



The Drexel Football Team Comedy Improv Handbook

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Notes: Honorary members, Timeline

Table of Contents

Part I: The Constitution

This is the official Drexel University document governing the organization. It includes bylaws, officer duties, and guidelines for officers, performers, and other members.

Part II: History and Membership

This section details the formation and early days of the organization and includes a list of all the members of the organization and all the officers that have officially served.

Part III: Tenants of Improvisational Comedy

This goes into brief detail on what every improviser should know – conflict, character, risk, as well as other information of what a good improviser does and does not do.

Part IV: Shortform

This section touches on what to remember in every shortform scene, from two to four people, even with scenes with very specific handles.

Part V: Longform

This goes in depth on Herald and other longform handles and what goes into a good one and how to tie everything together in the end.

Part VI: The Lists

These are a few lists that briefly go through what should always remember while doing a scene, also some general stuff you might want to avoid doing in a scene.

Part VII: Handle Repertoire (A-Z)

A list of shortform and longform handles that the team has performed or attempted at one point or another, along with other handles of interest.

Part VIII: Glossary

A glossary of important improv terms and what they mean – everything included is something to remember while performing.

Part IX: Traditions

Permanent inside jokes.

Part I: The Constitution

Article I: Name

The official name of this organization will be The Drexel Football Team Comedy Improv.

Article II: Mission Statement

The objective and purpose of this organization is to provide a group of performers an opportunity to practice improvisational games and styles in rehearsals and to perform in shows open to the student body and the general public.

Article III: Membership

Section 1: Definition

Any undergraduate student enrolled at Drexel University will be eligible for membership. No person or persons associated with the organization will be discriminated against regardless of race, religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or physical disability.

Section 2: Rights of Membership

All members, performers or otherwise, may offer input and opinions regarding anything in relevance to the organization and will be heard.

All members may attend any and all rehearsals, meetings, and performances.

All members have the right to be treated fairly by other members, whether it is in the context of performance, rehearsals, meetings, or at any team function.

Section 3: Affiliation

This organization is affiliated with Drexel University as a recognized student organization and as such, agrees to abide by the rules, policies, and procedures of Drexel University.

Section 4: Hazing Statement

Membership should be a valuable and beneficial experience for all students. Leadership of this organization shall provide its new and current members with

an experience that is positive, informative and consistent with federal, state, and local laws, and the policies and procedures of Drexel University. Activities which detract from the goal of fostering personal and intellectual development have no place in this organization. Hazing will not be tolerated by or of any member. It is the responsibility of the organization, its leadership and members to report hazing of any kind by members to the proper authority.

Article IV: Officers and voting

Section 1: Officers

The officers shall be agreed upon in an open vote by the members present at the final meeting at the end of the academic year.

The President

The President of the Drexel Football Team carries the following responsibilities:

- Will be responsible for setting the schedule for rehearsals, meetings, and performances, based on the existing schedules of the performers.
- Will serve as the representative of the organization to any faculty and administration of Drexel University concerning any matters the organization might have.
- Will provide the content and structure for rehearsals, selecting the scenes and styles that will be performed during the course of the meeting, as well as honing the performers' improvisational skill and craft.
- Will ensure each performer gets equal time performing in practices.
- Will serve as a moderator when members of the organization have critiques and criticism for other performers and ensure that all such critiquing is constructive.
- Will act, if on sufficient grounds, to remove a member's status as a performer.
- Will make the final decision regarding set lists and opening acts for performances.
- Will act, after consulting the rest of the team on all matters, as the final decision maker for all matters concerning the team.

The Treasurer

The Treasurer of the Drexel Football Team carries the following responsibilities:

- Will keep track of the expenditures of the organization.
- Will act as vice president of the organization.
- Will manage any money submitted by its members for any purpose and will return any money that was not used.
- Will be in charge of ordering, purchasing, and providing any items decided on by the membership, such as clothing, stickers, and flyers.
- Will aid the President, along with the other performers, in selecting new performers at auditions.
- Will act and assume the responsibilities of the president in his or her absence, as listed above.

The Vice President

The Vice President of the Drexel Football Team carries the following responsibilities:

- Attend a SOOT training session at the beginning of the academic year. The Treasurer does Vice President things, but we need this title in order to remain a club. We plan on re-specifying these roles for the 15-16 year.

The Event Coordinator

The Event Coordinator of the Drexel Football Team carries the following responsibilities:

- Nothing except attend a training at the beginning of the academic year. Since the 14-15 school year, we need this title in order to remain a club. We plan on re-specifying these roles for the 15-16 year.

Section 2: Electing Officers

At the end of each academic year, the members of The Drexel Football Team will confer and decide as a group who will fill the offices of President and Treasurer for the coming year. The tenure for both officers will last until the next election at the end of the next academic year. If at any point during the year an officer is unable to fulfill his or her duties as an officer by leaving the organization, a new officer to fill their place will be decided upon at the next meeting of the organization. Even in these circumstances, the election at the end of the

academic year will occur as normal.

Article V: Faculty Advisors

The primary advisor of the Drexel Football Team will be a full-time faculty or staff member in the Performer Arts Department.

Article VI: Performers

The amount of performers on The Drexel Football Team is good to keep around ten. The primary functions of the performer are to participate in comedy improv theater games and long-form improv styles in rehearsals and public performances.

Section 1: Auditions

Once or twice each academic year, depending on necessity, the team will hold open auditions. These auditions have traditionally been scheduled during one of the team's weekly rehearsal times. If necessary, a callback audition also takes place. The team will collectively make decisions about which performer(s) they would like to add to the team. Performers will be selected on the following criteria:

- Each performer's skill at improvising in a scene.
- Each performer's ability to work in a scene with others.
- Each performer's ability to make the members of the team laugh.
- Each performer's ability to perform comfortably in front of an audience.

Section 2: Responsibilities of the Performers

Those selected as performers in the organization carry the following responsibilities:

- To attend as many rehearsals and performances as possible, barring preventing circumstances.
- To participate fully in improvisational scenes and games at rehearsals.
- To accept constructive criticism regarding his or her performers' performances in scenes.

- To maintain a positive attitude during rehearsals and outside towards improv, the team, and its individual members, unless he or she has a grievance or problem with any of these listed, any of which should be aired and proper action would be taken.
- To take direction and use it and constantly strive to better themselves at their craft of comedy improvisation.

Section 3: Revocation of Performer Status

If a performer repeatedly ignores his or her responsibilities, then after the performer has been fairly warned, the President can choose to remove that member's status as a performer with the agreement of the Treasurer. If removed, the performer will still retain membership in the organization. Any member who has lost their status as a performer can audition for the spot again the next academic year.

Article VII: Standing Committees

Any students attending Drexel University who either were not selected for a spot as a performer or did not wish to audition may participate in the organization. The standing committee of members may participate in ways including the following functions:

- Design a logo for the organization that would be used on clothing, flyers, and other objects.
- Distribute flyers advertising performances.
- Serve as a disc jockey, providing a selection of music to be played at performances before the performers take the stage and also to play any music that an improvisational game may require.
- Serve on a technical staff at performances and operating sound equipment.
- Screenprint for t-shirts and clothing.
- Obtain, set-up, and operate film equipment for recording performances and other functions.
- Photograph the team for official photographs, at rehearsals, and at performances.

- Distribute flyers and other advertisements for shows as apart of a street team.
- Playing music before shows and as well as improvising music with the performers during performances.

Article VIII: Meetings

Section 1: Practices

Practices will provide a private format for the performers to hone their skills as improvisers. These will take place twice a week at times agreed upon by the performers.

Section 2: Performances

Performances by The Drexel Football Team will be held on dates scheduled by the organization's performers. Performances will be free of charge and open to the general public. They will showcase the performers in long-form improvisation styles and short-form theater games.

