

Advanced Improv Games

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1. Props

What it's Good For: Props is good for fostering creativity and thinking on your feet.

How to Play: Select six people and put them into pairs. Then, give a weird, uncommon item to each pair. One at a time, the pairs have to come up with a one-liner involving the use of their strange prop. After about three rounds, declare a winner (or let the audience declare a winner) and end the game.

Tips and Tricks: It is VERY EASY to be inappropriate in this game! Tell them that if they are inappropriate, you will kick them out of the rest of the games, and then follow through.

2. Do-Run-Run

What it's Good For: Do-Run-Run is good for warming up your brain, involving everyone, and thinking on your feet.

How to Play: Everyone gets in a big circle. This game is basically a sung story about a person. Pick someone to go first. This person has to pick a name that is easy to rhyme with, such as Joe, Mary, Ted, Ann, etc. The first person also picks a day of the week. Then, he/she starts the song. It doesn't matter what everyone else says, as long as they rhyme their line with the name. Every third person is going to have a harder time because he has to come up with three rhymed words instead of one. This is an example of how the song might work:

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Person 1: Met him on a Tuesday and his name was Fred
Everyone: A-Do-Run-Run-Run, A-Do-Run-Run!
Person 2: Fred woke up and got out of his bed.
Everyone: A-Do-Run-Run-Run, A-Do-Run-Run! A-Dooby-Do, YEAH!
Person 3: Fred felt like he was dead.
Everyone: A-Dooby-Do, YEAH!
Person 3: He had an ache in his head.
Everyone: A-Dooby-do, YEAH!
Person 3: He was as heavy as lead
Everyone: A-Doo-Run-Run-Run, A-Doo-Run-Run!

Then, continue rhyming with the name Fred until someone messes up, repeating this pattern. Try to make it all the way around the circle.

Tips and Tricks:

- If someone picks a name like “Gretchen,” you just have to rhyme with the last syllable.
- Make sure that people don’t feel bad when they mess up, even though they are all letting down the whole group.

3. 1-4, 4-1

What it’s Good For: This game is good for building quick scene structure, LISTENING! not saying no, developing characters, and going with the flow.

How to Play: 1-4, 4-1 (pronounced “one to four, four to one”) is a scene game with four scenes in it, and three of them are chopped in half. It begins with a one-person scene with three of the four actors off stage. The audience chooses the one-person scene. A little way into the one-person scene, the second actor enters and begins A NEW SCENE FOR TWO ACTORS. A little way into the second scene, the third person comes in and starts A NEW SCENE FOR THREE ACTORS. A little way into the third scene, the fourth actor enters and begins a NEW SCENE FOR FOUR ACTORS. The fourth person ends their scene quickly and exits. The scene then switches back to the three-person scene. After the third person ends the scene and exits, the scene reverts to the two-person scene. The second actor ends his scene and leaves, leaving only the first actor on stage, who is not automatically back in his one-person scene in which he began. Then he ends his scene and exits, thus ending the game.

Tips and Tricks:

- These scenes should be QUICK but should still follow the same structure of every scene (beginning, middle [with conflict], end.)
- When a scene ends, the following scene should pick up where it left off and end quickly.
- Every time there’s a new scene, everyone should change their character as well!

4. In and Out

What it's Good For: In and Out is great for developing listening skills (essential in improv), and character.

How to Play: In and Out is a game for three players. Begin by selecting your three players. Have the audience choose a scene. Then, have the audience choose three words that are common in the scene situation. For example, if the scene is that the players are at circus, the words may be "clowns," "tickets," and "popcorn." Then, you, the host, WHISPER one word to each player. Whenever that player hears their word they have to either enter or exit the stage. (Obviously, if they're onstage when they hear it, they exit. If they're offstage when they hear it, they enter.) FURTHERMORE, just because it's good practice, the player has to make up a REASON for exiting or entering the stage when he hears his word. This scene game, like all scene games, should have a conclusion. The best conclusion for this game is everyone leaving. After about 2 minutes, the scene should end.

Tips and Tricks:

- Make sure that the words picked for the scene are VERY common words.
- Make sure that the actors understand that they have to listen and actually say the words in the scene.
- One or two will undoubtedly say their own word. It's funny. Make them stick to it.
- Afterwards, you may want to use this game to show that listening is imperative in improv and all acting.

5. Countdown

What it's Good For: Countdown is a great memory game that helps with building scene structure, listening, and maintaining energy.

How to Play: Countdown involves two teams of three players, or six people total. The game begins by one team starting a scene that is chosen by the audience. It NEEDS to be a scene with lots of action! This scene will last ONE MINUTE and should be timed by you, the host. Next, the second team will perform the SAME scene in 30 SECONDS. Next the first team will perform the scene in 15 SECONDS. Next, the second team will perform the scene again in 10 SECONDS. Next, the first team will perform the same scene in 5 SECONDS. Finally, the second team performs the scene in 1 SECOND. The major parts of the scene should be hit with every turn.

