



# 2017 Student Handbook

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Welcome!**

Thank you so much for taking classes with Finest City Improv. We are excited to share the JOY of improvisation with you! We are so happy that you decided to join us and look forward to having you as part of our community!

This handbook was created to inform you of all the important information you'll need during your improv journey with us. Please review this handbook and if you have any questions please call us at (619) 306-6047 or stop by to chat!

Please never hesitate with questions about all things improv! We are here to help.

**Amy Lisewski**, Founder and Director

**Kat Brown**, Director of Community Engagement

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# ABOUT FINEST CITY IMPROV

FCI was founded by Amy Lisewski to fulfill a need for a home base for long-form improvisational theater in San Diego. After years of traveling to (and living in) Los Angeles to study and practice improvisation at Second City and IO West, she decided to bring the best of LA to San Diego. Starting with two teams and two shows per month at temporary locations, she quickly grew FCI to a permanent theater with shows four nights per week, a full offering of improv classes and workshops for all levels, and a community of improvisers on dozens of new teams.

## Our Core Focus

**We entertain, inspire, and bring joy to people with our talent and passion for improv and its transforming effects.**

## Our Core Values

**Cultivate fun, happiness, and a little weirdness in everything and everyone.**

Improv has made us happier people. We have chosen to spend our lives living, breathing, and sharing improv with others because it is how we stay funny, happy, and delightfully out of the normal comfort zones. Every audience member, student, client, and team member will be delightfully surprised by the degree to which we help them discover more joy in their lives with what we do.

**Ensemble first.**

The only star in an improv is the ensemble itself. We embrace everyone on our team and in our community with a spirit of generosity and respect. Our collective impact is greatest when we rely on, help, and challenge each other to be our best. We take a collective bow as a team and accept the applause with pride. We are the most inclusionary, fun, and supportive home to improvisers in San Diego.

**Stay grounded.**

As highly creative and active people we are constantly inspired by shiny objects and fast running squirrels. Although we are highly capable of achieving anything we put our minds to, we believe we are most effective when we “stay in the moment” and get “back to basics”. We stay humble and keep it simple and joyful.

## How We Approach Improv and Improv Training

- Improv has made us happier people and we want you to find more happiness and fulfillment with your life through improv. If you aren't having fun and/or growing then let's talk!
- We believe that everyone is unique and has so much to bring to the stage and the classroom. Honoring our own experiences and strengths leads to highly authentic and engaging improv.
- Improv is an ensemble process. It's all about each other. We treat others as we want to be treated ourselves.
- If we always start with listening and connecting to our scene partners we have fun and our audiences have fun. This begins even off stage.
- We learn from our failures as well as our successes and need both to grow.
- We play at the top of our intelligence and treat our audience like poets and geniuses.
- We live the improv principles off stage as much as on stage.
- We ensure all students feel comfortable enough to stretch themselves beyond their usual comfort zone. If you do not feel supported in your classes please let us know.
- We believe students should be given clear goals that help them to discover the key takeaways of each lesson. If you are ever unsure of what you are learning please let your teacher know.
- All students receive direct feedback on areas in which they are strong as well as areas in which they can improve related to the current class skills at least once during each term.
- All students are valued equally.

**Join our private Facebook Group for students and performers of FCI!**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/337137096435645/>

You will also be receiving important information directly via email so make sure yours is up to date in our records!

# TRAINING POLICIES

This General Information page contains important and pertinent information regarding the Training Center and general policies for our students. All new students should read this handbook thoroughly and keep it for reference. If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact the office. Every effort is made to keep this information up to date. However, policies and procedures are subject to change without notice, at the Training Center's discretion.

## Attendance

Improv is an ensemble process and students rely on each other to get the most out of their class experience. Please be on time for each class. Missing more than 20 minutes of any class will be counted as an absence. If you miss more than two classes, you will not be allowed to advance to the next class. You may make-up one class per term if there is the same level being offered that term and there is space available. You **MUST** get clearance from Kat prior to the make-up class.

## Auditing / Guests

For the sake of all students, visitors are not allowed in class. Our weekly drop-in classes or monthly free Discover Improv classes are a more suitable place to bring someone interested in our programs.

## Dress for Fun and Safety

- Students must wear shoes in class (safety and respect for others).
- Wear clothes that are comfortable to move in and maybe even roll around on the floor in!
- For your class shows, please dress to impress!

## Facility & Housekeeping

- We hold classes on the stage, in the classroom, in the “greenroom”, and in the Burgundy Room. The Burgundy Room is a hotel meeting room located across the hall from the restrooms.
- The **restrooms** are located within the hotel. After 6pm these are accessed by exiting the training center (if in classroom or stage) and entering through the double doors by the Red Fox Room. Please do not use the lobby hallway door.

- **Parking** is available on the street or in the open lot at the corner of Howard and Texas Streets. Entrance is on Howard Street. This parking lot is leased by the hotel and is the site of future development. We are able to use this lot as a courtesy by the hotel. If the lot is not available, please arrive early enough to find street parking, which is usually more available on El Cajon Blvd. or across El Cajon Blvd. Housekeeping
- **Please clean up** after yourselves after each class. Put chairs back where they belong and remove all trash.
- **Please no food or drink** (other than water) in the classroom or on stage. There is a water cooler in the greenroom but please bring your own cups or bottles.
- Upon entry to the classroom, **cellphones** should be off to limit distractions in class. If you are using your cellphone to take class notes please inform the teacher prior to class.
- **Valuables** - Do not leave your belongings unattended. Finest City Improv is not responsible for any lost or stolen articles. If you lose something check the red fabric bin located in the greenroom.

