

# THEATRESPORTS TRAINING MANUAL

## ABOUT THEATRESPORTS

Keith Johnstone, professor emeritus at the University of Calgary, created Theatresports in 1976 in his acting classes to inject theatre audiences with the passion displayed by sports fans. Since then, this form of competition improvisation has spread all over the globe providing audiences with enjoyment and performers with challenging games to stretch their creativity.

Basically, Theatresports is a series of timed games which place a focus on the idea of 'offers'. An offer is where a performer suggests something which could happen in a scene. The offer can be either accepted by a team-mate (in which case the scene will advance) or be blocked (in which case the scene is effectively killed). The ideal situation for a Theatresports game is for offers to be accepted and built upon so as the scene is constantly developing and growing.

Theatresports games fall into several main categories:

- ☆ **Endowment Games** – where one member of the team is endowed with certain attributes and must try and guess what they are.
- ☆ **Genre Games** – where the style of the performance becomes the 'hook'.
- ☆ **Emotion Games** – where extremes of emotions provide the entertainment.
- ☆ **Song Games** – where music plays a key role in the scene.
- ☆ **Story Games** – where the focus is on narrative development.
- ☆ **Word Games** – where the challenge lies in manipulating words or letters according to the game confines.
- ☆ **Novelty Games** – where each game has one sort of 'hook' which provides the entertainment.

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF THEATRESPORTS

1. Thou shalt not block
2. Thou shalt always retain focus
3. Thou shalt not shine above thy team-mates
4. To gag is to commit a sin that will be paid for
5. Thou shalt always be changed by what is said to you
6. Thou shalt not waffle
7. When in doubt, break the routine
8. To wimp is to show thy true self
9. She/he who tries to be clever is not; while she/he that is clever doesn't try
10. When thy faith is low, thy spirit weak, thy good fortune strained, and thy team losing, be comforted and smile, **because it just doesn't matter.**

## ABOUT IMPROVISATION

Improvisation is fun! It's about harnessing your creativity in a positive and safe environment. It is based on the following principles: acceptance, being positive, being in the moment, making your partner look good, embracing and removing fear, enjoying failure and storytelling. Regardless of experience, background or training, everybody can benefit from impro.

Improvisation has its roots back in the Commedia dell'Arte of 16th century Europe. The Commedia dell'Arte were travelling performers who would set up an outdoor stage and improvise stories based around a repertoire of stock situations and established characters.

Today, improvisation is widely used in theatre as an actor's training tool, a rehearsal technique, an exploration tool for writers and a performance style. You can find it in many forms on TV in such shows as Whose Line Is It Anyway, Thank God You're Here, World Cup Comedy and The Office.

## BASIC GAMEPLAY RULES

1. All games will allow a 10 second time out unless stipulated. All time out must be clearly signalled with the appropriate "T" sign to the compare.
2. All games must end on the given time limit. The timekeeper will blow the whistle at the end of the time. It is up to the team to finish properly... or should a team wish to finish the scene before the given time limit, the appropriate signal of "Hands Down" should be given.
3. Teams given the "0" boring signal from the judges must immediately vacate the stage.
4. All teams play with 4 players. These can be deployed according to the requirements of the game and the needs of the improvisation. Exact numbers of players and recommendations are outlined in the summary of each game.
5. All games are an incentive to "create a scene". The games will be judged on the following criteria:
  - a) Storyline: the story is the foundation of the scene. Characters should only be introduced upon the requirement of the impro.
  - b) Skills/Risk: technical and creative skills of yielding, advancing, extending and on the risks taken by the players to further the impro.
  - c) Entertainment: was this theatre? Did it entertain the audience?
6. All teams will therefore be judged according to their utilisation of the following theatre skills, when they are required in a game: Storytelling, Mime, Focus, Energy, Characterisation, Status, Vocal Projection, Physicalisation, Dance, Timing, Musicianship, Discipline and Good Sportsmanship.
7. The TEN COMMANDMENTS must be adhered to. Infringement such as blocking, wimping, and gagging will be heavily penalized.
8. The team with the highest score wins the competition.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**BEAT** – A point of punctuation within a scene.