Article IX: Ratification

This constitution will be ratified by the organization's members and will take effect immediately.

Article X: Amendments

Amendments to this constitution will be brought up at rehearsals, and then will be decided upon by the membership of the organization.

Article XI: Bylaws

Ratification of any bylaws by The Drexel Football Team must be made by majority vote at the meeting that they are proposed.

Part II: History, Membership, and Shows

Beginnings

The very beginnings of the Drexel Football Team lie in the Fall of 2005. Freshmen screenwriting majors Michel Jerome Faulkner and Luke Giordano both express an interest in starting a comedy improv troupe at Drexel. According to him, Michel, in fact, had already gotten something started with his friends. A group called “The Devine Order of the Clock.”

It became apparent that this was less of an “improv troupe” and more of a “dumb inside joke between Michel and his friends.” Nevertheless, the group went on as such for a few weeks. Early versions of the constitution were drafted even before rehearsals began and apparently were pretty crap, much to the rage of Ian Abrams because he had to read them.

The lineup changed often in these earliest parts. The name also was pretty fluid, having decided “a dumb inside joke between Michel and his friends” was not a great name for an improv team, it was suggested that instead it would be a dumb inside joke that included the entire student body at Drexel. Thus, the Football Team was born.

Growth

The team eventually moved its rehearsal residence to Ross Commons, added a few members, and had its first show, which was actually kind of decent. It took about a year from that show for anyone to take notice of us. Our first show as a recognized student organization in the Stein Auditorium in Nesbitt Hall brought 40 people in the audience, which was at least twice as many as the previous. After that, the crowds grew to over 100, to almost 200, to over 300.

The Present

Practices are now in Paul Peck Integrated Sciences Building. Members have come and gone, we’ve had many shows, and a lot of friendships have been formed. Crowds generally tend to be approximately 200 people and are still in Stein Auditorium, which was redone in 2014. The Football Team is now a well-recognized group and the joke is understood, although some people require a brief explanation.

The Many Faces of the Team

For historical posterity, as of the time of this writing, this is a full list of every person who has been a member:

Dominick Arp, Frieda Beckerman, Jake Beckerman, Caitlin Brady, Allison Brobst, Mo Chomko, Thomas Clough, Rose Dillon, Kendra Dobson, Brian Driskill, Michel Jerome Faulkner, Benny Feldman, Francesco Fevola, Jesse Fidati, Chad Fisher, Edric Garcia, Luke Giordano, Sean Huber, Mark Kenny, Andrew Leib, Alix Leszczynski, John Lukas, David Lustig, Nick Maleno, Jarret Palmer, Anthony Pellechio, Mary Perry, Erica Pike, Momoh Pujeh, Lucas Quagliata, Ross Reagan, Becca Rose, Rachel Semigran, Rashni Stanford, Aislinn Tomchak, Jeremy Toll, Jessica Turner, Tim Urian, Brent Urmey, Jesse Webster, Michael Weinstein, Matt Wiese

Presidents

1. Michel Jerome Faulkner (2006-2007)
2. Luke Giordano (2006-2008)
3. Rose Dillon (2009-2010)
4. Andrew Leib (2010-2011)
5. David Lustig (2011-2012)
6. Sean Huber (2012-2013)
7. Ross Reagan (2013-2014)
8. Mary Perry (2014-)

Treasurers

1. Kendra Dobson (2006)
2. Rose Dillon (2007-2009)
3. Anthony Pellechio (2010-2011)
4. Jesse Fidati (2011-2012)
5. Erica Pike (2012-2013)
6. Frieda Beckerman(2013-2014)
7. Benny Feldman (2014-)

Vice President and Event Coordinator lists will be kept starting in 16, as they are required by Drexel.

Part III: Tenants of Improvisational Comedy

What is Improv?

For the purposes of this organization, improv is getting on stage in front of a group of people without any kind of idea of what's going to happen and try to be funny. It is being given some guidelines and then being let loose and making everything up as you go. And because anything can happen and everything is completely spontaneous, it's often pretty hilarious. Improv is spontaneity.

Improvisation is often grouped in with acting and most actors have to learn how to do it along the way, and I suppose that in many ways, it is acting. But it's more than acting. Comedy improv has a completely different, and very much its own, set of skills necessary, along with its own conventions and rules and styles that make it a discipline all its own. It can be the most or least pure form of acting, depending on who you ask, but I think those definitions are a bit limiting.

Improv is not just acting. All it is, again, is making stuff up as you go along. This is why above anything else, you want to be spontaneous in improv.

What is funny?

Well, lots of stuff is funny. But what about in improv? Still, lots of stuff. But one thing, above all else, will get you more laughs that are more genuine and more often. Not to say other stuff isn't funny – because tons of stuff is. But more than anything else, the truth is funny.

Honesty is the best policy in improv. When you're in a character, that character's honest reaction, observation, and discovery about anything going on the scene is always going to be funnier than something contrived specifically to get a laugh. Staying true to your characters and to yourself will always bring rewards.

The funniest and best stuff you'll do in a scene will always move it forward rather than doing something unrelated to the scene to get a laugh.

Take Care of Yourself

One of the things you'll always hear in relation to improv is that you should always take care of your scene partners first – always yield to them, always make them look good, always consider what they're about to say funnier and better than what you're about to say. And this is true. But there's a certain philosophy

that says the best way to take care of your scene partners is by first taking care of yourself.

The best way to aid your scene partners is to start off strong, with a strong character, direction, first line. Actors who know what they're doing and are confident in doing it will be much easier to do a scene with and will bring out more in their fellow actors by doing it. This is not to say that you should trample over your fellow actors to get your ideas in – quite the contrary – it is simply the obligation of all in the scene to initiate as much as it is to receive, even if you do not set the direction or take full control of it. Making strong choices makes for strong scenes and helps your scene partners so very much more than simply allowing them to take full command of everything ever could.

Conflict

At the heart of any improv scene, from the very first few moments of the scene to the very last, is conflict. A scene is no different from a film, a book, a sketch, a play, or any form of narrative storytelling. If there is no conflict, the scene cannot work. Despite any rules or quirks a game or longform might have, if there is no conflict, the scene will not be funny. And just as importantly, sustaining and building that conflict for the entire duration of the scene until the climax is crucial in any scene.

But especially in improv, it's important to define conflict and what kind of conflict works. It is not always internal to the scene or one character against the other. It can be two characters overcoming nature or beast or science or just overcoming a trip to the grocery store. Conflict is the engine that moves your scene and it does not always have to be a fight between two actors. Much of the time, it'd be preferable if it weren't – arguments especially. Arguments in improv scenes are dangerous because they can stifle forward momentum (which should always be your number one priority of a scene), they set up refusal of one another's ideas easily (which is the worst thing you can do in a scene), and in arguments, it's usually just two people standing around talking (which is boring).

In a scene, just like in a movie – show, don't tell. Actions speak louder than just words and they will also get louder reactions. It's far more interesting to watch characters do something than just talk, or even worse, *talk* about doing something. Physical action aimed at moving the scene forward will almost always work better than a simple verbal scene. If given a choice in a scene between doing something active and talking (and I'm going to assure you, there's always going to be some sort of choice between the two), choose action.

The most basic form of sustaining conflict through an entire scene is simply raising the stakes. This works so much better and feels so much more natural

than introducing new conflicts to a scene. When you increase the importance and impact of the situation to the characters it will feel completely natural and you'll get bigger laughs rather than if you simply go the route of introducing a new conflict to keep the scene from flat lining.

For example, a woman reveals to her husband that she is pregnant. Depending on their relationship and their respective statuses, you have a conflict right there and then. How can you build on this? She reveals that the baby isn't his. That's a natural build on the situation and conflict existent in the scene. You can build on this even more depending on who is revealed to be the real father. And even more when the husband decides to murder the father or even her.