## A Few Important Rules of Personal Safety

Each class, your instructor will review the boundaries of personal protection and safety with you. Here are some general guidelines to keep in mind (this is NOT an exhaustive list of what is and is not acceptable. Please refer to Standards of Conduct Section for more information):

- No intentional physical contact to neck, head, chest, or genital areas. Touching someone's face in a scene gently is generally acceptable but holding or twisting their head is unsafe.
- It is extremely difficult to safely simulate hitting, slapping, or other violence in improvisation without stage combat training and practice with the consenting scene partners. Refrain from all actions of this type in class and in your class shows. Never slap or hit anyone ever.
- Do not kiss, grope, or fondle scene partners in class or class shows.
- Do not pick up anyone unless they explicitly agree to be picked up.
- Do not pull or grab clothes or hair.
- Never remove anyone else's eyeglasses.
- Do not jump on anyone's back without explicit consent from them.
- Inform your instructor about any physical injuries or limitations prior to class.

## Seeing Shows Helps You Grow!

A lot of your learning will come from watching shows. Each class has specific requirements for the number of shows students must see during the session. These can be at any improv

theater. Your teacher will be leading discussions about these throughout the term, and highlighting certain shows that you may really enjoy or learn from.

As a current student, you can take advantage of free access to our shows! Your teacher will issue you a show punch card that is valid for the current term and even includes 2 free guest punches so you can bring a friend or a date. We have a lot of fun every Thursday through Sunday at the theater and hope you will come laugh with us and meet the rest of the community! Punchcards expire one week after the end of the term.

## Performing is Fun!!!

Improvisation is a performance art and we want you to experience the joy of performing for an appreciative audience as much as possible. Every term, we have a student night at the completion of the term to showcase all of our classes. Levels three through five also have shows on Sunday evenings throughout each term.

There are many more ways to get on stage.

1. **Greenhorn!** Greenhorn is the student-teacher show every Sunday. All students in Levels one through three are scheduled for one Greenhorn show per term. These are optional but a ton of fun and the teachers will support you like rock stars!
2. **Open Jams!** We have open stage time where anyone with a basic understanding of improv can jump in and play. Check our stage schedule for the times as they change throughout the year.
3. **Start an Indie Team!** We have a few “house teams” that play every week but we fill most of our stage schedule with independently created teams. Many of our former students have found others they enjoy playing with and formed really great teams. All you have to do is get some folks together, find a coach, and submit your team for stage time. Ask us for more info!
4. **Level 6 Grad Group Show.** Every level 6 grad group is offered up to 4 slots to continue performing with their current class after graduation. To do so, let the office know that your team wants to continue playing together before you graduate. You must have at least 75% of your class participating in these shows to be scheduled.
5. **Audition!** Once you graduate from level 6 consider participating in our house team auditions.

## Registration & Advancement

Class days & times are filled on a first come, first served basis. Space in classes is limited. FCI reserves the right to change instructors when necessary. Specific instructors are not guaranteed. We highly recommend that you continue with the group you start with. We make every effort to keep each group on the same day and time throughout all levels.

**Tuition** for classes must be paid in full upon registration. A \$30.00 fee will be assessed for returned checks due to insufficient funds or closed accounts. Once payment has been made and a student is registered for a class, no refunds will be given unless FCI cancels the class. If a student discovers that they cannot take the class they have paid for, **at least 1 week** before it begins, you can roll over the tuition to a future session. A class credit is **good for 6 months** from when the class was purchased. Future classes, or space in classes cannot be guaranteed. Early bird registration is a \$20 discount to encourage filling classes early. See the calendar of registration dates online.

### Advancement

Upon completion of a term, advancement to the next class level is not automatic. Each student is individually evaluated by their instructor and given a recommendation to advance or repeat the level, based on the goals of the current level as well as attendance records. If by week five a teacher is concerned that a student might not be ready for advancement they will review the student's progress with the Artistic Director. If a student misses more than two classes in a term, they will be asked to repeat the level. Any student that repeats a level may do so at a 30% discount off the full tuition. This can be done once per level.

Classes that do not meet minimum enrollment of 7 students may be cancelled. You will be given at least seven days notice of this.

**Maximum enrollment is:** Level 1-3: 14 students; Levels 4-5: 12 students; Level 6: 10 students. Workshops and other special courses each have their own minimums and maximums.

### Multi-Class Tuition Discount

Students who enroll in more than one class in the same term will receive a 20 percent discount off each additional class. Some restrictions may apply. Contact the office to register.

### Listing Class Shows on an Actors' Resume

It is important that for any audition, whether through FCI or not, you represent your training and show experience with us correctly and honestly. For example, performing in the theater for a class show does not allow you to put "Finest City Improv" on the performance portion of your



actor's resume. After completing the core improv program, please list yourself as a "Finest City Training Center Graduate."