**BLOCKING** – A form of cancelling, which completely denies an offer. Example: "Is that your car?" "No. There's no car here."

**CANCELLING** – Setting up a situation, then neutralising it. Example: "The phone is ringing!" Picks up phone. Hangs up. "There was nobody there."

**GAGGING** – Getting a laugh at the expense of the story. Gags are narrative killers, but sometimes useful for ending scenes.

**HEDGING** – Avoiding narrative development with talking or actions. Example: Having to tell a patient bad news... "Have a seat. How are you feeling?"

**INSTANT TROUBLE** – Immediate action that establishes conflict but doesn't establish narrative. Example: Suddenly turning into a Werewolf.

**NEVER-ENDING STORY** – A story that continues to introduce so many new ideas, that it becomes impossible to tie the narrative together.

**OFFERING** – a positive suggestion, movement, expression which starts the improvisation and develops it within the game. It is a positive spontaneous commitment to the game.

**SIDETRACKING** – Finding activities to do, as to avoid doing what you established in the beginning. Example: Setting out to fix your car, but seeing the garage is a mess, you decide to clean it, find something else, etc.

**TALKING HEADS** – A scene that becomes void of action, and consists of improvisers onstage talking, not doing.

**WAFFLING** – Talking about an action rather than doing it.

**WIMPING** – Refusing to define an offer. Example: "Who are you?" "I'm the man you called." "The man I called of course! You're here to fix that thing, aren't you?" "Yes, I fix those things better than anyone else."

**YIELDING** – taking the offer, however bizarre and developing within the agreed scope.

## SKILLS

- Listening to and hearing what your fellow players are offering you
- Seeing and recognising the physical offers from fellow players
- Accepting and developing the action
- Creating problems and conflicts. Making the drama
- Understanding the concepts of Who, What, Where and When
- Taking Risks
- Communicating the theme clearly to the audience
- Recognising the ending
- The ability to develop a wide range of believable characters

## MAIN GAMES

### One Minute Games

**Word At A Time Story** - Title given. Team tells a story speaking one word each at a time.

**Mime** - Situation given. Team acts out the scene in mime.

**Slow Motion Commentary** - Situation given. Team acts out scene in extreme slow motion to a speedy commentary.

**Commercial** - Unusual product given. Team performs the commercial to advertise it.

**First and Last** - First line and last line of the scene given.

**Death In A Minute** - Situation given. By the end of a scene, someone must be dead – justifiably.

### Two Minute Games

**Expert Double Figures** - Interview situation. Two players become the 'arms' of the other two players.

**Subtitles** - Foreign movie title given. Players act out the movie speaking in gibberish language while other player(s) translate into English.

**Emotion/Genre Replay** - Situation given. Brief neutral scene played. It is then replayed with different emotions or genres.

**Voices Off** - Situation given. Players on stage 'mouth' their dialogue which is supplied by offstage players.

**Endowments** - One player leaves the stage. Others are given an OCCUPATION, and EMOTION and SOMETHING PHYSICALLY DIFFERENT about the off-stage player. They must endow the player with these attributes on his/her return.

**Reducing Scene** - A scene is played for one minute. The team then replays the scene first in 30 seconds, then 15 seconds and finally in 7 1/2 seconds, keeping the main points and physical action of the scene.

In the one-minute opening scene players need to create characters, their relationship and also have some sort of physical action in the scene (eg at the doctor's getting your broken leg fixed). As the scenes get faster players should try to keep the main points of physical action and the important bits of dialogue.

**Swapsies** - 2 or 3 players start a scene on stage with distinct characters. At a call from the host of "swapsies" players on or offstage 'swap' into playing the characters created in the scene, picking up the scene and character traits already created.

