

Nostos Directing Lab

This directing workshop introduces simple exercises that help infuse an actor's performance with spontaneity and realism. The workshop will explore contemporary theatre material that applies to both theatre and film.

Day 1: Introduction to the approach

This approach to directing is designed to create a foundation for the actor in a rehearsal setting that encourages spontaneous behavior that looks and feels like real life.

A Love NY/ B Hates NY Exercise:

The mentor will pair students up in the workshop- each is assigned a 'role' (A or B), and a way they feel about NY—one hates NY, and the other loves NY. They are given the direction “go” and then they have a discussion. The mentor will interrupt the discussion and then ask them to talk about what they just did

The group then compares the two conversations, writing down key observations about what each conversation was like (was there tension in your body in one conversation vs. the other, was one conversation louder than the other, etc.). Usually, this exercise will result in two very different columns. The first describes a tense, exaggerated version of two characters with opposing opinions, while the second column (conversation) is a list of relaxed, real behavior that looks and sounds like a real conversation. The mentor points out that the first column is how we might describe more performative acting, vs. the second column, which is more life-like and might be considered good acting.

Physical is fair: What was the difference in the direction given? The directors are introduced to the difference between grokable and non-grokable directions.

The first direction given was a non-grokable direction: “You're A and you're B. A loves NY and B hates NY. Go”. This is an unclear direction, assigning a way that the characters feel about something, resulting in broad, performative conversations. Non-grokable direction is assigning them a way of feeling or a quality to play

The second direction given was a grokable direction: “Talk about what you just did” is clear and concise. Grokable direction is usually physical direction, giving the actors something to *do*.

Through this exercise, directors are shown that effective direction is given through simple stimuli that do not assign a result or a “how” to do it, but rather just to do it.

The Directing Formula:

IR→ S→ AR

IR: Imagined Result- your conceptualized understanding of anything you're about to rehearse (a particular moment, the set, the performance, the entire scene, etc)

S: Stimulus- the direction you give. The direction can be an exercise, a set piece, a prop, a costume piece, etc.

AR: Actual Result- the result the actors are giving you.

After going through this formula, directors start again with a new IR, but never go back to their original IR

Script Analysis- Context and Story Structure

5 Ws: Who, What, Where, When, and Why

This is a simple, objective approach to script analysis, gathering information for the sole purpose of creating a list of things your actors can *do* to tell the story.

Who: who is physically present in the scene, and who is around those people that the audience cannot see?

Where: What is the exact location of the scene (the set you need to build), and what is the surrounding location/geographic location?

When: time of day, time of year, year

What: students will discuss the bullet points of a scene (the events that carry the story forward), and the 'snapshot' of the scene. The snapshot is a relatable situation you could call the scene. 'A blind date', 'a job interview', 'coming home from work', etc. The snapshot is meant to be relatable enough that the director has many ideas of what the actors can do to tell the story of that snapshot

Why: previous circumstances that are likely to show up in the scene in a physical way (e.g. the actors have to clear the room before someone shows up)

Story Structure:

inciting event, point of no return, and the main event

Students will discuss the indicators for each of these story structure points and how to treat them when directing a scene or a full-length piece.

Students will practice telling a story and then identifying the story structure points from these stories.

Students will apply this script analysis practice to a real script from a published play

Day 2: Script Analysis of a full-length script

Students will explore a full-length contemporary play with the mentor, identifying context and story structure for each scene

Students will start to conceptualize the scenes they are reading, walking through the pre-rehearsal process

Day 3: Set Building and Rehearsal Demo

Set Building:

Students will choose a scene from the contemporary play and build the set together, discussing key elements of set building for rehearsal purposes, but also for early designer discussions:

- Give your actors reasons to be all over the space. Don't leave a large space on stage where actors have no reason to go (unless appropriate to the scene).
- Create an environment where they can truly interact. If they are in a kitchen, give them drawers, counter space, chairs, tables, etc.
- Disrupt any presentational qualities on your set. Make sure your set doesn't look like an open dollhouse, but like the audience is a fly on the wall.

Rehearsal Demo:

Students will talk about broad stroke exercises that help lay the foundation for loose, spontaneous behavior from their actors in early rehearsals

Conversation Exercise: get your actors (not the characters) to talk to each other in real life and slip them into the scripted text. If the directors notice anything shifts about the way the two people are talking, they guide them in and out of the scripted and real conversation until there is no difference between the two

The Upload Exercise: get your actors to upload their lines and get off the page right away, so you see them responding to their environment and not the script

Directors are encouraged at this stage to respond to what they're seeing in front of them on the stage and refer back to the script after rehearsals are over

Each time a director stops their actors, they are encouraged to acknowledge what they think is working about the storytelling and address what isn't working by throwing a stimulus (direction)

Day 4-8: First and Second Rehearsals

Directors choose a scene from the full-length contemporary play chosen by the mentor, exploring exercises that will help clarify, enhance, and infuse the story with realism and spontaneity.

Actors will often be sent out of the space so that directors can discuss a possible direction and then bring them back in so that the director working is the only voice the actors are responding to

These classes are treated like a lab. We discuss whatever is coming into the room— the curriculum is determined by what is coming up in the moment. If a director is trying a new exercise, the class will share objective feedback.

Directors are encouraged to give one stimulus at a time, so we can discuss each direction and what it did to the storytelling

Objective Feedback: students share what they observe that is different from the first time they saw the scene or moment in a scene that day. They share what they noticed that changed, as opposed to what they wanted to see or what they would have done differently. This way, the directors working can process what these exercises can do to the storytelling