Perfa 33: Fall 2008
Acting 1 – Principles of Performance

M-W-F 2:15-3:15
FAH 120 (M-W)
ART 100 (F)

Professor Rebecca Engle
LeFevre 6 925.631.4159
rengle@stmarys-ca.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-2:45, Fridays 1:15-2:00 and M-W by appt.

ACTING 1, AN INTRODUCTION:
The Performing Arts Theatre Program has designed this introductory course with both prospective majors and non-majors in mind. As its title suggests, Acting I offers a hands-on introduction to the fundamentals of the actor’s process. The terminology and concepts you’ll encounter here are ones you’ll hear in all our theatre courses and productions; they are also widely used by professional stage and film actors, directors, and playwrights. By semester’s end, you will find yourself speaking and writing more perceptively about the actor’s art and the play’s journey from page to stage.

This course will also help you to become a more engaged reader. Learning to find and interpret the clues a playwright has woven into his or her play is a process called script analysis. Through it, you are not only learning to think like an actor, but are strengthening analytic skills you will use in many of your college courses. For this reason, “Acting 1: Principles of Performance” fulfills the Area A graduation requirement.

Finally, the Performing Arts faculty knows that deeper insight and fuller appreciation of the arts follow from direct hands-on experience. Through classroom exercises and performance assignments you will have the chance to put theory into practice, and to challenge yourself creatively. Whether you intend to pursue the study of acting beyond this course, or will remain an armchair critic for life, expect to grow in confidence and creativity as you and your classmates “step outside the box” of your everyday life.

MAJOR COURSE OUTCOMES:
By the end of the semester, students in this course will be able to:
a) discuss and write about theatrical productions and individual performances using essential acting concepts and vocabulary
b) produce a written analysis which answers key questions about a play-script
c) demonstrate partner and ensemble acting skills during participation in creative exercises
d) rehearse and perform a dramatic reading of a 5-minute scene from a play
COURSE ORGANIZATION:
In order to achieve our course goals, Acting I is organized into three parallel
tracks:

A) MONDAYS: The theory of acting: We'll be reading and discussing Robert Benedetti's
text The Actor at Work [Tenth Edition].

B) WEDNESDAYS: Script analysis/ Building a character: We'll be reading and
discussing a contemporary play, John Patrick Shanley’s recent Pulitzer-winner Doubt.

C) FRIDAYS: The actor's technique: A nuts-and-bolts introduction to fundamental acting
skills - from using your body expressively to trusting others and taking risks.

In the last month, these three tracks will converge in a final project as you and a partner
apply all that you have learned to the rehearsing and performance of a 5-minute scene
from a modern American play.

KEY COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
A) Attendance: In each class session you'll be learning both with and from your
classmates, through discussions and structured group activities. For this reason, absences
cannot be made up with substitute assignments, and your own faithful attendance is
critical to the success of the course. For classes meeting three times per week, college
policy excuses three absences per semester; excessive absences and/or lateness will be
penalized.

B) Reading Assignments: Our discussions of the assigned texts will encourage
thoughtful, informed participation. To prepare you should read actively: seek
connections, pose questions, make notes. Come to class ready to talk, and to listen.
Expect unannounced quizzes to test your comprehension and retention.

C) Writing Assignments: Written assignments are an important part of this course, and
will be assigned and collected regularly. In reflection-responses you will articulate your
understanding of a reading assignment, your observations of a specific acting exercise
or your impressions of a performance. In your final scene project portfolio you will
investigate specific aspects of script analysis, character preparation and the rehearsal
process.

D) Mandatory Special Events: We'll attend two plays this semester, one in October and
one in November: Doubt, presented by a Bay Area professional theatre company called
Center Rep; and Beth Henley’s Abundance, on our own campus. The course fee already
collected by the Business Office will cover the cost of your theatre tickets, a guest
speaker and related course expenses. You may need to purchase a copy of your final
project play, if it is not available through the library.
E) Final scene project: Several in-class rehearsals will give you constructive feedback and will help you towards the culminating live performance for an invited audience. But to achieve a performance of which you'll be proud, understand now how important it will be to work cooperatively (that includes being flexible about your other commitments), to organize your own out-of-class rehearsals and to use your time effectively.