Tips and Tricks:

- Make sure the scene has a LOT OF ACTION!! Natural disasters, storm chasing, or other such situations work well.

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- Don't forget to time the scenes.
- Remind the players that they should watch one person on the other team and memorize what they do to copy them.
- Remind the players that there should still be a conclusion to the scene, even though it's short.

6. Forward/Reverse

What it's Good For: Forward/Reverse works on listening, scene structure, memory, not saying no, and maintaining energy.

How to Play: Pick two players for the game and ask the audience for a high-energy scene for two people. The two players begin the scene, and at moments of high energy or funny lines, you, the host, say, "reverse," "forward," or one of those two in slow motion, as mimes, or in a foreign language. When you say this, the actors either have to perform the scene backwards or forward in the language and at the speed you want. The scene should still have structure, though, and when it's gone on long enough, say a command and follow it with "and end it."

Tips and Tricks:

- The actors should maintain the SAME LINES AND ACTION when you tell them to go forward and reverse. Adding things that relate to your commands is okay, as long as they don't get carried away. For instance, if you "forward in Russian," adding a Russian dance is okay, but taking a detour to the Kremlin is not.
- The scene should maintain a common scene structure
- The actors should maintain their characters.
- The actors have to do anything you say.

7. Flash Forward

What it's Good For: This game is good for listening, going with the flow, maintaining energy, scene structure, and character development.

How to Play: Flash Forward has two or three players. Ask the audience for a scene for two or three people. This game begins with a normal scene, but then when an actor says something, "you remember that time when we did gymnastics at the mall for charity?" then you, the host, can say, "Flashback to the time when they did gymnastics at the mall for charity" and the actors have to immediately go back to that moment in time as if it were actually happening. If they say something like, "Man, I sure hope we don't have to shovel poo for life!" you can say "flash forward to 50 years from now after they've shoveled poo

for life.” And the actors then have to switch to a new scene in which their characters are 50 years older and have been shoveling poo for life.

Tips and Tricks:

- A scene with a lot of dialogue would be the preferred option for this game.
- Make sure the actors have developed characters. It may not work as well if they don't.
- Be sure to go back to the original scene after you flashback or flash forward.

8. Gibberish

What it's Good For: Gibberish is the ultimate guessing game. This game is great for physical skills, lateral thinking, and patience.

How to Play: In Gibberish, someone has been murdered! Everyone wants to know about it, but no one speaks English or any discernable language that anyone else speaks, so they have to use motions and tones of voice. There are three players in Gibberish. Send two of them out of the room so they can't hear what the audience says. Then, ask the audience for *who was killed, where they were killed, and what the murder weapon was*. The players cannot speak any language. They can speak gibberish, such as “blah blah, buh, duh, la, pooh, doo,” but that's it. Once you have those three things and the first actor knows what they are, send in the first guesser. The clue-giver has to communicate the three things one at a time without using word but only using gibberish and charades (see above for charade codes). After the second person gets it, send in the third player, who is also the second guesser. Now, the first guesser is the clue-giver and the first clue-giver just sits to the side, ready to help if necessary. Once the third player/second guesser gets all three questions, the game is over. Have the third person announce who was killed, where he was killed, and what the murder weapon was. Hopefully, it will be correct.

Tips and Tricks:

- This one takes a bit of practice. Make sure that the actors know the charade symbols and what the three questions are.
- Number the questions. Who was killed is 1. Where he was killed is 2. What the murder weapon was is 3.
- After one of the thinks they got everyone, make sure that they check with their clue-giver that they are correct using gibberish and miming.

9. Interpretive Dance

What it's Good For: Interpretive Dance is good for developing scene structure, not trying to be funny, and lateral thinking.

How to Play: In Interpretive Dance, you select an audience member to guess a historical dance that is portrayed WITHOUT WORDS by three actors. First choose three actors, then choose an audience member and send him or her out of the room. Next, once the audience member can't hear, have the audience pick a historical event that the guesser would know. Next, pick an important person in the historical event and an important object. The guesser will have to guess the event, the object, and the person. For instance, if the event is the sinking of the Titanic, the person could be the captain and the object could be the ship. Then, the actors have to decide amongst themselves which of the three is going to represent the person, which is going to represent the object, and which is going to be the third person who helps with everything else. Give them no more than 30 seconds to figure this out. Also, in these 30 seconds, they have to decide the scene structure for their dance and how they are going to portray the event for the guesser. Finally, send in the guesser and have them pick music from a bag and play the CD. When the music starts, the scene begins. Make sure that the actors understand that it is a dance and that they are to move around and "dance" as their actions tell the story.

Tips and Tricks:

- Be sure to explain everything correctly.
- Know with songs are good songs for this on every CD in your bag of music. Slow songs probably aren't the best for this.
- Make sure they're dancing!!—It's the best part.
- If they don't get it, there are no second tries.

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