

Mission: Improv-able Games Handbook

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Acknowledgements

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Resources

For a great online resource, check the Human Pingpong ball: <http://ww.humanpingpongball.com>

Elements (4)

The Elements should be present in every improvisation. Create the Elements so that the audience can see them. The more Elements that appear in a scene, the more depth your story will have and the more believable it will be for the audience.

The Character

Think about the character you want to play before you set foot on stage. Who are you? What do you want? How do you relate to the other characters on stage?

Having a well defined character makes it easier for the audience and your fellow players to identify and relate to you and will make placing yourself in the scene easier. Answering the questions above and showing strong mannerisms and features as well as developing characters from well known archetypes is an easy way of achieving this.

The Environment

The environment is everything around you both real and imagined; the more you can make the audience believe your environment. The environment supports the scene and the story; think about the environment - what sort of things would you typically do or find in that environment?

Add details - if you're just standing still in a kitchen then do things you would expect in a kitchen... wash some dishes, or make a cup of tea. The little details help make the environment real for the audience and your fellow players. Remember what has been established. If someone mimes a coffee table try not to walk through it later.

The Scene

The Scene is usually set before the game commences - it provides the rules and boundaries of the Story you will be telling. If the Scene is "getting a haircut" then that limits the environment... you're not likely to be in a nightclub, unless you have a twist planned (such as you're getting hairs not on your head cut at a bondage club).

The Story

Having a continuous story that makes sense and has a logical flow is important so that the audience can easily follow the game. If the audience can keep up with the story then they are more likely to be entertained by it.

Going for gags, cheap laughs and jokes to the audience should be avoided because they can be very disruptive to the flow of the story.

Fundamental Skills (8)

Fundamental Skills that help an improvisation be smooth and entertaining for both the audience and the players.

Accepting

Try to accept everything that happens and is said, no matter how ridiculous (cf Be Coherent). If someone mimes giving you something (making an Offer) and they call it a live hand grenade, then act as if you are holding a live hand grenade.

Deliberately not accepting offers is called Blocking; this is almost always a bad thing as it throws the story into confusion, can alienate the audience and does not advance the story.

Awareness

Like Accepting, be aware of Offers and Elements created by other players. Be aware of elements, characters and things said - if the scene is set in a car then don't reach for an espresso machine. If another player has just mimed closing a door in your face, mime opening it before you walk through it.

Also try to be aware of your fellow players... get a feel for where they are on stage, what character they are playing, and what your relationship is to them. It is also important to be aware of when your fellow players are about to speak. Telegraph when you are going to speak, this makes it easier not to talk over each other.

Lastly try to be aware of Dead Air. It is not always possible to avoid but gaps should not go on for too long.

Be Coherent

If you tell a coherent story, your fellow players will be able to see where it is going; they will then be able to positively contribute. If all the players are working towards the same goal the story will be better, there will be fewer awkward moments and the audience will enjoy it more. On that note, non sequiturs seldom work - they interrupt the story, alienate the audience and throw your fellow players off.

Emote

Make things larger than life, so the audience sees and notices. Unless you point things out, audiences will miss things (no such thing as an extreme close up in theatre). You do not need to be a complete ham and subtlety can certainly be powerful, but you must remember you are communicating with the audience and if you want them to see and understand you need to show them, not just the people in the front row or your fellow players.

Endowing

Endowment is the act of giving an attribute to a person or thing. Walking up to a fellow player and saying "Hi Fred" endows that character with the name Fred. Fred can then gesture to a chair and say "Now which tooth needs to come out?", endowing the chair (as a dentist's chair), the other player (as having a toothache), and himself (as a dentist).

Endowing objects and people is a good way to steer a story.

Mime

Mime is your way of letting the audience "see" the things that aren't there - mime well, or you will lose them. Mime is not just "walking against the wind" and wearing white face paint. Being able to consistently mime things like riding a horse, opening and closing doors means that the audience and other players can relate better to the action. Miming well also reduces the need for explanatory conversation and creates a stronger reality.

Offer

Making offers can advance a story or get you out of (or into) trouble. See Escalation. You can also make an Offer to people off stage (fellow players, the MC, the audience) - this is called an Invitation. Invitations are one of the main ways to get fellow player on stage.

Offers don't have to be subtle - telegraph your moves, this gives your fellow players more time to think of how to accept the offer when it comes.

Relationships

Defining a relationship with the other characters is a good way of guiding the flow of the story and opening up more options. Why say "Hello" when you can say "Hello Dad" that then provides a link between the two characters and gives them some immediate options for dialogue. See Be Specific.

Performance Skills (6)

Performance Skills round out a scene and help the audience "get into it" as well as letting the players show off.

Be Specific

It's a great way of building the elements. Saying "Nice car" is one thing, saying "Wow is that a 1996 Suzuki Wagon R+? I love them!" doesn't just develop the object, it also develops the character (they're the sort of person that gets excited by this kind of thing) and gives more potential to move from.

The more specific you are, the more endowments you can make and the further you can steer the story in a single sentence. "Hello Dad" is fine but "Good morning Dad" is better but try to keep dialogue to one sentence at a time lest you deny your fellow players the chance to have input.

Enter/Exit with Purpose

Always enter and exit The Scene with a purpose. The audience will feel your uncertainty. Be aware that what you do should add to the story and develop it further, rather than entering the stage for the sake of being on stage. One of the more unusual ways to enter that can build the story very effectively is the Canadian Walkon. This is where you enter to build the environment, for example if the players on stage are on a street and talk about some big news event, a player can briefly enter stage yelling "Extra! Extra!".

Escalation

Escalation is where one player builds on what another player has said or done, usually beyond the intent of the first player. This is an effective way of leading the story - players can add to any of the Elements with very few words. Escalation can also be used to add conflict and tension to a scene and can put your fellow players into a bit of trouble, e.g.:

Player 1 says "I'm going to jump my bike over this pool". Player 2 says "How many sharks are in there this time?". This escalates Player 1's jump, putting them (playfully) into trouble (this can also be called Pimping).

The Story will flow better if the players accept all Offers and will allow Escalation (and the occasional Pimping).

Finish Naturally

Finish the game when the story is finished. Sure you may lose a few points for finishing before the bell, or after the buzzer but you will lose more points if you stick awkwardly around on stage trying to make up time after the story has obviously ended. Similarly you will lose more points for abruptly finishing the game mid-stride than if you ran on after the buzzer for a few seconds.

Motion

Show anima, show that you are alive. Be careful to move with purpose, fidgeting and pacing back and forth for no reason distract the audience from the story.

Motion does not have to mean moving around the stage. Use your face, arms, turn your body (and use Mime to interact with the Environment) and sometimes stillness infused with potential energy or meaning can be rivetting.

Timing

Have a sense of timing, and how to resolve the story within the time limit. Try to conclude the story between the bell and the buzzer. Be aware of dead air. Be aware of talking over each other.

Warm-Up Exercises (28)

Group activities to loosen people up and get them used to improvisation and getting involved in the action and doing silly things.

Alien, Tiger, Cow

Precis

Players form a circle and then at a signal, become an Alien, Tiger or Cow. This continues until everyone chooses the same thing.

Description

There are three things that the players can be. The first is an alien. The alien is signified by making antennae with your fingers and leaning into the circle making the noise "zeep zeep zeep". The second thing you can be is a tiger. The tiger is signified by leaning into the circle exposing your ferocious claws and roaring. The last is the cow. The cow's udder is exposed by putting your hand on your stomach and mooing loudly. The MC briskly counts to three. On three everyone commits to one of the three character types alien, tiger, or cow. Keep repeating the cycle of 1-2-3 until everyone does the same creature. Generally dissolves into complete chaos before there is any synchronisation.

Variations

- + Alter number of forms
 - + Majority Wins: the form that had the least people gets thrown out of the circle
 - + Put team members back-to-back, facing away from each other. Keep playing until one team all do the same animal.
-

Assassin

Precis

Everyone chooses an Assassin and a Bodyguard, then tries not to be "killed".

Description

Everyone picks someone to be their bodyguard, and somebody to be their assassin. Don't say out loud who picked who for what.

Game starts, and everyone tries to protect themselves from their assassin, by trying to keep their bodyguard between themselves and their assassin.

After several minutes of chaos everyone reveals who was picked for what.

Bzzzt

Precis

Players point in directions to a rhythm.