**BASIS FOR FINAL GRADE:**
1. Quizzes on readings (averaged) 20%
2. Mid-term exam 20%
3. Final project: performance and written portfolio 30%
4. Class contribution (active participation: discussion and group activities; written homework; classroom etiquette) 30%

*A final word about academic integrity and the SMC Honor Code:*
As students at Saint Mary’s you share with your professors the responsibility for upholding the College’s honor code. When you act with integrity, and expect the same from your classmates, you are contributing to the value of our intellectual work and to the honor of our community.

Put another way, our class discussions of the assigned texts have value only when you and your classmates actually read them and share your own ideas about them with each other. Students who “discuss” without having completed the assigned readings are engaging in a form of academic dishonesty.

Because we will sometimes draw on secondary sources in this course, it is also important that you avoid unintended plagiarism by following agreed-upon guidelines whenever you respond to, paraphrase or cite directly the ideas or words of others.

**Support for students with Disabilities:** Reasonable and appropriate accommodations, that take into account the context of the course and its essential elements, for individuals with qualifying disabilities, are extended through the office of Student Disability Services. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Services Coordinator at 925-631.4164 to set up a confidential appointment to discuss accommodation guidelines and available services. Additional information regarding the services available may be found at the http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/academic-advising-and-achievement/students-disabilities
Acting 1: Fall 2008

So that I may get to know you more quickly, please answer the following questions as honestly and fully as you can. Form your responses into a well-organized and articulate essay, using your best college-level writing skills.

1. What factors contributed to your decision to enroll in this course?

2. What meaningful experiences have you had as a theatre-goer?

3. What theatre training have you had? What related experiences have you had as a performer - for example in music, dance or athletics?

4. As a student and a person, what special attributes do you bring to any team or group learning community of which you are a part?

5. Is there any aspect of this course that may prove unusually challenging for you? What goals- either personal or academic - have you set for yourself in this course?

6. What questions, if any, do you have about the basis for grading in this course?

7. Do you know anyone who has taken this course in a previous semester? Do you know anyone currently enrolled? Who, and how do you know them?

8. For our class contact sheet, please answer as many of the following questions as you feel comfortable about: Do you live on or off campus? Do you have a car? What is your campus phone number, your cell phone number, and your e-mail address? Which is the most reliable way to contact you?
ACTING I: Principles of Performance/ Fall 2008
Schedule of Major Assignments

Note: This proposed syllabus may be modified at any time to accommodate the process and progress of the group. When you are absent, check with classmates for changes or updates.

(1) Wed. Sept. 3rd  Course Introduction

(1) Fri. Sept 5th  READ: Benedetti Part I "Preparing Yourself,” Chapter 1 ("The Actor in You"), Chapter 2 ("The Creative State"), and Course Introduction handout
BEGIN: Exercise 1.1
HAND IN: Introductory essay
Note: Today is the last day to add or drop this course

(2) Mon. Sept. 8th  READ: Benedetti Chapter 3 ("Centering, Moving and Gesturing") and Chapter 7 ("Working with Others")
HAND IN: Exercise 1.1

(2) Wed. Sept. 10th  READ: Doubt, Preface and Scenes I-V [p. 36].

