

Navigating the Unscripted Session: Improv Activities in Writing Center Tutor Training

East Central Writing Center Association Conference Workshop Handout

Michigan State University, East Lansing

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Presenters:

Grace Humphreys

humphreg@purdue.edu

Jeeyoung Choi

choi777@purdue.edu

Erin Paulson

epaulso@purdue.edu

Carri Jane Tenniswood

ctennisw@purdue.edu

Improv Gameplays

Alien, Tiger, Cow

Game Instructions:

- All participants form a circle.
- On the count of three, everyone simultaneously makes one of three hand motions:
- Alien = index fingers up near head like antennae
- Tiger = curled fingers like claws
- Cow = one hand forms an udder in front of stomach
- This process is repeated until everyone in the circle makes the same hand motion at the same time.
- The players cannot communicate verbally or make gestures with others to determine signs prematurely.

Tips for Leading Game:

- If your group struggles to align their signs, encourage them to focus on an individual across the circle from them, copying their previous sign. Because this game is all about observation, it helps if the participants actively watch which signs the others give.
- If your group excels at this game, you can assign roles before gameplay begins. This ensures the more difficult equal mixture of signs at the beginning.

Relations to Writing Center:

- Development of observational skills
- Encourages attention to visual cues
- Encourages cooperation with others

*Fortunately, Unfortunately***Game Instructions:**

- Those in a group stand in a circle (normally around 3-5 participants).
- One person makes a “Fortunately” statement. (For example: *Fortunately*, the mouse discovered some cheese.)
- The next person in the circle makes an “Unfortunately” statement continuing the narrative. (For example: *Unfortunately*, the cheese was moldy.)
- The “Fortunately-Unfortunately” cycle continues until the story reaches a reasonable ending.

Tips for Leading Game:

- If your participants get stuck, encourage them to think outside of realism. Aliens can always be on the brink of invasion.
- You can also encourage your participants to consider multiple characters and the environment. The story doesn’t have to be confined to a single character.
- If your participants are excelling, see if they can build a story around something you prompt. (For example: peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.)

Relations to Writing Center:

- Encourages active listening
- Encourages using what is provided as a starting point
- Focuses on the creation of a coherent story

*Three-Line Scene (with “Yes, And”)***Game Instructions:**

- There are two people within a group.
- Person A begins the scene with any sentence. (For example: The mermaid swam home from school.)
- Person B says, “Yes, and…” continuing the scene and adding to what Person A said. (For example: Yes, and on the way home, she ran into a dangerous shark.)
- Person A says, “Yes, and…” and completes the scene. (For example: Yes, and at school she had learned that sharks are blind, so she used this information to go safely home.)
- The goal is to create a complete, coherent scene within three lines.

Tips for Leading Game:

- If your participants are having difficulty with scene creation, encourage them to think outside of realism. Aliens can always be on the brink of invasion.
- If your participants are having difficulty with creating a complete scene within three lines, encourage them to align the three lines with the main three parts of the story arc: the inciting incident, the climax, and the resolution.
- Advise your participants to avoid asking questions when possible, as this makes their partner’s job more difficult.
- If your participants are excelling, you can add on requirements (such as establishing the who, what, where of the scene) to build more fully fleshed out scenes.
- You can also dispense with the phrase “Yes, and…” and agree more implicitly.

Relations to Writing Center:

- Encourages practice of agreement
- Develops attitude of positivity

Additional Reading

General Improv-Related Reading*:

- Diggles, Dan. *Improv for Actors*. Allworth, 2004.
- Goldie, Allison. *The Improv Book: Improvisation for Theatre, Comedy, Education and Life*. Oberon Books, 2015.
- Halpern, Charna, et al. *Truth in Comedy: The manual of improvisation*. Meriwether Publishing Ltd., 1994.
- Leonard, Kelly, and Tom Yorton. *Yes, And: How Improvisation Reverses “No, But” Thinking and Improves Creativity and Collaboration*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2015.
- Meggido, Adam. *Improv Beyond Rules: A Practical Guide to Narrative Improvisation*. Nick Hern Books, 2019.
- Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*. Northwestern University Press, 1963.

*These texts are great sources for additional improv activities and games.

Improv & Non-Theatre Spaces Reading:

- Benjamin, Stefanie, and Carol Kline. “How to yes-and: Using improvisational games to improv(e) communication, listening, and collaboration techniques in tourism and hospitality education.” *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, vol. 24, 2019, pp. 130-142. *ProQuest*, doi:10.1016/j.jhlste.2019.02.002.
- Berk, Ronald A., and Rosalind H. Trieber. “Whose Classroom Is It, Anyway?: Improvisation as a Teaching Tool.” *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2009, pp. 29-60.
- Huffaker, Julie Sheldon, and Ellen West. “Enhancing Learning in the Business Classroom: An Adventure with Improv Theater Techniques.” *Journal of Management Education*, vol. 29, no. 6, 2005, pp. 852-869. *ProQuest*, www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/enhancing-learning-business-classroom-adventure/docview/195708068/se-2?accountid=13360.
- Moshavi, Dan. ““Yes and...”: Introducing improvisational theatre techniques to the management classroom.” *Journal of Management Education*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2001. *ProQuest*, www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/yes-introducing-improvisational-theatre/docview/195706024/se-2?accountid=13360.
- Patel, Vimal. “Improv Helps Ph.D.’s Explain Their Work—and Loosen Up.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 Nov. 2014. *ProQuest*, www.proquest.com/trade-journals/improv-helps-ph-d-s-explain-their-work-loosen-up/docview/1625380352/se-2?accountid=13360.
- Rajeev, Priya Nair, and Subramanian Kalpathi. “Let’s play: the use of Improv games in change management training.” *Industry & Higher Education*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2016, pp. 149-154. *SAGE Journals*, doi:10.5367/ihe.2016.0299.
- Rossing, Jonathan P., and Krista Hoffmann-Longtin. “Improv(ing) the Academy: Applied Improvisation as a Strategy for Educational Development.” *To Improve the Academy*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2016, pp. 303-325.