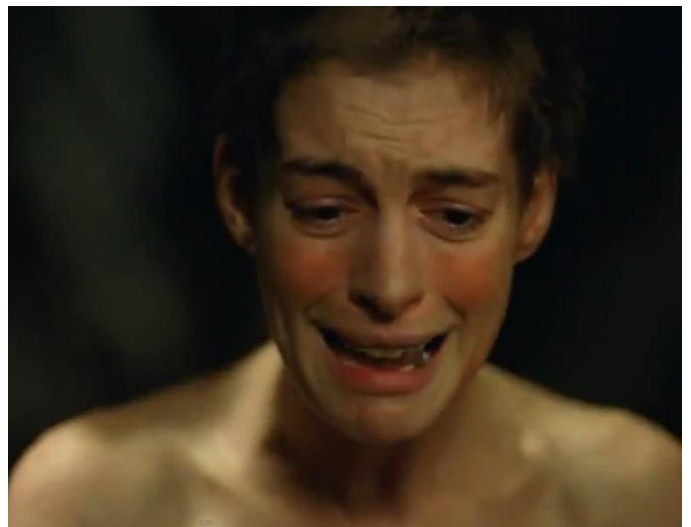


Play Study and Character Development

Scene Work:

It is important to fully understand the context of the scene within the play from which it originated. For example, if you found Maggie's famous speech from Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in a monologue book, you might think it is just an angry speech from a jealous wife to her husband. However, if you read the play in its entirety, you will discover a desperate woman clinging to a love and a way of life that were never really hers to begin with. This allows you as an actor to make more interesting and complex choices with your performance.



Things to keep in mind when creating a scene:

- Approach the scene **enthusiastically and confidently**
- **Well prepared** – be sure you have rehearsed thoroughly. You should know exactly what you are doing and saying.
- **Good energy**. This doesn't necessarily mean big and loud, but that you are committed, focused and participating fully in the scene.
- **Project, speak clearly** and be confident in your delivery of your lines.
- Use appropriate **non-verbal communication** – body language gestures, facial expressions to support your spoken lines.
- **Realistic, believable movement** – Don't just cross the stage to do something. Give each movement purpose.
- **Good timing** – keep the pace moving, use pauses or stillness when appropriate
- **Create a well-developed, consistent and believable character**
- **Begin and end your scene clearly and strongly**. Don't just finish with "Umm... that's it." Clearly tell the lights or curtain person what to watch for to indicate the scene is over. Stay still, or exit in character, depending on what makes sense for the scene.
- **Memorization:** Your scripts should be well memorized. As an actor, it's difficult to focus on creating an interesting character, your voice & body language, and details like timing and line delivery when you are still trying to remember your lines. Make memorization a priority.

Learning to Memorize

There are many ways to memorize. Using a variety of techniques to memorize will help you be successful.

Most people have many of their favourite songs memorized. There are two reasons for this. The first is that things are often easier to remember when they have a specific **rhythm** and when they rhyme. We also tend to listen to our favourite songs over and over again. This **repetition** also helps with memorization. In order to memorize a script, you need to take the time to work on it over and over again.

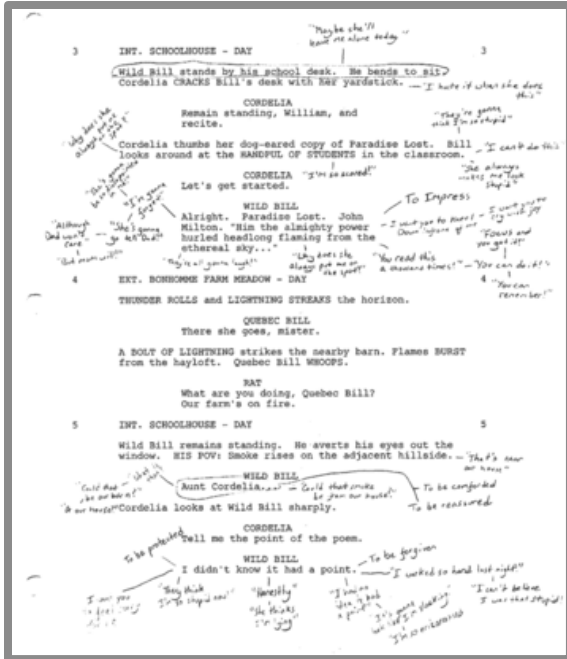
Knowing and understanding the story well also helps with memorization. Take the time when working on a script to understand what is going on with your character, and the other characters. You need to be clear on the plot and what the key pieces of exposition are.



Some Memorization techniques:

- **Repetition is key.** Whatever techniques you choose, know that repetition will be an important part of memorizing your script.
- **Record your lines** onto your phone or computer and listen to them over and over again while riding the bus, playing on the computer, etc.
- **Write your lines** down in a notebook. Writing helps with retention. I like re-writing the lines over top of each other many times. Writing them out several times (like Bart Simpson writing his lines out on the board in detention), is another good option.
- **Use creative devices** for memorizing particularly challenging parts. For example, try connecting the last word of one line to the first word of the next line. There are many ways to do this. Be creative.
- If the scene is written in a difficult language or pattern (perhaps even Shakespearian English), try **rewriting the lines in your own words**, then converting it back. This will help with understanding.
- Once your scene is memorized, if you find yourself needing to peek at the same places repeatedly, you may wish to highlight those in a different colour and spend more time working on just those spots.