Description

Establish a beat by slapping your thighs. Once beat is established every player has the choice between 4 different movements:

- + Point both hands up
- + Point both hands left
- + Point both hands right
- + Point both hands down

Every beat goes slap, point, slap, point and so on. Except, when the 2 players happen to make the same movement (i.e. in the same direction) then after the next slap they both make a 5th movement: point both hands towards the other player, miming a gun, and say 'bzzzt'. Next beat they do what they want again.

Clap Focus

Precis

Players form a circle; one player claps at another, that player claps at another player and so on.

Description

One person in the circle picks a random person in circle and claps at them. Sometimes taking a half step into the circle while doing so. The person that was singled out with the last clap immediately picks another random person out, by clapping at them. In turn the clapping flies back and forth across the circle. Ideally there will be a constant clapping noise. Eventually the players will be so attentive and so quick to respond it sounds like one person clapping rapidly. This warm-up usually ends when people's hand are denuded of flesh.

Variations

- + Distractions - those that are not clapping are snapping their fingers
 - + Listening can be made harder for the players by allowing the players to only point to the next person in turn. Eventually just eye contact is used as an acknowledged look flies around the room Lastly the players stand silent, immobile, and with their eyes closed as they telepathically communicate amongst themselves
-

Cross Circle

Precis

People form a circle; people can only move when they are moving towards a person they name.

Description

This exercise is complicated to learn. It is started by one person (called person A) who randomly picks another person out of the circle (called person B) and gets their attention by stating their name "hey B". Once person B acknowledges that their name has been called person A starts to walk towards them. You think that this is silly and that person A is going to crash into person B who is standing in the circle. Well person B calls out to another person in the circle (let's say person C). And when C acknowledges B then B can start walking. So A and B are moving across the circle (hence the name) at the same time. C does the same to D. By now A should be stationed in what used be B's spot. A will wait patiently, listening, but not moving until she is called on by someone else in the circle. Complicated, yes, Impossible, No. Walk through it slowly at first and it will start to make sense.

People cannot move until they say the name of the person that they have chosen. This forces people to learn names fast. If the group is big enough you can have more than one cycle going at once. More than one person can be moving at the same time. Therefore two separate cycles are crossing the circle.

Variations

- + The game can be played with just pointing and no names. Even more attention would be required to do this warm-up with just eye contact
-

Digits

Precis

One by one, people count up from one.

Description

Everyone in the circle looks down at the ground. Someone will count off the number one. Then someone else will count off the number two. No one knows who will speak the next number. If two people speak out at the same time then the group must start again at one. It is common to try and count to twenty. Usually there is such rejoicing when twenty is counted to the warm-up is over.

Variations

- + Count with your eyes closed
 - + Go through the letters of the alphabet, count backwards
 - + Do a Word At A Time story with the same rules
-

Falling

Precis

Players walk around, announce they are falling and others catch them.

Description

Once everyone is milling quietly one of the players chooses to fall. The player will announce their plan to fall, by calling out "falling" clearly. Once they do that, and it is obvious that they are going to fall they close their eyes and start falling towards the centre of the room. It is safest if they make themselves rigid and fall backwards towards the centre of the room. I cannot stress enough how important it is to fall inwards. Everyone else in the warm-up rushes to the person's aid and lowers them slowly to the ground. Everyone must help the person be lowered to the ground. Even if one is across the room and the falling player can be safely lowered by those that already there one still must rush over and help. Once the player is lowered safely to the ground she gets back up and the whole thing starts again. Enormous people should refrain from falling in this exercise, people with bad backs should only help with a light touch. Everyone should be able to participate in one fashion or another. Remember, safety first!

Free Association

Precis

Form a circle, one player says something and the next player says the first thing that comes into their head.

Description

The group can be structured in circles, and one person starts off by saying any word. The person to her left lets fly with the absolute first thing that comes to mind when they heard the previous word. There should be no pause to find "something funny" or to edit their thoughts. This is not a psychoanalysis exercise, but one to get people pulling down those barriers to creative thoughts. Associations like "boss-napalm" are quite common, and not too much to worry about.

Variations

- + Try it in gibberish
 - + Firing line is where one person is required to do all the word associations. Six people line up and fire off words that they have pre planned the player on the firing line responds immediately with a free word association
-

Group Stop

Precis

People mill about and one person freezes, and then everyone stops.

Description

Everyone quietly mills about the room. One person will elect to freeze in position unexpectedly. As soon as one notices that someone else has frozen in position they freeze as well. So the effect of one person freezing causes everyone to freeze. Once everyone is still the group starts milling around again. The goal is to see how quickly the group can freeze in position

Variations

- + Any person can call "freeze"
 - + MC buzzes, or calls "freeze" from time to time
-

Hands

Precis

People form a circle and hold hands; one person squeezes a hand and the squeeze is passed around the circle.

Description

One person squeezes that hand that they are holding. The person that received the squeeze squeezes the hand of the other person that they are connected to. This should generate a squeeze pulse that races around the circle. A second squeeze can start circling in the opposite or same direction. There should be no clue that they are receiving the hand squeeze, and therefore no one can really predict when it will come to them. The exact same warm-up can be done with the players contacting palms and giving a push instead of a squeeze. This is more obvious when the pulse moves around the circle. Sometimes the palm pushing wave can generate considerable force.

Hello

Precis

Mill around and greet people in a variety of ways (as announced by the MC).

Description

The players mill about the room. At some point the workshop leader asks them all to greet each other by shaking hands. Greet one person and move on, greet another and so on. This continues for a while. Then endow each of the greetings with an element. For example, "greet each other like you are long lost friends". You can continue to endow the greetings with elements like: ex-lovers, someone you have a crush on, someone you are afraid of, someone you love, a smelly person, etc. The greetings can be embellished with emotions like: greet everyone angrily, greet everyone happily, greet everyone like you have a secret, greet everyone like you are a Scottish Chieftain, etc. Have fun with it, and keep the greetings short and superficial.

Jeepers Peepers

Precis

People form a circle and close their eyes; they open their eyes and look at someone else, trying to make eye contact.

Description

Everyone looks down at the ground, not making eye contact with anyone else. The group collectively counts to three, and on a count of three everyone looks up at once. Each player in the circle is responsible for making a strong choice, and they must either look to their left, their right, or directly across the circle. If players make eye contact, both scream and step out of the circle. This activity is continued until all are out of the circle.

Kitty in the Corner

Precis

A game of tag and swapping using eye contact.

Description

Classic children's game. 4 to 6 players stand at corners of the playing area, one player in the middle. 2 players try to make eye contact, and then switch places, while the middle player tries to capture a corner. The faster the pace, and the higher the stakes (like making eye contact with people diagonally) the more fun.

Leading

Precis

Mill around, and walk by leading a named body part.

Description

All the players are milling around and someone suggests a body part to lead with. Everyone move around as if your left foot was leading your body everywhere. Continue on with various body parts like: knee, bum, right ear. End the exercise when players start calling out internal organs.

Malapropism

Precis

Mill around, calling objects what they are NOT.

Description

As the players are milling about they are to point at objects in the room and call out what the object is not. If they point at a light they may call out "fish", or "wallet". The goal is to call out loud and clear like that is what the object is. Watch for people that saying the same thing over and over again. It works better if people free associate with each new object that they point at. The exercise continues until boredom sets in.

One Mouth

Precis

The players have to answer the MC's questions at the same time with the same answer.

Description

One player (or the MC) is going to interview all other players, but the group of other players are really one character. This character answers the questions, but all players provide the answer at the same time, as if the character is speaking out of many mouths simultaneously. The answers should make sense (at least grammatically) and should be clear. If one player starts answering a question by saying "YYYY" no-one should try and turn that into a "No".

Pass Catch

Precis

Players in a circle do silly poses and share their neighbour's silly pose.

Description

Once everyone is in the circle make sure that they have enough space to move freely without accidentally clouting each other in the head. One player in the circle throws themselves into a bizarre stance and makes a corresponding noise along with it. This gesture is made to the player to their right in the circle. That player immediately reflects back the gesture and noise, imitating the other player as best she can. Once she has done that she immediately turns around and creates a new and wonder gesture and noise to the player to her right. The process is repeated and goes around the circle for a few minutes. It is important that the players not stop to think in between the poses. The player should receive, reflect, turn and create a new pose without pause.

Variations

- + The player to the right can dispense with reflecting the gesture and quickly turn around and give the gesture to the player to their right. This will result in a continuous noise and shape flying around the circle at high speed. Eventually the gesture is altered. The result can be stunning. The gesture can also be thrown across the circle. This keeps players from being prepared and gets people more in the moment
-

Popcorn

Precis

Form a circle and randomly jump in the air and clap.

