

Warm-ups

The goal of a warm-up is to generate camaraderie, trust, and joi de vive between the players that are about to do a workshop together, or go on stage together. They allow people to get in the moment and be prepared to take risks with the other players that they are about improvise with.

Alien, Tiger, Cow (warm-up)

Introduction:

This is an exercise used to break the ice, and get everyone in synch. Everyone into a circle.

Description:

There are three things that the players can be. The first is an alien. The alien is signified by making antennae with your fingers and leaning into the circle making the noise "zeep zeep zeep". The second thing you can be is a tiger. The tiger is signified by leaning into the circle exposing your ferocious claws and roaring. The last is the cow. The cow's udder is exposed by putting your hand on your stomach and mooing loudly. Someone in the circle briskly counts to three. On three everyone commits to one of the three character types alien, tiger, or cow. Keep repeating the cycle of 1-2-3 until everyone does the same creature. Generally dissolves into complete chaos before there is any synchronicity.

Gimmicks:

Increase the number of options i.e., cow, android, fridge, Chevy

Variations:

Majority Rules-- the odd people out are out. I.e., if there are six tigers, four cows and two aliens the two players that chose aliens are out of the circle.

Group Stop (warm-up)

Introduction:

This is listening warm-up. Everyone start milling about the room.

Description:

Everyone quietly mills about the room. One person will elect to freeze in position unexpectedly. As soon as one notices that someone else has frozen in position they freeze as well. So the effect of one person freezing causes everyone to freeze. Once everyone is still the group starts milling around again. The goal is to see how quickly the group can freeze in position.

Variations:

The warm-up can be made more interesting by having the players make noises as they move around. Increasingly noisy characters make it harder and harder to notice the group stop, and therefore makes it more challenging.

Hello (warm-up)

Introduction:

This warm up will help break the ice and get the blood moving. Everyone start to mill about the room.

Description:

The players mill about the room. At some point the workshop leader asks them all the greet each other by shaking hands. Greet one person and move on, greet another and so on. This continues for a while. Then endow each of the greetings with an element. For example, "greet each other like you are long lost friends". You can continue to endow the greetings with elements like: someone you are afraid of, someone you love, a smelly person, etc. The greetings can be embellished with emotions like: greet everyone angrily, greet everyone happily, greet everyone like you have a secret, etc. Have fun with it, and keep the greetings short and superficial.

Pass Catch (warm-up)

Introduction:

This warm-up will get the blood flowing, improve our reactions and get us feeling comfortable about being silly.

Description:

Once everyone is in the circle make sure that they have enough space to move freely without accidentally clouting each other in the head. One player in the circle throws themselves into a bizarre stance and makes a corresponding noise along with it. This gesture is made to the player to their right in the circle. That player immediately reflects back the gesture and noise, imitating the other player as best she can. Once she has done that she immediately turns around and creates a new and wonder gesture and noise to the player to her right. The process is repeated and goes around the circle for a few minutes. It is important that the players not stop to think in between the poses. The player should receive, reflect, turn and create a new pose without pause.

Variations:

The player to the right can dispense with reflecting the gesture and quickly turn around and give the gesture to the player to their right. This will result in a continuous noise and shape flying around the circle at high speed. Eventually the gesture is altered. The result can be stunning. The gesture can also be thrown across the circle. This keeps players from being prepared and gets people more in the moment.

Slow Motion Samurai (warm-up)

Introduction:

This warm-up will get us feeling silly, get the blood flowing, and help get us working together. Start milling about the room.

Description:

Once everyone is milling about comfortably they are told to start moving in slow motion.

Once a stable rate of speed is determined the players all become Samurai with poisonous blades built into their fore arms. The object is to kill all the other Samurai in the room. If anyone is touched by the fore arm of another player they must die a poisoned death in slow motion. It is important that players keep their speed continuous. The point is not to win the warm-up, but to have fun. If players are moving too fast and massacring everyone else simply tell them to slow down. It helps people work together. The warm-up usually ends when there is a large pile of bodies on the floor.

Variations:

Players are allowed to block attacking Samurai poison fore arms with their own fore arm. The workshop can be divided into two groups, having a little feudal war.

What Are You Doing? (warm-up)

Introduction:

This warm-up breaks one of the major improvisational rules, however it allows us to start getting in the moment. Everyone into a circle.

Description:

Once the circle is formed one player goes into the circle and starts to mime a simple activity. Once the activity has been established one of the players from the circle jumps in and asks "what are you doing?" The player doing the mime responds with some activity other than the one they are doing. If they are mowing the lawn they might say 'filleting a soul.' The player that asked the question starts the activity that was answered (i.e., filleting a soul) and waits to be asked what she is doing. This continues until all have tried the exercise.

