



**TAKE
YOUR
PLACE**

Developing an actor's perception

with Michael Norton

Acting is a challenging practice to understand. How do we create authenticity under false conditions? What is the 'it' factor on stage? Many different acting techniques probe this question, working towards a state of heightened presence, reception and intention. Modern acting masters like Stanislavsky, Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, Michael Chekov, Uta Hagen, Viola Spolin, Keith Johnstone and many more all approach this question of presence in different ways. A clear divide separates acting techniques: should actors work from the inside out (find the emotions inside of me that builds a character) or outside in (create the physical character and situation and the emotional life will follow).

In this session, we'll start to build a character by creating action. We'll start with a warmup to prepare your body and mind, then we'll look at objective (what you want) tactic (how you get it) and obstacles (what's in the way) and use status as a tool to play a scene.

Objective

This lesson will offer a taste of the different approaches to acting, focusing on observation, listening, objectives and tactics. You will get a chance to approach a simple text with different objectives and play with different ways of getting what you want from your acting partner, tuning your skills of observing others at work.



YouTube Workshop Link

<https://youtu.be/xPdWJCaZaQ4>

You will need

- Room to move around, stretch and lay on the floor
- Comfortable clothing
- Pencil and notebook
- Contentless scene text (included in this worksheet)
- An acting partner (helpful but not necessary)

Activity one: warmup

Acting is fundamentally a practice of being present with another person. Without taking time to check in, open up and connect to your breath, you'll miss the subtle information another actor is communicating to you. There are many ways of warming up and tuning your system, but today we'll start with some physical exercises.



Task two: warming up the voice (Linklater technique)

- Big breath in, sighing out on voice (making some sound).
- Shake your shoulders, rolling up and down the spine on an exhale.
- Warm up the nasal cavity by massaging gently around your nose. Take a breath in and make a really nasal sound, saying the word 'nnnn-gha'.
- You should feel buzzing in your nose, like a bee is flying around your sinuses.

Task one: assembling the body (Linklater technique)

- Stand, taking a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth, filling your belly with air in the inhale, and letting go on the exhale.
- Roll down your spine, letting your body hang loosely from the hips.
- Lay on the floor and let your knees stand in a triangle, feet firmly on the ground.
- Scan your body. What is your breath doing? How are different parts of your body feeling right now? Are there any emotions or feelings in your body?
- Pelvic rotation, around like a clock.
- Rolling up and down your spine, checking in with your breath.
- Sit up into a squat, deep breath, straighten your legs and slowly roll up.
- Check in on yourself now you have awakened your senses. What do you see, hear and feel?

TOP TIP: The more physically and mentally relaxed you are, the more present you will be. Presence is what makes a performer so exciting to watch.



Activity two: objectives, tactics and obstacles

Objective

What we want is called an objective in acting. In our everyday lives, we always want something, we just often don't know what it is. In acting, we work to name the objective of the character to motivate action. The more intense the objective (Hamlet: I want to avenge my father) the more motivated a character can be. Without an objective, people just stand around on stage with nothing to do! We usually talk about objectives in the phrase I want to ___ followed by a really active verb like 'humiliate you,' 'break up,' 'leave the room' or 'save the world.'

Tactic

A tactic is how you get what you want. Think of a situation where you really wanted something from someone, but they wouldn't give it to you. What are the different ways you tried to get it? Pleading, yelling, pouting, seducing... there are many ways to get what you want!

Obstacle

An obstacle is what is in the way of what you want. I want respect in my classroom (objective), I'm nice to everyone (tactic), but no one listens to me (obstacle). What do I do to get over that obstacle? In a play, a character can change their tactic and objective all the time.

Task one: identifying objective, tactic and obstacle

- Think of a character you know. It could be real or fictional, from a play, a show, a book, a film or real life.
- Try to imagine what the character's objective might be at any moment. Their objective can change from scene to scene. Be bold! The more active the objective the better.
- Now think about all the ways they tried to get what they wanted. Were they successful? Why didn't they get what they wanted?
- What obstacles were in their way?

TOP TIP:

Actors do a lot of homework before they ever come to a rehearsal. By mapping out your objective and the many tactics and obstacles, you'll be prepared for new ideas and you'll be able to respond to whatever your scene partner throws at you!

Task two: playing with objectives and tactics

- Look at the contentless scene. With a partner, assign yourselves an objective, a tactic and an obstacle. Play the scene together.
- If you're working on your own assign yourself an objective, a tactic and an obstacle. Read out your own lines.
- Afterwards, think and talk about what happened. What did you/your partner observe? Did you get what you want?
- Try the scene again, using a different tactic or adjusting your objective. What was different?



Contentless scene

“What did you do last night?”

A: Hi!

B: Hello.

A: How's everything?

B: Fine. I guess.

A: Do you know what time it is?

B: No. Not exactly.

A: Don't you have a watch?

B: Not on me.

A: Well?

B: Well what?

A: What did you do last night?

B: What do you mean?

A: What did you do last night?

B: Nothing.

A: Nothing?

B: I said, nothing!

A: I'm sorry I asked.

B: That's all right.

Taken from *Acting One* by Robert Cohen.



Conclusion

Objective, **tactic** and **obstacle** are tools to think about how to play with other people. Without these three things, there would be no action in a story. They create tension, drama and comedy. The more you prepare your mind and body for rehearsals, the more you can play and experiment with new ways of performing. The skills you have explored today are crucial in interpreting a character from your own perspective, an acting partner's or a director.

Find out more about Michael Norton

 [@mbnort](https://www.instagram.com/mbnort)

 www.michaelburdittnorton.com

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 [@NUAoutreach](https://www.instagram.com/NUAoutreach)

 [@takeyourplace_he](https://www.instagram.com/takeyourplace_he)

Further resources

Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*
Kristen Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice*
Keith Johnstone, *Impro*
Sanford Meisner, *On Acting*

Useful links

 [@norwichuniarts](https://www.instagram.com/norwichuniarts)  [Creative Careers](#)

 www.takeyourplace.ac.uk