Description

Players randomly and unexpectedly jump up in to the air. At some time in the air they clap their hands. Since other players are also jumping and clapping at the same time the name popcorn seems appropriate. If two players clap their hands at the same time they are out of the circle for a few seconds only to join in later. The exercise is continued until hands become sore or someone sprains an ankle.

Questions

Precis

Players must only speak in questions.

Description

2 Player Game.

A broad scene is set, and then the 2 players play it out only speaking in questions. If one of the players makes a statement or hesitates too long swap them out for a different player.

Redirection

Precis

Form a circle, one person walks around with their eyes closed and the others redirect them.

Description

Someone is chosen to get into the middle of the circle. They simply close their eyes and start to walk in any direction. The spotters on the outside of the circle redirect the walker as she comes to the edge of the circle. The spotters in the circle need to remain silent so as not to alert the walker when she is about to be turned. The blind folded walker is supposed to pick up speed, and trust that her players will not let her crash into something. Continue until all have gone into the centre.

Simulclap

Precis

Form a circle, and send a clap around the circle.

Description

One player starts off by clapping their hands (a singular clap), while facing another player. The goal is for both the players to clap their hands simultaneously. The player that received the applause then turns and claps simultaneously with the next player in the circle. This produces a cycle of simultaneous claps racing around the circle. It takes some time for a group to get this going. Once the simultaneous clapping is moving nicely the player that is receiving the applause may opt to give it back to the person that clapped at them. This will reverse the direction of the clapping. What the player does to reverse the direction of the clapping is to not turn to the next person in the circle, but stand her ground and clap directly back at the player that handed her the applause. There is an overwhelming urge to try and screw up the other players in the circle. This is to be discouraged as more can be learned from trying to make the circle flow quickly rather than fail frequently.

Slow Motion Samurai

Precis

People move around in slow motion, killing those around them.

Description

Once everyone is milling about comfortably they are told to start moving in slow motion. Once a stable rate of speed is determined the players all become Samurai with poisonous blades built into their fore arms. The object is to kill all the other Samurai in the room. If anyone is touched by the fore arm of another player they must die a poisoned death in slow motion. It is important that players keep their speed continuous. The point is not to win the warm-up, but to have fun. If players are moving too fast and massacring everyone else simply tell them to slow down. It helps people work together. The warm-up usually ends when there is a large pile of bodies on the floor.

Variations

- + Players are allowed to block attacking Samurai poison fore arms with their own forearm
 - + The workshop can be divided into two groups, having a little feudal war
-

Song Circle

Precis

Collectively try to sing a song about a named theme.

Description

A very general theme is chosen, like transportation or love. Once the theme is chosen players jump into the centre of the circle and start to sing any song related to the theme. Once the player gets stuck on the song, another player must show support and jump into the circle to help with a new song. The previous person in the centre steps out. This continues until songs start to get repeated, or things collapse utterly. The point of the warm-up is not to embarrass people in the centre, but to support the player in the centre. This is done by quickly jumping into the circle once they start to have any trouble at all.

Stretching

Precis

Stretch body parts.

Description

Let's all get limbered up by doing some simple stretching exercises. Stretch odd body parts like noses, scalps, etc. This seems to work best if everyone in the group submits a stretch and is responsible for stretching one body part.

Vocal Symphony

Precis

Each player makes a noise at the directions of the conductor.

Description

Each player is endowed with a noise - this can be a silly sound, a word or phrase... anything vocal. It is good to get a range of contrasting noises for the players to use. Once each player is given their noise the conductor points from one player to another. When pointed to, the players make their noise. The volume of the noise is increased as the conductor raises their hand while pointing at the player. The conductor moves from player to player conducting the symphony.

What Are You Doing?

Precis

One player in the middle of a circle mimes an activity and then tells the next player what their activity will be.

Description

This warm-up breaks one of the major improvisational rules, however it allows us to start getting in the moment. Everyone into a circle.

Once the circle is formed one player goes into the circle and starts to mime a simple activity. Once the activity has been established one of the players from the circle jumps in and asks "what are you doing?" The player doing the mime responds with some activity other than the one they are doing. If they are mowing the lawn they might say 'filleting a soul.' The player that asked the question starts the activity that was answered (i.e., filleting a soul) and waits to be asked what she is doing. This continues until all players have tried the exercise.

Yes Lets

Precis

Players mill about and the group suggests activities which the group then does.

Description

This warm-up focuses on accepting offers and getting silly. Start milling about the room.

Someone will loudly suggest an activity for all the group to mime. Everyone simultaneously yells "yes lets", and starts the do the activity. Once the activity has been mimed for a while another one is yelled out and the group responds with "yes lets" and starts the activity. For example, if someone calls out let's all dig holes. The group responds with "yes let's all dig holes", and every manner of hole digging mime will begin (complete with sound effects). The someone will suggest a new activity and the cycle continues. Someone yells out "let's finish this exercise", or "let's all sit down".

Zip, Zap, Zoop

Precis

Form a circle, pass "zip"s around the circle, direction may be changed by saying "zap" or "zoop".

Description

This warm-up gets our brains acting without thinking.

Everyone into a circle. This is another motion around the circle warm-up. In this warm-up one of the players points to another player to one side of them and says 'zip'. That player turns to the next player in the circle, points to them and says 'zip'. Thus the 'zip' moves around the circle in one direction. At any time a receiving player can say 'zap' to the person pointing at them. When they do the player that said 'zip' and was pointing at them must change direction of the pointing. This means that they must quickly turn around, point and say 'zip' to the person that just pointed at them. Now the 'zip' can zip around the circle, but changing direction every time there is a 'zap'. Lastly the person that receives the 'zip' may elect to yell 'zoop' and point at someone anywhere in the circle. That player then restarts the 'zip' going in the direction of their choice. The group must really pay attention for this to work.

Skills Exercises (28)

A series of typically short games, and other activities, designed to demonstrate or practice specific skills.

1-2-3-4-5

Precis

Structured scene development using single sentences.

Description

This exercise covers the basic framework of an open scene. It is very structured and requires three people. 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.

ONE - 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.

TWO - 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.

THREE - 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.

FOUR - 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.

FIVE - resolution

The two players 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.

Variations

- + If players cannot keep to one sentence. Try doing the steps in gibberish or have someone off-stage speak the player's sentence
- + Discussion after each point, do steps 1 & 2, then build up to doing all five steps

Advance and Expand

Precis

This exercise focuses on raising the stakes and exploration of the environment. Please set up a scene.

Description

The players start into their scene as they would any other. When the 'advance' is called out the players focus solely on the story, and advance the story. When 'expand' is called out the players solely explore their environment. During an 'advance' the players would add nothing to the environment, but would introduce constructive new bits of information about who, why and where. They could raise the stakes, introduce a new character, but every offer must make the story move forward. These advances can be done at the exclusion of the environment and even the reality. The goal of the exercise is to make the players keenly aware of when they are advancing a story. During an 'expand' the story is completely ignored, characters are not developed and the players engross themselves in their mimed environments. The sink that their character is standing at becomes the focus. The taps are explored, the shape is explored, its taste, etc. Again the story will be derailed by the 'expand' but the environment will become much more real.

Variations

- + Have one player expand while another advances.

Ask Fors

Precis

Each player in the workshop will get up in front of the workshop group and get an ask-for to set up a scene.

Description

Each player gets a single ask-for from the audience. They should treat the other workshopers as if they were an audience. Getting the offer for the scene simply involves asking for some kind of audience input. Our policy is to get a single noun, relationship, verb, adverb, or adjective. Thank the audience for the suggestion and then state this scene will somehow involve the Offer.

Variations

- + The style of the set-ups will vary from troupe to troupe. It is good to practise getting ask-fors in the style of your troupe
 - + The audience can make typical bar offers like: gynecologist, proctologist, bathroom, my dick, your dick, big dick, condom
-

Can I Help you?

Precis

One player is a help desk clerk and must respond to the strong characters who approach.

Description

One player acts as a help desk clerk in a major department store, the other 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 inquiries 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.

Variations

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

Conducted Story

Precis

The players stand in a line and one person to conduct a story.

Description

The goal of the conducted story is to have the players tell a story that moves seamlessly from one player to another. The goal of the conductor is to make the story flow as well as possible. If the conductor moves from one player to another the new player that is speaking must continue on as though there was no pause. For instance, moves from player A who said, "many children were afraid of Carl for he was known to ha.." to player B, who would continue seamlessly ".ve piles of library books that were overdue." The key is listening. It is a listening exercise. The players that are not speaking must be listening. They all must have the next word ready to go, and only if they are listening will that word make any sense. The players must also be accepting of what is happening in the story. Forcing their own agenda will show up quickly. Words like, 'but' and 'instead of' reflect someone denies another players offers.