Note: it is great to designate characters by hats.

## Three Minute Games

**Typewriter** - First sentence given. One player 'types' out the story which is performed by the other players.

**Sing About It (Inner Song)** - Situation given. At any point off stage player or Compere call "Sing About It" and performer goes into song.

**Interpretive Dance** - Situation given. Scene is performed as dance.

**Physical Contact** - Situation given. Team members can only speak when in physical contact with one another.

**Genre/Emotional Rollercoaster** - Situation given. Compere or team member calls out changes of emotion or genre which are immediately incorporated into the scene.

**Party Quirks** - One player leaves the stage. Other players are given three attributes, one each. Off stage player returns. It is their party, and they must guess the attributes of the other players as they arrive for the party.

**Crime Endowments (tiebreaker game only)** - One player leaves the stage. The remaining players are given a petty crime, a foreign country, and a famous accomplice. When the player returns, they are the criminal and other players the police. The 'police' try to get the criminal to confess to each of these endowments without directly telling them what they have done.

## SUGGESTED WARM UP GAMES AND EXERCISES

### Accepting & Blocking Games

- ☆ *Yes Let's* – A performer suggest an activity, and everyone says, "Yes lets!" in a cheesy supportive manner.
- ☆ *Yes And...* – Every line of dialogue begins with the words, "Yes, and..." The goal is to absolutely support your partners' suggestions.

### Story Games

- ☆ *Word At A Time* – Performers share telling a story one word at a time.
- ☆ *Sentence At A Time* – Performers share telling a story one sentence at a time.
- ☆ *Story, Story, Die* – The director points to one performer who begins a story. As the director points to another person, they have to continue the story without missing a beat or they are knocked out.
- ☆ *Song Lyrics* – Conversations can only be in song lyrics.

### Statue Games

- ☆ *Freeze Tag* – Performers act out a small scene. Another performer says 'Freeze' and tags someone out, taking up their pose and a new scene begins based upon the new pose.
- ☆ *Space Jump* – Players enter a scene at timed intervals, freezing as the next player enters and beginning a new scene based upon the poses. As players leave the scene, the stories revert to the previous scenes.

### Endowment Games

- ☆ *Celebrity Heads* – A performer is given a celebrity identity (unknown to them) and must guess who they are with Yes/No answers.
- ☆ *Press Conference* – A performer is given an identity (unknown to them) and is the centre of a press conference with leading questions from the audience.
- ☆ *Animal Kingdom* – Each performer is given an animal as a basis for a human character.

### Genre Games

- ☆ *Director's Cut* – Performers must enact a short scene in several different styles.
- ☆ *Occupations* – Different occupations are suggested, and the scene must continue in the style of the new jobs.
- ☆ *Point Of View* – A scene is re-enacted from differing points of view.

### Emotion Games

- ☆ *Emotions Scene* – Each performer is given an emotion which they must pay for the entire scene.
- ☆ *Emotional Props* – Several props are designated emotions. As the performers touch the props, they take on the emotions. There must be a purpose in passing the props.
- ☆ *Emotional Zones* – The stage is divided into several 'emotional zones', and performers have to enact the scene in the emotions which the areas of the stage dictate as they move from zone to zone.

### Some Games Just For Fun

- ☆ *Death In A Minute* – Someone has to die within a minute.
- ☆ *ABC Game* – Each sentence begins with subsequent letters of the alphabet.
- ☆ *Arms* – One performer is the 'arms' of another.