This seems pretty simple and it should. This kind of thing should come naturally an improviser, but a lot of times, it doesn't and too many scenes didn't go anywhere because the improvisers didn't raise the stakes or heighten the conflict when it needed to be.

It's usually a bad idea to start the conflict in a scene right away. And by right away, I mean in the first line or two. Allow the characters to introduce themselves, the situation and location to establish, as well as the relationship and then a conflict will usually come naturally. If you do not let all this set and offer a conflict right away as soon as the scene begins, the conflict has the tendency to be more one-note and shallow.

Introducing a conflict too early also has the danger of one actor ripping control of a scene from the other or others completely. Always pay attention to what your fellow actors are doing and trying to contribute to a scene. Be chivalrous – consider whatever your scene partners are doing in a scene more important what you're going to do. But do this while still concentrating on setting up and maintaining an interesting conflict throughout a scene, but keep a balance between you and your fellow actors for the best scene possible. Where does the conflict come from? It can come from the game or the location suggested by the audience, but above all, it comes from characters.

Characters

When improvising a scene, always keep in mind things like what characters would work in the particular location or situation or work well off of another character or characters. You want the audience to know who your character is almost immediately. Be it from mannerisms, accent, way of talking, quirk, attitude, status – you should know your character inside and out as you are assuming it and it should be easy for the audience to follow along, as well.

If a scene partner chooses a character of high status, chances are you'll want to

choose a character of lower status and the scene will work better for it. This goes for character as well as conflict – while you might have a great character in mind for a scene, if a scene partner or partners introduces a character first, you should keep in mind what kind of character would work well with that character rather than what kind of character would get you laughs as an individual.

Status relationships between characters are a huge part of comedy and certainly improv. Depending how high or low status you want your character to be or if you want a character normally of lower status (i.e. a janitor or a butler) to be the high status character in the scene and vice versa, you will get a more interesting and much funnier scene than if the characters are of equal status. Scenes with characters of equal status tend not to go anywhere, considering the natural conflict is not there, and as a consequence, are not very interesting.

The thing about all of this (conflict and character) is that you want to set this all up within the first few beats of the scene. You want the audience to know who you are, where you are, what your relationship is, and what your conflict is *as soon as possible*. This cannot be stressed enough.

And you do want to assume a particular character in a scene. In every scene you're in. It doesn't have to be outrageous – in fact, it's sometimes better if it's the other way around and the character is close to reality or even who you are as a person. But there has to be a character there. This cannot be you. This has to be a fully realized person that you are acting as. We're not talking Brando or full character arcs here (though that would be great), but conflict and a wider range of conflicts will come easier and more naturally to more interesting characters.

And again, the characters can be very basic. Even if it is just “smart sarcastic guy” or “closeted gay guy,” *those are defined characters*. Everything will come easier to you once you have this in mind because character is the foundation of everything that happens in any storytelling medium. Good characters will make for interesting conflict. Interesting conflict will make for more laughs and better scenes. It all starts right here, with the very first thing that leaves your mouth and the quality of the whole scene depends on what you decide to represent in that split-second before the scene starts.

Risk

This, of course, ties right into risk, which is another crucial part of improv comedy. The very base of improv is risk. Improv is about going out and performing in front of an audience with absolutely no idea of what is going to happen. That is the definition of risk, right there. Extended from that, the bigger risks you take; be it from character, from plot, from dialogue – anything – the bigger risks you take the more laughs you will receive and the better the scene

will be. Improv is not a medium for the timid and it does reward the brave.

Calling back the pregnancy scene earlier – which is funnier? The milkman being the father of the baby or any one of the members of the Detroit All-Male Choir? The gardener or a homeless man she met in a soup kitchen? It's not just that one choice is funnier than the other. Riskier suggestion will always have a bigger payoff. And even if you can't come up with an all-male choir in the heat of the moment in a scene, riskier suggestions will almost always be better than the safe one. Even if it doesn't get a laugh, it can lead the scene into a new, more interesting direction than the safer option. The safe option leads to a conventional scene, the risky option leads somewhere with more potential and more reward.

Rather doing something you're comfortable with, do something – anything and see where it takes you. You're on stage, you're performing, what is stopping you from taking that next step? Just say something! Say anything!

There is a lot of fear in a lot of improvisers. Fear of taking that risk that makes great scenes great. And risk isn't just contributing unconventional suggestions – that isn't even most of what it is. Risk is putting your whole self out there and taking those risks to come up with more interesting characters, more interesting conflicts, more interesting situations to take place in settings, more nuanced relationships that have more opportunity for comedy.

It's even just taking the reins and leading a scene and giving it drive and direction. It's about having complete confidence in everything you do on stage. It's about being at complete ease and being outside your head at all points and being truly spontaneous when you improvise.

It all comes back to risk because you do not possess complete self-confidence, you cannot take the necessary risks and you cannot improvise to the best of your abilities or even very well. If you can't make these risks and become confident, your team mates can't trust you, and it makes you more difficult to do scenes with because you're too self-conscious.

To become really good, you must let go and free yourself to take these risks or your put yourself in danger of being useless to your team mates, the people who rely on you. You need their trust as they need yours and without taking that risk, everything breaks down.

General Good Things to Always Do

Most, if not all, of the ingredients that go into a good improviser (aside from being funny) have to do with helping others. Selfish improvisers might get laughs

and often do, but they cannot participate in good scenes if they only think of themselves. Let them go do standup. Good improvisation is about giving and accepting and when accepting, using what you've been given.

The concept of chivalry may be long dead when it comes to men and women, but it is alive and well in improv. As discussed earlier, even if you want to take care of yourself first in a scene and make sure that you are able to contribute to a scene properly, putting the other members in your scene above yourself is crucial. *You* adjust to *their* ideas. *Your* status adjusts to *theirs*. *Their* ideas are more important, funnier, and better. You don't talk over each other because you shut up immediately when they start to speak and you don't open your mouth until they're done. When they give you a gift, you not only accept it, but you use it and incorporate it into the scene.

It's like the *Seinfeld* episode with the car rental person who takes Jerry's car reservation and then gives the car to someone else anyway, "You see, you know how to *take* the reservation – you just don't know how to *hold* the reservation. And that's really the most important part of the reservation: the holding. Anybody can just take them." And that's the same exact thing. It's not enough to acknowledge, take, and then discard an offer – you must use it in some way – which goes so much into, again, taking care of your partners by taking care of yourself.

Again, *take care of yourself all the while*, so scenes do not become charmingly befuddled Hugh Grant movies full of "You go ahead!" "No, *you* go ahead!" It is simply a means of advancing a scene without argument or pulling it in two directions. It is a way of getting all the actors on the same page so the scene moves naturally. Competing ideas make for bad scenes and no laughs. When a reality is set in a scene, *it is set*, whether you set it or someone else in the scene sets it.

Another crucial means of aiding your partners is justifying. Anything that is entered into a scene must never be thrown away and always be justified. It is your job as an actor to always justify whatever anyone does in a scene. Never, ever refuse a gift, even if it does something as drastic as change the entire reality of the scene. If someone makes an offer like that, try to justify it, accept the new reality or gift, and keep the scene going.

General Bad Things to Never Do

This section is summed up nicely as the opposite of the previous section. Anything that does not move the scene forward *always* hurts an improv scene. Be it jokes and verbal wit that contributes nothing and leaves the others in your scene hanging. Be it refusing offer or accepting offers and then doing nothing

with them. Be it stalling because you're out of ideas or asking questions to redirect the focus back on the other person because you don't want to be responsible – if you're not helping the people you're doing your scene with, you're hurting them.

