

IHSSA Speech Coaches Convention 2021

The process described below has been of great help to students working on a two-person scene. Select about a page or less of the scene for this exercise. Not only is the activity a great aid in memorization, but also advances the scene physically and emotionally.

SCENE BUILDING

*Learning to Listen and React
Absorbing Dialogue
Character Development*

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- Read scene aloud. Just the words. Flat. No emotion.
- Whisper the scene.
- Read the scene with your backs to each other.
- Read the scene very close and facing each other.
- Read the scene with a large distance between each other.
- One reads, the other pantomimes his/her responses. Reverse.
- Do the entire scene in pantomime.
- Do the scene without scripts .

Once the process is completed, actors most likely will have their lines committed to memory.

Students should then work together (with or without the director present) to develop the scene further creating the blocking and use of props, if necessary.

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Invest in the development of your actors by taking an hour from rehearsal and create a workshop to define and develop physical comfort through improving character gestures.

GESTURES WORKSHOP

The following notes are from *Moving Parts* by Jon Jory. Dramatics magazine published by the Educational Theatre Association. May 2016.

Types of gestures: **Emotional**

EX: Anger (spinning and punching the air when you learn your car was stolen)

Task

EX: Something you do. Serving drinks. Cleaning a room. Hanging up a coat.

Objective

EX: You want someone to leave because they're drunk. Help them up and out.

What gestures does your character have?

Many actor gestures are small and repetitive (uninteresting)

1. Many gestures are small—"stabbing" hands in the air, and returning hands to your side
Practice Larger: Pick a line or two. Gestures must be over your head.
I ask each actor to find at least one moment in performance they have an "overhead" gesture.
2. Most gestures are round or staccato
Practice Variety: Pick a 6 or 8 line scene with someone. One does round gestures—the other does staccato. Switch.
3. Many gestures start and end at the hips ("Gunfighter" acting)
Practice beginning and ending gestures: Pick another scene. When the gesture is done, leave your hands/arms where the gesture ends. Then on the next gesture, start from that position and end the gesture in another position. Start the next gesture from there, and so on.
4. Body Positions Your body position is a massive gesture (Full-body acting)
Practice: Sit in a chair 9 different ways. Now sit in a chair 9 more different ways as you speak improvise a short monologue. This is not a circus act. Make the movement/position believable.
5. Gestures are more than hands, arms, and body.
Practice: Do another scene or improvisation with a few lines with a partner. Use **intuitive** gestures (natural) and **intentional** gestures (pointing, drawing attention to something, poking your finger into the palm of your other hand for emphasis, etc.). Demonstrate the differences of intuitive and intentional gestures before you do the scene. Then, do the scene again using your feet and legs for gestures. This may be pretty comedic, but strive for believability.

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Actor's Script Analysis: Character

Name _____

All decisions about your characterization should be grounded in your script. Carefully analyze the script to determine how the dialogue and actions of your character and other characters reveal aspects of your character. Begin by filling in the chart below with the appropriate information about your character in each column. Also consider any physical/movement clues about your character as you study the script. Include script page numbers for reference.

WHAT THE PLAYWRIGHT SAYS ABOUT MY CHARACTER	WHAT MY CHARACTER SAYS ABOUT SELF	WHAT OTHER CHARACTERS SAY ABOUT MY CHARACTER

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CIRCLE CHARACTER

DIRECTIONS: Up to 5 actors (could be as few as three. Or challenge yourselves: Seven?) First actor is given a line to speak. Clarity of “character” should be evident: voice, face, body. Second actor recites the same line (or ad libs a response?) and demonstrates “growth” of character. For example: defined voice (tempo, pacing, tone, etc.) distinct facial expression, defined physical presence or movement.

(NOTE: In working with students on this exercise, it’s best not to coach students to be “bigger.” In fact, what worked best was to start “big” and next student go small, and then the next smaller. Instead of bigger, we focused on the word “defined.” Realistic characters were stressed rather than “over the top” approaches.)

Students then wanted to be coached before they established a character and stated the line. Students were asked to deliver the starting line using a single descriptor, such as greedy, frightened, proudly, sarcastically, and other such descriptors.

Lines to Establish Character

“I brought you flowers.”

“We’re out of sugar.”

“I’m not cleaning that up.”

“So what if I ate it.”

“You won’t believe what happened at work.”

“Look what I found in my locker.”

“I just found a \$20.00 bill in the couch.”

“I’m worried about Grandpa.”

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