Rehearsals and Performances



Check with the teacher about what the specific timeline will be for this particular performance, but use this guide for ensuring all parts of the rehearsal process are covered. There is more to developing a scene or play than just walking through the scene and memorizing.

Day 1: Rehearse your scene using your script. Mark ideas in the script using a pencil. Clarify any confusion if you don't understand a word or part of the script. Start working on memorization.

Day 2: Plan and record blocking. Decide on details – when will you sit, when will you stand and cross. Work on memorization. You will probably need to work on memorization outside of class time as well.

Day 3: Continue to rehearse using your script. Ensure all of the planned blocking is working – make changes if needed. Make it a goal to get “off book” today. Put those scripts down and focus on getting the lines right.

Day 4: Sit down with your script again. Now that everything is basically worked out, it is important to double check that nothing is missing. Work in props and consider costumes. Start working on details – business to bring your performance to the next level. For example, if your scene takes place in a home, perhaps one of the characters is folding laundry, or making a snack while the scene is going on. Make it connect to the scene and help make it more realistic. Make sure your characters are well-developed and that you are using all of your acting techniques to the best of your ability (voice, body language, facial expressions).

Day 5: Have someone else watch your scene and critique it, and do the same for them. Thank them for the critique, and then with your group, decide if you want to change anything based on their criticism. Spend the rest of your rehearsal time polishing (perfecting) your scene for performances.



When are you ready?

Your scene will be ready for performance when it feels like second nature to you. It must be 100% memorized, including lines and actions. Double check that you are following the basic rules of acting, such as being loud and clear, being visible to the audience, and staying true to the script and the author's intent. Most importantly, the scene must have good energy throughout – even during silent pauses.

Acting:

There is much more to acting than just reciting lines with emotion.

Imagine going to a performance where a young actor is playing an elderly man. At times he is hunched over like a very old man whose spine is crooked. But perhaps he forgets to maintain this posture, and sometimes the audience sees a 25 year old “acting” like an older man. Perhaps the elderly man is from France, but the actor is not confident in his dialect, so the character sounds as though he is from some undiscovered country between France and England, with a bit of German influence. When an actor’s performance isn’t complete, his performance becomes noticeable to the audience. They are continually reminded that it is a play. However, when an actor is polished and comfortable in his own performance, the audience forgets that they are at a play and they become involved in the characters’ lives.

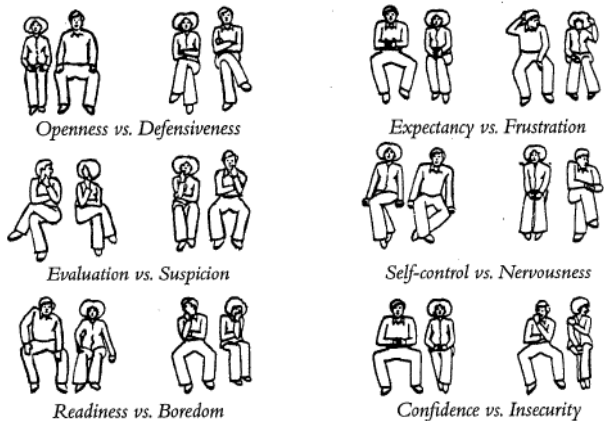


Voice:

Keep in mind the things that we’ve talked about already in voice. To improve your voice control, work on your breathing. Practice tongue twisters to improve your diction. Play with changes in your pitch and tone to expand what your voice can do – practice this by imitating a variety of voices.

Body:

Interpret the character that you are playing. Consider their age, emotions, health, social status, job etc. Create a posture and body language that connects all of these elements together.



Engaging Approachable Body Language

Imagine a coal miner in his forties. He has six children and just found out the mine is shutting down and he will lose his job. He has mined for over twenty years and his health is suffering. Now imagine a banker in his forties, well-off, two children, fast sports car, tennis player. Can you see how they would stand, walk, gesture and carry out everyday tasks? They would move very differently.

There are three basic types of stage movement:

- **Blocking** is the act of planning and carrying out stage directions. Keep blocking natural and motivated.
- **Gestures** are hand movements actors use to communicate or support communication.
- **Business** is the little things that an actor does onstage to appear naturally “busy,” such as a painter cleaning her supplies, covering her paintings, and washing the paint from her hands in a wash basin.

Keep in mind:

- Body language
- Facial expressions
- Posture – the way one holds his or her body
- Pace – how fast or slow a character moves
- Rhythm – the beat to which a character moves (bouncy, strutting, slinking etc.)
- Quirks and Habits – little things characters do to make them unique (adjusting glasses, twirling hair, taking the steps two at a time, etc.)

Developing a Character:

When you get a script (or when you are developing one yourself), it is important to consider all aspects of the character. Some actors like to go so far as to create an entire backstory for the character – knowing their entire life history in rich detail. You need to at least understand what key points of their lives brought them to this moment that the story within the play is being told. You need to consider their voice and body language and how you can communicate who this person is to the audience. You need to understand exactly what they are saying and why they are saying it. You must know this character as well as you know yourself (if not better).

Most of all – have fun with it. Enjoy creating a complex and fully-realized person, and enjoy telling their story through your performance.