

IMPROV TO STORY

SPRINGBOARD
FOR CREATORS

REAL
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LAB

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This is a collection of exercises used inside the **Real Actor's Lab Original Project Class** that have proved extremely valuable in the development of our past group projects. Pick and choose the exercises that feel the most useful for your particular project and always feel free to adapt to best suit your needs. These exercises can be used on their own if you wish to build as a solo-creator or you can invite a group to join in on the process (whether or not the group ends up being involved in the piece/production). In the Original Project Class we have used most of these exercises as both group and solo improv and writing experiments and most can be adapted to work in many ways.

TOP FIVE CHALLENGES FACING SOCIETY

Make a list of what you feel are the top five challenges facing society today. If you can do this in a group, ask your members to do the same and see if you can boil all these challenges to one list. This can be a powerful list and help uncover important themes you may wish to write about.

- If you could choose just one of the issues from above to devote the rest of your life toward solving -- which would it be?
- Write or improvise a monologue or scene from the POV of a character who is trying to convince a person or group of people of anything at all, big or small, related to the issue. Include a strong objective as well as obstacles and stakes. Don't feel like you have to spell it all out. It doesn't have to be profound. Create details and specifics, avoid being general. Know who these characters are, where they are and who they are talking to.
- What other scenarios might you create around the top five challenges listed?

ANGRY, SCARED, HOPEFUL & ASHAMED

Write or speak for 3 minutes about what makes you angry, scared, hopeful and then ashamed. Set a timer and go for three minutes on each emotion.

MUSEUM EXERCISE

Write a short monologue inspired by a person or character in a piece of art, painting, drawings and photographs all work well. Find an image that speaks to you. In non-pandemic times going to a museum is ideal, but not necessary.

You can write the dialogue as if this person is talking to another someone else but it could also be an inner monologue. There are no rules. Don't try to be funny. See what grabs your attention in the picture and let that inspire you to jump off from there. If you are working in a group, have everyone share their pieces and images. See what works and what doesn't. Could two of these characters be in a scene together? Could several actors improvise a scene together as these new characters?

ALMOST STRANGERS

Think of someone in your life you don't know very well or know only peripherally--a doorman, a postal worker, a grocery store bagger, the vendor at the farmer's market, your downstairs neighbor, etc. What questions do you have for them? Grievances? Apologies? What do you wish they knew about you? What do you hope for them? Write or improvise a monologue as this person. Let it flow and see where it leads. Perhaps it's a scene?

LEAD WITH A POINT ON YOUR BODY

Choose a point on your body to lead with and play with increasing and decreasing the levels of exaggeration. Do this for a while. As you explore leading from this place, let this center lead you into a character improvisation. What kind of person leads from their nose? Their hips? Their toes? Be free. What does their voice sound like? Avoid generalizations, let the improv come from your inner instincts. I once created a really fantastic character who was deathly afraid of objects falling on them from out of the sky simply by doing this exercise and leading with my forehead.

PARTNER WORK

The next section of exercises will be best explored with more than one actor / creator, but always feel free to adapt if you need to and to play multiple characters on your own.

- Already have a cast but no story? Brainstorm 10 + reasons why this particular group of people have come together.
- Have a location in mind? Brainstorm 10 + site-specific scenarios specific to this location.

HIGH STAKES IMPROV SCENARIOS

It's really important to get your way. Keep the stakes high. You might offer 30 seconds to discuss the brief circumstances and then have the improvisers begin the scene straightaway.

- **A and B know they screwed something up together. Partner A wants to come clean and partner B wants to keep it a secret.**
- **A's character is obsessed with getting a goal and it's destroying a relationship with B. Stay committed to objective for as long as you can. (discuss circumstances, define the relationship and the goal)**

ONE LINE PROMPTS

The following prompts can be used for solo-creators or in a group setting. I have used these prompts as writing exercises and as jumping off points for verbal, improvised storytelling. The stories can be real or fictional. Avoid feeling pressure to be profound or funny or anything. Just explore. If the prompts are done in improv form then I recommend repeating the prompt out loud again and again until the story comes. It can also be helpful to walk and move your arm in a circular motion (as if you are gesturing "again and again") as you repeat the line until the words of the story begin to flow. An alternate version is to explore the prompts as a famous person or someone you can picture or know well.

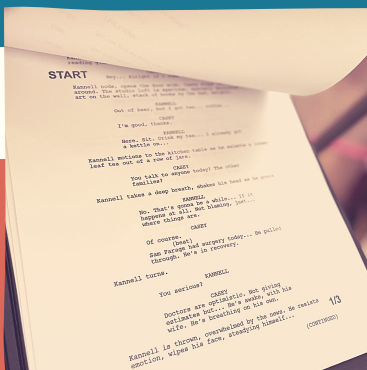
- I lied because...
- The last time I saw him/her...
- I felt the most lost when...
- My biggest fail was...
- If I knew then what I know now...
- Just as my flight took off, I discovered this shocking note under my seat, it said...
- I knocked louder and louder on the door but nobody answered...
- I'm outraged because...
- Since I have just 10 days left to live...
- I said my final words and I left.
- It needed to be cleaned, the police were going to be there any minute. And after that I was an instant celebrity...



What prompts can you come up with on your own?

HIGH STAKES IMPROV SCENARIOS

- A is no longer going to continue on in the family run business. Partner A set up this conversation to tell B they are pulling out. B does everything in their power to keep A from leaving.
- A is making plans for their own, future funeral/celebration of life, B hates the plan and has a completely different idea about what it should look like .
- A and B went to a funeral for their father (as strangers) and found out they are siblings.
- A regrets joining the “experiment” and has begun to sabotage it for B who strongly believes in its benefit for humankind. Use your imagination.
- A and B are a married couple. A is at a hotel, they are Zooming. A tells B they want a divorce for the first time. B does not want to separate and fights to keep them together.
- A is B’s birth parent and they are meeting for the first time. B initiated the meetup. A has suffered some sort of great loss and is weary of heartbreak again, afraid to develop a relationship with B. B discovers during their meeting how much they need A in their life.
- A wants B to join the revolution, use your imagination. B is deeply worried and reluctant.



ONE SENTENCE STORY

Two or more actors
improvise a story by going
one word OR one
sentence at a time. See
where it leads.

30 YEARS

Partner A is the person Partner B will become in 30 years.

- For A: What do you wish you could tell your younger self? What mistakes do you wish you could shield them from, what are their feelings you're glad you've released since being their age? What's happened between then and now, whether it's factual or something more abstract?
- For B: What are your hopes/plans/aspirations/fears for getting older and moving into the future? What do you expect to look like, to feel like, to sound like, and does the expectation match the reality, knowing (or guessing) how it seems for your partner?
- Write or improvise for as long as you want (go deep, though, if you're able!). You can use the questions as jumping off points but feel very free to explore beyond. Be compassionate and honest, innocent and unafraid. Don't worry about mixing fact with fiction—perhaps sometimes you're writing as yourself, other times as a potential character.



MAD LIB IMPROV

Each actor brainstorms an item for as many of the categories as you wish based on the worksheet found here:

bit.ly/MadLibImprov (make a copy and start your own)

Shuffle the items, you now have a list of character attributes.

Daydream, free associate for each item. Write or improvise a short monologue based on the information you have and share it with the group.

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