Variations:

Get players to ask 'what are you doing?' in different accents or moods.

Zip, Zap, Zoop (warm-up)

Introduction:

This warm-up gets our brains acting without thinking. Everyone into a circle.

Description:

This is another motion around the circle warm-up. In this warm-up one of the players points to another player to one side of them and says 'zip'. That player turns to the next player in the circle, points to them and says 'zip'. Thus the 'zip' zips around the circle in one direction. At any time a receiving player can say 'zap' to the person pointing at them. When they do the player that said 'zip' and was pointing at them must change direction of the pointing. This means that they must quickly turn around, point and say 'zip' to the person that just pointed at them. Now the 'zip' can zip around the circle, but changing direction every time there is a 'zap'. Lastly the person that receives the 'zip' may elect to yell 'zooop' and point at someone anywhere in the circle. That player then restarts the 'zip' going in the direction of their choice. The group must really pay attention for this to work.

Exercises

Each exercise has some specific improvisational rule that it exemplifies. Exercises often break other improvisational rules so that players can focus on certain aspects of their craft. There are many exercises that are also good handles. Keep in mind that all the handles develop improv skills as well.

1-2-3-4 (exercise)

Introduction:

This exercise covers the basic framework of an open scene. It is very structured and requires three people. Could one person set up a scene.

Description:

This exercise is very structured. Each player in it has a specific role, and each sentence spoken has a specific role. It is crucial to emphasize that each step represents only one sentence. It is recommended to talk the players through this the first through times.

ZERO - environment

The first player comes on stage and creates an environment based on the set up of the scene. The environment is created in silence through mime. Once they have clearly defined their environment the second player comes on stage. For the sake of this explanation a kitchen is created.

ONE - relationship

The second player comes on stage and accepts the environment that the first player defined through her mime. The second player on contributes only one sentence to the scene and NO more. That sentence simply defines a relationship between the two players. For example a simple sentence like 'hi mom' would suffice.

TWO - conflict

The first player in the scene then speaks only one sentence. This sentence creates a conflict based on the ask-for, environment, or relationship. For instance 'you are late for dinner' is a simple choice.

THREE - raising the stakes

Player two now has a chance to speak her second sentence. This sentence accepts all of the previous elements of the story, and makes the conflict worse. 'I hate your cooking mom' would be a sentence that advances the story by making the conflict worse.

FOUR - resolution

The two player have to keep their mouths shut. Keep in mind that this is an exercise and not a scene. The third player now enters the scene, accepts the environment and speaks her singular sentence. This sentence will end the scene and resolve the conflict at hand. The resolution must somehow incorporate elements from the scene that went before. For example, 'hi honey, lets go eat at mcswiney's tonight.'

That is the end of the exercise and another three players get set up to do another one. They usually take about one to two minutes each.

Variations:

If players cannot keep to one sentence. Try doing the steps in gibberish or have someone offstage speak the player's sentence.

Advance and Expand (exercise)

Introduction:

This exercise focuses on raising the stakes and exploration of the environment. Please set up a scene.

Description:

The players start into their scene as they would any other. When the 'advance' is called out the players focus solely on the story, and advance the story. When 'expand' is called out the players solely explore their environment. During an 'advance' the players would add nothing to the environment, but would introduce constructive new bits of information about who, why and where. They could raise the stakes, introduce a new character, but every offer must make the story move forward. These advances can be done at the exclusion of the environment and even the reality. The goal of the exercise is to make the players keenly aware of when they are advancing a story. During an 'expand' the story is completely ignored, characters are not developed and the players engross themselves in their mimed environments. The sink that their character is standing at becomes the focus. The taps are explored, the shape is explored, its taste, etc. Again the story will be derailed by the 'expand' but the environment will become much more real.

Variations:

Have one player expand while another advances.

Conducted Story (exercise)

Introduction:

Let's get four or five players in a line and one person to conduct a story.

Description:

The goal of the conducted story is to have the players tell a story that moves seamlessly from one player to another. The goal of the conductor is to make the story flow as well as possible. If the conductor moves from one player to another the new player that is speaking must continue on as though there was no pause. For instance, moves from player Eh who said, "many children were afraid of Carl for he was known to ha.." to player Bee, who would continue seamlessly "...ve piles of library books that were overdue." The key is listening. It is a listening exercise. The four players that are not speaking must be listening. They all must have the next word ready to go, and only if they are listening will that word make any sense. The players must also be accepting of what is happening in the story. Forcing their own agenda will show up quickly. Words like, 'but' and 'instead of' reflect someone denies another player's offers.

Gimmicks:

Hold on one player for a long time.

Variations:

Give each of the players a genre the impact the story when it comes to them. Try the story in gibberish.

