Improvisation Exercises

1-2-3-4

Synonyms

One sentence, ABC, where-who-what

Introduction

This exercise covers the basic framework of an open scene. It is very structured and requires three people. Could one person set up a scene.

Description

This exercise is very structured. Each player in it has a specific role, and each sentence spoken has a specific role. It is crucial to emphasize that each step represents only one sentence. It is recommended to talk the players through this the first through times. ZERO – environment The first player comes on stage and creates an environment based on the set up of the scene. The environment is created in silence through mime. Once they have clearly defined their environment the second player comes on stage. For the sake of this explanation a kitchen is created. ONE – relationship The second player comes on stage and accepts the environment that the first player defined through her mime. The second player on contributes only one sentence to the scene and NO more. That sentence simply defines a relationship between the two players. For example a simple sentence like 'hi mom' would suffice. TWO – conflict The first player in the scene then speaks only one sentence. This sentence creates a conflict based on the ask-for, environment, or relationship. For instance 'you are late for dinner' is a simple choice. THREE – raising the stakes Player two now has a chance to speak her second sentence. This sentence accepts all of the previous elements of the story, and makes the conflict worse. 'I hate your cooking mom' would be a sentence that advances the story by making the conflict worse. FOUR – resolution The two player have to keep their mouths shut. Keep in mind that this is an exercise and not a scene. The third player now enters the scene, accepts the environment and speaks her singular sentence. This sentence will end the scene and resolve the conflict at hand. The resolution must somehow incorporate elements from the scene that went before. For

example, ‘hi honey, lets go eat at mcswiney’s tonight.’ That is the end of the exercise and another three players get set up to do another one. They usually take about one to two minutes each.

Gimmicks

None

Variations

If players cannot keep to one sentence. Try doing the steps in gibberish or have someone offstage speak the player’s sentence.

Credits

None

Park Bench

Synonyms

None

Introduction

This is a character exercise. Could we have one player sitting on a park bench.

Description

The first player on-stage sits silently, displaying as much about their character as they can without verbalising it. The next player in makes a strong complimenting character choice. A complimenting character may be contrasting or supporting. The player coming on should make strong character choices as soon as they are off their seat. This means the character should be embodied in their walk, voice and intent. The two characters interact for about thirty seconds and the player that was on the bench first finds a reason to leave. This leaves the second player on the bench alone for a while. The next player creates a character and joins the player that is on the bench. This continues until all in the workshop have done one or more characters.

Gimmicks

Lock the players into the characters that they create, and have them meet again on the park bench.

Variations

Info Desk: a series of characters approach a department store info desk, and each request causes the person behind the desk to leave.

Credits

Photograph

Synonyms

none

Introduction

This exercise gets people thinking and asssists with improvisation and working together.

Description

One person stands somewhere and freezes in a position doing something. One by one, people join in to make a photograph. At the end it is worked out what the photo is of and what everyone is doing.

Gimmicks

none

Variations

Make to the photo come to life at the end with everyone doing what their charcter is doing.

Credits

none

Yes And

Synonyms

None

Introduction

This exercise emphasises over accepting and supporting other players on stage. Two people up.

Description

In Yes And the players are constantly saying, 'yes and'. The mechanism goes something like this. One player may start off with, "Your coat is so lovely." The response of the other player could be, "YES AND I made it for you." The other player responds, "YES AND I have a thousand dollars for it." "YES AND I am going to use that money to make a hundred more coats for you." The players must always have the 'yes and' at the beginning of their sentence. This seems contrived and it is. It is remarkable how much easier it is to notice players that insist on controlling the scene. They cannot bring themselves to accept the offer. The most common response is, "yes and but." These scenes have a tendency to accelerate into the stratosphere.

Gimmicks

None

Variations

There is a version called, 'yes but'

Credits

None

Help Desk

Synonyms

None

Introduction

Can we get one person up to act as a help desk clerk in a major department store.

Description

Once the person at the info desk is in place the players approach the desk and ask for things that one might find in a department store. They are expected to make strong character choices, and make enquiries related to their characters. Ensure that each player draws from physicality, voice and intent to create their character. The help desk person is neutral and helpful to all the players that come along.

Gimmicks

None

Variations

Personnel manager hiring a string of different people, mountain guru offering advice to passing wisdom seekers.

Credits

None

Silent Scene

Synonyms

None

Introduction

This is a silent scene. The players will set up an open scene, but there will be no talking during the scene.

Description

What more can be said. The common pitfalls in the silent scene is to start to use frequent gesticulations, lip reading, and pointing to get concepts across. It is not a charades scene, it is a silent scene. Everything thing is the same as any other scene, except the information is conveyed without speaking aloud.

Gimmicks

None

Variations

This scene can work great as a handle in any show.

Credits

Machines

Synonyms

None

Introduction

This exercise is designed to help players work together and develop physical cooperation.

Description

A machine that does not exist is called for and the players create the machine by each adding an essential part. There is no discussion amongst the players before starting. The first player starts with a repetitive activity and an associated noise. The next players add to the machine with some activity that fits into the previous player's activity. This continues until a machine is created. The machine is sped up and slowed down. Certain players can be asked to malfunction, and the whole machine must respond. There is no leader in the creation of the machine. It is important that all the players reflect the changes in each part of the machine.

Gimmicks

See Machines.

Variations

None

Credits

None