## **Work Study**

Work Study positions are generally given priority to our student volunteers. Volunteer positions come up very regularly and are the easiest way for adult students to receive discounted tuition. Volunteers are usually sought to assist with theater operations, show operations, or public events. To apply to be a volunteer, please submit contact the office. Priority is given to students that are enrolled in Level 2 or above.

# STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

## Civility

By their very nature, improv theater and comedy are artistic pursuits in which the boundaries of what is deemed socially “appropriate” and/or politically correct are often blurred and subject to interpretation. Words and/or conduct that offend one person may have no effect on another. The Training Center does not endeavor to shield students from ideas and/or behavior that they may find unwelcome, disagreeable or even offensive; indeed, the free exchange of ideas between students and their instructor(s) – even those that some may find objectionable – is vital to the creative process underlying great improv theater. As such, students should approach their class work with an open mind, and take into the account the diversity of viewpoints, beliefs and backgrounds that make the programs at the Training Center such a rich learning experience. By the same token, students should exercise good judgment when participating in class activities, and avoid engaging in conduct that rises to the level of abuse, such as targeted attacks directed at a particular individual. As a general rule, the Training Center will not intervene to enforce social standards of civility. If, however, you feel that certain conduct – whether by an instructor or a student – has overstepped the bounds of what is acceptable even in an improv theater/comedy setting, you may decline to participate and report the behavior to Kat Brown, Director of Community Engagement. The Training Center will investigate the matter and address the issue, as needed. There will be no retaliation against any student who in good faith raises a concern, reports an incident and/or participates in an investigation under this policy. Any student who believes that he or she has been retaliated against in any manner should report it immediately to Kat Brown.

## Anti-Harassment Policy

Harassment of any kind, including sexual harassment, is strictly prohibited. The Training Center will not tolerate harassment by anyone, including instructors, staff, students, visitors, vendors, contractors and third parties.

Harassment is defined as unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical or visual, that is so severe or pervasive that it unreasonably interferes with an individual’s participation in

Training Center programs, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive educational environment. Examples of prohibited harassment include, but are not limited to epithets, slurs or negative stereotyping; threatening, intimidating or hostile acts; denigrating jokes directed at an individual based on his or her personal characteristics, which **do not serve any class-related function and/or fall outside the bounds of what is acceptable in the classroom**, as set forth in the Training Center’s Civility policy.

## **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment in particular is strictly prohibited. Sexual harassment encompasses a range of conduct from sexual assault (which is also a criminal act) to conduct such as unwanted touching or persistent unwelcome comments, sexual advances, propositions and/or requests for sexual favors, depending on the specific circumstances and context in which the conduct occurs. For example, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or sexually directed remarks or behavior constitute sexual harassment when (i) submission to or rejection of such conduct is made, explicitly, or implicitly, a basis for an academic decision or professional advancement, or a term or condition of either; or (ii) such conduct is directed against an individual despite its rejection. On the other hand, sexual innuendo or suggestive comments, gestures or jokes made in the course of a class exercise or performance may not be considered impermissible sexual harassment, if they serve an educational and/or artistic purpose.

Please note that due to the unique nature of the improv theater/comedy setting, a person's subjective belief that behavior is offensive, intimidating or hostile does not necessarily render that behavior harassment under this policy. Rather, the behavior must be objectively unreasonable in light of the surrounding circumstances and context. Such expression will not constitute impermissible harassment unless (in addition to satisfying the above definitions) it is targeted at a specific person or persons, is abusive and/or serves no educational purpose.

## **Complaint Procedure**

Any student who experiences or witnesses harassment of any kind, including sexual harassment, whether from a fellow student or a faculty member, should feel free to discuss the problem with Amy Lisewski (Artistic Director and Owner) and, if desired, request that she speak informally to the person complained about. No one at the Training Center – whether a faculty member or a student – may reprimand, retaliate or discriminate against an individual for raising a concern, making a complaint and/or participating in an investigation under this policy. Any individual who believes that he or she has been retaliated against in any manner should report the matter to Amy Lisewski.

All concerns and complaints will be treated with confidentiality to the extent practicable without compromising the investigation and/or resolution of the matter, and will be investigated thoroughly and promptly. Where possible, the Training Center will attempt to resolve the issue informally (for example, by speaking to the alleged harasser and/or counseling the parties). However, this does not preclude more formal corrective or disciplinary action.

## **Consensual Relationships Between Faculty and Students**

It is against Training Center policy for students and instructors to enter and/or engage in romantic and/or sexual relationships with one another while the instructor is teaching the student in a class and/or supervising the student's work at the Training Center. Consensual romantic and/or sexual relationships between instructors and Training Center students not enrolled in a class the instructor is teaching, while not forbidden, generally are considered unwise and inappropriate. Please note that even where both parties have consented at the outset to a romantic and/or sexual involvement, such consent does not preclude a subsequent charge of sexual harassment against the instructor.

## **Sexual Assault Policy**

Sexual assault is a criminal act that violates the standards of our community and is unacceptable at the Training Center. The Training Center's Sexual Assault policy applies to students, instructors, staff, and visitors, as well as vendors, contractors and third parties.