(2) Fri. Sept. 12th  REVIEW: Key concepts Benedetti Chapters 1-3 and 7
DRESS: for acting lab and meet in Art 100

(3) Mon. Sept. 15th  READ: Benedetti Part II, "Action", Chapter 8 ("The Flow and Shape of Dramatic Action") and Chapter 9 ("Action for the Actor")
HAND IN: Exercise 9.1 (Action in Life)

(3) Wed. Sept. 17th  READ: Doubt, Scenes VI-IX [p.58]
HAND IN: Initial Play Response

(3) Fri. Sept. 19th  DRESS: for acting lab and meet in Art 100
HAND IN: Exercise 9.2 (Internal and External Action)
RECEIVE: Doubt character assignments

(4) Mon. Sept. 22nd  READ: Benedetti Chapter 13 ("The Function and Elements of Character")

(4) Wed. Sept. 24th  REREAD/ANALYZE: Doubt Scenes I-V
HAND IN: Exercise 13.1 (Dramatic Function) and 13.2 (Functional and Likeness Traits)
(4) Fri. Sept. 26th  HAND IN [with partner]: Exercise 13.3 (Physical Traits) and 13.4 (Social Traits)
DRESS: for acting lab and meet in Art 100

(5) Mon. Sept. 29th  READ: Benedetti Chapter 10 ("Action, Character and Emotion")


(5) Fri. Oct. 3rd  DRESS: for acting lab and meet in Art 100

(6) Mon. Oct. 6th  READ: Chapter 11 ("The Acting Process")
HAND IN [with partner]: Exercise 11.2 (The Givens: #1 only):

(6) Wed. Oct. 8th  HAND IN: Exercise 11.3 (Aspirations)
IN-CLASS PARTNER WORK: Exercises 11.4 and 11.5: (Productive Objectives/Playable Actions)

(6) Fri. Oct. 10th  DRESS: for acting lab and meet in Art 100

(7) Mon. Oct. 13th  REVIEW: Chapters 1-3, 7-11, 13 and Doubt
PREPARE: study questions

(7) Wed. Oct. 15th  MID-TERM TEST
HAND IN: Take-home exam

(7) Fri. Oct. 17th  DRESS: for acting lab and meet in Art 100

(8) Mon. Oct. 20th  READ: Benedetti Chapter 12 ("Beats, Through-Line and Superobjective")

(8) Wed. Oct. 22nd  HAND IN [with partner]: 13.2, #1-2 (Scene Analysis)
DISCUSS: TBA

(8) Fri. Oct. 24th  DRESS: for acting lab and meet in Art 100

**DATE/TIME TBA**  ATTEND: Doubt at Center Rep in Walnut Creek

(9) Mon. Oct. 27th  INTERVIEW: guest actors
HAND IN: performance response
(9) Wed. Oct. 29th  READ: Benedetti Chapter 12 ("Beats, Through-line and Superobjective")
               HAND IN: Exercise 12.2 (#1-3 Scene Structure Analysis)
(9) Fri. Oct. 31st  DISCUSS: Final Project Guidelines
               HAND IN: 12.5 (The Superobjective)
               RECEIVE: Final scene project assignments [Note: You have 12
days to find and read your final play]

(10) Mon. Nov. 3rd  READ: Benedetti Chapter 14 ("The Character’s Mind")
(10) Wed. Nov. 5th  GROUP WORK: “practice scene” selections
               HAND IN: Exercise 12.3 (Beat Analysis)
(10) Fri. Nov. 7th  DRESS: for acting lab and meet in Art 100
               PRESENT: Doubt “practice scenes” with group analysis

Note: Today is the last day to withdraw from the course, or to file for pass/fail
grading.

(11) Mon. Nov. 10th  READ: Benedetti Chapter 6 ("Dramatic Language")
               ASSIGNMENT: complete the initial reading of your play
(11) Wed. Nov. 12th  PREPARE: In-class readthroughs Scenes 1-4
               DISCUSS: Given Circumstances
(11) Fri. Nov. 14th  PREPARE: In-class readthroughs Scenes 5-8
               DISCUSS: Given Circumstances
               HAND IN: Final Project: “Play response”

