

Method Acting Ebook

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Table of Contents

Fundamentals of Method Acting	3
Definition	3
Relaxation	3
Relaxation Exercise	3
Concentration	4
The Fourth Wall	5
Sense Memory	5
The Breakfast Drink	6
The Mirror	7
Shoes And Socks	7
Getting Undressed	7
Summary	8

Fundamentals of Method Acting

Definition

Method Acting is the term for the type of acting taught by Lee Strasberg. Method Acting addresses the question of how can an actor both really feel and also be in control of what he needs to do on stage? How can the actor make his real feelings expressive on stage?

Relaxation

The first step in method acting is relaxation. Michael Chekhov called relaxation the "Feeling of Ease". Lee Strasberg said that one of the biggest problems an actor faces is the inability to relax. Strasberg created a relaxation exercise to lose the tension in your body created by your personal life. The objective is to lose the expressions, mannerisms and energies not necessary for your character.

Relaxation Exercise

First, attempt to find a relaxing position in a chair. The idea is to find a position not used in everyday life. You want to find a position that is not habitual for your body. You are trying to break down habits and mannerism. When this exercise was first developed the actor would simply try to fall asleep in a chair.

Next, begin exploring each area of your body one area at a time. The fingers are usually the first areas to explore, then moving on to the hand, wrist and arm. You'll want to continue exploring all areas of the body to release tension in each area. You explore for tension by contracting and then stretching individual muscles. While flexing muscles in this manner, ask yourself if there is tension. You will instruct the muscle to "let go" of the tension. Mentally will your body to release the tension and allow the muscle to relax. Moving the muscle you are addressing helps you achieve the command to relax.

You'll want to pay special attention to areas of your face. Your face is where your mental stress hides. Flex your eyebrows and temple. Relax the bridge of the nose. Explore the jaw by opening your mouth as wide as possible and releasing. Stick out your tongue and move it in circles. Attempt to release your everyday expression.

Also pay special attention to your neck and back. Explore the arch of your shoulders. Flex your lower back. Tension and stress gather in these points.

For some actors, the movement in the relaxation exercise has become movement for the sake of movement. You are attempting to release tension and everyday stress and become a clean slate. Excessive movement is not necessary.

Generally first sign of falling asleep in the relaxation exercise is that your eyelids will flutter. At this point, produce sounds like “ahhh” from your chest. Do you sound angry or sad when releasing the “ahhh”? Did something happen to you today to make you angry, sad or some other emotion? Are you anticipating something? Do you feel nervous about participating on stage? As you ask yourself these questions, you may find yourself becoming angry or sad. It is beneficial to have a fellow actor or instructor ask these questions. The other person can prod and provoke the emotional release from you by questioning you. You are attempting to connect with emotions and experiences that have affected you. As you express these feelings, you release them and you relax.

This exercise can take up to an hour for a beginner. An experienced actor can relax in twenty to thirty minutes. It requires faithful practice everyday. After practicing this exercise, you should eventually become adept at locating tension within your body. Ultimately, you will use this awareness of your body on stage. You will be able to identify and release tension in front of an audience should it creep into your performance.

The exercise requires a great of concentration. By practicing the relaxation exercise, you will also be improving your concentration.

Concentration

The purpose of the sense memory concentration exercises is to train the actor to create and recreate any object or groups of objects through sheer concentration. This will stimulate an emotional response. You should be able to concentrate on a real object, or on a memory of a real object. An object can be anything, imaginary, physical or fantasy, upon which you have chosen to concentrate.

In life, you generally focus all of you attention on a single task or series of tasks. The task in this case is the object. Your attention may shift from object to object, as required by your goal or because you were interrupted. Likewise, you must focus your attention and concentrate on a single object while acting. As you gain experience and concentration skills, you can begin to focus on multiple objects. Your object may change as the scene progresses but devote all your concentration to the object you have chosen.

When you an acting scene to perform (called a “side”), you must choose the object that you will concentrate on. Try to choose objects relevant to the scene. Otherwise you can choose object irrelevant to the scene just to keep you focus within the scene. The more scene work you perform, the easier it will become for you to choose relevant objects. There are over one hundred sides available for you to download at www.actingscenes.com. It is you choice as what object you will use for different scenes, and remember that an object can be anything.

Sufficient concentration will prevent stage fright. The character you portray will be concentrated on a person or object during a scene. You must also be concentrated on the same object. When you become so concentrated on your object, you will become

oblivious of an audience. You cannot concentrate on the audience if you are fully focused on the object.

The Fourth Wall

The fourth wall is a concentration effort by the actor to create an imaginary wall on stage between yourself and the audience. This removes the audience from your awareness and allows a private and personal scene. An actor who is unaware of the audience will not suffer from stage fright.

Sense Memory

Sense memory is re-living sensations that were experienced through the five senses. Strasberg stressed the term re-living and not just remembering. The difference lies between knowing something and truly recreating it. That difference is substantiated by psychology.

You have heard of psychosomatic illnesses and hypochondria. The mind can manifest symptoms and responses from simply believing the body is sick. This true even if the body is not sick. Sense memory exercises are designed to train you to be able to elicit a response from your body by concentrating on stimuli associated with an experience.

Sense memory is using your memory of real objects to create sensory objects on stage. You need a great deal on concentration to create a sensory object. When you can create a sensory object, you can invoke a “real” response. You will be re-living a sensory experience and not demonstrating an experience. From this stimulus that you know isn't real, suddenly all the other false things become real and you start behaving truthfully. The audience will believe the performance is real because the actor believes it is real. Sense memory creates great truth performance, which is the actors “ability to experience”.