Sexual assault is defined as:

- Any intentional or knowing touching or fondling by an individual, either directly or through the clothing, of the genitals, breasts, thighs, or buttocks of the victim
- without the consent of the victim;
- Touching or fondling of an individual by the victim when the victim is forced to do so against his or her will; or
- Any nonconsensual acts involving sexual penetration of the sex organs, anus, or mouth.
- Use of alcohol or drugs may impair an individual's capacity to consent freely and may render an individual incapable of giving consent.

## **Reporting Procedure**

Any student who believes he or she has been sexually assaulted, whether by a fellow student, faculty member or visitor, should report the incident to Amy Lisewski or Kat Brown. The student is also encouraged to report the incident to the police and seek medical care as soon as possible. No one at the Training Center – whether a faculty member or a student – may reprimand, retaliate or discriminate against an individual for raising a concern, making a complaint and/or participating in an investigation under this policy. Any individual who believes that he or she has been retaliated against in any manner should report the matter to Amy Lisewski or Kat Brown.

All concerns and complaints will be treated with confidentiality to the extent practicable without compromising the investigation and/or resolution of the matter, and will be investigated thoroughly and promptly. Depending on the severity of the incident and the individuals

involved, the Training Center may pursue the matter through internal disciplinary procedures without the cooperation of the victim. Under such circumstances, the Training Center will inform the victim of its decision to proceed in this manner.

## **Violence**

The Training Center maintains a zero tolerance policy for violence. Acts or threats of physical violence which involve or affect Training Center faculty, students and staff or which occur on Training Center /Finest property, will not be tolerated. Examples of prohibited threats or acts of violence include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Hitting or shoving an individual
- Physically injuring another individual
- Threatening an individual or his/her family, friends, or property with harm, or otherwise engaging in behavior that creates a reasonable fear of injury in another person
- Intentional destruction or threatening to destruct Training Center /Finest property
- Making/sending harassing or threatening phone calls, text messages, and emails
- Harassing surveillance or stalking
- Unauthorized possession or use of firearms or weapons

Every student is encouraged to report incidents of threats or acts of physical violence of which he/she is aware. The report should be made to Amy Lisewski or Kat Brown. Please note that this policy does not apply to fictitious “threats” or simulated “acts” of violence made in the course of your work at the Training Center.

## **Weapons**

The Training Center prohibits all persons who enter Training Center /Finest property from carrying a handgun, firearm, knife, explosive, or other prohibited weapon of any kind regardless of whether the person is licensed to carry the weapon or not.

The only exception to this policy will be police officers, security guards or other persons who have been given written consent by the Training Center /Finest and/or are permitted by law to carry a weapon on the property.

Violation of this policy is grounds for discipline, including immediate dismissal.

## **Drug and Alcohol Policy**

The use, sale, manufacture, cultivation, distribution, dispensation, possession of illegal drugs or other unauthorized or controlled substances while on Training Center /Finest City Improv property, or while otherwise engaged in Training Center activities, is strictly prohibited. The

term “controlled substances” is defined as any substances that are illegal or controlled by federal and/or state law, including lawful substances (such as prescription drugs) which have been improperly obtained and/or used in violation of their lawful prescription.

Students are prohibited from having any such illegal or unauthorized controlled substances in their systems while attending class and/or engaged in Training Center activities. Outside alcohol consumption or illegal drug activity that impacts a student’s class work or participation in Training Center activities and/or threatens the reputation of the Training Center /Finest City Improv will not be tolerated.

The only exception to this policy applies with respect to alcoholic beverages served and consumed at Training Center sponsored or Training Center approved social or business related functions or meetings, provided that the student consumes alcohol responsibly and in moderation and does not become intoxicated or otherwise impaired. Alcohol consumption by Training Center employees, volunteers, students or guests who are under the age of 21 is strictly prohibited.

Students who violate the Training Center’s Drug and Alcohol policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including permanent expulsion from the Training Center and/or referral for prosecution of criminal violations.

## **Student Whistleblower Policy**

Students must immediately report to Amy Lisewski or Kat Brown any activity or conduct that they suspect is:

- Illegal, or a violation of any state or federal law and/or regulation; or
- A serious violation of Training Center policy and/or procedure, including the abovestated policies regarding violence, use of drugs and/or alcohol and weapons; or
- Otherwise inappropriate and/or unethical.

The Training Center will not retaliate against any student as a result of his or her report of inappropriate conduct under this policy, or because he or she has refused to follow an illegal, inappropriate and/or unethical request.

## **Confidentiality**

Reports of inappropriate conduct under the policy may be submitted on a confidential basis by the student directly or may be submitted anonymously. The Training Center will endeavor to investigate the reported conduct as discreetly as possible under the applicable circumstances. Reports of violations or suspected violations will be kept confidential to the extent possible, consistent with the need to conduct an appropriate investigation.

## **Handling of Reported Violations**

Upon receipt of a report of inappropriate conduct under this policy, the Training Center shall conduct a prompt and thorough investigation and appropriate corrective action will be taken, if/as warranted.

## **Open Door Policy**

The Training Center is committed to providing a safe, productive and fun educational environment for all students. Part of this commitment is encouraging an open and frank atmosphere in which any problem, concern or question can be addressed and discussed.

