

Improvisation Rules by the Numbers

DEFINITION: IMPROVISATION is theatre without a script; but with a scenario; a brief outline of a plot. The actor creates the scene and dialogue as he/she goes along.

1. Have a CHARACTER and keep it. Using a funny voice, accent, or unusual physical quality helps but the best characters start with the actor himself with an additional point of view, preoccupation, or attitude that this character has.
2. Use your IMAGINATION. Never ignore something unusual or unexpected. Listen to your inner voice, trust yourself, and go with the impulse. The unusual choices result in the best scenes.
3. RELAX, so you can listen to your impulses
4. LISTEN to everything that is said. The best improvisers are those that listen and remember what was said. A player's move is not complete until you see how it affects your partner(s).
5. SHARE the stage time, don't try to control it. And improv grows from explored moments where nothing is ignored, nothing is forgotten, and nothing is a mistake. No one player is more important than anyone else. Each player must share the responsibility of the scene. Share your ideas, but drop the idea immediately the moment the scene takes an unexpected twist.
6. Stay in GOOD TASTE. Inappropriate material is used as a last ditch effort by insecure players when they are worried that a scene isn't funny.
7. The best way to look good is to make others look good. You do this by never DENYING what is said. There are no mistakes on stage if everyone commits 100% to the scene
8. The characters in the scene must have a RELATIONSHIP. Establish this quickly. Conflict is the starting point but it is the relationship that makes the scene.
9. Try for AGREEMENT rather than arguing, for fighting accomplishes little except to delay the action. It is easy to argue, but audiences find it

more interesting when actors agree. They rarely see people agree to the things improv forces them to agree with!

10. Don't explain what you plan to do – JUST DO IT. Keep the action in the present, and make active choices.
11. Don't WHISPER on stage; make sure your audiences hear everything said.
12. The truth is funny. NEVER FORCE a scene to get laughs. The only way to do comedy is play it completely straight. A truly funny scene is one of generosity, where you are trying to make the other person and his/her ideas look as good as possible. In comedy honesty is the best policy.
13. Don't COACH from the audience. On stage, play the scene honestly and don't let audience's reactions (or lack of reactions) direct the scene.
14. Use good BLOCKING (Blocking is where the actors stand and how they move.) Don't hide behind people and don't turn your back to the audience.
15. He who gives information is a gift giver, he who asks QUESTIONS is a thief. Questions place the burden of the scene on the other person. Do your share by giving information? When a player asks a question he/she usually has an answer in mind; so why ask the question.
16. SILENCE creates tension and draws in the audience so give yourself time to think.
17. Please don't use PHYSICAL VIOLENCE. If it has to occur always play these moments in slow motion for safety.
18. When making a choice SPECIFICS are more interesting than generalities. "Nice car" is dull but "Wow, Rolls Royce," adds interest, realism and gives your partner(s) more to work with.
19. Conflicts do not have to be SOLVED. In fact, an improv is better when players add to the conflict rather than solve it.
20. In improvisation PRESENT TENSE always works the best. This is especially important to remember when we play word story games like "Building a Story," "Dr. Know-it-All," etc.