
Improv Glossary of Terms

Beat

A point of punctuation within a scene.

Blocking

A form of canceling, which completely denies an offer. Example: "Is that your car?" "No. There's no car here."

Canceling

Setting up a situation, then neutralizing it. Example: "The phone is ringing!" Picks up phone. Hangs up. "There was nobody there."

Gagging

Getting a laugh at the expense of the story. Gags are narrative killers, but sometimes useful for ending scenes. Example: A menacing killer corners our hero, pulls out a gun, points, and bites into it explaining that it's made of candy.

Gossip

A substitute for action. Talking about something that has happened, or is happening off stage. Example: "You should see my new plane, it's over there. (Points offstage) It has gold wings, ..."

Hedging

Avoiding narrative development with talking or actions. Example: Having to tell a patient bad news, you begin with, "Have a seat. How are you feeling? I suppose you're wondering why I called you in here?"

Instant Trouble

Immediate action that establishes conflict, but doesn't establish narrative. Example: Suddenly turning into a Werewolf.

Never-Ending Story

A story that continues to introduce so many new ideas, that it becomes impossible to tie the narrative together.

Sidetracking

Finding activities to do, as to avoid doing what you established in the beginning.
Example: Setting out to fix your car, but seeing the garage is a mess, you decide to clean it. You begin to clean and find an old photo album. You look at pictures, etc.

Talking Heads

A scene that becomes void of action, and consists of improvisers onstage talking, not doing.

Waffling

Talking about an action rather than doing it. Example: "Shall we climb that tree!" "Why sure, it's such a big old oak tree. What do you think we'll be able to see at the top?" "Oh, we should be able to see my house from up there!" etc.

Wimpering

Refusing to define an offer. Example: "Who are you?" "I'm the man you called." "The man I called of course! You're here to fix that thing, aren't you?" "Yes, I fix those things better than anyone else."