

# Improvisation for the Theater and Beyond

**Improvisation-** (*vb*) to create without prior preparation or practice; to make or invent or arrange offhand.

## Three Basic Rules of Improvisation

1. **Work at the top of your intelligence** - By being well read and using a variety of different styles and situations, you can create an infinite amount of scenes, characters and situations to move the scene along.
2. **Be a generous actor** - By actively working to make your acting partners look good, you take the focus off yourself and will feel less self-conscious. It will also help you listen and respond appropriately and avoid "acting in a vacuum." This courtesy is contagious and if you openly help your partner, they will make you look good in return.
3. **Have the freedom to waste** - Improvisation, unlike more traditional theater, is about using your ideas to create a scene in the moment. Often you will have a great idea for a scene, but your partner has already started and taken it into another direction. Part of being generous (see rule 2) is to support the premise they have started and not force your idea unless the scene merits it. You will over have 100 billion ideas in your lifetime. Clinging to one idea and trying to make it fit into scene where it is not needed will just bog things down. It's better to "waste" the idea and realize that you will come up with another great idea the next time.

## **Important Things to Remember for Doing Good Scene Work**

1. **Stay in the present** - Try not to allow the scene to get bogged down with too many references to past or future events. Staying in the present gives you a point of action to work with and things within the scene that need to be dealt with immediately. Show don't tell.
2. **Pre-established relationships are important** - If the situation is a store with a clerk and customer, it would be really easy to go for the obvious. But what would happen if the clerk was the high school valedictorian 10 years ago and her teacher is the customer? What about a man waiting on his ex-wife? The scenes take on much more depth when you use pre-established relationships to move things along. Past references can be made, but only if they apply to the current situation.
3. **Establish your physical space** - Using mime to establish where the character is living is vital to a good improvisation. Beyond a table and chairs, look at the space and establish where the stove would be in a kitchen, where the sink would be in a bathroom, where the vanity would be in a bedroom.
4. **Keep it simple and specific** - In referring to objects in a scene, it's important for you and the audience to be specific about what you are referring to. For example, rather than saying "a can of soda", ask for a can of Jolt cola or Mountain Dew. Rather than referring to a doll, refer to it as a Cinderella Barbie. Rather than just talking about a car, make it a red Corvette. The specifics offer an instant point of recognition for the audience.