Equally, you're hurting your scene partners if a scene is floundering and you do not act. If no one is taking charge and driving a scene forward, it falls to you. Especially in scenes with four or more people, ever action that does not lead to accomplishing the goals of the scene or resolving the conflict is unnecessary and superfluous.

Asking questions in improv scenes is bad form for a lot of reasons. The main reason you shouldn't ask your scene partner questions is that not only are you putting them on the spot, but you're basically forcing them to respond to your lead rather than letting them get their own ideas in.

Let's say a scene starts with an actor clutching their stomach as if wounded and saying that they're hurt. If his or her scene partner responds with a question, like about what happened, there's always going to be a pause by the first actor – the question is doing nothing to move the scene forward and is actually the second actor deflecting their responsibility back on the first actor. When the second actor's line is supposed to advance the scene, asking a question instead is selfish and hurts the scene and the other actors because that actor has contributed nothing.

In my opinion, questions are well behind another way of putting your partners on the spot that might be one of the worst things to do in an improv scene. About two years ago, before I started the team, I was sitting in on my old high school's team's rehearsal and two people were in a scene in a newspaper office and the first actor, the reporter, hands his story to the editor and says, "Here it is, I'm finished." So, she takes the story and hands it back to him and says, "Read it to me." Even before I knew why this was so terrible, alarms went off in my head. Meanwhile, the new drama teacher (who was not one of the two very excellent coaches) was also sitting in on the rehearsal and trumpeted this single line after the scene was over as great and "what improv is all about." He blew hot air about this at length and I was sitting there horrified that this guy had absolutely no idea of what he was talking about.

Let's ignore the part where the reporter was giving the editor a gift and she not only didn't use it but threw it back in his face – that's bad enough. But the fact that she actually did something so terrible to her partner as, "Here. Read this," is incredible. It's not just leading them with a question – it's forcing them to come up with something that you could not. It's the worst form of stalling and pimping and should never, ever be done. For that matter, anything you do when receiving a gift that is not accepting it, justifying it, and using it, is again selfish and hurts

your scene partners and your scene.

I am of the impression that the absolute worst thing to do in an improv scene is verbal wit. That is why we have games specifically for verbal wit. Verbal wit is deadly in a normal scene where you must function with other actors. Not for you. If you keep spouting off jokes one-liners during the scene, you'll get more laughs than you'll know what to do with. The audience will love you. However, by doing this, you will make your scene partners hate you because you've just hung them out to dry.

Using your comic prowess for verbal wit, you've effectively become the biggest bastard you could possibly become short of shouting out random Family Guy-esque interjections. "Oh no! Look! It's Smacks the Frog!" Actually, that's still verbal wit, it's just really unfunny verbal wit. I could keep going about verbal wit, but all you really need to know is to never do it. Usually while you're making jokes, you've added nothing to keep the scene going forward and it's up to your partners to do everything for you – which just makes them look really bad in comparison to you, the supposed funny one.

Part IV: Shortform

Most, if not all, shortform improvisation is in the form of theater game handles that will range from having very simple rules to complex, set in stone structures. What's important to remember is that even in spite of these rules and the humor that will inevitably come from these handles, if you take away any rule or quirk from the scene, the scene itself should still be funny.

In a game like Change, for instance, it's pretty easy to fall into an unremarkable scene and wait for the change mechanism to start and get laughs from that. When you do this, consciously or no, you're basically letting the rules of the particular game do your improvising for you. If you let this happen by not setting up an interesting situation, characters, or conflict, you're likely to be less spontaneous when the change comes and get less laughs than you would if you were in a good scene to begin with.

Handle or no, most games start out as a normal scene before the handle really kicks in – allowing for the actors to set up everything that needs to be set up in the confines of a normal improvisational scene before the actors get too caught up in the rules of the handle. This is especially true for the “replay” style of shortform games. These games allow for an entire short scene unfiltered by rules. While it definitely is possible to have a mediocre or even poor beginning scene and have a funny replay scene or scenes, if the starting scene is good, there will be more funny stuff to recall and draw on as you replace it.

You always, always, always want to keep everything in mind from Part III for any scene you're doing. No matter if it's rigidly structured, like The Dating Game or a simple one like Change, a good scene with interesting characters, a clear conflict, with chivalrous actors who are not afraid to take risks will always be better and funnier than a scene without these ingredients, ***without exception.***

If the tenants of improv are important in two or three actor scenes, they are doubly so in a four actor scene (or more). Due to the very nature of having this many actors on stage at the same time, four actor scenes are often chaotic and without direction. Much of the time, all four people are pulling it into four separate directions and the scene goes nowhere at all. Or what is often the case in a game like Superheroes, there is direction, but the scene often gets sidetracked, with actors caring more about themselves and getting laughs than accomplishing the scene's goals.

In a scene with four actors that is not structured like The Dating Game, everyone *must* be chivalrous. There must be a single focus and conflict with everyone together doing absolutely nothing but resolving that conflict. There might be some actors in the front seat and some in the back seat when it comes to this, but

anything other than working towards the conclusion of the scene with a scene
this crowded is selfish and unnecessary.

Part V: Longform

In its purest essence, longform is basically free-form improv. It is a number of scenes that are connected, however loosely, by a common theme, setting, thread, story, characters, or whatever else you could possibly think of. A lot of the more free form longform handles start off with a monologue or a short game to get ideas and words into the air and what follows are a series of scenes inspired in any way, perhaps completely abstract, by the initial monologues that may or may not tie together in some way.

Then there are others, such as Spork River, where everyone playing has a set character that they inhabit through a series of events in a particular location. There are so many different ways to play longform that there is just as much variety in terms of handles as there is in short form. But the common theme throughout different longforms is that everything in each particular longform is connected in some way, even by ideas in the head of a single performer.

That's why when further connections are made, especially with disparate things in unrelated scenes, it's always really rewarding. In longform, making connections, especially when you tie everything thing up together at the very end, is the surest way to get the biggest laugh – it's like an inside joke that everyone in the theater is in on together.

The most famous longform handle, Herald, is based on this. Herald takes place in three rounds. The first round is headed off by a monologue or with a short word game. From there, three scenes will take place, each related in a different way to the opener. From there, there will be another set of monologues or another game and the second round of three will take place.

In this second round, the first three scenes will be reprised. They don't necessarily have to pick up where they left off – they can be in different locations or at a later point in time or with a different context, but it is here where the scenes begin to show some influence on each other. They start to connect more with the two round openers or with other scenes, but not definite connections, small ones for the audience to follow along with.

The larger connections happen in the third and final round where the three scenes reach their conclusion after a third game. In this round there is definite crossover between the three scenes, which all comes to a head at the very end where everything ties together. This is difficult to achieve, but supremely satisfying when it does.

This kind of format of different, unrelated scenes coming together as a longform moves forward is not limited to Herald. This is a device to strive for in any

longform handle. This also works well when things, ideas, gifts, are brought up in early scenes and are shelved until the very last moment. These kinds of connections and final tie-together will give the longform a sense of completeness and the impact will be more powerful and much funnier to the audience. And it's just really cool to do.

Part VI: The Lists

General Do's and Don't's

If you've mastered these rules, feel free to break them. Until then, treat them as sacred.

The Twelve Commandments

1. React in character.
2. Don't negate or deny.
3. Focus. Work at the top of your intelligence. Concentrate.
4. Keep the scene moving. Make actional choices. Use your offers.
5. Don't ask questions.
6. Trust. Trust your fellow actors. Trust yourself.
7. Check your impulses.
8. Support. Save your fellow actor before the piece.
9. Never underestimate or condescend to your audience. Keep it PC.
10. No jokes.
11. When in doubt, break the routine.
12. *Listen. Watch.*

Stuff to Generally Avoid

Stuff you generally want to avoid including in scenes or doing scenes about. This is by no means hard and fast. There can be good scenes with them included, but it's good to avoid.