Variations

- + Hold on one player for a long time
 - + Give each of the players a different story genre
-

Corridors

Precis

Players go down the corridor to have single sentence conversations.

Description

This exercise will help us in defining characters and generating interpersonal relationships. Form a single file line with two players down stage on either side of the line.

The two players down stage wait for the first player from the line to join them. The player from the line approaches the player on their left. In one sentence the player defines a relationship between the two of them. "Carol would you marry me?" would suffice. This clearly defines the relationship between a suitor and her spouse to be. The player then responds with a one sentence conflict, finds a reason to leave the room, and confer with another character. That character just happens to be down the corridor in the next room. The player might say, "I am happy to marry you I must first confer with my mother." She promptly leaves the room, travels down the corridor and to the player on the right of the line. Gives the news, and then the player there responds in the character that she was endowed as. For instance, "finally getting married you little schlaghunte. Good riddance." The player on the right goes to the back of the line, and the process is repeated with a whole new set of characters and a new situation. All the players should rotate through each of the parts in the exercise.

Variations

- + Each player must remain as the character that they were endowed as for the entire exercise.
-

Drill Instructor

Precis

Players in 2 teams face off in 30 second improvisations.

Description

All players line up in 2 lines, facing each other. The MC yells a word/title, and next player in line gets 30 seconds to do their thing, based on the suggestion. After 30 seconds new title/word is given and next player goes.

Elevator

Precis

One by one characters get on an elevator, clearly establishing their character physically.

Description

This is a character exercise.

The players each get onto an elevator at different floors. Each character uses the step of getting on the elevator as a vehicle for demonstrating their characteristics. Without speaking the character should be clearly defined by how they move, how they push the call button, and what noises they make. The next character on should make a choices that compliment the character that is already on the elevator. These characters all interact as they see fit. Keeping in mind the confined space of the elevator, and the eventual need to exit. It is important that all the players accept and help define the environment of the elevator.

Variations

- + Have the elevator break down and leave them stuck in it for some time
-

Emotional Symphony

Precis

Each player plays an emotion at the directions of the conductor.

Description

Five of the players are lined up in a performance fashion. One person is chosen to conduct the players in the symphony. Each player is endowed with some emotion. It is good to get a range of contrasting emotions for the players to use. Once each player is given their emotion the conductor points from one player to another. The players do not speak, but express their emotions through physicality and noise. The intensity of the emotion is increased as the conductor raises her hand while pointing at the player. The conductor moves from player to player conducting an emotional symphony.

Variations

- + This exercise is fun, and does have some performance value. A way to make it closer to the audience is to ask for names from the audience, and get the players to speak only that name, tainted with the emotion with which they have been endowed
 - + Point at two players at once etc
-

Freeze

Precis

Play a 2 person scene where the other 2 players off stage can tag in.

Description

2 players start a scene, once the scene has been established, another player yells "freeze" and the players on stage freeze in their positions. The player who yelled "freeze" then replaces one of the players on stage and begins a new scene. This process repeats until a logical ending is reached, or time is up.

Game-O-Matic

Precis

Invent the game rules.

Description

This is like 'invent-your-own-game': ask the audience for the name of a non-existent improv game, then invent the rules on the spot, and play it.

Kind of risky, but if the group has been playing short form improv games for quite a while, coming up with rules is easy.

Happy Circles

Precis

Change expressed emotion in tune with how you rotate your limbs.

Description

Use of circles and movement in expressing emotion physically. Move hands in outwards circles (ie left hand is moving clockwise, right hand is moving anti-clockwise). This generates happy expression. Similarly if you rotate at the elbows, shoulders, knees or feet in outwards directions it generates happy expressions. If you rotate your hands inwards you generate sad expressions. Go through each part of the body, or focus on one particular part per workshop.

Happy Face

Precis

Change facial expressions slowly from happy to neutral.

Description

Start with a deadpan face. With your palm facing inwards move your hand over your face, from chin to forehead. As you move your hand upwards your face becomes happier, when you move your hand downwards your face becomes sadder. Practice slowly and then get faster.

Variations

+ Face of with a partner, you may alter your own expression, or the expression of your partner

Happy/Sad

Precis

Change facial expressions from happy to sad.

Description

Get players to do the most miserable expression they can think of. Now get them to do the happiest expression they can think of. Assign the most miserable expression with the value 1 and the happiest expression with 8. Now count through gradations from 1-8.

Variations

+ Once people are familiar with their range, jump about, call out 7, then 2 then 5, then 1 etcetera

Machines

Precis

Players become parts of an imaginary machine.

Description

In this exercise the players must create the parts of an imaginary machine. Each player will enter one at a time, and offer a repetitive motion and noise to the machine. [get name of a machine]

The players should use all levels of the stage, and the exercise works best when the motions fit together into some kind of machine. Don't do anything that you cannot physically maintain (one armed push-ups), or something that causes physical pain (dropping to your knees). The players will find that the machine they create reflects the suggestion that they were given.

Variations

- + This machine can be frozen and used to start a scene based on the original suggestion.
-

Marshmallow Mania

Precis

Don't make the audience laugh!

Description

Play a scene in which the audience is not supposed to laugh. Any player who provokes a laugh, gets a piece of marshmallow in his/her mouth. Players are allowed to chew, but may not swallow.

Missing Letter

Precis

Play a scene without using a given letter.

Description

Players play a scene (perhaps based on an audience suggestion) but they cannot use the letter 'P' (or any other letter). When a player uses a 'P', the audience screams 'Die' and the player is replaced by another on. The scene continues, and the new player needs to take over the character of the player he replaces.

Monarch

Precis

One player is the supreme ruler. The other players try to win their favour.

Description

The monarch sits proudly on stage and is persistently approached by all of the other players in the workshop. The players approach the monarch making strong character choices and making offers to please the monarch. Offers such as "a box of chocolates for your royalness" or "a new necklace for my monarch" are common. The role of the monarch is to accept the offer and decide whether the offer was worthy of that player sitting beside the monarch in an exclusive place in her court. Other players are constantly coming forward in an attempt to gain that exclusive spot by offering better and better goodies for the monarch. An ideal monarch will not base her responses on the goodies themselves, but how well they are presented by the player. If a player offers the monarch a rock, but does it with a strong and committed character the monarch will place them at her side. Only one player may be in the monarch's favour at any one time. Like all good royalty no commoner may touch the monarch (this keeps the monarch from getting a 10 minute massage instead of accepting new offers).

Variations

- + If the monarch is bested with an offer they die and the new player becomes the monarch
 - + Saint Peter's Gate, each player approaches Peter with a reason they should not get into heaven, and Peter finds a reason to get them into heaven. If Peter cannot find a reason to get the player into heaven he is replaced by that player. Beware of these competitive games, the improv rules of story and making everyone else on stage look good must still apply. If things get to competitive just stop the exercise
-

Object Narrative

Precis

Players do monologues on an object.

Description

The group sits or stands to the sides so they can see what is going on. Someone chooses an object from the room and places it on the chair. (Or get an object from the audience in a show) That object is your suggestion. One at a time, three members (or how ever many you decide) do a short monologue off that object. One person starts and when they are done, they leave the object on the chair for the next person. Whoever is inspired jumps up next adding their part of the story/situation from another character's point of view. and the third person completes the cycle.

This exercise is extremely character based. The first character sets the story in motion and then the other two people find a way to be another interesting character that will accept and heighten the first initiation. The challenge is to not be totally predictable with the follow up character choices (avoid immediately choosing to be the spouse when you could be that person's mailman...or manicurist instead). At the same time you still want to support the story line and justify what the previous characters have already established. The characters don't have to know each other, but they must have connections (if only through the object).

Open Your Hand

Precis

Players catch imagined falling objects from the sky.

Description

The players walk around the room leisurely. Then ask them to stop, open their hands, and let something fall out of the sky, right into their hands. The players name the object in their hands, set it aside, move on and open their hands again.

Variations

- + Players they can vary the way they extend their hands or hand. They can hold hands in front of them, above their head or close to the ground. See if different stuff shows up
 - + A slightly less difficult version of this game can be done by players pulling things out of their pockets. Make sure they all got pockets if you want to play this game
-

Park Bench

Precis

Characterisation 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.

