

THEA 318: SPECIAL TOPICS: ACTING FOR THE CAMERA

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Office hours: By Appointment Only

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The information presented in the syllabus is subject to change with adequate notification.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the world of film and television acting, you only get one rehearsal, and it's for the camera. This course is an introduction to the craft of acting on-set and adapting your highly trained stage performances for the intimacy of the camera lens. You will learn to develop and hone your skills to ready you for a career in film and television.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

The course objective is to provide each student with studio as well as on-set training in the craft of working with and for the camera. Film and television are collaborative crafts. As such, you will explore them in all their aspects, spending much of the semester working with production students, collaborating in front and behind the camera. You will deepen your understanding of how film and television is produced from start to finish, actively participating in a number of real-world scenarios giving you the language and technique necessary for a thriving film and television career. You will finish the semester with a practical insight and confidence in making the transition from stage to screen with two short shorts and a demo reel to add to their portfolio.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A ring light and/or a tripod for your phone.

EXCERPTED READING FROM THE FOLLOWING (all available on Canvas):

- *Secrets of Screen Acting* by Patrick Tucker
- *The Actor's Life: A Survival Guide* by Jenna Fischer
- *Acting in Film* by Michael Caine
- *500 Days of Summer* by Scott Neustadter and Michael H. Weber
- *Hitting Your Mark: Making a Life—and a Living—As a Film Actor* by Steve Carlson

ASSIGNMENTS & PROJECTS

CONTRIBUTION TO LEARNING: Class participation is very important. Assigned readings and viewings frame our discussions as do screening each other's scene work. Please come prepared to engage fully with all class conversations. Different points of view are encouraged and protected. Class discussions are healthiest when everyone contributes with enthusiasm as well as thoughtfulness. Come curious and ready to learn

Film and television are collaborative crafts, and we are here to explore them in all their aspects. As such, we will meet often with the production students, collaborating with them in front and behind the camera. Therefore, it's important we remember to be respectful of each other's work, to clarify what we don't understand, to exercise patience and compassion on the set at all times. We are here to further our understanding of how film and television is produced. We will actively participate in all facets of the filming process. We seek to find common ground with all our colleagues, no matter their job or position.

READING: Learning how to work in film and television is as much studying the wisdom of others and their experiences as it is practicing it. You are tasked with reading from several texts by industry professionals and discussing your insights with the class. Focus on questions you have had answered from your studies. You may discover them in a book or from watching a film or television show. Write them down. Share them with your peers. Seek nuance and detail.

LAB: As stated before, the classroom is a laboratory for exploration and discovery. During this assigned time, we investigate methods to deepen and refine our skills as on-camera actors. Please bring your best and most curious selves to these sessions. Whether improvisations, games, and exercises, or clearly defined systems of working, each LAB requires we bring open minds and hearts to the process.

Scene Work: Our cellphones contain sophisticated cameras and microphones. Using these wonders of technology, actors will shoot and edit THREE assigned scenes, editing them with simple, easy-to-use free software, and uploading them to the class OneDrive for viewing in class. Never fear. You are never graded on the quality of your camera skills but rather on your ability to use the techniques learned in class to tell a story on camera. All scenes, except for the final, are given at the discretion of the instructor.

Final Scene: With a partner, you must choose, shoot, and edit a two-person scene of no less than 3 minute and no more than 5 minutes for their final project. Given at least three set-ups—i.e., wide shot, two- or medium shot, close-up, etc.—grades are based not on the professionalism of the camerawork but your performances.

EXPECTATIONS

This class takes a practical approach when performing on-camera for a grade. As such, please approach these classes as if you were attending an actual audition. You should be on time, fully prepared, appropriately dressed, professional, and courteous. **Cell phone use is not permitted in class without permission.**

If you are running late, do not email me. I check my email twice a day: in the morning and in the evening. I will not see it if you try and email me during the day. Instead, text the class by way of our Slack thread immediately. Do not wait until class has already started to get in touch. Give your ETA, and then, please stick to that time. If you accrue more than 3 late excuses, they will be registered in the attendance book as one absence.