- Acting as small children. When you're a small child, you're not really responsible for your actions and thus it makes it very difficult to perform a scene with one. A big exception is for when the child is high status and the adult is low status. Doing a scene with everyone as kids is dangerous.
- Drugs, specifically acting as under the influence of something. This is not a comment on drug use in general or people who do them, but when it comes to improv, drugs are not funny, nor are they interesting. This ties in with the thing about children – when you're on drugs, you're not responsible for the things you do. Also, a lot of the time you won't even get laughs, you'll get cheers from the people who do drugs and then you'll alienate the other portion of the audience.
- Excessive swearing. Swearing can be a crutch in comedy and adds very, very little. The difference for being funny for everyone and funny for some people is as little as a single word.
- When on the sides pay carefull attention and think how you could help build on the idea with future scenes.

Part VII: Handle Repertoire (A-Z)

Advice Panel

Type: Audience Participation, Verbal Wit

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Questions of advice for the panel.

Description: Four members of an expert advice panel will field questions from the audience. As it rotates, the first panelist will give good advice, the second will give bad advice, the third will give worse advice, and the fourth will give nonsensical advice.

Alliteration

Type: Warm-up

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Letters of the alphabet.

Description: When prompted, each actor will name something that begins with a chosen letter (such as a first name, a country, food). There is a round for each letter and the first actor unable to come up with something for that letter is eliminated. Repeat until only one actor remains.

Animalistics

Type: Endowment

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Animals and location.

Description: Each of the two actors is assigned an animal that during the scene, they must take upon the characteristics. They are not that animal in the scene, instead the characteristics may be physical, vocal, or status based (i.e. an actor playing a chicken would be cowardly).

At the Oscars

Type: Longform

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Title of a fictitious film.

Description: This is a longform handle that begins with an Oscars acceptance speech from the director of a film. Based on his speech, the rest of the Longform will take place during scenes and the production of the film.

Backwards Interview

Type: Limitations, Experts

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Subject for interview topic.

Description: Two actors, the interview host and the expert, will talk about the interview topic given by the audience, but the interview will be conducted

backwards. In other words, the first line spoken will be the last line of the actual interview. The two actors can also set each other up with lines like, “That was a very interesting story about ostriches,” and so on.

Before or After

Type: Continuation

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: “Before or after” and location.

Description: Two actors play a short scene. When the scene is complete, the host asks the audience if they want to see what happened before or after this scene takes place. The two actors will then play this scene.

The Bench Game

Type: Warm-up

Actors: Two / Unlimited

Audience Prompt: None.

Description: One actor sits alone on a bench. The next actor joins them, being as annoying and obnoxious as possible to get them to leave. Once the first actor does leave, the second slides over and another actor comes to annoy them and get them to leave. Repeat this process.

Blind Date

Type: Guessing, Quirk

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: A celebrity persona for three of the actors.

Description: One actor, about to embark on a blind date at a restaurant, is sent out of the room while the three other actors (the date, the waiter, and an old friend of the actor sent out the room) are assigned celebrities they must portray during the scene for the actor to guess who they are. The waiter will appear intermittently and the old friend will stop by towards the end of the date. The date will then call his or her friend (the host) and tell them of her horrible date as she names who the three actors were.

Change

Type: Spontaneity

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: Two actors play through a scene while the host yells “Change!” at any given point. When this happens, the actor must change the last thing they have said or done.

Confessions

Type: Verbal Wit

Actors: Four / Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Confessions.

Descriptions: Before the show, the host records confessions (i.e. “I’m actually a woman”) from the audience. When the scene is played, the host will call out a confession and the actors will step forward and utter witty replies to each confession.

Continuing Emotions

Type: Continuation, Endowment

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Emotions and location.

Description: Two actors will play a scene until halfway through, the host will call freeze and get suggestions for an emotion for each actor that they must play through the duration of the scene.

Countdown

Type: Replay

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: Two actors must play through a complete scene in one minute. Then, they must play through the same scene in thirty seconds. Then in ten seconds. And finally, in one second.

Day in the Life

Type: Audience Participation, Longform

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Entire subject for longform.

Description: The host will pick an audience member to come on stage and ask him or her a number of questions (i.e. name, hometown, brothers and sisters, major, place of work, hobbies) and the actors will improvise a longform based on it.

Deaf Interpreter

Type: Experts

Actors: Three

Audience Prompt: Subject for interview topic.

Description: One actor is a host of an informational TV program who is interviewing an expert on a particular topic. This interview will be translated for the deaf and hearing impaired by the third actor, who will use “sign language” to do so.

Director

Type: Replay

Actors: Three

Audience Prompt: Film genre.

Description: Two actors will play a scene from a movie. On three different occasions a third actor, the director, will come in and make changes for the scene and have the actors do the same scene a different way.

Dolts

Type: Endowment

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Location and actors to be the dolts.

Description: Two actors will play a straight scene while the other two cover their ears and turn around. Throughout the scene, the dolts will interject something into the scene and the actors must incorporate it, no matter how bizarre.

DVD Special Edition

Type: Narration

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Name of fictitious film.

Description: One actor has just rented a film, which he or she is sharing with the audience. The actor will play scenes from the film and fast forward, rewind, slow motion, and pause the film as necessary as the three other actors play these scenes as the actors in the film, responding to the scene runner as necessary. The scene runner can also turn on director's commentary, alternate language tracks, go to deleted and extended scenes, special features, and whatever else appears on a Special Edition DVD.

Emotional Quadrants

Type: Limitations

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location and emotion for each quadrant.

Description: The stage will be divided into four quadrants, and each quadrant will be assigned an emotion by the audience. When in that quadrant, the actor will have to display and justify that particular emotion.

Emotional Replay

Type: Replay

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Actors' emotions and location.

Description: A scene will be played once. The second time it is played, the two

actors will each be assigned a particular emotion they must display as they play the scene again.

Evil Twin

Type: Characters

Actors: Four

Description: Two actors are on a first date. Periodically, one will excuse himself to the restroom and his evil twin will instead return and ruin everything. It is then up to the good twin to make everything up for what the bad twin did to the date. There's also a waiter.

Fairy Tale Talk Show

Type: Audience Participation

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Fairy tale.

Description: One actor is the host of a trash TV talk show like Jerry Springer. On his show, he has a similarly trashy version of a character from a popular fairy tale. The actor interviews the character and introduces a surprise guest backstage – the fairy tale's villain. The two characters engage in fisticuffs until broken up and the host interviews the villain and gives his final thought. Throughout this, there is a fourth actor in the audience, leading them in cheers and boo's and chants of the host's name. The host will periodically field questions from this actor as he or she assumes different identities of typical trash TV talk show audience members.

Famous Last Words

Type: Verbal Wit

Actors: Four / Unlimited

Audience Participation: Fictional characters, historical figures, and celebrities.

Description: From the audience, the host will get suggestions for what people (listed above), living or dead, and the actors will improvise what they would have said or would say for their last words.

Fast Forward

Type: Continuation

Actors: Two

Audience Participation: Location.

Description: Two actors play a scene. Periodically through which, the host will freeze it and call fast forward or rewind to a particular time and place and the actors will play what happens to the characters at that point in time before or

after the original scene.

Film and Theater Styles

Type: Limitations

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Film and theater genres and location.

Description: A scene is played and as it progresses, the host will call out different styles of film and theater suggested by the audience that the scene must adjust to as it continues.

Film Noir

Type: Spontaneity

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: Two actors play through a scene in the style of a film noir. Throughout the scene, the actors can step out for an aside in the style of a film noir monologue.

Foreign Film Interpreter

Type: Gibberish

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Country and actors to appear in the foreign film.

Description: Two actors will be selected to play in a foreign language film of a certain country. They will speak in gibberish of that language as two other actors translate for them and make a scene out of it.

