

## **GO AGAINST THE VOICE OF REASON**

In our everyday lives, it often makes sense to follow the voice of reason. In real life, if your friend says "I'm ugly", you may tell them they aren't, even if they are. Why? Perhaps because you feel it's not important, you want them to feel better, you want to preserve your friendship, and so on. On stage, a different logic may apply. Audiences come to the theater to escape the mundane logical world, they sometimes want to see the barriers lifted. You may respond to "I'm ugly" with "you know, I've been meaning to say something...". You may rob a bank because someone tells you to. You may play sycophant to your abuser. In short, you may do things onstage the real you wouldn't do. Try going against the voice of reason, it's liberating. You don't have to justify your actions much, sometimes "I don't know why I'm doing this, but ..." is sufficient.

## **GIVE YOURSELF A SUGGESTION WHEN YOU DON'T ASK THE AUDIENCE FOR ONE \***

We all know scenes are better when you enter them with an attitude, activity, or emotion -- so just pick one for yourself either randomly or in response to the other character, and you'll have a better scene.

## **GET BEHIND THE STORY**

Try not to think about yourself in longform. Instead, always ask yourself "how can I contribute to the larger picture?" and "what is my function in this piece?". A structured longform piece, like an episode of the Simpsons, should have a main character.

## **COMMENCE WITH CHARACTERIZING ACTIONS**

Characterizing actions are those which define a character's occupation or role, such as a teacher erasing a blackboard, a janitor cleaning up, or a child playing with toys, are good for starting scenes because they provide your fellow actors something to build on. They say a lot about what is going on and thus help the scene get to the point faster. Note that the scene need not (and often should not) be about drinking a beer or chopping lettuce just because that's what one of the characters is doing. Two people can start a scene engaged in an action together. By putting status into this two-person action, a lot of information can be communicated very quickly. For example, consider a scene which starts with one character hitting tennis balls, and the other chasing around after them. The audience knows what the status is and where the characters are before the scene even starts.

## **BE VERY SPECIFIC**

If you're going to say "nice car!", why not make it "wow, a 1979 Volvo Station Wagon!" If we know the Volvo owner is a 21 year old woman, suddenly we can visualize her (well, maybe you can't, but I can: she has dried blue and white oil paint on her fingers, wears an extra large men's dress shirt as a smock, and has long, straight, chestnut-brown hair). A more vivid image opens up a rich, new world. Adjectives accelerate scene development.

## **ADD HISTORY \***

The swiftest way to add reality and depth to a scene is to have the characters call up specifics from their common history. A simple exchange such as:

--"Are you trying to get us arrested?"

--“Like the time we ran naked through the Yale-Princeton lacrosse game?”

though just a few words, provides a great deal of information. The audience and actors now can infer that the characters are college boys, they are troublemakers, they are educated, they are in New England, they drink to excess, they have police records, they are old friends, and much more. With one sentence, the amount of information the improvisers can now draw on has grown greatly.

Some improv teachers suggest staying in the present tense as often as possible. I disagree. I think, however, that you should avoid talking too much about the future. Things in the future might happen, they might shape your characters. Things in the past did happen, they did shape your characters.

### **ENTER AND EXIT WITH PURPOSE**

Entering, exiting and staying put should have a reason, be justified. This is the purpose of playing the game Entrances and Exits (go figure) in rehearsal. Don't just say "OK, bye" and walk out of a scene. Give a reason. Unjustified exits tend to be a problem novices have.

### **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF \***

This simply means going into every scene with an activity or emotion. This does several things i) it gets the scene going faster ii) it provides information which your partner can use iii) and, perhaps most importantly, it gives you something to do which makes the audience comfortable. What do I mean "comfortable"? If the audience sees you standing there doing nothing, they think "oh no, he doesn't know what to do. He's worried. He's confused". Then they feel bad. The audience wants the actor to succeed. The moment you launch into an activity (baking bread, counting money, sweeping the floor) or an emotion (hope, love, pride), the audience thinks "oh, I see. They know what's going on. They have a plan" and then they relax and enjoy the show. Of course, you don't really have a plan, and you don't really know what's going on. As Mick Napier said: "improvisation is the art of being completely O.K. with not knowing what the f-- you're doing." In more polite English, the best improvisers appear completely confident even when they have no idea what's going on.

### **status -**

Whoever has influence or control over a situation has the higher status in the scene. Many pre-defined stock relationships, such as, judge / plaintiff have status build right into them. Status can easily invert and this can become the plot of entire stories, a la Trading Places.