Elevator (exercise)

Introduction:

This is a character exercise.

Description:

The players each get onto an elevator at different floors. Each character uses the step of getting on the elevator as a vehicle for demonstrating their characteristics. Without speaking the character should be clearly defined by how they move, how they push the call button, and what noises they make. The next character on should make a choice that compliments the character that is already on the elevator. These characters all interact as they see fit. Keeping in mind the confined space of the elevator, and the eventual need to exit. It is important that all the players accept and help define the environment of the elevator.

Gimmicks:

Have the elevator break down and leave them stuck in it for some time.

Emotional Symphony (exercise)

Introduction:

This exercise will help us explore emotions. Could we get five people in a line.

Description:

Five of the players are lined up in a performance fashion. One person is chosen to conduct the players in the symphony. Each player is endowed with some emotion. It is good to get a range of contrasting emotions for the players to use. Once each player is given their emotion the conductor points from one player to another. The players do not speak, but express their emotions through physicalization and noise. The intensity of the emotion is increased as the conductor raises her hand while pointing at the player. The conductor moves from player to player conducting an emotional symphony.

Gimmicks:

Point at two players at once.

Variations:

This exercise is fun, and does have some performance value. A way to make it closer to the audience is to ask for names from the audience, and get the players to speak only that name, tainted with the emotion that they were endowed with.

Environment Build (exercise)

Introduction:

This exercise will help us work on accepting, complementing and creating environments.

Description:

This is a silent exercise. An environment is called out at the beginning of the exercise. Each player comes on stage and mimes one object in the environment. Each following player also adds an object to the environment, but before they do so they must use

each mime object previously created within the context of the environment. So the first player gets it each easy, but the fifth player would have to use all four of the previously mimed objects in the environment before adding hers. The exercise helps with mime, visual listening and attention to detail. Commitment is an important component of this exercise because players will often be faced with mime objects that do not make any sense to them at all. It is also informative to have the players tell what each of their objects was once the exercise is over. That way everyone can find out what each player really mimed.

Variations:

Once all the players have mimed an object they start a scene using the environment that they created.

Environment Shift (exercise)

Introduction:

In this exercise a group of players will create an environment within a few seconds. The players can be objects in the environment, sound effects, or characters typical to that environment.

Description:

Once the environment is called out the players will create the environment. It is done without conversing or planning. Players will become trees, rocks, birds, or characters. No scene is started, just the creation of the environment. The 'shift' comes in when all the players are on stage and the environment has been established. Another environment is called out and the players must make a seamless transformation into the other environment.

Variations:

The players create an environment without getting one called out. Each player comes on stage in one second intervals and an environment is created.

Freeze Tag (exercise)

Introduction:

Everybody up in a line. The first two players start some shared physical activity.

Description:

At any time during the two person scene that is taking place someone calls out freeze. The two players immediately stop what they are doing and 'freeze' into whatever positions that they were in when the 'freeze' was called. The next player in the line immediately tags one of the players that is frozen on stage and assumes their exact position. For the exercise freeze, as opposed to the performance handle [freeze](#), the player must assume the *exact* physical position of the player they chose to tag out. This ensures that the player was paying attention to the physical detail of the scene as opposed to just the words. They must be listening with their eyes. Once they assume the position they must start a whole new scene that justifies the position that they are in. This scene must be completely different from the preceding one. This means that they must be paying attention to the scene, so as to assure that their new scene is completely different. If the player breaks any of these rules stop the exercise and give a note. It is also a good idea to put a moratorium on those activities that can be called

upon which justify any position: fighting, dancing, adhesive accidents, painting models, store mannequins etc.

Gimmicks:

Don't call freeze and let a scene continue. This is good for catching those players that are in for the short gag.

Variations:

See the handle [freeze tag](#) for all kinds of variations. It can also be good to randomly pick players from the workshop as opposed to the next person in line. This ensures that everyone is paying attention to the scene at hand.

Gibberish Exercises (exercise)

Introduction:

This exercise will help us get out of worrying about what we sound like and explore accents. Everyone up in a circle.

Description:

Once in the circle the one of the players turns to their left and greets their neighbour in a gibberish tongue. That player responds with a gibberish 'hello' that mimics the other player. That player turns around and greets the next in the circle and so on. Once the gibberish greeting has gone around the whole circle the gibberish gets embellished. For instance, all the gibberish could be sad gibberish, or happy gibberish, Computer gibberish. The gibberish can also be used to communicate intent like, school bullies gibberish. The goal is get people communicating emotions and concepts without depending on words. If going around the circle gets boring the exercise can be combined with the exercise [Cross Circle](#) to get the players moving.