For example, do you know the smell of movie theatre popcorn? When you think of it, do you recall the last movie you saw in the theatre? Does the memory of the smell help trigger other memories? By concentration on the smell, can you recall other aspects of your trip to the theatre? Does concentrating on the smell remind you of the sights and sounds of the theatre? Do the sense memories you recall help you remember the movie, the date and other details? You have recalled the sense memory of the smell of popcorn to re-live the experience of going to the movies.

Smell is the sense most closely associated with memory. It has been shown that smell helps triggers memory recall. Smells become associated with vivid memories.

You must concentrate on the sensory object and it's stimuli. Do not concentrate on trying to elicit an emotion. Through practice you will learn what sensory objects produce the desired emotional response. Then you must simple devote your focus to produce the

sensory object without regard for the emotion. The emotional response will follow naturally.

Again, the choice of the sensory object for a scene is up to you. Ideally, you should choose an object that you have practiced with and you know will provide the appropriate emotional response. If possible, make your choice relevant to the scene as well. The more sensory objects you have practiced, and the more scenes you work, the more skilled you will become. Dozens of scenes are waiting for you to use at www.actingscenes.com. You can download them instantly.

The Breakfast Drink

The purpose of this exercise is to experience and fix in memory the reliving of all the sensory aspects of the breakfast drink. Choose what you habitually drink in the morning (e.g. a cold fruit juice or a hot drink like tea or coffee). Take the cup or glass in both hands and concentrate on your five senses one at a time. Breathe in the smell. Concentrate on the aroma. Allow yourself to feel the heat, steam or cold of the cup. Explore the cup with your hands. Note the weight and texture of it. Be aware of the patterns or decorations on the cup. Note any cracks, nicks or flaws. Listen to the liquid as you stir it or swirl it. See the color, size and shape of the cup. Taste the liquid. Be aware of the temperature, texture and flavor. Also pay attention to the cup against your mouth.

This whole procedure should be done slowly. Deeply explore all of the sensations. The more time to devote to exploration, the more beneficial the exercise becomes. The idea is to be entirely focused and completely concentrated on the breakfast drink.

Now set the container down, turn away and repeat the entire procedure without the breakfast drink.

If you find that you are not able to recreate some of the sensations experienced with the actual cup or glass in your hand, go back to the physical object itself and explore it again. Concentrate on weak sensory aspects as you work with the container (for example, if you cannot re-live the odor, return to the drink and focus on the odor in particular). By thus alternating between the actual drink and imaginarily re-experiencing the drink, weak sensory aspects may be strengthened.

The goal of this exercise is to improve concentration, but specifically this is an attempt to determine how many of your senses are working.

The “breakfast drink” refers to coffee. Coffee has a distinct smell. As you have learned, smell is an important trigger for memory recall. Using a cup of coffee as the breakfast drink will make the exercise easier. However, the exercise is called the breakfast drink so that any cup and liquid may be used.

The Mirror

The mirror exercise is the next sense memory exercise. In this exercise you attempt to create the sensory object of your own image in a mirror. Later, you can add the activity of shaving or putting on makeup.

You are trying to determine if you can explore the sensory object of your reflection in a mirror. Are you simply following a habitual sequence and going through the motions of an activity or are you able to create your sensory reflection?

The exercise is beneficial in determining your personality. If you are unable to recreate the sensory object of your image, then you most likely have difficulty expressing emotions. It follows that you will have difficulty expressing emotion on stage. At this point, you must recognize that you need to work on expressing emotions. Alternatively, if you are able to create the sensory object, then most likely do not have difficulty expressing emotion.

Shoes And Socks

The next sensory exercise is shoes and socks. In this exercise you try to create the sensory objects of shoes and socks. The exercise is putting on these sensory objects.

Getting Undressed

The next exercise is getting undressed. You create the sensory objects of underwear and undress.

Are you self-conscious or inhibited when performing this exercise?

The remaining sense memory exercises are listed to the right. These are more advanced exercises and cannot all be covered here. In particular “Sunshine” moves beyond

List of the sense memory exercises...

- The breakfast drink
- The mirror
- Shoes and socks
- Getting undressed
- Three pieces of fabric
- Sunshine
- Sharp pain
- Sharp taste/sharp smell
- Sound or sight
- Place
- Overall Sensations - Bath, Shower, Wind, Rain, Sauna, Extreme Heat, Extreme Cold
- Personal Object
- Combinations of two, then three, four
- Private Moment

physical sensory objects to a feeling. In that exercise you are re-living the stimuli for sunlight on your skin.

Summary

Your goal as an actor is to audition and win roles. Method Acting can provide you with a valuable set of skills to use in your acting, and therefore in auditions. Most auditions require a cold reading.

Would you like to learn more about auditioning, cold reading and acting? The companion ebook to this piece is the [Acting Secrets Ebook](#). Learn the secrets to winning a role from a cold read audition. You'll learn how breakdown a scene for a cold read. You'll see how to determine the following elements of a scene...

- The **setting** of the scene.
- The **relationship** between the characters.
- The **conflict** driving the scene.
- The **wants** of each character.
- The **emotional colors** of the characters.
- Determining the **moment before**.

In addition, the ebook covers tips and tricks for bringing characters to life in your cold read. You'll discover...

- substitution
- making use of body language
- playing the opposite
- reacting
- free movements

The ebook includes two scenes for you to practice cold reading with. The [Acting Secrets Ebook](#) is the perfect companion piece to this ebook. Visit www.ActingScenes.com today to pick up your copy of the [Acting Secrets Ebook](#).

That concludes the Fundamentals of Method Acting. The three pieces of the Fundamentals of Method Acting are relaxation, concentration and sense memory. After you have mastered the ideas and exercises here, you may add more sophisticated techniques on top of these building blocks.