Students who have a question, problem, suggestion and/or complaint should feel free to discuss the issue with Kat Brown. There will be no retaliation for raising a concern under this policy. Any issues raised or discussions held pursuant to the Training Center's Open Door Policy will be treated with confidentiality unless the student agrees to include others in the discussion or an investigation into the matter is warranted, in which case, confidentiality will be maintained to the extent practicable without compromising the investigation.

Please note that the Training Center's Student Whistleblower and Open Door policies do not apply to complaints of harassment or sexual assault. Students who wish to report an incident of harassment or sexual assault must follow the complaint procedures set forth in the Training Center's Anti-Harassment and Sexual Assault policies.

## **Discipline Policy**

### **Immediate Dismissal or Expulsion**

If at any point during class, the instructor feels that a student is engaging in behavior which is threatening, dangerous and/or highly disruptive to the classroom ensemble, the instructor may require that the student leave the classroom for the remainder of that day's class. Students dismissed from class in this manner may not return to their regular class until they have spoken with someone from the Training Center office. Behavior which would result in immediate dismissal includes, but is not limited to threats or acts of violence, inebriation and/or severe impairment due to use of drugs and/or other controlled substances, violation of the Anti-Harassment and/or Civility policies or other actions which are disruptive to the work of the class, in the discretion of the Training Center. If behavior is deemed excessively disruptive or dangerous to the Training Center environment, the Training Center reserves the right to permanently expel a student from the Training Center as well as the extended Finest City Improv property.

## **Warnings**

Students who display behavior which an instructor deems to be detrimental to the progress of their ensemble may be issued a warning. The instructor gives the warning verbally and then notifies the Training Center office. If a student receives more than one warning for similar issues, the Training Center will be notified and appropriate action will be taken. Depending on the circumstances, students may be required to transfer classes, repeat a term, take a leave of absence from The Training Center or to leave the Training Center permanently. Examples of conduct considered detrimental to the progress of the ensemble include, but are not limited to, excessive lateness, inappropriate classroom behavior (including being under the influence of drugs and/or other controlled substances), harassment of another student or Training Center employee, and/or inability to keep up with class progress.



## **Receipt and Acknowledgement of The Finest City Training Center Handbook and Policies**

I have received and read a copy of the Finest City Improv Training Center Handbook, and agree to abide by the Handbook's rules, policies, and standards of conduct, including, without limitation, the Civility, Violence, and Anti-Harassment policies, as well as any revisions made thereto. I understand that the policies described in the Handbook are subject to change at any time.

I understand that by their very nature, improv theater and comedy are artistic pursuits in which the boundaries of what is deemed socially "appropriate" and/or politically correct are often blurred and subject to interpretation. As such, I may, at times, be exposed to ideas and/or behavior that I find unwelcome, disagreeable or even offensive. Under such circumstances, I agree to approach my class work with an open mind and take into account the diversity of viewpoints, beliefs and backgrounds inherent to the Training Center learning experience. By the same token, I will exercise good judgment when participating in class activities and avoid engaging in conduct that rises to the level of abuse, such as targeted attacks directed at a particular individual. Finally, I understand that if I am exposed to and/or experience any conduct that makes me uncomfortable and/or that I believe oversteps the bounds of what is acceptable in an improv theater / comedy setting, I am not required to participate, and should discuss the matter with Amy Lisewski or Kat Brown.

Amy Lisewski

Kat Brown

[amy@finestcityimprov.com](mailto:amy@finestcityimprov.com)   [kat@finestcityimprov.com](mailto:kat@finestcityimprov.com)   (619) 306-6047

Student Name:

Signature:

Email:

Phone:

Date:

# CURRICULUM

**Dear Students,**

**Improvisation is the art of spontaneous creation.** Great improv is engaging, surprising, thought-provoking ..... and sometimes very funny.

As improvisers, we step onto a bare stage with nothing but each other and create theater on the spot. We have nothing planned and we have the times of our lives. On stage, the world is our oyster... full of limitless possibility! The principle of **“Yes! And...”** is how improvisers at Finest City Improv and theaters around the world create scenes and entire sets out of thin air. The seemingly magical act of improvisation on stage can be broken down into some basic principles and best practices. There are hundreds of exercises we use to prepare to improvise and you will be learning them in each level of classes.

When we step off stage, the training and preparation that we have had does not leave us. It influences every aspect of our lives. **Improv has made us happier people and we have dedicated our lives to sharing this art form with others because of this.** Learning and practicing the “Yes! And...” approach will completely transform your life. Saying “Yes! And...” in life—to yourself and to the opportunities and challenges that arise—is how we create and embrace opportunities in everything we do.

Because you are joining our community of students, chances are you either want to play and perform on stage or were brave enough to step outside of your comfort zone and learn improv to help you have more fun in your life. These, and the dozens of other reasons to learn improv, are all fantastic goals and **we are dedicated to making sure you are successful.** Regardless of your original intention, we are certain that you will become a confident performer, discover new ways to tap into your greatest potential, become more innovative, be better able to think on your feet, become more skilled at building relationships and so much more!

Your future is a playground of opportunity in which you have the courage and the tools to choose the game you want to play, and to love doing it! Welcome to improvisation!