Variations:

On/off gibberish is an exercise where the players switch from gibberish to their native tongue when called to do so from off stage. Translating gibberish has one person assigned to translating another's gibberish. There is a handle called [Poet's Corner](#) that uses this gimmick.

Hunting The Whatsit (exercise)

Introduction:

This exercise works on character development. One player up on stage.

Description:

The player that is on stage becomes a hunter. She is kind of an Elmer Fudd of hunting, because she starts to talk out loud about what it is that she is hunting. "it is a lovely day for hunting deer". The next player in line hops up on stage as a deer, and kills the hunter. The player that was endowed and entered the stage becomes the hunter, and the hunter heads off stage. The hunters can look for anything that they want: winged rhinoceros, happy limping Scotsman, aggressive washing machines, etc. It is up to the player that is called on-stage as the prey to sneak up on the hunter and vanquish them in character.

Machines (exercise)

Introduction:

This exercise is designed to help players work together and develop physical cooperation.

Description:

A machine that does not exist is called for and the players create the machine by each adding an essential part. There is no discussion amongst the players before starting. The first player starts with a repetitive activity and an associated noise. The next players add to the machine with some activity that fits into the previous player's activity. This continues until a machine is created. The machine is sped up and slowed down. Certain players can be asked to malfunction, and the whole machine must respond. There is no leader in the creation of the machine. It is important that all the players reflect the changes in each part of the machine.

Mirrors (exercise)

Introduction:

Everyone into pairs for an exercise that trains sharing focus, taking focus and physical listening.

Description:

One of the players in the pair begins to gradually move. The other player mirrors the movements of the other player. Initially one player is leading the other and then the lead switches. Eventually there is no way to tell which player is leading the exercise the focus is being shared rather than taken by one player or the other. The object is not to screw up the other player, but to make the reality of the mirror the priority.

Gimmicks:

Try a kaleidoscope with three or more players all mirroring actions in a circle.

Variations:

Sounds can be mirrored as well.

Park Bench (exercise)

Introduction:

This is a character exercise. Could we have one player sitting on a park bench.

Description:

The first player on-stage sits silently, displaying as much about their character as they can without verbalising it. The next player in makes a strong complimenting character choice. A complimenting character may be contrasting or supporting. The player coming on should make strong character choices as soon as they are off their seat. This means the character should be embodied in their walk, voice and intent. The two characters interact for about thirty seconds and the player that was on the bench first finds a reason to leave. This leaves the second player on the bench alone for a while. The next player creates a character and joins the player that is on the bench. This continues until all in the workshop have done one or more characters.

Gimmicks:

Lock the players into the characters that they create, and have them meet again on the park bench.

Variations:

Info Desk: a series of characters approach a department store info desk, and each request causes the person behind the desk to leave.

Silent Scene (exercise)

Introduction:

This is a silent scene. The players will set up an open scene, but there will be no talking during the scene.

Description:

What more can be said. The common pitfalls in the silent scene is to start to use frequent gesticulations, lip reading, and pointing to get concepts across. It is not a charades scene, it is a silent scene. Everything thing is the same as any other scene, except the information is conveyed without speaking aloud.

So I'll (exercise)

Introduction:

Everyone into a circle for a very structured one sentence at a time story.

Description:

This exercise forces listening and gets players taking smaller, more logical steps with their story building. It also helps players when they draw a blank in a performance setting. The first player makes any kind of statement. For instance, "It is a lovely day out." The next player in the line says, "WHAT YOU ARE SAYING IS THAT--It is a lovely day out, SO I WILL--go for a walk." The goal is to say the next most logical thing in the story. The next player would say "WHAT YOU ARE SAYING IS THAT--I'll go for a walk, SO I WILL--get my shoes." The story that builds should be a logical one. It will not be a story that will win Pulitzer prizes, but it will make sense. This a great way of combating troupes that are suffering from 'offer suffocation' in their shows.

HANDLES

The list is composed of improv structures that have the crucial audience participation component and have built in gimmicks that greatly increase the chance that comedy will happen. The rules of environment, character and story should be maintained.

Alphabet Game (handle)

Introduction:

In this game the actors must start each sentence of dialogue with a new letter from the alphabet. For example the first sentence must start with A, and the second sentence must start with B and so on...

Description:

The actors must build a scene within 26 starts. Most places allow for the more than one sentence to follow the first sentence. When this is done it is important that actors really

punch the word that starts with the letter. Activity is important as it allows the scene to progress independent of words. This game ceases to be a challenge rapidly.

Gimmicks:

Automatopeia (sound effects instead of words) Dingle-dingle for D.

Variations:

Starting at Z and ending at A. Starting and ending at some random letter from the audience. Using a box of alphabet cookies to randomly pull letters up and start sentences with those (eating the cookies is optional).

