

5 Things You Need To Act a Scene

Relationship

Not just defined by titles: brother, lover, friend, etc.

It's the primary way your character feels toward the other: envy, jealous, love, resentment, hatred, etc.

This will help you understand what keeps your character in the room/relationship with the other person.

Beats & Transitions

You must identify where changes happen in the scene: someone reveals new information, asks a more intimate or aggressive question, dodges or changes the subject, etc. AND changes tactics in trying to get what YOU want ...make strong choices: intimidate, con, seduce, appease, avoid, etc.

Emotional Prep

Your scene will *live or die* based on your emotional prep.

Joe Palese's 7 emotions: love, joy/happiness, sadness, jealousy, fear, anger, hate.

Like a painter, these are the supplies that an actor colours their character/scene with.

Done 5-15 minutes before you start, use sensory work (5 senses) to imagine a very personal situation that gets you in the emotional place your character would be in at the start of the scene (you need to know what happened to your character right before your scene, and the main issue they're dealing with). Use a situation from your life that you are able to re-visit, or an imaginary one. This primes your emotions and gets you "in" the scene. In most cases, it should feel like it costs you something to go there, like walking on a tightrope; but not something you haven't dealt with, so that you can get on with your day/life after the scene.

Sanford Meisner has a sign in his NYC acting school that says, "No acting please." This is where you make your scene very personal, so that it's real and matters to you. It keeps you out of *pretending* to have emotion. Don't try to push emotion to happen; if the scene needs more, do the sensory work with a higher-stakes prep. Also, don't start your prep more than 15 minutes before performing, or you might burn it out and it may not be there for your scene.

You should be "fully loaded" with your emotional prep. Then choose, moment by moment (thinking as the character) how much you sit on it (repress/reveal).

Practice this in private and in public, especially with emotions you have difficulty connecting to. Like going to the gym, this is your emotional exercise which allows you to get stronger & more flexible with your range & availability of emotions. The right music, movies, theatre, etc, can also help affect & inspire you emotionally.

Once you start the scene, stay open to allow your emotions to change based on what's happening in the scene; play your Objective and Connect!...

Objective

The main thing your character wants, needs or desires in this scene from the other character.

This keeps you focused on what the scene is actually about.

You also need to understand & connect to the consequence of not winning your objective so you know what's at stake.

You must fight to win this objective and you have to make it matter to you personally, so the stakes should always be of very high importance.

Make sure you keep trying different ways to win your objective (providing it suits the character), like we do in real life with tactics like: intimidation, guilt trips, lecturing, reasoning, pouting, withdrawal, etc. (see Beats & Transitions).

If your character doesn't win their objective at the end of the scene, you have to fight for it as though you can win, and then react to losing only once you've lost (Ivana Chubbuck's website has good stuff on this).

Connecting

An actor is focused/connected to 1 of 3 things: the other character, yourself/feelings, objects/tasks.

1. Connecting to your scene partner

This is where you Listen to your scene partner and React to what they do, say, and how they behave.

Reacting is much easier if you memorize your lines that way: knowing what comment your line is a response to. If you didn't memorize this way, the other character's lines will throw you off of your lines, and you will get stuck in your head, thinking about your next line.

Stella Adler said, "*Listen until it hurts*," which means it's not a passive thing, but active & focused discovery, taking in what is said to you and letting it affect you ...listen with your whole heart, body, soul.

As a rule (there are exceptions), you always stay connected to your scene partner even if the other two are in play...

2. Connecting to yourself/feelings

This is when a character gets more internal about their experience, and so pays less attention to their scene partner, such as getting lost in recalling a vivid memory or daydream, pain, etc.

3. Connecting to objects/tasks

This is when a character gets more external about their experience, and so pays less attention to their scene partner because they are preoccupied with an important task, or distracted by the significance of an object (Uta Hagen's Endowment).

Tips...

Warm up your body & voice before a scene. Loosen up so you have access to your emotions & body.

Regardless of how big/small the role, your character is always the leading man/woman in their own life.

Any time you refer to someone else, you must have a specific person from your own life for that person.

Don't rush: enjoy & own your space.

"If you think like your character, you can do no wrong" -JP