COMMUNICATION POLICY

- I promise to do my best to return email from your official BSU address within 24 hours during business days and within 48 hours on the weekend.
- I'll make every effort to grade your assignments for class no later than within 10 business days of submission.
- Please feel free to email me at any time throughout the course if you have any questions or concerns about your performance in class.

UNIVERSITY and DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

Ball State University is committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's [Disability Services](#) office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

ATTENDANCE

As this class meets 2 days per week, students are permitted, according to university policy, **2 unexcused absences** for the semester. Your third unexcused absence will result in a 10% grade deduction for the semester. No exceptions. Every subsequent unexcused absence will be an additional 10% deduction. When you reach your 6th

absence, it is no longer possible to achieve the course learning outcomes. There are two options at this point: 1. You will receive an “F” in the course. 2. You may request an Incomplete in the course. In order to do this, you must provide paperwork regarding hospitalization, extensive illness, recurring absences due to mental health issues as documented by a letter from Disability Services, or other documented issue that has caused your excessive absences. If your documentation is approved, your GPA will NOT be impacted, and will be required to complete the coursework in a future semester. Those details will be worked out on an individual basis.

The ONLY excused absences are religious holidays; death in the family (number of days per University handbook), pregnancy, jury duty, active military duty; and an EXTENDED and DOCUMENTED absence related to illness or health issues (mono, broken leg, pneumonia, etc.). **For all EXTENDED illness related absences, students MUST produce a note from their medical professional.**

NOTE: The university is no longer processing and/or vetting excused absences for COVID, just as an absence for the flu, cold, etc. would not be excused.

In addition to being in class, students are required to be there on time. **Tardiness is not acceptable.** Class starts on the hour, and **three (3) instances of lateness will add up to one unexcused absence.** NOTE: If an emergency happens and you must be absent or tardy, you are responsible for contacting me by way of our GroupMe chat as soon as possible.

I check my email twice a day: in the morning and in the evening. If you are running late, please do not email me. I will not see it if you try and email me during the day. Instead, text the class by way of our GroupMe thread immediately. Do not wait until class has already started to get in touch. Give me your ETA, and then stick to that time. If you accrue more than 3 late excuses, they will be registered in my attendance book as one absence.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Academic dishonesty – both intentional and unintentional – is an offense that the university takes very seriously, as do I. It is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to know what constitutes academic dishonesty. The university, the department, and I have provided numerous resources to help you with this. If you want to check something with me personally, don't hesitate. Just don't say, after the fact, “I didn't know that counted as plagiarism.” That's unacceptable.

MINIMUM GRADE POLICY

The lowest acceptable grade in a course for credit toward a major or minor in Theatre or Dance is C. Any student receiving a C- or lower must retake the course to receive credit towards a major or minor in the department.

TACTILE/PHYSICAL INTERACTION TEACHING STATEMENT

Studio theatre courses often require the instructor to touch or be in close physical proximity to students to adjust/align the body and guide the student on how to best execute the material. I will always verbally request student consent before touching anyone. If, for whatever reason, being touched or physically adjusted is not part of a student's learning process or makes them uncomfortable, please let me know as soon as possible so that accommodations can be made. If a student is uncomfortable speaking with me, contact the departmental Associate Chair, Tyler Smith (tasmith2@bsu.edu).

COURSE EVALUATIONS

You are expected to complete a course evaluation prior to the final class session. These evaluations are essential to the development of the acting curriculum and are required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for Belmont to maintain its accreditation and, therefore, the value of everyone's degrees.

GRADING SCALE

Scene Work	50%
Class Participation	40%
On-Set Behavior	10%
Total	100%

Grading Scale:

	B+: 87-89	C+: 77-79	D+: 67-69
A: 94-100	B: 83-86	C: 73-76	D: 64-66
A-: 90-92	B-: 80-82	C-: 70-72	F: Below 64

**Grading in a course of this nature is extremely subjective. For all audition scenarios, I will be using the SETC format of a 1-5 scale.*

Earn the Grade You Want

A: All assignments are completed on time. Each demonstrates thoughtfulness with attention to detail.

B: All assignments are completed on time. Each demonstrates thoughtfulness.