**YES! And...**

*Amy Lisewski*

Founder and Artistic Director

*“If you cannot risk, you cannot grow.  
If you cannot grow, you cannot become your best.  
If you cannot become your best, you cannot be happy.  
If you cannot be happy, what else matters?”  
- Dr. David Viscot (“Risking”)*

# LEVEL 1: FOUNDATIONS OF IMPROVISATION

Invite more creativity, spontaneity, and fun into your every day life. Designed for anyone new to improv OR for anyone who has experience but is new to our Improv Series, you will learn the fundamentals that we believe are the basis of great improv! All classes have a short, optional show at the end of the term.

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## Goals:

- Students will find joy in **playing improv games with a group** and feel comfortable trusting, supporting, and contributing to this process.
- Students will have a highly enjoyable introduction to improvising basic scenes with a partner.
- By the fifth class of the term they should be **creating very short scenes given one parameter** (who or where) making choices to fill in the missing who or the where and demonstrating agreement.
- By the end of the term students are able to improvise a basic scene of 1-3 minutes based on a single word suggestion demonstrating the concepts of agreement, support, spontaneity, and acting (doing).

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## Major Skills Introduced At This Level:

### 1) Support and Trust

- a. The only star in improv is the ensemble itself
- b. Let go and support everyone else
- c. Respect each other's choices

### 2) Playfulness (energy, spontaneity)

- a. Have FUN and your teammates and audience will have fun
- b. Trust your instincts
- c. Create now – evaluate later

### 3) Yes, And...

- a. Agreement is the only rule that can't be broken
- b. Agreement leads to more action – and “Acting is Doing!”
- c. OR “I know... and”
- d. And means adding something (justify, details, etc.)
- e. KISS – one idea per line of dialogue

### 4) “Doing”

- a. Object work

- b. Environment
- c. Physicality

## **Level 1 Notes**

## LEVEL 2: DISCOVER AND PLAY!

In this level you will take the fundamentals and discover even more playfulness! You will learn dozens of more super fun improv games and follow your fears to find more ease in your scenework. Scene work focuses on trusting your partner, yourself, and the “rules of improv” to simply discover the fun in your scenes every time!

This level has one class show at the end of the term and every student can participate in the student/teacher show, “Greenhorn.”

Students are required to see 3 improv shows during the session, which will be discussed at the beginning of each class.

### Goals:

By the fourth class of the term students should be consistently initiation scenes by connecting with their partner and offering a very simple but clear initiation that leads to relationship oriented scenes.

By the sixth class of the term they should be consistently building scenes collaboratively and trusting their ability to discover the “what” and “why” rather than forcing it.

By the end of the term students should beginning to heighten the emotion and action of every scene, making the most out of the first things discovered in the scene.

By the end of the term students are able to begin improvising a montage of 2-person scenes of 1-3 minutes as part of a longer montage of scenes with self-editing using a sweep edit.

### Major Skills Introduced At This Level:

**Getting Suggestions and Initiating Scenes** for success

**Relationship** - making scene about each other and not about the situation, exploring the relationship and what character wants.

**Emotion** - having emotional reactions, investing in scene, being affected by what is happening and what is being said.

**“The Zen of Improv”** - follow your fears, reduce inner critic, simply trust the process and discover collaboratively. (let go!)

More physicality: introduce use of space and basic object work.

### Level 2 Notes:

## LEVEL 3: AWESOME TWO-PERSON SCENES

In this level you will learn to consistently and effortlessly craft engaging scenes! While continuing to practice the fundamentals of improvisation and learning even more awesome and fun games, you further develop your skills to create improv scenes in groups of two.

**Instruction continues to focus on relationship, and discovering collaboratively while adding more character, game, and heightening.** This class also works on some basic **acting skills** that are helpful in improvisation and using the stage and **imaginary environment** more. **Three person scenes**, more editing, and **montages** are also introduced.

This level has one class show at the end of the term and every student can participate in the student/teacher show, "Greenhorn."

Students are required to see 4 improv shows during the session, which will be discussed at the beginning of each class.

### Goals:

- By the third class of the term students should be bringing unique characters to at least 50% of their scenes using clear physical choices and/or points of view.
- By the end of the fifth class students should be discovering and heightening the "game of the characters" when applicable.
- By the sixth class students should be able to perform a 3-person scene using clumping.
- By the end of the term students are able to consistently improvise engaging 2-person scenes of 1-3 minutes as part of a longer montage of scenes with self-editing using a simple "soft edit".

### Major Skills Introduced At This Level:

1. **Developing Characters** from a physical or emotional choice or from a POV and maintaining it through the scene.
2. **Game & Heightening** - recognizing and playing patterns, finding the "game of the character", playing with a sense of humor and joy.
3. **Clumping** for scenes with three or more people.
4. **Soft edits** to keep the momentum going and create more interesting theater.

**Major Skills Strengthened At This Level:** Listening, Supporting, Trusting, "Yes, and...", Taking risks, emotion, connection, physicality, object work, environment.

## Thoughts for discussion:

- How is comedy the **byproduct** of good improv?
- Each scene is about loving the process, not proving your self to the audience.
- David Brent in The Office doesn't do clever one-liners. He sees everything in his world as a game that he believes he plays with great skill, when in reality his only skill is playing his games in the most inappropriate circumstances.
- How is the start of a scene like paddling a canoe?
- What does it mean to “bring a brick, not a cathedral?”