Animal Characters (handle)

Introduction:

Each player in this scene will take on the traits of some kind of animal chosen by the audience. The actors do not pretend to be the given animal, but act like person would if they were that kind of animal.

Description:

Once the actors are each assigned an animal type the scene starts like any other. The animal types are used to give the actors character and activity to embellish the scene with. The actors should be somewhat subtle with the endowment. For example, if one is endowed with a cat personality it would be obvious to go meow, but more fun to play with your meal like a cat plays with its prey. The scenes are just normal scenes otherwise.

Variations:

The type of characteristic can be varied: automobiles, kitchen appliances, emotions, movie genres, political causes. The handle can become a game when the actors are given the endowments secretly and the audience must guess it, or the each of the other actors must guess the endowment.

Arms Expert (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene actor A will talk and supply the body for the character while player B will supply the arms for the same character.

Description:

Actor A stands with her arms at her side while player B pushes her arms through the armpits of actor A. Ideally the players will be chosen for appropriateness of size. It is ideal if the arm supplying player can hide behind the talking player. The two go about the scene usually in the form of a question answer session with the audience. The talking player is left to justify the actions of the hands that she has no control over.

Gimmicks:

Usually come from the arms player, she can make bizarre and inexplicable gestures, or contradictory gestures, etc. while the talking player tries to maintain the reality. The interviewer can also make life challenging for the two actors by asking for something from the player's pocket, getting her to adjust articles of clothing. Doing push ups would be the ultimate for this handle.

Variations:

Arms and legs expert (you have to be close for this one), one player per arm, reversed one player per arm (i.e., a left arm on the right side and vice versa) this looks really odd.

Backwards Scene (handle)

Synonyms:

Rewind scene, reverse scene

Introduction:

In this scene the actors will tell a story backwards. They will not be talking backwards, or moving in reverse, but they will present the components of the scene from the 'end' to the 'beginning.' This is a very hard scene.

Description:

The actors start with an ending to a story. Then each actor must ask herself what would have happened immediately before this event and then portrays the most likely thing that would have preceded. Actors will find themselves frequently asking themselves, "she just said...so I would have..." Very hard stuff. Keep it very simple and never talk in the future tense, that already has happened!!

Sound Trouble (handle)

Introduction:

During this scene the sound effects person will randomly insert sounds throughout the scene that the actors must justify appropriately.

Description:

The actors start out and continue, a regular scene. At any time the sound effects tech can insert random sounds, and usually ones that have nothing to do with the context of the scene. The actors do best by justifying the noises in the context of the scene.

Gimmicks:

Keep using the same sound effect over and over again. Keep using the same justification for everything over and over again.

Categories (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene each actor will be assigned a general category of stuff. During the scene the actor must reference her assigned category as often as possible. For instance if her category were cars she could reference cars by puns, analogies or direct references.

Description:

The person setting this scene up must be certain to get general categories for the actors to work from. Categories like: cars, cutlery, vegetables, etc. The actors should carry out a regular scene and reference the category that has been assigned to them as often as possible.

Variations:

This can be turned into a competitive game where the players must list off all the things from a category.

Do Run Run Song (handle)

Introduction:

The players are going to tell a story in the format of a classic pop song.

Description:

Several players line up and start to sing in the following pattern. A, A, B, B, B. This is best explained by example:

Player one, "I went to the store to buy some pop."

All players, "a do run run run a do run run."

Player two, "And on the way there I met a cop."

All players, "a do run run run a do run run."

Player three, "hey and that cop was lean."

Player four, "hey she started to make a scene."

Player one, "hey and she was really mean."

All players, "a do run run run a do run run."

Player two, "the cop pushed me up against her car."

All players, "a do run run run a do run run."

Player three, "that's how I got this terrible scar."

And so on.. Until the story is told. There are all kinds of variations to this. It's format is particularly forgiving of those who cannot sing all that well. It is recommended that the player doing the solo line step forward from the line of players.

Gimmicks:

When someone gets stuck just punch out any verse and the rest of the players kick in with a supportive do run run. This isn't really a gimmick, it is the way that improv should always be performed: commitment and support.

Variations:

It can be turned into a die type game, where the players that slip up are dropped from the line. There are an infinite number of variations that can be made to the song itself.

Dubbing Games (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene there will be two actors offstage and two actors on-stage. Actor A's (on-stage) voice will be supplied by actor B (offstage) and actor C's (on-stage) voice will be supplied by actor D (offstage). However the actor's supplying the voices (B and D) will not be able to see what the other two actors (A and C) are doing

Description:

The actors supplying the voices must make distinctly different voices. It is also important that the actors that are being dubbed move their mouths like they are speaking when the dubbers are talking. It is important to have an activity and to justify what is being said through activity.

