

**Introduction to Acting (Acting 101) - Section 003**  
*Fall 2003*

Instructor: **D. Ross**

**MWF 1:30 - 3pm**

Office: **3540 Frieze Building**

**2528 Frieze**

Phone: **764-6304** (email is preferred)

office hours: M 12:30 - 1:30pm

email: **drossz@umich.edu**

W 3 - 4pm *and by appointment*

**Objectives:**

Overall, to explore and practice the fundamental skills of stage acting.

1. To participate in a learning/performance ensemble consisting of your class, learning from and with your classmates.
2. To learn and practice basic textual analysis as actors apply it to dramatic works, including character analysis, scene breakdown, background research, and stylistic differences.
3. To learn and practice basic movement and voice exercises in order to break habits of everyday moving and speaking.
4. To understand how the actor's job differs from other jobs in the professional and amateur theater, as well as the career demands on professional actors.

**Texts:**

The following required books are available at Shaman Drum Bookstore:

- *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*, by Bruder, et al. ISBN: 0-394-74412-8
- *The Laramie Project*, by Kaufman & the Tectonic Theatre Project. ISBN: 0-375-72719-1
- *A Streetcar Named Desire*, by Tennessee Williams. (any edition)

A *coursepack* consisting of two play texts and a collection of interviews with actors is available at Excel on South University Ave.

**Grading:**

Our semester will be divided into four units, each consisting of a scene or monologue, a research project, and possibly a few preparatory assignments. For each unit you will receive a letter grade reflecting your demonstration of skills in performance and your research project. (Up to 20% of a unit grade may be drawn from supplementary unit assignments.)

Each unit grade will be worth 20% of your final course grade, adding up to 80%. The remaining 20% of your final grade will come from your final exam, your attendance, and the quality and amount of your participation in the on-line Actor of the Week discussions.

**Attendance:**

You are required to attend all class meetings, and to arrive on time, ready to work, and dressed appropriately to move and possibly get on the floor. When you do not attend class, your partner cannot work and your classmates are deprived of your input. Attendance will be taken every day (tardies will be noted) and your attendance WILL impact your grade.

*\*\*In the event that you miss a graded scene presentation day, make-up credit will be accepted RARELY, by arrangement in advance or for documented emergencies, at the discretion of the instructor.*

*In the event that your scene partner misses a graded scene presentation day, you will be allowed to present your scene without penalty when they return.\*\**

Please note that we WILL have class on the Wednesday immediately following Fall Break (October 15), and the Wednesday immediately preceding Thanksgiving Break (November 26). Remember that the University is still in session on these days and make travel plans accordingly– I will not be lenient with absences.

**“Actor of the Week” Email Forum:** <actoroftheweek@umich.edu>

Your coursepack includes twelve interviews with an assortment of professional actors. All students should read the interviews and note unfamiliar concepts or terms, parallels to and divergences from what we are doing in class, or important biographical details. The email forum is a class listserv to share and discuss these reactions to the interviews. Though we will likely not have time to discuss the interviews or our commentary during class, I will be participating in the email forum and you will be graded on your participation in the forum (both quantity and quality).

In addition, each student will “sponsor” two different actors (no more than two sponsors per actor) and will submit a two- or three- paragraph supplement to the interview and an open-ended question to the class email list (see address above) *no later than* 9:00pm Monday of the week in question. Your “sponsorship” will involve doing some additional research on something in the interview: for example, A) relating additional biographical information on the actor to her/his interview, B) researching a play, production, or performance group mentioned in the interview, or C) researching a method or technique mentioned in the interview. Other creative topics for sponsorships are invited, but clear them with me beforehand if you are unsure.

### **Scenes:**

Each unit will include a short scene to be performed before the class. All scenes will be memorized and will be graded on the acting skills we have covered in class up to that point.

Unit #1: “DMV Tyrant” by Christopher Durang. M-F pairs (assigned).

memorized: 9/12                      final: 9/22 (9/24 spillover)

Unit #2: 2-min. scene from *Trifles* by Susan Glaspell. M-M pairs, F-F pairs.

memorized: 10/8                      final: 10/15 (10/17 spillover)

Unit #3: Monologue from *The Laramie Project*.

memorized: 11/7                      final: 11/12 (11/14 spillover)

Unit #4: 2-min. scene from *Streetcar Named Desire*. In trios.

memorized: 11/26                      final: 12/5 (12/8 spillover)

### **Research Projects:**

Each unit will include a research project relevant to your work as an actor. All work will be graded on organization, grammar & mechanics, and relevance. Written work should be typed, double-spaced. These assignments reflect part of actors’ preparation for a role, so if you are having trouble seeing the point of a research project, please see me during office hours to discuss your project and hopefully get some direction.

**Unit #1:** (*due Friday 9/19*) 3-5 page journal describing and analyzing a “social experiment” applying acting concepts to everyday life. More detailed instructions will be given in class.

**Unit #2:** (*due Friday 10/10*) With a partner, an oral presentation/demonstration to the class on “period research” for the play *Trifles*. You will choose an activity depicted in the play or contemporary with it and learn how to do it “for real,” then share your learnings with the class.

**Unit #3:** (*due Monday 11/10*) 5-page paper describing and analyzing the facts, opinions, and circumstances of the murder of Matthew Shepard. This paper should include a thesis statement and clear organization of your research.

**Unit #4:** (*due Wednesday 12/3*) With a partner, you will make a short “casebook” of previous productions of *Streetcar Named Desire*. Each casebook should include at least four different productions, with relevant illustrations (2D or 3D) when possible, and a maximum one-page “fact sheet” on the production, including an identification of the predominant theme or artistic concept of each production. (Notes on the historical/social context of each production are helpful, too.)

#### **A Note on Research:**

The internet provides access to a phenomenal store of information, ranging from posted copies of reliable research to personal opinion pages that contain “facts” which are simply wrong. For actors, web-based research can sometimes offer a speedy alternative to the tedious collection of library materials. But internet research is best used in the early stages of research, when trying to explore a topic that you know little about, or when trying to get a sense of general opinions or atmosphere.

- KEEP IN MIND that when researching events or periods prior to 1996, the internet will be of limited usefulness and reliability.

- ALWAYS check information from webpages against reliable sources. (In other words, use the library!)

- NEVER should all your sources for a research project be web pages. (Journal articles posted on the web through a library are not considered “webpages” in the same sense.)

- NEWSPAPERS and MAGAZINES are readily available on the web through the U of M library website and are often rich and reliable sources of information on 20<sup>th</sup> century events.

#### **Final Exam:**

On the last day of class I will give a written exam on the readings, skills, vocabulary, and concepts we will have covered in class. There will be no class meetings after Wednesday December 10, 2003.