Freeze

Type: Warm-up

Actors: Two / Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: Two actors play a scene. When an actor off-scene calls freeze, the two actors freeze in place and that actor comes in to take one of their places and takes the scene in a new direction and context based on the position he or she took. A variation on this is **Blind Freeze**, where freeze is called by the host and he or she calls upon the actors to take the positions.

The Fruit Game

Type: Warm-up

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: None.

Description: All the actors make a circle as one stands in the center. They go around the circle and assign themselves a fruit (or anything, really). When the

warm-up begins, an actor might say, “Apple loves Banana!” The actor in the center must tag Banana before Banana can say who he or she loves. If Banana is tagged, Banana must take the position in the center. Whoever was previously in the center must start and call who he or she loves.

Game-O-Matic

Type: Limitations

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Improv game name and location.

Description: The audience will provide a name for a brand new improv theater game. On the spot, the host will improvise the rules for the game based on the name. The two actors will improvise a scene based on these rules.

Goalie

Type: Warm-up

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: One actor as the goalie, everyone else lines up opposite him or her with an opening line and a character ready, to which the goalie must immediately respond to. The goal is to set up the scene and possibly the conflict in the first two lines.

Half Scripted

Type: Limitations

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: All of one actor’s lines come from a script or a play that he or she must read, while the other actor must justify and make a scene from those scripted lines.

Harold

Type: Longform

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Word.

Description: This is a longform played in three rounds with three scenes in each round, usually started off by a monologue. The scenes in each round are related, even vaguely, but are not related to scenes in other rounds until the very end when everything is tied together.

Helping Hands

Type: Limitations

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: None.

Description: Two actors play a scene with two other actors standing behind

them, acting as their hands. Scenes usually involve props and messy food.

Hesitation

Type: Limitations

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: Two actors play a scene. When one of them chooses to hesitate during a line of dialogue, he or she turns to the audience to get the rest of his or her sentence. The actors must incorporate whatever the audience says into their scene.

Hey You Down There!

Type: Narration

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Subject for instructional film strip.

Description: One actor is the narrator of an old 1950's instructional film strip called "Hey You Down There!" He or she will instruct the three other actors (usually playing children) around the activity and they will respond to his or her narration accordingly.

Historical Replay

Type: Replay

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Historical era, past or future and location.

Description: Two actors play through a short scene. Once complete, they must play the scene again in the context of a historical era chosen by the audience.

Hitch Hiker

Type: Warm-up

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: None.

Description: One player is seated in the driver's seat of a car. Along the road, he picks up a hitch hiker with an unusual personality or quirk. Slowly, he himself will take on that quirk. Then, another hitch hiker will be picked up and everyone in the car will slowly take upon their quirk. Repeat this until the car is full and the passengers leave in reverse order that they came and everyone goes through the quirks as the person leaves until only the driver is left.

Human Props

Type: Environment

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: Two actors play through a scene. They are assisted by two other actors who become human props and will function in any capacity for props and scenery as they are needed by the actors.

Improv Jam**Type:** Longform**Actors:** Unlimited**Audience Prompt:** A word.**Description:** A longform similar to Harold. The longform begins with at least two monologues based on the audience suggestion. The following two scenes are long and are based on elements from the monologue. From there, it spins out into loosely tied-together free-form improv.**Interrogation****Type:** Guessing**Actors:** Three**Audience Prompt:** Crime for perpetrator to have committed.**Description:** One actor is sent out of the room as the audience gives them a crime to have committed. After rejoining, he or she will be interrogated by the two other actors, who will drop hints about the crime until the actor can confess.**Jeopardy****Type:** Verbal Wit**Actors:** Four / Unlimited**Audience Prompt:** Jeopardy-style answers.**Description:** Supplied with audience suggestions, the host will name off answers that the actors will respond with the famous Jeopardy “what is” questions to witty results (i.e. if the answer given by the host is “Girls,” someone may respond with “What are my deepest fear?”).**La Ronde****Type:** Longform**Actors:** Unlimited**Audience Prompt:** Location.**Description:** From an initial scene and location with two actors, everyone lines up as each consecutive actor in the line tags the actor who’s been on stage the longest out to do a scene with the person who had just come on stage right before them. Continue this until the round is complete and the first person on stage wraps it up and closes out the scene.**Little Voice****Type:** Environment**Actors:** Two**Audience Prompt:** Location.**Description:** One actor plays a scene in an environment when he or she discovers that the environment, either animals or inanimate objects can speak and interact with him.

Location**Type:** Longform**Actors:** Unlimited**Audience Prompt:** Location.**Description:** An entire longform that takes place in one particular location. Actors filter in and out with short scenes around this set location.**Marshmallow Mania****Type:** Limitations**Actors:** Two**Audience Prompt:** Location**Description:** Two actors play a scene in which the audience is not supposed to laugh. Every time an actor provokes laughter, a marshmallow will be placed in his or her mouth. Actors are allowed to chew, but not swallow.**Meanwhile****Type:** Longform**Actors:** Unlimited**Audience Prompt:** Location.**Description:** In the beginning, longest scene, two characters will play out a normal scene. From there, actors will call meanwhile and give a time (i.e. two weeks later) and give what happens in the aftermath of that scene. This will continue and scenes will occur before and after others in the timeline.**Movie Review****Type:** Narration**Actors:** Four**Audience Prompt:** Title of a fictitious film.**Description:** One actor plays a snooty film critic reviewing a bad film. As he tears the film apart, the other three actors play out clips from the film as he prompts them.**Moving People****Type:** Audience Participation**Actors:** Two**Audience Prompt:** Location.**Description:** The host will pull two members from the audience, who are responsible for moving the two actors as they act out a scene. The two actors cannot move on their own.

Murderer**Type:** Longform**Actors:** Unlimited**Audience Prompt:** Location.**Description:** Scraps of paper are handed to all of the actors. One contains an “X.” Whichever actor receives the X has committed a horrible murder. It is up to him or her to leave clues for the other actors, lead by a protagonist who introduces the situation in a monologue who must solve the murder.**No P****Type:** Limitations**Actors:** Three**Audience Prompt:** Location**Description:** Three actors must play through a scene without ever using the letter “P.” If an actor uses the letter, the audience shouts “DIE!” and the actor must kill him or herself until there is only one actor left.**Old Job, New Job****Type:** Characters, Limitations**Actors:** Two**Audience Prompt:** An actor’s job they are training for and their previous job.**Description:** One actor will be training the other how to do a new job. The catch is that the new person will retain characteristics from their previous job when performing this new job.**Oscar Moment****Type:** Spontaneity**Actors:** Three**Audience Prompt:** Location.**Description:** Three actors will play a scene that is periodically interrupted by the host, who will call each other players out to deliver an impassioned “Oscar Moment” speech based on their feelings in the scene.**Party Quirks****Type:** Quirk, Endowment**Actors:** Four**Audience Prompt:** Personality quirks for the three actors.**Description:** One actor is throwing a party and is sent out of the room. His

three party guests are assigned quirks by the audience. He comes back in and the guests enter the party one by one and leave as the host correctly guesses their quirks.

Poetry Corner

Type: Verbal Wit

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Subject of poem.

Description: In order, the actors will recite an ABAB rhyming poem (preferably epic or telling a story), line by line (each actor recites one line) until logical completion.

Press Conference

Type: Guessing

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Accomplishment.

Description: One actor has just accomplished something great and is sent out of the room as the audience decides what it is. When he or she returns, he is treated to a press conference where reporters field him or her questions to hint at what exactly it is that he or she has accomplished.

Props

Type: Association

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: None.

Description: The four actors split into teams of two as each team is handed an unusual prop. They take turns doing clever things with the prop or props.

