enhance a performance.

### Suggestions

Poems in this instance are more impressive if they rhyme. The dances are always better when performed with gusto and tie into the poem in interesting ways.

## **Director's Cut**

### Rules

Four players are given a prompt and scene to play. The fifth player acts as a director, and yells "cut" whenever they choose, and the scene stops. The director then gives notes/comments/suggestions, and the scene continues or restarts.

### Objective

Using concepts of acceptance, endowments, and character development to enhance a performance.

### Suggestions

The scene can either restart or continue with the director's changes. The director is the driving force in this game to provide suggestions for changes. Think of creative or interesting ways to have actors try changes.

## **Scene Three Ways**

### Rules

A scene suggestion will be given to each team. The team will then play a short, open improv scene using that suggestion. The moderator will then stop the scene, and give them a suggestion of a film, TV, or theater genre. The team will then replay the same scene, using the suggested genre. The moderator will then stop them again, give them another genre, and they will replay it one more time influenced by this new genre.

### Objective

To improvise using a variety of performance genres, and to remember and repeat performed scene work.

### Suggestions

The genres will affect characterization, style of movement, language, etc., but the structure and plot of the scene should remain essentially the same - although if there's an obvious change that's made for the sake of the genre, that's fine. Even if teams are given a style that they are unfamiliar with, playing to it to the best of their ability will still earn them a good reaction from the audience. (The most common example of this tends to be the genre of Japanese Noh theater - which often results in players speaking with Japanese accents and saying "No!" a lot.)

## **Emotional Objects**

### Rules

Teams will be given three props to use in the scene. (All teams will use the same three props.) Each of the props will be endowed with a particular emotion. During the scene, any player holding a particular object must embody the object's emotion. The players will play an open improv scene with the theme of a family crisis or emergency. The objects used in the scene will be everyday objects - during the scene, performers can choose to use the objects as themselves, or as something else. However, each object should retain its assigned identity through the entire scene. For example, if one of the objects used is a hat, you can choose to either let it be a hat, or it could start the scene as a cooking pot. Either way, it should remain a hat or cooking pot for the entire scene.

### Objective

To heighten performance using emotional reactions and changes.

### Suggestions

Fun can be had with a player having to hold more than one object at a time. Because a crisis has (hopefully) a natural resolution, teams should endeavor to find a solution to their crisis or emergency by the end of the scene.

## **Victor / Victoria**

This game is sometimes called Here Comes Charlie. The example video is an instructional video which describes how to play the game but doesn't really demonstrate it. It has been modified for our purposes to allow for two (2) players to be endowed with characteristics and enter the scene.

### Rules

Three team members will start the scene planning a party of some kind, given as a suggestion by the moderator. During the process of planning the party, they will review the

guest list and discover that there are two unwanted guests on it: Victor and Victoria. The three players will then proceed to describe why they're not looking forward to Victor and Victoria's attendance, by endowing them with various characteristics - strange quirks, unusual emotional reactions, etc. After endowing each of them with 2-3 characteristics, the last two players will enter as Victor and Victoria and interact with the other three players, all the while demonstrating their endowed characteristics. The three original players will interact with them, while trying to find ways to leave the scene politely.

### Objective

To endow other players with characteristics that can heighten action in a scene, and to accept those endowments and work with them.

### Suggestions

While this game has obvious potential for mugging, sight gags, and such (and is designed for those), be wary of making endowments too extreme for your fellow players to perform. The three original players should be brave in their endowments, and make sure some of them include themselves. Victor and Victoria can also be endowed with relationships to each other or to other characters in the scene - and the party planning players should try to give at least a hint of character to themselves. Finally, Victor and Victoria should make sure they're listening carefully to the first part of the scene, to ensure they hear all of the endowments they are given - and then let the audience see all of them at least once.

## **Character Bus**

### Rules

One team member will be the bus driver. The driver will pick up the other team members as passengers on the bus one-at-a-time. Each new passenger will bring a specific characteristic or trait onto the bus. The driver and other passengers must adopt the traits of the previous passenger until the next passenger arrives. The game ends when all passengers are on board and the bus arrives at the destination, or some other conclusion.

### Objective

To portray strong characteristics that can heighten action in a scene, and to accept those endowments and work with them.

### Suggestions

Be careful of offensive stereotypes and inappropriate characterizations. Have fun, but keep it appropriate. Bus Driver, give each character enough time to establish and have the spotlight before picking up the next passenger. Passengers, a little bit of chaos goes a long way. Make sure your characters are not just yelling and screaming.

## **Slide Show**

### Rules

Two members of the team act as narrators and show 'slides' of a recent event (vacation, family reunion, etc.) The other three members of the team create the tableau photographs of that event. The 'Picture People' create the image, and THEN the narrators explain what the audience is seeing in the 'slide'. When the narrators are ready to move to the next 'slide',

they simply say “click”. The ‘Picture People’ create a new image for the slide show, and they move on. The scene ends after five ‘slides’ have been shown or time runs out.

### Objective

To explore nonverbal communication and physicality skills.

### Suggestions

The idea is that the story is built both by the presenter, and by the images the other players present in the slides. Narrators not to simply just `build` what the ‘slides’ have created, but to extend it, to build/show the sequel or next step in the story. Remember to keep track of the number of slides in your head and work to some kind of conclusion on the fifth slide.

## **Evil Twin**

### Rules

This game is for Two players, Two Twins, and One Caller. Two players begin a scene, and at any time, the player who is the ‘caller’ can yell freeze, at which point, an evil twin for one of the original actors will come into the scene and do something evil. After that, they move out again, and the original twin brother needs to justify the evil, correct or repair the damage done and continue the scene.

### Objective

This game adds the element of an outside observer–the caller—who can help guide the scene. This scene combines many improv fundamentals.

### Suggestions

The role of the caller here is vital. They should practice feeling for the rhythm and pacing of a scene. Evil twins do not need to spend a lot of time on stage. Most of the humor and tension will come from the original players trying to justify the actions.

## **The Oracle**

### Rules

The team will line up at the front of the stage, and will be asked a question, and the team must answer one word at a time with each player adding one word down the line and until the question is answered. Words will be added in Questions will be open-ended about life and advice.

### Objective

This game is a verbal wit game that requires players to listen and predict.

### Suggestions

Know when to end the advice. A common misstep is that the answer becomes word-salad that doesn’t mean anything. Listen carefully to your other players and keep the whole answer in mind as you add your word.

## Reverse Trivia

### Rules

This verbal wit game is a quick game where the team will be given an answer to a question, and they have to provide the question. Multiple players can step forward and give questions to the answer. And multiple statements will be given in the round. For example, the answer might be “the froyo shop”, and a player might step forward and say, “Where my troupe director doesn’t know I go.”

### Objective

Verbal wit is a cornerstone of improv theatre. This game challenges players to think on their feet without the pressure of story-building.

### Suggestions

Speed is key here. Don’t be afraid to jump out there and say something. Dead-air kills games like this. Remember to keep the humor as universal as possible. It’s easy to dial in on inside jokes and references during rehearsal that don’t translate well to a conference audience.