Quick Change

Precis

Play a scene where lines have to be changed.

Description

Play a neutral scene where the MC calls "change" (or rings the bell) from time to time and the last line spoken has to be changed.

Reality TV

Precis

Like Reality TV shows, players get "voted off the island".

Description

Four to six players play a scene. Then the audience chooses one of the players to get "voted off the island". The remaining players do the scene again, covering everything that happened the first time. Then another person gets voted out, and so on until one person has to act out the scene all by themselves. There are various ways of re-playing the original scene, even when only one player left: player can do a monologue, can play all original characters herself, you name it ... You can play this for an audience, but it's also a great listening and paying-attention exercise.

Secret

Precis

A scene is played where a secret is uncovered.

Description

Two or more players start in a neutral scene about 30 seconds before a secret is uncovered.

That Must Be Charlie

Precis

The players Endow one player who has to embody all the Endowments.

Description

One player, "Charlie", starts offstage whilst the others talk about them; Endowing "Charlie" with a variety of odd mannerisms and habits. After a while, "Charlie" enters the scene and has to display all the Endowments.

Timing

Precis

Players build a sense of time.

Description

Get players to have a sense of what one minute feels like. Players quiet and still and time a minute. Then get the players to close their eyes and to open their eyes when they feel like a minute is up.

Variations

- + Have people do an activity or improv and have them guess how the time rather than use a buzzer. With these skills building have feedback as immediate as possible
 - + Vary the amount of time, 10 seconds is a useful time to know
-

Voices from Heaven

Precis

The players tell a collective story about how they came to die.

Description

Excellent game for building characters and group-storytelling. 4 players, ask the audience who they are, what their occupation would be. These 4 characters have died together, and they are going to tell us how that came about. Players line up. The game is played in 3 rounds. In every round, each player offers some information about how they happened to die. At the end of the thirds round, they should all be dead. Notes It's fun to take risks - if in the first round each of the players just offers what they happened to be doing the day they died, and where. It is quite a challenge to get these 4 stories together, including the deaths of all characters, by the end of the third round.

Word at a Time Expert

Precis

2 Players are the one expert and are interviewed.

Description

3 players: one is the interviewer, and the other 2 are an expert on a subject chosen by the audience. The expert is really one person, with 2 heads, and answers to the interviewer's question are provided word by word, one word at a time per player.

Variations

- + Also known as Oracle. Use an ancient Greek oracle instead of an expert, and have the audience ask the oracle questions about life & love
-

Short Games (14)

Games designed to be about 60 seconds long with a 10 second warning. The focus of these games is on wit and a fast paced story building.

Advertisement

Precis

The players advertise a product or service.

Description

The players must create and play out an advertisement for a non-existent product or service that the MC gives.

Alliteration

Precis

Characters converse, cleverly constructing consonants.

Description

Players are given a letter, usually a consonant, and incorporate into the scene as many words beginning with that letter as possible.

Variations

- + Each player can have their own letter
-

Death in a Minute

Precis

Play a 1 minute scene, in which one player must die.

Description

Play a 1 minute scene, in which one player must die.

Lounge Singer

Precis

1 player sings in the style of a lounge singer in an odd location.

Description

Hard Game.

Single Player Game.

Ask for an unlikely place to find a lounge singer. One player does a solo song, Frank Sinatra style. You'll get something like "Welcome to the Paediatrician's Office".

One Mouth

Precis

The players have to answer the MC's questions at the same time with the same answer.

Description

One player (or the MC) is going to interview all other players, but the group of other players are really one character. This character answers the questions, but all players provide the answer at the same time, as if the character is speaking out of many mouths simultaneously. The answers should make sense (at least grammatically) and should be clear. If one player starts answering a question by saying "YYYY" no-one should try and turn that into a "No".

One Word Scene

Precis

A scene is played using only a single word.

Description

One word is obtained from the audience and this is the only word used in the scene.

Opening Line

Precis

Play a scene from a given opening.

Description

The MC provides the players with an opening line that ends in a cliff-hanger that the players then continue on from.

Eg "You were climbing up the idol to remove the bejewelled eye when..."

Prima Donnas

Precis

All the players sing bits of songs.

Description

Hard Game.

One player jumps out to centre stage, begins singing a song but is interrupted after a few lines by another player who pushes them away, takes centre stage and begins singing another song somehow related to the previous song. This cycle continues for many songs.

Props

Precis

The team comes up with different ways of using a given prop.

Description

The teams are both on stage at the same time and are given 1 prop each. The teams alternate in coming up with different ways of using their prop.

Puppets

Precis

2 players act out a scene and the other 2 control the actors.

Description

2 players will be puppets; these players offer the lines of dialogue in the scene, but they are not allowed to move about themselves. The other 2 players are the puppet masters, that will provide the movements for the puppets.

Variations

+ Two Player game, with the two players controlled by 2 audience members

Set Length Sentences

Precis

Player play a scene but they can only speak in sentences of a set length.

Description

Players are given a number - all sentences that they speak can only have that number of words. A scene is provided and has to be played out.

Verses

Precis

The players act out a scene in verse.

Description

Hard Game.

Scene is played in verses, that is, every player need to rhyme to herself. Nice handle to combine with a Shakespeare style.

Word at a time Story

Precis

Players tell a story, one word at a time.

Description

The players are given a style of story, and they then, taking turns, each contribute one word to the story.

World's Worst

Precis

The MC provides a phrase, and the players come up with bad illustrations of the phrase.

Description

Not exactly theatre, but fun if played well. Players line up, and the audience provides verbs, hobbies and occupations. The players need to come up with the worst possible way of doing/being what the audience suggests.

Medium Games (41)

Games designed to be about 2 minutes long with a 30 second warning. The focus of these games is on keeping the story consistent whilst maintaining a quick pace.

Alphabet

Precis

Play a scene where successive lines start with successive letters of the alphabet.

Description

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. There is some leeway with Z and X.

Variations

- + Players who hesitate, or use the wrong letter 'Die', and are replaced by another player. The replacement needs to take over the character of the player she replaces. Better to 'Die' than to break story flow. This variation is more of a skills exercise
-

Animalistic

Precis

Players play a scene, in which the characters are based on animals.

Description

Players do not become the animals, they only take over characteristics of the animals. Characteristics may be physical, vocal or status based. For example, being given chicken as an animal might inspire a player to a cowardly character, moving about jerkily but a lion as the king of the animals would move confidently and have a commanding manner.

Asides

Precis

A scene is played and play stops from time to time as the characters voice their inner thoughts.

Description

A scene is played where any player can stop at any time and break out of the scene and address the audience, telling them what the character is really thinking. The player returns to the scene and it continues until someone else breaks out to make an aside. The other characters of course are not supposed to know what the character is thinking, but the players do, and should use this.

Variations

- + The thoughts of the players can also be provided by players off-stage. Also known as Alter Ego
-

Backwards Scene

Precis

The players play a scene in reverse

Description

The MC will provide the ending of the scene, and the players have to play the scene in reverse.

Blind Date

Precis

An audience member goes on date with a character.

Description

One player is on a blind date with an audience volunteer at a dinner location provided by the audience. Two other players then stand behind the daters and speak their inner-thoughts. The fourth player will be other people as needed (such as a snooty waiter etc).

Channel Surfing

Precis

The MC swaps between different channels (players).

Description

Each player has a TV format, like the News, a documentary, Pokemon, you name it. The audience provides the central theme, and the MC will surf through the channels. Miraculously, all broadcasts cover the same theme.

Continuing Emotions

Precis

The scene is played and the MC interjects with different emotions.

Description

A neutral scene is started, and is then interrupted (frozen) several times by the MC. The scene is then continued but all characters switch to an emotion from a list provided by the audience.

Doo Wop

Precis

Sing a 50s Doo-Wop style song.

Description

Hard Game.

This is another structured song format, sung as a 1950's Doo-Wop. It can be structured in various ways. Here's one in 5 beats: ask for an object. Then:

- + Lead singer sings verse about the object
- + All sing Chorus, in the style of I love my (object)
- + Verse 2: explain how you found your object
- + (all) chorus on how you love your object
- + Verse 3: That fateful night ... explain how you lost your beloved object. This can be done as a parlendo (i.e. you speak to the music, rather than sing)
- + (bridge) Explain how bad you miss your object
- + (all) chorus on how you miss your object
- + Verse 4: explain how your replaced your object by a new (or other) one
- + (all) chorus on how you love your new object (finale!) Feel free to drop e.g. the first of second chorus if you feel it drags you down.