Gimmicks:

The moving actors should make large obvious physical choices that they must justify when their dubber makes a contradicting statement. A chainsaw becomes an ax, a hug becomes a punch and so on.

Variations:

Straight dubbing: the dubbing players can watch the actors. Cross dubbing: the two actors on stage dub each other's words (very hard). Three-way dubbing: actor one dubs actor two and actor two dubs actor three and actor three dubs actor one.

Emotional Boundaries (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene the stage will be divided into three zones. Each zone will be designated with a particular emotion, as the players move about on the stage they must adopt the emotion of the zone that they are in.

Description:

The introduction pretty much explains the game. It is important that the players use the entire stage to explore each of the emotional areas. The transitions are best done crisply as the player crosses the boundary. The host setting the scene up should make sure that the emotions are contrasting and simple.

Gimmicks:

Rapidly crossing the stage and altering every word in the sentence with the emotion. Straddling the boundary and combining emotions.

Variations:

Obviously there can be more than three zones, and emotions can be assigned to furniture and props. There are genre variations where each zone is assigned a type of entertainment. Again the common list of categories can apply to the zones: emotions, genres, animals, professions.

Emotional Transfer (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene the two actors will be assigned contrasting emotions. At some point in the scene they must switch the emotions from one player to the other.

Description:

The emotions must be contrasting (love, and hate), and the players must make strong choices in the beginning of the scene. The transition is best appreciated if it is done subtly and the transfer is somehow justified within the context of the scene.

Variations:

This can be done with status (high versus low), and the players must make a switch in status within the scene. Any of the endowments can be switched: animals, appliances, vehicle types, etc.

Endowments (Emotional) Party (handle)

Introduction:

Each player in this scene will be assigned an emotion. The emotion is kept secret from the each player, but it will be taped to her back on a large piece of paper. It is up to the other players in the scene to get the player to express the emotion on her back. The game is over when all players have expressed their emotion. [send all players out and write down some emotions].

Description:

The players should subtly nudge the player into expressing the emotion written on her back. This is one instance where it is good to occasionally turn your back to the audience, reminding them of the emotion that has been assigned to you.

Variations:

The situation need not be a party either, the scene could take place at work, school, with the same goals in mind.

Entrances and Exits (handle)

Introduction:

In this game each player is assigned some word that might come up in casual conversation. Whenever that word is spoken by another player in the scene they must enter or exit. If the player's word is spoken and she is offstage, she must immediately come on-stage and justify her entrance. If her word is spoken while on-stage she must immediately exit and justify her exit. [assign words to each player]

Description:

This is a listening game. If you don't hear your word, the audience will immediately notice. If the players notice that someone has not heard their word, they should repeat it. Each player must also remember each of the other players' words. This scene can get quite chaotic. Remember to build a story and justify the entrances and exits. Saying your own word does not count.

Environment Scene (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene the participating players will create an environment of your suggestion.

Description:

The players rapidly fill the stage, each one taking up the role of another essential part of the suggested environment. The players should offer themselves as props: trees, tables, rocks. They can supply sound effects as well. This is obviously a warm up game, and it is a good one for breaking the boundaries between improv and 'regular' theatre.

Variations:

Once one environment is set the players are given another one, and they must transform into the new environment without leaving the stage.

Fairy Tale In A Minute (handle)

Introduction:

The players are going to present to you a fairy tale of your choice [get fairy tale known to most, recap it]. They are going to present this story in under 1 minute starting now...

Description:

This is a high energy scene where all the essential components of the fairy tale must be portrayed in less than 60 seconds. Frenetic can be fun but the characters must be clear and sheer chaos will not be fun to watch.

Variations:

Movie in a minute is another variation. Check to be sure that most of the players know what the story is, and remember to get a recap. Historical event in 45 seconds is fun too.

Last Sentence Scene (handle)

Introduction:

This will be an open scene. The only constraints on this scene will be the first sentence and the last sentence of the scene are chosen by the audience. [get a first sentence and a last sentence from the audience]

Description:

One of the actors must state the first sentence as the first words out of her mouth. Feel free to set up the environment without speaking. Don't be afraid to build into the first sentence. The last sentence of the scene is a bit harder to manage, and it is much better appreciated by the audience. The players must remember that they have only been asked to do two things in the scene, and you are expected to do them.

Variations:

First and last word can be used instead. There can also be a middle sentence, or word, that must appear at any time between the first and last sentence/word.