## Level 3 Vocabulary

Agreement

Blocking

Canceling

Game

Heightening

Object Work

Environment

Point of View (POV)

Edit

Wipe

Soft Edit

## **Level 3 Notes**



## LEVEL 4: ADVANCED SCENES

In this level you will focus on two and three person scenes, and **begin learning long-form improv structures**. You will stretch your skills in a challenging and fun environment as you **begin to find you “improv voice.”** You will learn about openings, La Ronde, side support, recognizing themes, and numerous improv “devices”.

This level has two class shows during the term and every student can participate in the student/teacher show, “Greenhorn.”

You are required to see at least 5 shows during this term, 3 of which should be house teams.

### Goals:

- By the third class of the term students should be much more confident performing montages of group, 2-person, and 3-person scenes (giving and taking).
- By the end of the term they should have a strong sense of confidence in their scene work and their ability to “have their show”. They should be clearly identifying their strengths and weaknesses.
- By the end of the term, students are able to connect multiple scenes of various numbers of players into a single long-form show that explores a theme or idea using the Montage and LaRonde forms.
- By the end of the term, students will be able to enhance shows with side support, use of simple improv devices like walk ons, and a simple show opening.

### Major Skills Introduced At This Level:

- Pattern Game and character monologues as intro to using opening games
- La Ronde form
- Walk-ons and Tag Runs
- Back line support (environment, sound effects)
- Beginning thematic montage
- Varying energy and style from scene to scene (relatable, visceral, bizarre, etc.)
- Use of stage (stage presence and stage picture)
- Please plant the “seed” of the Harold towards the end of the term.

### Major Skills Strengthened At This Level:

- Editing

- Connection with scene partners and group
- Recognizing and heightening game
- Playing at top of intelligence
- Developing character

## **Level 4 Vocabulary / Terms**

“Agree through conflict”

Tag

Tag Run

La Ronde

Walk on

Theme

Back line

Opening

Monologue

Pattern Game

Back line / side line Support

Paint A Room

## **Level 4 Assignments**

Take 10 minutes to answer each question.

**What is your greatest fear in improv?**

**What is your greatest strength?** (or what brings you the greatest joy?)

WHY or WHERE do you think these fears or strengths may originate from in your life? Do you see any correlations between the fears and strengths?

Are you a more **proactive** (attitude and emotion) **or reactive** (action and environment) player?

How can you find more balance in your play?

How is improvisation impacting you OFF the stage?

## **Level 4 Notes**

## **LEVEL 5: FORMS AND PERFORMANCE**

Learn 'The Harold' and other essential improv forms! You will learn how to weave your scene work into a single long-form show. Performance skills are fine-tuned and essential show structures are studied. You are encouraged to make bold choices and act on inspiration with confidence.

This level has 3 class shows during the term.

### **Goals:**

- By the end of the term, students are able to connect multiple scenes of various numbers of players into a single long-form show that explores a theme or idea using the Harold structure.
- By the fifth class of the term they should understand the structure of the Harold at a theoretical level and be able to perform one through the second group game
- By the end of the term they should be able to perform a complete Harold at a basic level.

### **Major Skills Introduced At This Level:**

- Developing theme over multiple beats (use techniques such as time jumps, analogous scenes, etc.)
- Additional group games
- Harold Structure (as springboard for many forms)

### **Major Skills Strengthened From Level 4:**

- Group scenes
- Group non-scenic games
- Opening games and pulling inspiration from them.
- Intense connection with scene partners and group
- Recognizing and heightening game
- Playing at top of intelligence
- Use of character
- Support Moves

## The Harold

**Opening** (invocation, organic, monologue, pattern, paint a room, cocktail party)

**First Beats** (really important for nailing down specifics – just do good improv – 2 person scenes – each should be distinct energy or theme – BE with your scene partner)

**A1    B1    C1**

### Group game 1

**Second Beats** (follow the patterns and not the plot – your characters ARE the story and you need very clear callbacks for your “civilian” audience – introduce NEW information)

**A2    B2    C2**

**Group game 2** (little shorter than first game, return to suggestion or continue first game)

**Third Beats** (scenes connect, can change up order, keep these short, most heightened state)

**A3   B3   C3** (though these can begin to interact with each other)

### Some ways to develop a scene over three beats:

- Same two characters, further along in the same situation (time jump)
- Same two characters, totally new situation, same game (character dash – think home/work/play)
- Same two characters, back in time
- Follow only one of the original characters, playing their character’s game
- Same game, new characters, new specifics (analogous scene)
- Expand the world of the game.... If this is true, what else is true?
- Tangent (something that just can’t be ignored – may be in same location)

## Invocation Opening

The invocation was created by Del Close and was one of the standard openings for Harold taught at ImprovOlympic. It was one of many exercises that Close used that were inspired by religious and pagan ritual and ceremonies.

### Structure:

#### 1. IT IS

**Describe** examples of the object. This is the most **objective** part of the opening. Stake out as wide a territory as possible, given the suggestion. For example, if the suggestion is shoe, players should describe many different shoes, not just one particular shoe, each with salient details. Players should also yes and each other describing in further detail the examples that their teammates establish. Examples:

- It is black and made of leather.
- It is canvas with a rubber sole.