Feel free to modulate after the bridge, or not. Each player must sing at least one verse.

Dubbed Movie

Precis

2 players play a scene and their voices are provided by the other 2.

Description

2 players act a scene, but they don't speak, although they can move their mouths as if they are speaking. The other 2 players are offstage and provide the speech. The effect is (or should be) like watching a dubbed movie.

Evil Twin

Precis

2 players play a scene, the other 2 are their evil twins and can swap in and out at will.

Description

2 players play a scene. The other players are the other's evil twins. At any point, the 'twins' can shout 'freeze' after which they tag out their twin, and continue the scene and do something evil. After that, they move out again, and the original twin needs to justify the evil, correct or repair the damage done and continue the scene.

Freeze

Precis

Play a 2 person scene where the other 2 players off stage can tag in.

Description

2 players start a scene, once the scene has been established, another player yells "freeze" and the players on stage freeze in their positions. The player who yelled "freeze" then replaces one of the players on stage and begins a new scene. This process repeats until a logical ending is reached, or time is up.

Great Dalmuti

Precis

Draw a card each so that everyone else except the person it belongs to can see it. Act out a scene with the card denoting relative importance.

Description

Pick 4 cards out of a deck, and attach a card to each player's forehead, so that players can see each other's card, but not their own.

The idea is to play a scene, in which the relative importance of the characters is defined by the cards. For example two people on 6 would treat each other as equals, a 4 isn't so bad when compared with a 6, but is scum when compared to King. Evidently, players don't know their own status, so the other players will have to endow them.

Variations

- + Players can only see their own card, but not the others'
 - + Give players multiple cards, and let them switch cards in the middle of the scene. Status should change accordingly
-

He Said, She Said

Precis

Play a scene where a pair of players narrate the actions of each other.

Description

2 Player Game.

Play a scene where one pair narrates the actions the other pair must perform. One person narrates only for one actor.

Example:

- + 1: "I want a divorce"
- + 2: "She said, while grabbing a knife from the kitchen table." At this point player 1 needs to take a knife. Player 2 continues with his own line. "Sure Honey"
- + 1: "He said, while turning to the sports page of the paper". Now, it's quite clear that player 2 should be paying more attention to the paper than to his wife. Player 1 continues with her own line. "You're not listening to me"
- + and so on.

Players refer to each other in the third person (he or she), and endow each other with the next action to take. This can be quite funny, if you endow your partner to do crazy or not-so-nice things to you (or to themselves, but that's would not be Mr Nice Guy).

Keep the action do-able and active. Making someone else 'think about something' is hard to play, and not very active.

Hesitation

Precis

A scene is played with help from the audience.

Description

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

Hijacker

Precis

1 player is the hijacker and does not know the transport, object or goal but must guess and act through using the object to hijack the transport to achieve their goal.

Description

Also known as Rebel without a Clue.

One player is the Hijacker and puts on the headphones, so that they cannot hear the means of transportation, object, objective or goal. The idea is that the Hijacker needs to guess the means of transportation, and then use the object to hijack the others and achieve the objective.

The players need to provide hints to the hijacker, but they cannot explicitly tell the hijacker what to do, with what or why.

Works best is players take risks. If they do the 'wrong' thing or use the wrong object the audience will probably just laugh, and that should be enough to signal the player he's going the wrong way.

Hoe-Down

Precis

Players each sing a verse of a hoe-down.

Description

Hard Game. Four players each separately deliver a four-stanza (AABB) call about the audience suggested occupation sung to a hoe-down/square dance riff. The last players few words are re-sung by all players.

Human Props

Precis

One player starts acting a location, the other players become props in that location.

Description

One player starts doing an activity that somehow defines (broadly) a location. e.g. when someone starts typing they might be in a (home) office. The other players then become the other objects in the environment. Tell the first player they can start using the props built by other players in the environment (if recognized). Tell the players to go for the obvious: in just about any room you could be a plant, a door or a table, after all.

Little Voice

Precis

1 player acts out a scene and the others provide voices of normally inanimate objects.

Description

One player plays a scene. The other players are offstage and they play the voices of objects in the environment. Anything can have a voice. Examples:

- + A player walks in a forest and an ant starts talking to him
- + A player is in the bathroom and his toothbrush starts talking

Players should immediately make clear what exactly is doing the talking. Either the voice makes this clear, or the other player:

- + Oh my god, a talking duck with a machine gun!
 - + Bet you've never seen a talking couch, have you?
-

March

Precis

Players make up a marching song on a topic.

Description

The players stand in a line and are given a topic for a marching song. Going down the line in turn, the players each make up a short verse to a marching beat (big band style).

Missing Letter

Precis

Players act in a scene but must not speak one letter.

Description

The MC provides a scene and gives each player a letter that they cannot say, and a letter that they must say instead.

Object Endowment

Precis

A scene is played where characters hold objects, each of which provide an Endowment.

Description

Start a scene, and identify the endowments given by each object. During the game the objects should move from players to player. Each player takes on the endowments that go with the object. The story needs to continue and should make sense.

Old Job, New Job

Precis

A scene is played where a player has to show the influence of a previous job.

Description

Play a scene, and give them a job. Then tell one (or more) of them what job(s) they had in a previous life.

The idea is that somehow in the scene players reflect their previous jobs in their actual life. The idea is not to 'play' the old job, but to show character traits of someone with the old job while performing the new job.

One Word Scene

Precis

A scene is played using only a single word.

Description

One word is obtained from the audience and this is the only word used in the scene.

Party Quirks

Precis

1 player is host of a party and has to guess the endowments of the guests.

Description

1 player is the host of a party and the guests are given endowments that the host does not know about. The host has to guess the endowments of the guests based on their behaviour .

Perfect Match

Precis

The scene is a dating game show - 1 player has to ask questions of the other 3 and guess their endowments.

Description

This is played like a Blind Date show. One player dons the headphones, and the MC provides endowments for the 3 others. Examples might be No. 1 is stupid, No. 2 is a serial killer and No. 3 thinks he's a macho.

The 4th player (AKA The Contestant) gets to ask 3 questions, and each of the others answers it. After the questions player 4 should guess what the endowments are.

Press Conference

Precis

One player holds a press conference and has to guess their endowment from questions asked by the press.

Description

One player is the host of a press conference. The host is given an endowment that everyone but they knows. The others (as the press) ask questions to hint at the endowment, and the host has to guess their endowment.

Variations

+ The host can be a famous or historical figure

Protest Song

Precis

The players sing a 70s style protest song.

Description

Hard Game.

The players improvise a song about something that pisses the audience off, like the 70s screw-the-government type characters. Typically done as a Verse-Chorus type song.

Repair Shop

Precis

A player has to find out what object needs fixing and fix it.

Description

One player wears the headphones, the MC provides an object, and something not-so-obvious that is wrong with the object. Example: an airliner for which the keys to open the door have been lost.

In the game the player needs to solve the problem, without knowing what the problem is.

Scenes from a Hat

Precis

Players given quick scenes drawn from a hat.

Description

Players line up and a scene is drawn from the hat and read out. Players enter stage and perform the scene until the MC gets the idea. The Buzzer is sounded and a new scene is drawn.

Slide Show

Precis

A character shows us a slide show, the other players providing the tableaux of the frozen scenes.

Description

One character narrates a slide show, the other players providing the tableaux of the frozen scenes described by the first player.

Variations

- + Pop Up Story Book, a variation where the still players are pictures in a book. The storyteller can pull leavers, slide tabs etcetera to get some minimal action
-

Stand, Sit, Lie Down

Precis

A scene is played out, where no two players can have the same position at the same time.

Description

At no time can the players occupy the same position on the stage simultaneously. One player must be lying down, another player must be standing, and so on. If two players are occupying the same position, let them know about it.

Complete chaos is the best description of this game. All four players should get into the scene rather quickly. This helps work the gimmick, and makes things the most challenging for the players. Try to create a story. Try to justify why you have changed position. Try not to hurt yourself. Change position often, but justify the change. If you can telegraph the move to the other players the whole scene will benefit.

Stunt Double

Precis

Two players play a scene, swapping to their stunt double for stunts.

Description

A scene is played by 2 players. Every time a player needs to do something difficult/unpleasant, another player jumps in as a stunt double. When done, the stunt double freezes the scene and the original player continues the scene.

Subtitled Movie

Precis

Two people play a scene in gibberish and their subtitles are provided by the other 2.

Description

Two players act a scene, but they only speak in gibberish. The other 2 players are offstage and provide the English translation. The effect is (or should be) like watching a subtitled movie.