Modern Fairy Tale (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene the players will combine a well known fairy tale with a genre of movie. [be sure to recap the fairy tale and recap the genre]

Description:

This scene involves altering a known story with characters and genre clichés from commercial film. Remember to tell the story as it was recapped. If you are combining a fairy tale and a specific film it is important to get an idea of what the film was about. If you have no idea, offer some support, background or sit back and enjoy. What makes this a useful scene is that players can introduce topics from either genre, and it is likely that they will know one or the other.

Variations:

Combine any known story with a contrasting genre: science fiction, war movie, love story, Shakespeare, occupation, etc.

Moving People (handle)

Introduction:

The players in this scene will be unable to move. For some reason they must have

helpers controlling their bodies to move around in the scene. The players can speak and will supply dialogue for the scene, but someone else will supply their motion. [select audience members to move the players]. Move the players by pushing on the body part you want to move. Don't force their backs or necks, and be careful pulling on their clothing

Description:

It is important for the players to get themselves an activity to do. This will force the people doing the moving to move the players. This game is such a gimmick that players often forget to set up an environment and establish a relationship.

Variations:

One player can be responsible for moving all the players on the stage. The more players the more work.

Musical Scene (handle)

Introduction:

The following scene will be a musical. This simply means that at various times throughout the scene the players will break into song.

Description:

Singing on stage is the terror of many improvisers. There is a feeling that they may be tolerated speaking on stage, but singing would surely lead to their lynching. Not so. The audience really gets behind someone that sings on stage. It is the same for make-a-song, do-run-run, or madrigals. Singing is respected, and if it can be done remotely well it will be loved. A musical requires some musical instrument to work best. Singing from taped music is harder to orchestrate and ruins the magic a bit. Consider the musician as another player with offers and complimentary support in the scene. The musician may offer musical styles to select the mood, and even direct the scene. Musicals are most easily done when there are songs intermixed amongst a regular scene. This allows for advances to be made without having to sing them.

Variations:

Opera. All words are sung.

Options (handle)

Introduction:

At various points in this scene the actors will be asked to freeze. At that point we will ask you [audience] for some vital piece of information from the story. The players must immediately incorporate the suggestion into the scene.

Description:

The players simply go about the scene as they normally would. Like all [freeze games](#) it is important to hold position when the freeze is called. Attempt to incorporate the suggestion immediately into the scene. The less one thinks about it the easier it is, and the more appreciated by the audience. The goal of the players is to keep the scene sane and on track while rationalizing the distractors. The ask fors can be words, emotions, secrets, props, physical ailments, genres, etc..

Variations:

If the audience is particularly destructive it might be worth while getting a list of

suggestions that are called out by the host. This game is often called shopping list. A roller coaster is the same as a shopping list, except that all of the suggestions are along the same track: all genres, all restaurants types, all textiles, all occupations, etc. An Umm Err scene is just an option scene where the players ask for a suggestion, by pausing and saying um..err, and the audience suggests the player's dialogue. In What Happens Next? the players are frozen and the audience is asked what happens next in the scene.

Slide Show (handle)

Introduction:

In slide show the players will be freezing into positions one after another while the presenter justifies each 'slide' and tells a story.

Description:

This game is done best with lighting cues for the position changes. Each time the lighting drops, the players on stage scramble into a new position. When the light comes up the presenter (usually just off stage miming a controller) must justify the new positions that the players have taken on. Slide show will be stronger if the presenter identifies a lead character, and resolves each slide around the lead character. Don't be afraid to endow players in the slide as inanimate objects like trees or lamps. The players that make up the slides should keep a few things in mind. Everyone does not need to be in every slide. If the story is going in a certain direction try to continue with the story. Save the crazy positions for later in the scene, or when the scene is dying. The players need to support the presenter, and listen to the presenter. Eventually a story will be told and the slide show will end.

Gimmicks:

The players on stage can get into stranger and stranger positions. All the players can run off stage leaving a blank stage. The players can keep the same position slide after slide. The presenter can comment that a slide is in backwards or upside down, or out of focus requiring the players to accommodate the slide.

Variations:

Usually this is a travel monologue with photos. Slide show could just as easily be a series of wedding photos, an instruction manual, or pictures of a birthday party.

Soliloquies (handle)

Synonyms:

None

Introduction:

In this scene the players have the actors vain luxury of breaking out into a soliloquy whenever they feel like it, and whenever you least expect it.

Description:

A soliloquy is any monologue where the player reveals innermost information about herself with no intent of addressing a particular listener. If a spotlight can be thrown onto the player that is ideal. The other players in the scene must throw focus to the player doing the soliloquy. Ideally a soliloquy will both advance the scene and develop the character.

Soundscape (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene you, the audience, are responsible for the sounds effects in this scene. When a player walks across the stage we will need foot steps, when a door is opened we will need a door sound.

