

Interpreting Character: Wants & Actions

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Exercise: Tactics & Objectives-- Please/No

A cornerstone of the actor's process is exploring what the character wants, what motivates them to want it, and what obstacles are in their way. The following exercises are designed to open up that process:

- Have two volunteers sit or stand facing each other.
- Actor A and Actor B are going to carry out an improvisation. In the improvisation, actor A can only say the word "please." Actor B can only say "no."
- Brainstorm with the class on a situation and objectives for actor A and actor B. Actor A should have a very specific **objective** - something that they need very badly when they are asking "please" (i.e. student needs an extension from a teacher on an upcoming paper). Actor B should have some reason that is equally important for saying "no."
- Make sure that the relationship between the two 'characters' is very clear and potent. As in Shakespeare, the more tied the characters are to each other, the higher the stakes and the higher the potential for conflict.*
- The object of the game is for Actor A to get Actor B to change their mind and say "yes."
- Brainstorm with the class on different **actions and tactics** that Actor A and B can try in order to achieve their objectives. Write these actions on sheets of paper.

Please/No pairings with Shakespeare:

Lady Macbeth/Macbeth (Act I, sc 7) *Lady M wants Macbeth to kill Duncan,; Macbeth does not want to...at first*

Helena/Demetrius (Act II, sc i) *Helena wants Demetrius to love her/be with her; Demetrius is bound to Hermia)*

Romeo/Mercutio (Act III, sc i) *Mercutio wants Romeo to fight Tybalt and he refuses*

*Directions are the same as above. Have the class articulate the conflict, what the "Please" character wants and what the "No" character wants based on the given circumstances, before the students begin the improvisation.

Further suggestions:

Nominate two directors from the class, and pair them each with an actor. Each director will choose which actions their actor will use, and in what order; during the improvisation, the directors will hold up the "action" signs, signaling to the actor the choices they should make during the scene.



Tactics: Pairs & Scenes

Tactics are the HOW that the character (or person!) uses to get what they want. Unless the character achieves their objective immediately, tactics change depending on how well or poorly they are working.

Introductory Question: Ask your students to think of a time that they asked a parent or caregiver for a toy or gadget they wanted. HOW did they try to get their parent to **yes**? What are some of the different tactics they used?

For example, did they....

	<i>Beg</i>	
<i>Argue</i>		<i>Negotiate</i>
<i>Charm</i>		<i>Exhaust</i>
<i>Plead</i>		<i>Convince</i>
<i>Intimidate</i>		<i>Bully</i>

(All active verbs!)

Exercise “Upping the Stakes”:

- Pair students up.
- Create a basic scenario: Student A has \$100 and wants to keep it; Student B wants to get the \$\$\$ from Student A.
- Guide each student to concoct a really juicy, high-stakes reason why they need the money.
- Let students improvise the scene. Encourage them to make shifts in their tactics and strategies—when one strategy doesn’t work...try something else!
- Brainstorm a list of action verbs that describe their different strategies (pleading, demanding, threatening, sweet-talking, etc.) Share & discuss.

Stakes and Strategies: Upping the Ante

Another exercise that helps to illustrate the way that tactics change and accelerate when the stakes are raised.

- Have volunteers come up, and place a chair in the room.
- Explain that one actor is a teacher and the other is his or her student, and that we are going to look at the same improvised scenario three different ways.
- Whisper the instructions each time to the volunteers’ so that the rest of the class does not hear.
- Scenario 1:
 - Tell the student that s/he needs an extension on a paper. Tell the teacher that s/he likes the student and to go easy on them. Play out the improvisation.
- Scenario 2:
 - Tell the student that s/he REALLY needs that extension in order to pass the class. Tell the teacher that this student is regularly late on work, but that they seem to be trying to improve.
- Scenario 3:
 - Tell the student that s/he MUST GET THE EXTENSION because otherwise s/he will fail the class and not graduate! Explain that s/he has five minutes to resolve this before the principal locks in the final grades. Tell the teacher that this student is always making excuses, blaming others, and not delivering with no growth in sight.
- After the three improvisations, discuss the differences among the scenes, including:
 - Tactics
 - Time urgency and pace
 - Range of tactics