Super Hero

Precis

One player has a problem and calls a Super Hero to fix it, who needs to call another, etc.

Description

First player gets a trivial problem, like My Shoelaces are Untied.

The first player starts a scene in which the Problem arises, and is unable to fix the problem. Hence the first hero calls in the help of a named superhero (say, Kitchen Cabinet Man). Each superhero comes in with lots of brouhaha only to make the problem worse. The last player onstage finally fixes the problem.

Use whatever you can think of first as the super power.

The game is really Pimping folks into playing outrageous superheroes.

Variations

- + One player starts as a fictional super hero discovering an audience provided world crisis on the crisis monitor. This player will call for help and then name the super hero who arrives. This super hero will call for help and name the next super hero cycling until there are four heroes present. Each leaves in reverse order after helping to solve the crisis
-

TV News

Precis

A TV newscast with an anchor, co-anchor, weather and sports presenters - all with endowments.

Description

The players are all given endowments and play characters in a TV newscast. One will be the lead anchor, another is the co-anchor, weather and sports presenters. The anchor will play through the scene and must throw to each of the other presenters.

TV Sports

Precis

A mundane task is acted out as an Olympic sport, including commentary.

Description

2 players acts out an every day activity competitively (such as brushing your teeth, washing your car). In this game, the every day activity is performed as if it were done at the Olympics or at a world championship, two players competing against each other. The other 2 players are in a TV studio commentating on the event.

Gimmicks may include:

- + Interviewing the athlete on the field after the win (or the disaster)
- + Asking for a replay of a particularly dramatic moment
- + Asking for a replay with a different camera

Variations

- + Three Player version, one player is the athlete, one is the interviewer who interviews the athlete's trainer, as the athlete performs the task. Usually, something goes wrong and the athlete fails miserably
-

Translation for the Deaf

Precis

2 players act out an interview, whilst the others translate into "sign language".

Description

One player is an expert on a topic provided by the audience; another will be the interviewer. The other(s) will provide simultaneous translation for the hearing impaired, using "sign language".

This works best if the interview itself does not go too fast, so the translator has plenty of time to translate. Also helpful are returning keywords that the translator can always translate the same way. A gimmick is to translate everything literally, even 'dummy' words, like 'oh', 'great', 'hm hm'.

Two Line Scene

Precis

Players can only speak 2 lines for the entire scene.

Description

Each player but one is given 2 different lines. These lines are the only lines the player can speak during the scene. The player without any set lines may speak freely.

Understudy

Precis

Two people play a scene and they are swapped for the other two who continue the story.

Description

A scene is started, typically played by 2 players. Mid-scene the MC interrupts, and all characters are replaced by new players. The new players should take over the original characters, and stick to the story that was being developed.

Walkout

Precis

A scene is played and the players walk in and out on a word cue.

Description

Give each player a word cue. Scene starts with 2 players with people coming and going according to word cue. As soon as a player hears their word, they have to leave the scene. As soon as they hear their word again, they need to walk into the scene again. Walkouts and re-entrances need to be justified.

Whose Line?

Precis

Draw some lines randomly, then play out a scene, reading all the lines during the game.

Description

Ask for a location, or a profession, and have the each player draw 2 slips of paper, each of which has a phrase on it.

The players put these in their pockets without reading them.

Then a scene is played, in which at any point in time, players replace what they might have said, by whatever is on the piece of paper they draw out of their pocket. Try to incorporate/justify whatever is your line into the scene.

Try to avoid things like 'My granny always said' - you want your character to say whatever is on the piece of paper - don't try to put those words into someone else's mouth.

Variations

+ Two Player Game. Each player draws 3 slips of paper, each of which has a phrase on it

Long Games (14)

Games designed to be about 4 minutes long with a 30 second warning. The focus of these slower paced games is on keeping a consistent story that holds the audience's interest.

Actors in a Box

Precis

Actors in a can, rotate through four scenes.

Description

Hard Game.

Four players arrange themselves into a square. Two up front, two in back. The front pair plays out a scene, the the box is rotated until all four pairs have played scenes. Each scene continues until the MC freezes and rotates the box to another scene.

Players are anchored to the one spot during their scenes.

Asides

Precis

A scene is played and play stops from time to time as the characters voice their inner thoughts.

Description

A scene is played where any player can stop at any time and break out of the scene and address the audience, telling them what the character is really thinking. The player returns to the scene and it continues until someone else breaks out to make an aside. The other characters of course are not supposed to know what the character is thinking, but the players do, and should use this.

Variations

+ The thoughts of the players can also be provided by players off-stage. Also known as Alter Ego

Blind Musical

Precis

Players perform a musical with random song titles.

Description

Hard Game.

This is like a musical version of Whose Line? Hand each player 2 or 3 slips of paper containing simple sentences (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.

Director

Precis

The players play a scene with an interfering director.

Description

One player is the director, the others play a short scene provided by the MC. The scene starts with two players and includes the entrance of the third player. The director then interrupts, giving a direction (such as "do it bigger", or "do it more like a romantic comedy", etc) and the scene is replayed incorporating the directions. The director keeps giving directions and repeating the scene until time.

Try to keep the scenes to under a minute, that way the scene can be played 3 times during the game.

Film & TV Styles

Precis

The scene is played and the MC interjects with different styles.

Description

A neutral scene is started. This scene gets interrupted several times by the MC, and then continued in a film/ literature/ drama/ TV-program style provided by the audience. The platform and the story need to continue flawlessly.

Hitch-Hiker

Precis

A driver picks up one hitch-hiker at a time and picks up their mannerisms

Description

Use 4 chairs to build the interior of a car. One player starts driving the car, and another player becomes a hitch hiker. The hitch hiker has a particular character tick or particular emotion, which the driver takes over.

Other hitch hikers join in, each with their own characteristics or emotions, taken over by the driver and the passengers in the car as the hiker joins.

Musical Producers

Precis

Two players describe a Broadway style musical, and the other two act out the highlights.

Description

Hard Game.

Two players are giving a pitch for a musical, describing some highlights. The other players act out the highlights, including the musical numbers.

Scene Replay

Precis

A short scene is played, and then replayed with some changes.

Description

A short scene is played. The scene could be limited by time or dialogue. Then the MC asks the players to replay the scene, with changes such as:

- + A particular emotion. Also known as Emotion Replay
- + An era. Also known as Through the Ages. Also known as Historical Replay
- + A different location
- + A film / TV / literature style. Also known as Style Replay
- + In Gibberish
- + Backwards. Also known as Backwards Scene

Variations

- + Have the scene played by 2 players and replayed by the other 2 players
-

Script Writer

Precis

One player is a script writer, the others play out the scenes as they are written.

Description

One of the players is the Narrator, who has a (mimed) typewriter and starts the scene by reading aloud as they type. As soon as the Narrator has given a few elements, the players take over and start playing the scene. At any point, the Narrator can take over again, perhaps switch to another location, introduce new character, provide tilts or flashbacks.

When a scene goes bad, the Narrator can mime ripping a couple of pages of his story apart, and restart the scene (or the story).

Variations

- + Like the game of the same name, the script writer plays the part of the Baron Munchausen telling one of his many outrageous tales. The other players must act out various scenes from the tale, as the Baron recounts them.
-

Sounds like a Song

Precis

A scene is acted out that periodically breaks into song.

Description

Play a scene; at any time, anyone can stop the scene and say 'Sounds like a song', after which the player(s) sing a song based on the last line that was spoken, or last action that was done. The story then resumes as if nothing has happened.

Space Jump

Precis

A scene is acted out; the scene changes each time a player comes on stage and returns when that player leave again.

Description

One player starts miming an every day activity or routine. The MC calls "Space Jump" and the first player freezes. 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, as soon as "Space Jump" is called, 2 and 3 take on their positions in which they were frozen, and continue their scene. And so on backwards. As soon as Player 1 is back alone in his activity, they need to finish it.

TV Expert

Precis

A TV show with the anchor interviewing someone on the set, and a roving reporter interviewing other characters.

Description

The players are characters in a TV news program. One will be the lead anchor, another is an expert on something who will be interviewed on the set, the third is a reporter at a location interviewing various characters (as mentioned by the anchor or guest) all of which are played by the other player.

Time Warp

Precis

Players perform a story that jumps about in time.

Description

As the scene is played the MC occasionally calls out "Time Warp" and gives a time such as "Ten minutes into the future" or "Three years ago". The scene must switch to that new time with the same characters, either experiencing flow on effects of previous actions or setting up the action they have just down which is now in the future.