Questions Only

Type: Warm-up, Limitations

Actors: Two / Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: Two actors play a scene by only asking questions. They cannot reverse a question asked, they cannot make a statement and slap a question on the end of it, etc. If they do one of these things or cannot think of a question, they must leave the scene and another actor takes his or her place.

Rashomon

Type: Replay

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: A simple scene will be played. When finished, the scene will play again, but from the perspective of each actor.

Scene from a Hat

Type: Verbal Wit

Actors: Four / Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Scenes to go in the hat.

Description: The audience provides ideas before the show to be placed in a hat (i.e. overheard in the kitchen of an Olive Garden) and the actors will perform short scenes and one liners based on these.

Scene Three Ways

Type: Replay

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Book genre, film genre, and location.

Description: Two actors will play a scene. They will play the same scene two more times, once in the style of a particular book genre, and finally in a film genre.

Scene to Music

Type: Musical

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: During a scene, at certain points, different music is played three times. During those times, the actors must adjust the tone and action of the scene to fit the mood of the music.

Slide Show

Type: Narration

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: One actor has recently been on vacation and is showing the slides from his or her trip. The other three actors will portray those slides and assume positions based on what he or she says and also leading what he or she says. The actor will cycle through the slides by saying, "Click."

Sitting, Standing, Lying

Type: Limitations

Actors: Three

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: During a scene, one actor must be sitting, one must be standing, and one must be lying down. The actors must justify the switching of positions.

Sound Effects

Type: Audience Participation

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: The host will pull two members of the audience on stage and assign them to provide sound effects to each of the actors when they are prompted as the actors play the scene.

Space Jump

Type: Association

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: One actor begins a scene on stage. At some point, the host will call freeze and the next actor will join him, starting a different scene with the two of them. The host calls freeze again and a third actor will join, doing the same thing. Finally, this will happen with a fourth actor. As the host calls scene when the four person scene finishes, the actors will leave as they came and the three person, two person, and one person scenes resume to their completion.

Spork River

Type: Longform

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: None.

Description: Spork River is a long form taking place in the events of a small town called Spork River. At the beginning, the residents of the town will introduce themselves one by one as conflict between them already becomes apparent. The final towns member is usually one that does not belong in the town, such as a time traveler or a magical talking bear.

Sports Announcers

Type: Narration

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Activity.

Description: Two actors provide color commentary and play-by-play information on two other actors in a competition of a mundane, everyday activity as if it were a high-stakes sports event. They introduce the contestants as

compete as well as fight and cheat their way to victory. The two announcers can also do things like instant replays and freeze frame the action.

Storyboard

Type: Narration

Actors: Two narrators, rest unlimited

Audience Prompt: Relationship

Description: Two actors know each other and recall a story. As they describe the story, the other actors silently portray the characters in the story. The story characters may speak when prompted or reasonable.

Superheroes

Type: Quirk, Endowment

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Superhero power for the first actor and world crisis.

Description: One actor is an unlikely superhero going about his or her daily routine. Upon discovering a world crisis, the hero is joined by their superhero friend to help solve the crisis. As the hero enters, each is endowed with a power by the previous hero. As the crisis is solved, they leave in reverse order upon which they entered.

Superhero Movie

Type: Longform

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Profession.

Description: An actor is assigned a superhero power based on a profession and the ensuing longform is based on the life of that superhero, structured like a superhero movie. It begins with the traumatic event in childhood where the hero acquired his or her powers, the stopping of a petty crook, the hero's alter ego, the villain and his or her nefarious plans, and the eventual thwarting of said villain.

Survivor

Type: Replay

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Location, actors to vote off.

Description: Four actors will play a short scene. When finished, the audience will choose one actor to remove from the scene and the scene will replay exactly the same without that actor. Repeat until one actor is left, playing all the parts by him or herself.

Three Lives

Type: Continuation

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Locations.

Description: One actor must cycle through three different and unrelated locations, actors, and scenes more and more quickly as the host calls switch.

Three of a Kind

Type: Limitations

Actors: Three

Audience Prompt: Quirk and activity.

Description: Three actors play a scene, all with the same quirk, profession, or character (i.e. three John Waynes, three Terminators) as they attempt to accomplish an unlikely activity for that character.

Three Rules

Type: Limitations

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Three rules the actors must follow and location.

Description: For a two actor scene, the host must get three suggestions that would be the rules of the scene for the actors to follow (i.e. everything they say must rhyme).

Timeline

Type: Limitations

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location

Description: Two actors will play one scene, that as they play, progresses through the entirety of human history (they will adjust their actions and mannerisms during the scene) to reflect the time periods they are in.

Two Lines Only

Type: Limitations

Actors: Three

Audience Prompt: Lines for the actors and instruction.

Description: One actor leads or instructs another two through a certain task. These two actors can only speak two different lines each given by the audience. The leader must integrate their lines into the scene seamlessly.

Two Rooms

Type: Continuation

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Which actors pair up and location for each room.

Description: Two pairs of actors will each do a separate scene in a location given by the audience. When the host calls switch, the first scene will stop and the next will begin and the first line of this scene will be the last one from the other scene. This continues as the host switches between the two scenes.

Understudy

Type: Continuation

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: Two actors play a scene. Halfway through, the host will interrupt the scene and the two actors will be replaced by their understudies who must continue the very same scene.

Walkout

Type: Limitations

Actors: Three

Audience Prompt: Entrance and exit words for actors and location.

Description: Three actors play a scene. When a certain word is said during the scene, an actor's exit word, that actor must exit the scene. When their entrance word is said, they must return. Entrances and exits must be justified by the actors.

Weird Newscasters

Type: Quirk, Endowment

Actors: Four

Audience Prompt: Quirks for the newscasters.

Description: One actor runs a local newscast as the anchorperson. However, the co-anchor, the sports anchor, and the weatherperson all have personality quirks given by the audience. The anchor leads the newscast, prompting the co-anchor, sports, and weather.

What Are You Doing?

Type: Warm-up

Actors: Two / Unlimited

Audience Prompt: None.

Description: One actor approaches the second actor and asks, "What are you doing?" The second actor names a physical activity, like cutting hair. In turn, it is the first actor that must mime cutting hair. The second actor then asks the question and the first actor names something for him or her to do. Repeat.

Whoosh

Type: Warm-up

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: None.

Description: Everyone in a circle. Start with one actor. The basic action is when the actor says "Whoosh!" and points to his or her left. Continue this. However, there are four other actions. "Wow!" is the same as "Whoosh!" except that you point to your right. "Zap!" is when you point to anyone in the circle. When "Groovelicious!" is called, everyone shouts it out and makes groovelicious dance moves. The "Whoosh!" is started afterwards by the actor who called "Groovelicious!" When "Freakout!" is called, everyone runs around screaming

and takes new places in the circle and the caller sets the “Whoosh!” in motion again.

Whose Line

Type: Endowment

Actors: Two

Audience Prompt: Location.

Description: Two actors are given each two lines written down on pieces of paper. At random intervals during their scene, the actors must say the lines written on the piece of paper and incorporate each line into the scene. The scene usually ends when the second person says their second of the two lines.

World’s Worst

Type: Verbal Wit

Actors: Four / Unlimited

Audience Prompt: Categories.

Description: Upon suggestions from the audience, the actors provide examples of the “World’s Worst” thing in each category (i.e. world’s worst doctor).

Zoom

Type: Warm-up

Actors: Unlimited

Audience Prompt: None.

Description: All the actors stand in a circle. One will point to any and say “zoom.” When receiving the zoom, the actor points and zooms immediately to another actor in the circle. Repeat.

Part VIII: Glossary

Many of these words and phrases come and go, and we don't necessarily use all of them on a regular basis. "Blocking," for example, is a fundamental concept and will be used frequently. Conversely, "Mugging," is something that occurs occasionally but the word is hardly used.