Thurs. Nov. 13-
Sun Nov. 16  ATTEND: Abundance, LeFevre Theatre

(12) Mon. Nov. 17th  DISCUSSION/GUEST SPEAKERS: Abundance
(12) Wed. Nov. 19th  REVIEW/DISCUSS: Objectives, Actions and Beats
(12) Fri. Nov. 21st  PREPARE: In-class rehearsals: Scenes 1-4
               DISCUSS: Finding objectives and tactics
               HAND IN: Final Project: “Given Circumstances”

(13) Mon. Nov. 24th  PREPARE: In-class rehearsals: Scenes 5-8
               DISCUSS: Finding Objectives and Tactics
HAND IN: Final Project: “Scene Response”

(13) Wed. Nov. 26- Fri. Nov. 28th
THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – no class

(14) Mon. Dec.1st
PREPARE: Final in-class rehearsal: Scenes 1-3
COMPLETE: Final Project: “Beat/Tactic Analysis”

(14) Wed. Dec. 3rd
PREPARE: Final in-class rehearsal: Scenes 4-6

(14) Fri. Dec.5th
PREPARE: Final in-class rehearsal: Scenes 7-8

Mon. Dec. 8th
PRESENT: FINAL SCENE PERFORMANCE
2PM
HAND IN: Final project portfolio
ACTING I: Fall 2008
Guidelines for Final Scene Project Portfolio

Your completed final scene project portfolio is due on Monday December 8th at 2PM. Since this portfolio is as important as the actual performance of your final scene, I hope you will use it as an occasion to produce your most thoughtful and well-written work.

Note that the portfolio builds on script analysis skills you’ve been developing from the beginning of the course: as you complete each section you may find it helpful to recheck sections of the Benedetti textbook, to look at comments you received on your “Doubt” analysis, or to ask me for clarification on any sections you don't understand.

I. Play response: First version due Friday Nov. 14th in class. [You are welcome to revise and expand your response before submitting the final portfolio. After carefully reading (and rereading your play), you should have a clearer understanding of both its story and meaning. Your thoughtful response, in the form of a two or more page typed essay, will lay the groundwork for a deeper investigation of your character and scene, and will also form the first component in your scene project portfolio.

In your essay you should respond to the following series of questions:

What was your gut response to the play? What aspects of the drama moved you, excited you, hooked you in as a reader? On what levels and in what ways do you imagine this play would grab a live audience? Why will an audience care about the characters in this play?

What is the play really about: what are its central themes, images and/or ideas? What opposing forces collide to create the central conflict in the play? What deeper significance do you find in the play's title?

What special challenges might this play pose for its actors? [Consider the style of the play, the language, the issues, etc.]

At the level of plot or story, what confusions remain for you?

When you have grappled with the above questions yourself, talk about the entire play with your partner, resisting the temptation to focus narrowly on you own character at this point. Let your conversation deepen your understanding and appreciation of the playwright's craft. Remember, together you will be building on these first thoughts and impressions as you work towards the final performance on Monday December 8th.

II. Research: /Complete early in your analysis/rehearsal process. Include in final
**portfolio.** Identify all the unfamiliar words in your scene, including slang, foreign terms, proper names, place names and any word whose meaning you don’t know. Clarify their significance in the context of your lines. Be sure you can pronounce them correctly.

Make a list of “research activities” which might help you develop insight into your character and the play. What topics would be helpful for an actor playing this role to investigate? In addition to traditional study, how else might an actor immerse themselves in “the world of the play?” Are there, for example, films or music which capture the flavor of the period? “Experts” you might be able to talk to? Environments you could visit? Etc.

**III. Given Circumstances: First version due Friday November 21st. [You are welcome to revise and expand your response before submitting the final portfolio.]**

*Your scene portrays a human interaction unfolding in a very specific context. Good playwrights shape these "givens" to put pressure on their characters, to create obstacles to their objectives, and to make the characters more off-balance and uncomfortable -- all of which makes the scene more dynamic.*

On your own, analyze the given circumstances of your scene, focusing on those aspects of your character's world and situation that especially influence their immediate actions and reactions. **Consider the basic categories Benedetti sets forth in The Actor at Work, as well as the "Engle scene-study questions":**

**Who** -- general relationship, specific relationship
  Are you familiar with each other or strangers?
  When did you last see each other?