#### 2. YOU ARE

**Address the object** as if it were a person, a friend, a colleague, or a peer. This begins the more **subjective** part. Describe what the object might mean to you personally.

- You are kept inside the box you came in, and are only brought out for weddings and funerals.
- You were my companion in gym class for two years, but you now hide away at the back of my closet.

#### 3. THOU ART

Begin to “elevate” the shoe, addressing it as if it were royalty or a spiritual being. Address the greater themes, what the shoe means to society and what its place in history is.

- Thou art a symbol of formality, discipline and respect.
- Thou art meant for Saturday afternoons at the playground.

#### 4. I AM

Finally the players have invoked the “god of Shoe”, and they are possessed with the spirit of this god. They speak with commanding voices, letting the audience know how Shoe feels about the puny mortal before it.

- I bind your feet, my shiny patent leather surrounding and suffocating your soul.

- I, Chuck Taylor, was the king of the basketball court before the days of Jordan.

### **General notes**

- With each phase, the invocation should gain energy and commitment, starting with a casual conversational tone and building until the players are using their biggest stage voices. The opening finally climaxes when the players say in unison at a near shout, "I am Shoe!"
- Just like in this example, there should be runners which appear in all four phases.
- It is helpful to imagine a shoe in front of you, that you are describing, then talking to, as if it sits on a pedestal for the first two phases and then rises above you for the Thou Art phase.
- Generally each player should contribute three to five lines to each section. With a big group 1-3 each is better.
- If there is a pause in the rhythm of the piece, that may be a good moment to move to the next phase.

modified from: <http://wiki.improvresourcecenter.com/index.php?title=Invocation>

## **Level 5 Terms**

Living Room

Town Hall

Group Game

Non-scenic group game

Time Dash

Beat

Invocation

Organic Opening

Cocktail Party

Tangential

Character Dash

Inanimate Object Monologue

## **Level 5 Notes**



## **LEVEL 6: HAVE YOUR SHOW!**

Design and develop your unique comedic point of view within a show format. Receive feedback and direction from Finest City Improv instructors. Strengthen the long-form structure and put up your show on the Finest City Improv stage!

This level has 3 class shows during the term. Your Level 6 group is then invited to perform up to 4 additional shows upon graduation.

At this level you should be seeing at least 8 shows per term.

### **Goals:**

By the end of the term, students are able to connect multiple scenes of various numbers of players into a single long-form show that explores a theme or idea using a structure they create as an ensemble.

### **Major Skills Introduced At This Level:**

- New forms (i.e. Deconstruction, Monoscene, Oak Tree, WeirdAss)
- Creating a longform structure

### **Major Skills Strengthened From Level 5:**

- Connection with scene partners and group
- Playing at top of intelligence
- Developing character
- Developing a set over 20-25 minutes
- Use of Harold as springboard

## Level 6 Notes

# 2017 REGISTRATION DEADLINES

## Term 1

Term Dates: January 7th-February 26th

Registration Opens: November 15th

Early Bird Discount: November 15th-November 25th

Registration Deadline: January 1st

Late Fee: January 1st-January 10th

Break: February 27th-March 4th

## Term 2

Term Dates: March 4th-April 23rd

Registration Opens: January 25th

Early Bird Discount : January 25th-February 5th

Registration Deadline: February 28th

Late Fee:February 28th-March 8th

Break: March 24th-29th, No class Easter

## Term 3

Term Dates: April 30th-June 24th

Registration Opens: March 20th

Early Bird Discount: March 20th-30th

Registration Deadline:April 23rd

Late Fee:April 23rd-May 5th

Midterm Break: May 26th-June 1st

Break: June 25th-July 7th

## Term 4

Term Dates: July 8th-August 25th

Registration Opens: June 5th

Early Bird Discount:June 5th-June 15th

Registration Deadline:July 1st

Late Fee: July 1st-July 15th

Break: NONE

## Term 5

Term Dates:August 26th-August 21st

Registration Opens:July 11th

Early Bird Discount: July 11th-July 21st

Registration Deadline: August 21st

Late Fee:August 21st-August 30th

Midterm Break: September 1st-September 7th

Break:October 21st-October 27th

## Term 6

Term Dates: October 28th-December 22nd

Registration Opens: September 12th

Early Bird Discount:September 12-22

Registration Deadline:October 21st

Late Fee:October 21st-October 31st

Midterm Break: November 20th-26th

Break: Tuesday class starts 10/24

## SUGGESTED READING

- Relax, We're All Just Making This Stuff Up!, Amy Lisewski (available at box office and on Amazon)
- The UCB Improvisation Manual, Roberts, Walsh and Besser
- Improvise: Scene from the Inside Out, Mick Napier
- Improvisation at the Speed of Life, T.J. Jagodowski and David Pasquesi
- Improvisation for the Theater (3rd Ed.), Viola Spolin
- The Second City Almanac of Improvisation, Anne Libera
- Truth in Comedy, Charna Halpern, Del Close, & Kim "Howard" Johnson
- Improvising Better, Jimmy Carrane & Liz Allen
- Yes, And: How Improvisation Reverses "No, But" Thinking and Improves Creativity and Collaboration--Lessons from The Second City, Leonard and Yorton
- Why is That So Funny?: A Practical Exploration of Physical Comedy, John Wright