Accepting – the act of embracing an offer by another actor during a scene. A good thing.

Advancing – the process of moving a scene forward. Generally a good thing.

Agreement – improvisers need to create a reality that is not really there without knowing what other reality the other players have in mind. In order to clearly establish one united reality, improvisers should be accepting any offer from each other. If offers are accepted we say there is agreement.

Blocking – not accepting other actors' offers, and actually destroying these offers. Not the same as ignoring. Not a good thing.

Breaking the Routine – interrupting a routine action with another action in order to advance the scene. Generally a good thing.

Bulldozing – moving through a scene with attention to the other players' offers and to push only your own ideas into the scene. Not a good thing.

Canceling – destroying what has been established. Better is to use all elements that have been introduced.

Chivalry – not clinging to your own ideas, your own status, or even your own life (as a character). Chivalry is daring to give up control. Actors should allow themselves to be changed by other players. Be happy to be forced to change, and change. Obviously a good thing.

Denial – when players are not accepting each other's offers. Obviously not a good thing.

Endowing – assigning attributes to another performer's character. A good thing if it helps the other player to establish his or her character (and if it is accepted).

Focus – the center of the attention of the audience. Focus should be in one place at any time - if more than one action/plot is going on simultaneously the focus is split. Less experienced improvisers often tend to steal the focus (i.e. split the focus and draw it to something unnecessarily new they introduce).

Fuck Your Fear – The idea is the improvisers fear the consequences of their own actions (or the actions of their characters) and as a result, freeze, or stick to safe-but-boring actions and scenes. Napier urges us to fuck our fear, and just do something, anything, and see where it leads us while improvising.

Gagging – joking, doing funny things, using verbal wit without advancing the scene.

Give and Take – improvised dialog going back and forth between the players. In scenes where players interrupt each other, ignore each other, does not show good give and take.

Gossiping – talking about the action instead of doing it. Or talking about what other people do, or about things in the past or the future. Not a good thing. Try and stick to the motto "Play it, don't say it."

Hedging – making small talk rather than forwarding the action.

Heightening – adding information, to build upon what was built before and by others, to deepen character and emotion, to raise the stakes.

“Hooty Hoo!” - This is the noise you should make when you are not in the scene in order to tell someone in the scene that they are not facing the audience.

Ignoring – ignoring others' offers. Not a nice thing to do. Note that this is even worse than blocking.

Instant Trouble – starting the scene with an offer that creates a problem or a conflict. Usually frowned upon. It is usually better to first establish a decent platform so we know who the characters are, where they are, what their status is, and how the relationships between them are define. After that, a conflict can be dealt with far more interestingly.

Justifying – finding a solution for every offer and every element introduced in the scene. The idea it to justify everything. A good thing, obviously.

Meta - The standard format or practice of a game. The meta can be broken to allow for unusual jokes. For example, in the dating game, two of the contestants could end up together. This makes sense within the world, but isn't standard practice, and is therefore a meta joke.

Mr. Nice Guy – a good improv player is one that makes it easy for other players to play with him or her. This encompasses accepting what your fellow players have to offer, and some chivalry. This does not mean you always need to play nice

characters. You can still be an evil character and be easy to play with.

Mugging – making silly faces instead of acting truthfully. Usually frowned upon.

Never-ending Story – a scene that continues to introduce so many new ideas that it becomes impossible to tie the story together.

Offer – any action or dialog that may advance a scene. Usually a good thing. Offers are supposed to be accepted. A strong offer is an offer that clearly gives a direction into which a scene might evolve. An open offer is an offer that leaves a lot of possible directions for the scene to evolve in.

Out of Your Head – refers to not thinking, letting go of preconceived ideas (which your co-players obviously are painfully unaware of). Goes with the expression 'being in your head': not being 'in' the scene, but thinking about what you should be doing / saying / playing. Improv works best if you just let it happen and don't think about it too much or too hard. It works best is you're not in your head.

Overloading – throwing unnecessary elements into a scene; this will usually lead to sidetracking. Another common cause of overloading is often the introduction of a new and un-needed character, which will usually prevent whatever was going to happen from happening.

Pimping – playfully getting another player to do something unpleasant or difficult. Not really a good thing as it doesn't show much chivalry . Used sparingly if can be quite funny (if accepted).

Postponing – the opposite of advancing.

Questions – generally frowned upon in improv, though they are not always a bad thing. A question that gives no information and leaves the rest of the action/the story to be defined by the other players is a form of wimping . But a question that implies a lot of information about how the story might continue can be quite useful - assuming of course, that all replies to questions are positive, in the sense of accepting the information in the question.

Raising the Stakes – good technique for advancing the scene – make the events in the scene have greater consequences for the characters in the scene.

Reincorporating – recycling or re-using ideas or situations from earlier in the scene, or from previous scenes. While it's always interesting to use elements that were introduced earlier and were neglected or forgotten, you don't want to overdo

this, and turn things into running gags.

Shelving – acknowledging an offer, but not using it right away, with the intent of using it later. If later ever comes before the scene is over. Alternatively: stacking an idea or an interesting character for use in later scenes (or even later performances).

Sidetracking – changing the main story line for no reason.

Status -- a character's sense of self-esteem. When building characters, make sure to play different statuses. And allow your status to be changed (see chivalry); a lot of interesting stories are built around status transformations.

Subtext – a character's subtext is the character's underlying drive, goals, ambitions and sense of self-esteem or status .

Taking Care of Yourself – another pet peeve of Mick Napier (see Improvise - Scene from the Inside Out). The idea is that if you take care of yourself, in the sense of know what your character is all about, have the character's goals and subtext clear in your mind, makes it easier for you to actually play and do something. This may sound contradictory to the Mr. Nice Guy and chivalry principles, but it is not – if you take care of yourself, you'll play free-er, be more playful, and hence be more fun to play with for the other players, as they'll feel more supported.

Talking Heads – a scene in which there is little action, and in which the characters mainly talk, talk, talk, almost telling the story (if you're lucky) rather than playing it.

Tilts – interesting twitch to advance a scene, or to cause status change. A classic tilt would be a couple at the breakfast table, where the woman announces out of the blue that she's pregnant.

Trial by fire - Playing a game you have never played before without first watching older members perform it.

Truthfulness – we play theater, and theatre is supposed to somehow touch the audience, and that's usually done by creating recognizable situations. Audiences naturally laugh when they recognize things they do, or things they know others do. Hence keeping things truthful is pretty powerful. Absurdity is usually cheap and not very interesting (very few of us are Ionesco's after all).

Waffling – postponing by lack of ideas; you just keep on babbling in the hope you'll have an idea. Another example of waffling is wimping , when you accept the other's offer but babble about them without doing anything constructive with the

offer. Not a good thing, obviously.

Walk Through – entering a scene, making a strong offer that advances or tilts the scene, and then exiting. May indeed help advancing the scene, but should be used sparingly.

Wimping – accepting offers but refusing to do anything with them. Such as asking open questions, thus leaving the action to be decided by the other player.

Part IX: Traditions

These are permanent inside jokes. Some inside jokes come and go, but these have stuck around. Inside jokes recorded here should only be permanent elements of the team culture.

Quags - Seconds before every show, we put our hands in and repeatedly say “Quags” louder and louder until we finally shout it and run out on stage. Originates from the mighty ducks quack scene being combined with the nickname of a member of the team. Lucas Quagliata, whose nickname was quags. We replaced quack with quags. Prior to this tradition, the president would give a

PoHuck - In the hour or two before every show, we eat food together and bond as a team. These are what you may know as Potlucks, but someone once wrote the tl too close together to look like H. It used to basically be a Potluck, but now we just have pizza. This joke may currently be transforming into PizzaHuck.

Schlongform - This is when you say the word “longform” but instead replace the word long with a Yiddish word for penis, “schlong.”