Description:

Do a normal scene. In the beginning move a bit more slowly than normal so that the audience can get the hang of what is happening. Like any other scene activity is a good thing. It is essential here. Accept the reality of the sounds, try not to comment on the nature of odd sounding doors, or sick sounding carpets.

Gimmicks:

Start to move really fast so that the audience cannot keep up with the sounds. Introduce something into the scene that has no known sound.

Variations:

Sometimes a microphone is given to one player that is responsible for all the foley in a scene. This is a good idea with a really large, or destructive audience.

Space Jump (handle)

Introduction:

This game will consist of a series of different scenes. The first scene will have one player, the next will have two players, and so on. At some point in the one player scene we will yell freeze, and the next person will jump in and justify the positions and start a new scene. This will continue until all five players are in the scene. At that point the players will leave in the reverse order that they came in. As the players leave you will see all the previous scenes taking place as if time had passed, and justifying their new physical positions. Simple huh?

Description:

This is just a simple game of freeze. The twist is that you must justify the positions of several other people when you start your scene. The next twist is that you must remember where in the order your scene is. The player that started the scene (i.e., the third player in the three person scene) is responsible for reminding all the others which scene it is when the game returns to her scene. A trick is to remember the scene that follows yours. Then you will be cued that when that player leaves, your scene is next, and you will deftly remind all the other players.

When the scene includes all five players, the fifth player must find some reason to exit the scene, preferably within the context of the scene. Then the fourth scene spontaneously starts, and the fourth player finds a reason to leave, and the third scene starts and so on. I have seen this work successfully with 16 people.

Variations:

Described above is the ascending/descending version. There is another version where the scene numbers are randomly called out and the players jump on and off as cued. When each scene returns it will be advanced in time, and the positions must be justified.

Split Environments (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene two players will be in the same scene, however each player will believe that she is in a different environment. If one player believes that she is in an air traffic control tower, she will respond to everything that the other player does as if she were in an air traffic control tower. However the other player will believe that she is in a batter's cage. [get two contrasting and physical environments]

Description:

In this scene the two players interact as described. Each must maintain her reality as strongly as possible, and react to what the other player does as if it were in her reality. Now that I have repeated that often enough... If the player that is in the batter's cage says, 'okay let them fly.' The player in the air traffic control tower might give clearance for take-off. If the player in the air traffic control tower types at her console, the other player might think that she is doing special pre-batting finger warm-ups. Etc. It is a very hard scene to do. There are enormous payoffs when the players listen, accept and advance within their own well defined environments. Does this sound familiar?

Stunt Doubles (handle)

Introduction:

In this scene the regular actors will have stunt doubles [introducing them helps] that can replace them at any time that the scene just gets too dangerous. Of course you can determine when things are getting dangerous simply by yelling for stunt doubles!

Description:

The regular actors carry out their scene as they would any others, ideally the scene will be mundane and safe. Stunt doubles can be called in when one player is about to open a door, or comb her hair. The stunt doubles replace the two players and that mundane activity becomes extraordinarily dangerous and harmful. Some players can do the action in slow motion. When the stunt is finished usually with some horrid injury to the stunt double, the regular actors come in and continue the scene where the stunt doubles left off.

Gimmicks:

Have the stunt doubles become more and more lame as they come on for each stunt.

Switch Characters (handle)

Introduction:

When the word switch is yelled all the players must change characters by replacing the character to their immediate right. The right most player will exit stage right.

Description:

Not much to add here other than most of these scenes decay into some form of chaos. Be careful not crash into each other when moving from character to character. It is one scene where having a lot of players on stage makes the gimmick more fun. Brisk changes are better, and rapid choices about which character you are supposed to be (eventually you will be wrong) make the game more fun for everyone.

Gimmicks:

Having a dead character makes for lots of movement, switching sexes.

Video Tape Machine (handle)

Introduction:

The players will carry out a scene just like any other. The only difference is that someone [host, audience, off-stage player] will have a VCR controller. The controller can be used to fast forward the scene, reverse the scene, slow down the scene, or even worse.

Description:

The players are recommended to have as simple a story as possible. Everyone must listen closely for the call to alter the tape. Fast forward/reverse is usually represented by frenetic action that ends when the tape is returned to play. When the tape is on play again the scene proceeds in the in future, or repeats itself. Try to facilitate the request as best as possible, do slow motion, repeat the line over and over. Reverse is hard (but most tape players don't have sound in reverse if you feel the need to wimp).

Gimmicks:

Eject. This usually ends the scene. Tracking problems.

Variations:

Forward/reverse. This is just like a VCR except that the only directions are forward and reverse. The players must step through the actions in reverse order, and then repeat them once forward restarts. Very hard.