Who, What, When, Where and Why?

Precis

1 player has to act out their endowments without directly being told what they are

Description

One player leaves the room. The audience provides:

- + Where we are, and when (what era)
- + Who the player will be (can be a person, or just his occupation)
- + A physical handicap for the player (perhaps they're blind?)
- + A problem the player has

Then a scene is played, in which the other players need to coach player 1 into guessing each of the items above, without giving any explicit clues. Example: scene is played on the Red Square in Moscow, in 2050, where a limping salesman of vacuum cleaners never sells any vacuum cleaners, since his prices are quoted in Roubles instead of Euros.

Unclassified Games (3)

Games that have not been classified yet or that can't be easily played now due to logistical reason.

Game Show

Precis

Players improvise a game show.

Description

The MC provides a title for the show, and one player is the host - the rest are the contestants. The players make up the show and the rules as they go.

Helping Hands

Precis

A scene is played with 2 players acting, and 2 players being the arms.

Description

Scene 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.

Scene to Music

Precis

Play a scene and the mood changes with the music.

Description

Play a neutral scene and the mood or style of the scene changes in reaction to the supplied music.

Tweaks (13)

These are modifications to a game, to make them more challenging (and thus more entertaining to the crowd). Teams that (as judged by the MC) successfully tweak a game get 3 extra points at the end of the match but if they fail then they lose 2 points instead. The MC has final say about the appropriateness and success of any Tweak.

Accents

Precis

Players have to speak in a specific accent.

Description

The players suggest an accent they would like to perform in, and the MC then (in consultation with the audience) tells the players their accent.

Blindfolded

Precis

One or more players are blindfolded for the entire game.

Description

One or more players are blindfolded for the entire game and this fact must be ignored in the story.

Bucket of Water

Precis

One player at a time has their head in a bucket of water.

Description

For discussion.

We need three or four players. During the scene, one player is always off-stage, with his head inside a dry cleaning bag, slowly suffocating. He is not allowed out of the bag until some other player finds a way to exit the scene and 'liberate' the suffocating player. New player puts his head into the bag until freed by another player, and first liberated player finds a way to justify his entrance into the scene.

Death under a Minute

Precis

After the buzzer sounds, the players have 30 seconds to stage a death.

Description

After the buzzer sounds, the players have 30 seconds to stage a death. This death is on top of any other game requirements.

Gibberish

Precis

All players must speak in Gibberish.

Description

All players must speak in Gibberish - an entirely fictitious nonsense language. Harder than it sounds, especially as the players still have to convey meaning and a sense of story to the audience.

Last Line

Precis

A scene is acted out that must end with a line provided by the audience.

Description

Rewrite.

Get a line (any line) from the audience. Players play a scene that concludes with the given line.

Play It Straight

Precis

Play the game dead pan.

Description

The game has to be played straight and serious.

Rules of Play

Precis

The players are given some simple rules they have to follow.

Description

The MC gives the players some simple rules they have to follow during the game. The rules are usually along the lines of:

- + If a certain word is spoken, this action must be taken
 - + If a certain word is spoken, this phrase must be spoken
 - + Certain words or actions are forbidden
-

Sing It

Precis

Players have to sing instead of speak their lines.

Description

Players have to sing instead of speak their lines.

Stretch

Precis

Take a shorter game and play it to fill a longer game slot.

Description

Hard Game.

Play a Medium game to fill the Long game slot, or a Short game to fill the Medium game slot. The chosen game must to played to the time limits of the slot it's played in.

Tied Up

Precis

One player is tied to a chair for the entire game.

Description

One player is tied to a chair for the entire game and this must be worked seamlessly into the story.

Touch to Talk

Precis

The players can only speak if they're touching another player.

Description

The players play a game in which they can only use speech when they touch each other.

Don't go for the easy option of just touching your partner's forearm or shoulder - there are so many ways to touch each other. Try hugging, fighting, baptising, tickling.

Two-Up

Precis

Play 2 games at the same time.

Description

Hard Game.

Choose 2 games to play and play them both at the same time, following all the rules and goals of both.

Glossary (27)

Bell

The ringing of a bell - or a short, light noise, to give warning that the Game is near the end. The Bell will sound 10 seconds before a Short Game finishes, 30 seconds before the end of Medium Games and Long Games.

Blocking

This is where a player flatly denies an Offer or an Element in the scene. This is considered very bad form as it will interrupt the flow of the Story, put your fellow players on the back foot and alienate your audience. Blocking typically uses phrases such as "no it isn't" and other phrases that start with the word no.

Buzzer

A long buzz to signify the end of a Game... if you go on much past the end, the Buzzer will sound more often until you finish.

Canadian Walkon

This is when a player who is offstage enters the stage briefly and remains in the background, purely to support the story being told but without taking focus away from the players already on stage (eg if 2 players are on a life raft in the ocean, then a player could make a short appearance as a shark).

Dead Air

Silence on stage, where nothing is happening; this can interrupt the flow of the Story and alienate your audience. This is usually caused by people thinking of what to do next. If you create the Elements, then this will be less of a problem as you can fill time in with interacting with your Environment.

Elements

The Elements should be present in every improvisation. Create the Elements so that the audience can see them. The more Elements that appear in a scene, the more depth your story will have and the more believable it will be for the audience.

Fundamental Skills

Fundamental Skills that help an improvisation be smooth and entertaining for both the audience and the players.

Game

Games are defined in the Mission: Improv-able handbook and are either Short, Medium or Long in duration. Each type of Game has a different focus and uses different skills to make work.

Gibberish

Gibberish is an entirely fictitious and nonsense language. When speaking Gibberish, you are still trying to convey meaning to the other players and the audience, you are just not allowed to use any actual words from any real language (even Klingon).

Hard Game

This is a game that is deemed to be very challenging. Because of their difficulty, these games bring a 3 point bonus (added at the end of the Match).

Only the first team in a round has the option of a Hard Game, and the second team has the option of taking the Hard Game as well (and getting the bonus too) or choosing another (non-Hard) game.

Invitation

This is where one player makes an Offer to another player.

Judging

There are 3 judges:

- + Entertainment Judge - This Judge scores on how well the Judges and the Audience were entertained
- + Technique Judge - This Judge scores on how much good technique the team showed during the game
- + Story Judge - This Judge scores on how coherent and consistent the Story was and how well it matched what the MC asked for

Long Games

Games designed to be about 4 minutes long with a 30 second warning. The focus of these slower paced games is on keeping a consistent story that holds the audience's interest.

Match

A Match is made up of 3 Rounds - a round of Short Games, a round of Medium Games and a round of Long Games. A Match will end up with both teams having a score out of 100, the highest score being considered the winner of the Match. A Match can take 45 minutes with an audience.

Medium Games

Games designed to be about 2 minutes long with a 30 second warning. The focus of these games is on keeping the story consistent whilst maintaining a quick pace.

Neutral Scene

A neutral scene is one that does not have any particular theme or flavour. Usually they are used to start a Game that will be interrupted and given new themes throughout.

Performance Skills

Performance Skills round out a scene and help the audience "get into it" as well as letting the players show off.

Pimping

Pimping is an Escalation that is one-upping another player - it is usually a playful way of getting your fellow players into a bit of trouble.

Round

A round is two teams playing one game each. The two teams draw a card and the team with the highest card chooses the game but has to go first.

Scoring

Each Judge scores each Game out of 10 that are then added together. At the end of the Match, Hard Game and Tweak bonuses are added (or subtracted) giving a score out of 100.

Short Games

Games designed to be about 60 seconds long with a 10 second warning. The focus of these games is on wit and a fast paced story building.

Skills Exercises

A series of typically short games, and other activities, designed to demonstrate or practice specific skills.

Tie Breaker

A tie breaker happens when two teams have the same score at the end of a Match. The MC chooses a Short Game for the two teams to play.

Tweaks

These are modifications to a game, to make them more challenging (and thus more entertaining to the crowd). Teams that (as judged by the MC) successfully tweak a game get 3 extra points at the end of the match but if they fail then they lose 2 points instead.

The MC has final say about the appropriateness and success of any Tweak.

Unclassified Games

Games that have not been classified yet or that can't be easily played now due to logistical reason.

Warm-Up Exercises

Group activities to loosen people up and get them used to improvisation and getting involved in the action and doing silly things.

Wimping

Wimping is where an Offer has been made, and the player avoids it (usually to dodge a difficult Pimp that the player does not want to deal with). This is not necessarily Blocking but it is still bad form.