**Where** -- physical environment, social environment
  Are you outdoors or indoors?
  Alone or in public?
  On your "turf"? their turf? or neutral "turf"?
  How is the immediate physical environment impacting your senses?

**When** -- time of day, day of the week, season, year, historical era
  Is it a day/season with special associations?

**What** -- the main event of the scene, and antecedent action that affects this scene.
  The moment before: What just happened?
  The future: What does your character expect (or fear) is about to happen?

Don't stop here: as an actor, your job is "translate" each of these facts into your character's point of view. Analyze the way each "given" influences your character's actions and reactions in this scene, and explain which "given" has the strongest impact on them in your opinion.
At your next rehearsal, share the results of your inquiry with your scene partner. Notice which "givens" are affecting both of you in the same way, which differently, and which influence only one of you.

IV. Scene Response. *First version due Monday Nov. 24th.* [You are welcome to revise and expand your response before submitting the final portfolio.]
Theatre is about human relationships, not individual characters, and almost all scenes show a significant CHANGE in a relationship. With your scene partner, continue reading the scene aloud, and talking about the relationship at the heart of the scene. In your written response, focus on three critical questions:

**How has the playwright created a "pair of opposites":** a pair of characters [like Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn] whose contrasting qualities produce dramatic conflict? [In your written response, consider every possible angle - including language and social style, physicality, status, and values/life goals as well as immediate agendas.] From the audience's perspective, are these differences immediately obvious, or gradually revealed?

Remember that it will be your job, with your scene partner, to highlight these drama-producing differences between your two characters.

**What does each character really want from the other person in this scene?** Why must these two characters depend on each other to get these needs met? What larger life issues are at stake for each in this scene?

**Overall, what happens or changes to the relationship in this scene?** [This is the main event of the scene.] In the larger context of the entire play, what is the underlying significance of this change?

IV. Research: [Do step one as soon as possible. Include in completed portfolio.]
1) Check all the unfamiliar words in your scene, including slang, foreign terms, proper names, place names and any words whose meaning you don't know. Look up definitions and clarify significance in the context of your lines. Be sure you can pronounce them correctly.

2) Make a list of "research activities" which would help you develop insight into your character and the play. What topics would it be helpful for an actor playing this role to investigate?

3) In addition to traditional study, how else might an actor immerse themselves in the "world of this play:" are there films or music which capture the flavor of the period? "experts" you might be able to talk to? environments you could visit?

V. Beat Analysis. [Include in completed portfolio.]
Begin this analysis as soon as you have completed III, and continue working on it as you rehearse the scene over the next couple of weeks. Include in your completed portfolio.

Analyze your scene by breaking it into units of action, or beats. Clearly number these sections in your script, and include a copy of the scene in your final portfolio.

Using a transitive verb, identify your character's overall scene objective and the specific tactic (or action) they're using in each beat.

Identify the central beat in the scene. Where specifically is the turning point, or moment of crisis, in the scene? Which character "drives" the action to the moment of maximum tension? How and why is the situation/relationship fundamentally altered at this moment?

Finally, after thinking about the play as whole, relate your character's immediate scene objective to their throughline or super-objective in life.[as revealed in the rest of the play.] Are there any lines from the play in which the character seems to sum up what they're all about?

VI. Character Analysis: Due Wednesday Nov. 24
As rehearsals continue, your insight into your character is develops through trial-and-error. You are making choices, the most important of which is "What is my objective in
“this scene?” At this stage, it is useful to step back and clarify your character's dramatic function and character traits

**Dramatic Function:** In writing, discuss your character's dramatic function on two levels: plot and meaning. Explain how key actions (in this scene and in the play as a whole) drive the play's action? How your character highlights larger values or points-of-view expressed in the play?