C: All assignments are completed on time.

D: An attempt was made to finish the work.

F: No work was turned in.

GENERAL COURSE SCHEDULE

The following is a general guide to our progress through the course. All times and topics subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

JANUARY

Tuesday, 6: Course Introduction, design, and expectations

HOMEWORK DUE: January 8: Please prepare a one-minute monologue for class.

Thursday, 8: Film people admire professionals. Given a choice between two actors (all else being equal), professionalism will be the deciding factor. Your professionalism implies you understand the extra disciplines that film acting demands. Today, we begin that journey.

- **LAB:** Stage vs. Screen (please bring your phones)

HOMEWORK DUE: January 13: Read *500 Days of Summer* by Scott Neustadter and Michael H. Weber (available on Canvas) and be prepared to discuss it in class.

- What do you foresee as being the special challenges of this screenplay?

Tuesday, 13: Discuss *500 Days of Summer* (Neustadter/Weber) and the special challenges of shooting this screenplay.

- **LAB:** Listening Exercise (please bring your phones)

HOMEWORK DUE: January 15: Read Chapter 1 – “Camera, Set, and Stage Basics” – from *Hitting Your Mark* by Steve Carlson (available on Canvas).

- Download the Tom and Summer scene from *500 Days of Summer* (available on Canvas).
 - If this scene were your first day of shooting, what preparations you would have to make to be ready to work?

Thursday, 15: Read Chapter 1 – “Camera, Set, and Stage Basics” – from *Hitting Your Mark* (Carlson).

- Discuss the Tom and Summer scene from *500 Days of Summer* and the preparations necessary to begin shooting your first day on-set.

LAB: Before You Get to the Set...

HOMEWORK DUE: January 20: Read Chapter 3 – “The Frame” – from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Patrick Tucker).

- Knowing that there may be ‘coverage’ of you in wide, medium, medium close-ups, and possibly extreme close-up shots, what preparations do you now need to add to your list of preparations?
- Choose a role – either Tom or Summer – and memorize the first four lines of the scene (ending with Summer’s “Awhile.”) and the last four lines of the scene (starting with Summer’s “Anyway, I should probably be getting back...” to the end of the scene. Be prepared to perform this in class.

Tuesday, 20: Discuss Chapter 3 – “The Frame” – from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker).

- How have your preparations changed?
- **LAB:** Dancing with the Camera

- **HOMEWORK DUE: January 22:** Prepare the opening and closing lines of the Tom and Summer scene for our work with the Production teams.

Thursday, 22: Continue our exploration of “Dancing with the Camera.”

HOMEWORK DUE: January 27: Read Chapter 7 – “Screen Acting” – from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker).

- Choose a partner and memorize the entire Tom and Summer scene from *500 Days of Summer* for class on Tuesday.

Tuesday, 27: Discuss the framing and focus pulling exercise from Thursday.

- What did you think was successful? What did you find challenging and will need to work on?
- Discuss Chapter 7 – “Screen Acting” – from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker).
- **LAB:** Screen Acting

HOMEWORK DUE: January 29: Read Chapter 2 – “Technical Basics” – from *Hitting Your Mark* (Carlson) and Chapter 4 – “The Camera” – from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker).

Thursday, 27: Discuss Chapter 2 – “Technical Basics” from *Hitting Your Mark* (Carlson) and Chapter 4 – “The Camera” – from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker).

- In-class demonstration on equipment and understanding the process from the other side.

FEBRUARY

HOMEWORK DUE: February 3: Read Chapter 3 – “Marks” – from *Hitting Your Mark* (Carlson).

- Be fully memorized and prepared to work on your Tom and Summer scenes for class.

Tuesday, 3: Be prepared to stage your Tom and Summer scene for the camera.

- **LAB:** Blocking Exercise

HOMEWORK DUE: February 5: Read Chapter 5 – “Sound and Vocal Effects” – from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker).

- Review your Tom and Summer scene for class.

Thursday, 5: Discuss Chapter 5 – “Sound and Vocal Effects” – from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker).

