

SYLLABUS
Movement for the Actor
Spring 2012

INSTRUCTOR:

Ryan Michael Decker • [REDACTED] • [REDACTED] • [REDACTED]

Individual communication about your work is part of my teaching. I am happy to make appointments to talk about class work, your individual progress, your work in productions, or additional voice, movement, and acting coaching.

CLASS MEETINGS:

[REDACTED] • [REDACTED] • [REDACTED]

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course offers a playground in which you can recognize and expand your creative imagination and impulse(s) – particularly through physical expression. You will learn and apply techniques to free your body (including breath), mind and emotions, and you'll use these techniques in character development. You'll create performance pieces on your own and in collaboration with others. You'll learn movement principles from a variety of approaches, including: Bogart & Landu's Viewpoints, Laban's Effort Actions, Chekhov Work, Reflexology, The Feldenkrais Method®, and others.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- *The Inner Game of Tennis*, W. Timothy Gallwey
- *Awareness Through Movement*, Moshe Feldenkrais

COURSE OUTCOMES:

A student who successfully completes this course will understand:

- That natural alignment contributes to a reduction in tension
- That freedom from tension allows greater vulnerability, freedom to follow impulses, and more spontaneous expression: i.e. more compelling acting
- That you can shift alignment and reduce tension through movement work and self-use choices
- That you have habits of thought as well as habits of behavior that influence each other
- Basic anatomy in a way that contributes to practical self-knowledge

A student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

- Physically warm-up yourself for class, performance, or auditions
- Help yourself stay physically free and aligned
- Apply the work in performance by:
 - Speaking from embodied stillness
 - Using space creatively in performance
 - Using movement to develop and inhabit character
 - Making bold, specific physical choices in acting
- Create movement-based ensemble improvisations

ACCOMPLISHING OUTCOMES (HOW GRADES ARE DETERMINED):

- **Conceptual Information (30%)**
 - ✓ Response paper on *The Inner Game of Tennis* (10%)
 - ✓ Response paper on *Awareness Through Movement* (10%)
 - ✓ Cumulative Anatomy Test (6%)
 - ✓ Additional Quizzes (4%)
- **Performance (40%)**
 - ✓ Expressive Self Performance (20%)
 - ✓ Physical Characterization Performance (20%)
- **Class Participation & Professionalism (15%)** (see next page)
- **Personal Development (15%)** (see next page)

CLASS PARTICIPATION & PROFESSIONALISM:

- **Be prepared**
 - ✓ Prepare for class
 - ✓ Be in the room, focused and warming-up at the start of class or before
 - ✓ Make time for work outside of class
- **Be willing to learn**
 - ✓ Value your own work – you get out of it what you put into it
 - ✓ Jump in to exercises without reservations or judgment
 - ✓ Remain open to criticism and eschew defensiveness
 - ✓ Dare to use personal emotion and take risks in your work
 - ✓ Stay in the room
- **Develop and embody professionalism**
 - ✓ Honor class policies, treat others and the space with respect
 - ✓ Focus on class topics during class
 - ✓ Engage in clear discussion
 - ✓ Focus on classmates' work and offer pertinent feedback

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- **Areas of focus**
 - ✓ Natural alignment
 - ✓ Reduction of unnecessary tension, habitual gestures, and extraneous movement
 - ✓ Performing with embodied stillness
 - ✓ Making bold choices
 - ✓ Performing with specificity
- **Dedicate yourself to your own improvement**
 - ✓ Reflect on your own process and set goals
 - ✓ Take the action required to meet your goals (including movement work, warm-ups, work with classmates, rehearsals, consultations with me, etc.)

GRADE GUIDELINES:

- A:** Outstanding work that is significantly above basic requirements for the assignment, shows significant personal development, and demonstrates a high level of commitment. Work surpasses that of others in class
- B:** Above average work that goes beyond basic requirements for the assignment, shows personal development, and demonstrates commitment
- C:** Work that meets basic requirements of the assignment
- D:** Work that is worthy of credit, even though it does not fully meet the basic requirements
- F:** Work fails to meet basic requirements

OVERVIEW OF SCHEDULE, PERFORMANCE AND DUE DATES:

- **The Actor's Instrument, Ensemble (5 weeks):**
Learn basic warm-up; Explore natural alignment, reducing tension (Awareness Through Movement lessons, etc.); Explore Body/Mind awareness, process, and presence; Explore Viewpoints; Read and discuss The Inner Game of Tennis, write paper
* ***The Inner Game of Tennis*** response paper due: **Tuesday, 7 February**
- **The Expressive Self (5 weeks):**
Learn Feldenkrais Warm-up; Continue Awareness Through Movement lessons; Explore Laban Effort Actions; Explore additional self-discovery and expressive exercises; Read and discuss Awareness Through Movement
* **MIDTERM/Expressive Self performance-in-progress:** **Thursday, 23 February**
* **Expressive Self performance:** **Thursday, 8 March**
- **Physical Characterization (5 weeks):**
Continue Awareness Through Movement lessons; Continue to read and discuss Awareness Through Movement, write paper; Explore Michael Chekhov Work; Explore additional physical characterization exercises
* ***Awareness Through Movement*** response paper due: **Tuesday, 10 April**
* **FINAL/Physical Characterization performance:** **Thursday, 3 May, 8:00 AM**

CLASS POLICIES:

Attendance: Attendance at all classes is required. Movement work is an experiential process: you cannot learn if you are not present. More than 2 absences (for any reason) will result in your grade dropping one mark (e.g. "B-" becomes "C+"), and continues with each subsequent absence.

Promptness: Class begins at the stated time with no grace period for lateness. Two late arrivals equate one absence and will affect your grade accordingly. Being prompt also means showing up ready to work, with the assignment complete, text memorized and dressed appropriately. If you need to change clothes, do so before class begins or you will be considered late.

Missed Work: If you miss a class, you miss an essential part of the work and opportunity required for your learning and development – and your grade. You are still responsible for understanding the work. This means that if you show up after an absence and don't know about a quiz, you have to take it anyway. If you miss a particular class exercise, you may need to schedule a session with me to learn the work: this will not remove the absence from your record. If you miss a class during which your performance was scheduled, your performance is due on the day you return to class. If you are unable to perform the day you return, your grade will drop one mark for each day it is late (e.g. "A-" becomes "B+"). If you are ill or absent for another reason on the day a paper is due, the paper is still due. The grade of your paper will drop one mark for *each day* (not class meetings) it is late. For instance, if your paper was due at class time and you turn it in at 10:00 PM the same day, your earned grade of "C" would drop to a "C-".

Warming-up: You are *required* to be in the room, starting a personal warm-up at the beginning of class – and preferably before class. This is part of your grade, but more importantly, it is an essential part of developing the focus required for self-awareness (and for a career in acting).

Focus and Participation: Each person learns from others and contributes to others' learning. Any student who is inattentive, disruptive, or disrespectful can expect a very low grade, and may be told to leave class. If you are told to leave, you will be marked absent for the day.

Be Willing to Learn: Acting, especially movement and voice work, is very personal – it's work on the Self. Taking in feedback can sometimes be uncomfortable. Do your best to remain open to feedback and criticism and avoid putting up defenses. If you successfully deflect or argue against criticism, you have successfully avoided an opportunity to grow. Emotion comes up in our work – you may become sad or angry during class, you will sometimes be frustrated. You may feel overwhelming joy. Allowing these emotions to be present while you continue to focus and work is how you develop emotional range as an actor. Therefore, you must not leave the room if you feel upset. If you leave the room, you will be marked absent and it will affect your grade.

Our Room: Our classroom is our creative home; please treat it with respect. No wet shoes are allowed on this floor (to keep it clean). No food other than bottled water is allowed in class. Help put away mats and rehearsal cubes at the end of class when necessary. If we need to clean the mats or floor, everyone will be expected to help. No gum in class. Leave the classroom in a better state than you found it.

Clothing: Wear comfortable clothing in which you can move for every class **No jeans** or woven trousers. Also, please avoid low-cut tops or pants – if you have to tug at your clothing to stay decent and comfortable, it is not appropriate.

Touch: From time to time I will use touch to guide you in an exercise or to bring your attention more clearly to what you are doing. If you have any concerns or hesitancy about being touched, it is your responsibility to speak with me immediately so that we find options with which you are comfortable.

Self-care, Professionalism, and Awareness: You have chosen a field where professionals frequently work with injuries, illness, agonized mental states, emotional distress, and all sorts of discomfort. Welcome. Develop the ability to recognize when you are truly unable to work, and when you have discomfort which will not prevent you from working. As a rule of thumb, ask yourself "will it get worse if I work?" For instance, if you have a tension headache, participating in class may not feel good, but it won't actually make your headache worse. If you have a dislocated shoulder, many movements *will* make it worse. See a health care professional and only do what is safe for you in class. Never skip class because you have a scratchy throat or "are losing" your voice (unless you have a severe contagious illness). Honoring your restrictions can often bring new discoveries to light. There is a huge difference between emotional risk and physical carelessness. You are responsible for your own safety. It is your right and *responsibility* to care for yourself.

**** Please immediately contact me any time during the semester if concerns arise.**