**Functional and Likeness Traits:** What specific personality traits has the playwright given your character to help them credibly serve their dramatic function? To make them "human" and three-dimensional?

---

**V. Character Analysis/Portrait** Develop this section as work on your scene progresses. If you would like feedback, submit a working draft on or before Monday December 1st.

After reviewing Benedetti’s guidelines, construct a well-rounded portrait of your character that includes their physical, social, psychological and moral traits. Reveal the source of your insights by citing the script: include the author’s descriptions, comments by other characters, and significant words and actions of the character him/herself. You may also indicate the elements you have filled in from your own imagination. Include a photographic portrait which captures the “look” of your character. Justify your choice.

Then, after reviewing Benedetti’s explanation, analyze the dramatic function of your character. Finally, evaluate this character’s functional and likeness traits.

---

**VI. Beat/Tactics Analysis:** Should be more or less completed by Monday Dec. 1st. Include in the final version of your portfolio.

Analyze your scene by breaking it into units of action, or beats. Clearly number and mark these sections in your script, identifying the actual starting and ending moment of each beat. Include a marked copy of your scene in your portfolio.

Using a transitive verb, identify your character's overall goal in the scene. Then identify the specific actions (or tactics) suggested by the lines in each beat. [Remember, feelings are not actions.] On a separate page, identify the central beat in the scene. Discuss: what specifically is the turning point, or moment of crisis, in this scene? Which character "drives" the action to the moment of maximum tension? How is the situation/relationship alters fundamentally at this moment?

Finally, after thinking bout the play as a whole, discuss the relationship between your characters' central objective in this scene, and his/her superobjective (or life goal) as
revealed in the rest of the play.

VII. Personalizing Your Performance: Write just before the actual performance, and include in completed portfolio.

In a final essay/journal entry, reflect on your journey in bringing this character to life. In what ways did your connection to your character grow and deepen during rehearsals? What were the most important discoveries you made? How did your fellow actor help you believe in the imaginary relationship you were bringing to life?

To which aspects of your character were you able to relate most easily? Do you and your character share similar experiences, which helped you to empathize and understand them? Did your character remind you of someone you know? What aspects of the character did you find difficult or uncomfortable to relate to? How did you "stretch" yourself to commit to these less comfortable or less familiar aspects of the character?

Evaluating your Final Scene Project
Your actual performance will be evaluated in FOUR skill areas:

PERFORMANCE BASICS: physical relaxation/control; concentration; energy

PARTNER-WORK: cooperation and trust; energy flow/connection; talking to (not at) each other; listening and reacting. Overall, evidence of adequate on-going preparation.

SCENE/CHARACTER ANALYSIS: beats: development and variety, a build to scene’s climax; playing objectives, not attitudes; emotional commitment; clear contrast between characters.

VOICE/LANGUAGE: clarity: breath support, articulation, and pace; "thinking" [the brain/mouth connection]; vocal dynamics and variety

A portfolio which is overall Satisfactory, Good or Very Good will neither raise nor lower the final project grade.

A portfolio which is overall Excellent or Outstanding will raise the final project grade.

A portfolio which is Below Satisfactory will lower the final project grade. [Please note that since the portfolio documents scene preparation, points will be deducted when certain sections are submitted after the due date.]

Acting I: Principles of Performance
Lesson Plan on Monday Sept. 8th, 2008

A. Response to essays – inspired me! Type written work!
I accept late work but reduce overall credit; I don’t accept electronic submissions.

B. Chapter One: The I and the Me: What did you observe?

C. Mini-lecture: Aristotle – drama is “something done” – something happens or changes
Stanislavski’s impact on conception of acting and human behaviour
Type versus Need/Objective

D. Concepts introduced in readings:

Discipline – how does Benedetti define? Give an example from your own experience
Center
Ensemble: commitment, support and open communication

E. Tips for reading *Doubt*
Keep thumb on character list. Reread if you get lost.