- **LAB:** Whisper to a Scream

HOMEWORK DUE: February 10: Prepare to perform your Tom and Summer scenes in class.

Tuesday, 10: Perform your Tom and Summer scenes with mics

LAB: Voice Capture Exercise

HOMEWORK DUE: February 12: Be prepared to perform your Tom and Summer scenes in class.

Thursday, 12: Perform your Tom and Summer scenes with mics.

- **LAB:** Voice Capture Exercise

HOMEWORK DUE: February 17: Read Chapter 5 – “The Shoot” – from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker).

- Double-check your lines for your Tom and Summer scene.

Tuesday, 17: Discuss Chapter 5 “The Shoot” from *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker)

- **LAB:** Continuity Exercise

HOMEWORK DUE: February 24: Read Chapter 5 – “The Take” – from *Acting in Film* by Michael Caine.

Thursday, 19: Discuss Chapter 5 – “The Take” – from *Acting in Film* by Michael Caine.

LAB: Doing It Over and Over and Over...

HOMEWORK DUE: February 24: Review your Tom and Summer scenes for Thursday.

Tuesday, 24: It’s important you have your line down cold for today’s exercise.

LAB: Stage 4 Exercise

HOMEWORK DUE: February 26: Read Chapter 5 “You Got a Job! How Things Work on a Film Set” from *The Actor’s Life: A Survival Guide* by Jenna Fischer (available on Canvas).

Tuesday, 21 (BC168): Discuss Chapter 5 “You Got a Job! How Things Work on a Film Set” from *The Actor’s Life: A Survival Guide* by Jenna Fischer.

NO CLASS on Thursday, February 30

SPRING BREAK

March 2-6, 2026

MARCH

NO HOMEWORK DUE for March 7

Tuesday, 7: Partners and scene assigned for first round of scenes.

LAB: Guerilla Filmmaking 101

NO CLASS on Thursday, March 9

Shoot, edit and upload your film scene to the class OneDrive DUE by Tuesday, March 14 at 12:00 PM.

Tuesday, 14: Screen your first round of scenes for notes.

NO CLASS on Thursday, March 16

Using your notes from class, shoot, edit and upload your film scene to the class OneDrive on Tuesday, March 21 at 12:00 PM.

Tuesday, 21: Screen your first round of scenes for a grade.

- Partners and scenes assigned for second round of scenes.

NO CLASS on Thursday, March 23

Shoot, edit and upload your film scene to the class OneDrive DUE on Tuesday, March 28 by 12:00 PM.

Tuesday, 28: Screen your second round of scenes for notes.

NO CLASS on Thursday, March 30

Using your notes from class, shoot, edit and upload your film scene to the class OneDrive DUE on Tuesday, April 5 at 12:00 PM.

APRIL

Tuesday, 7: Screen your second round of scenes for a grade.

- Partners and scenes assigned for third round of scenes.
- **REMEMBER:** Choose a partner and a scene from a film for your Final. Shoot, edit, and upload your scene to the class OneDrive **DUE Tuesday, April 28 by 12:00 PM.**

NO CLASS on Thursday, April 9

Shoot, edit, and upload your film scene to the class OneDrive DUE on Tuesday, April 14 by 12:00 PM.

Tuesday, April 14: Screen your third round of scenes for notes.

- **REMEMBER:** Choose a partner and a scene from a film for your Final. Shoot, edit, and upload your scene to the class OneDrive **DUE Tuesday, April 28 by 12:00 PM.**

NO CLASS on Thursday, April 16

Shoot, edit, and upload your film scene to the class OneDrive DUE on Tuesday, April 21 by 12:00 PM.

Tuesday, 21: Screen your third round of scenes for a grade.

- **REMEMBER:** Choose a partner and a scene from a film for your Final. Shoot, edit, and upload your scene to the class OneDrive **DUE Tuesday, April 28 by 12:00 PM.**

NO CLASS on Thursday, April 21

Shoot, edit, and upload your Final film scenes to the class OneDrive DUE on Tuesday, April 28 by 12:00 PM.

Tuesday, 28: Screen your film scenes for your Final.

**SUMMER BREAK
END OF SEMESTER**