## ANIMALS

*This list of animals is useful for characterisation or improvisational games like 'Animal Kingdom'.*

<u>Wild Animals</u>	<u>Domestic</u>	<u>Birds</u>	<u>Water</u>	<u>Insects</u>	<u>Reptiles</u>	<u>Amphibians</u>
bear	cow	hummingbird	whale	worm	snake	frog
elephant	bull	parrot	dolphin	spider	cobra	toad
rhinoceros	goat	budgerigar	dugong	fly	boa-constrictor	newt
hippopotamus	sheep	dove	seal	butterfly	crocodile	
giraffe	lamb	pigeon	walrus	moth	alligator	
bat	pig	owl	shark	ladybird	lizard	
lion	dog	vulture	salmon	firefly	iguana	
tiger	cat	eagle	stingray	gnat	chameleon	
leopard	mouse	hawk	jellyfish	mosquito	gecko	
cheetah	hamster	falcon	octopus	bee	turtle	
puma	rabbit	swan	squid	wasp	tortoise	
deer	fox	duck	trout	cockroach		
gazelle	weasel	goose	tuna	beetle		
moose	goldfish	ostrich	mullet	caterpillar		
monkey		emu	cod	flea		
donkey		kiwi	flounder	maggot		
horse		penguin	sardine	earwig		
ape		dodo	lobster	ant		
chimpanzee		turkey	crayfish	termite		
gorilla		chicken	crab	locust		
baboon		rooster	shrimp	cricket		
kangaroo			prawn			
wallaby			oyster			
wombat			clam			
possum			mussel			
gopher			eel			
beaver						
squirrel						
mongoose						
porcupine						
skunk						



## EMOTIONS

*The following Emotions can be applied to relationships/scenes, as a starter for character development or for improvisation games like 'Emotional Rollercoaster'.*

<u>Positive</u>			<u>Negative</u>		
excitement	intrigued	optimistic	distressed	absorbed	vexed
agitation	bittersweet	hopeful	impatience	staggered	remorseful
earnestness	sincerity	courageous	resentment	overwhelmed	apologetic
seriousness	calm	modest	vehemence	boastful	troubled
flirtatious	placid	effervescence	nervous	jealous	wounded
eagerness	philosophic	excited	temperamental	impetuous	downtrodden
enthusiasm	happy	amused	cold-blooded	rash	fatigued
enthusiastic	euphoric	compassion	agitated	intoxicated	pessimistic
grateful	love	stoic	resigned	explosive	bored
passion	amiable	humble	sadness	angry	dull
ecstasy	harmonious	condoling	anguish	volatile	fearful
sensitivity	sweet	emotional	heartless	sorrow	loathing
sympathy	peaceful	tender	indifferent	melancholy	prejudice
exhilaration	grateful	sentimental	nonchalant	misery	obnoxious
stupefied	relieved	romance	lackadaisical	despair	offensive
nostalgic			shock	broken-hearted	envious
			overly dramatic	tired	vengeful

## RELATIONSHIPS

*Combine any of the following to establish a relationship. Remember that establishing status is pivotal in an onstage relationship.*

Mother	Principal	Judge	Producer	Priest
Father	Teacher	Lawyer	Director	TV Host
Son	Student	Thief	Actor	Elderly Person
Daughter	Employer	Prisoner	Gopher	CEO/President
Brother	Employee	Witness	Critic	Businessman
Sister	King	Doctor	Journalist	Bank Manager
Grandparent	Queen	Nurse	Secretary	Police Officer
Teenager	Master	Patient	Motorist	Ticket
Baby	Servant	Psychologist	Cyclist	Inspector
Newly-Wed	Butler	Farmer	Pedestrian	

## LOCATIONS

<u>At A...</u>		<u>On A...</u>		<u>In A...</u>	
Beach	Circus	Cruise	Road	Soap Opera	Secret
Restaurant	Olympics	Boat	Highway	Forest	Hideout
Office	Board	Bus	Farm	Prison	Disco
Department	Meeting	Train	World Trip	Retirement	Super Villain's
Store	Milk Bar	Aeroplane	Television	Home	Lair
Theatre	Airport	Spaceship	Show	Mansion	Canyon
Sports Event	Take Away	The Moon	Mars	Army	Church
Football	Shop	Another	Desert Island	Barracks	Library
Match	Green	Planet	Safari	Hospital	Pet Shop
Cricket Match	Grocers	Fishing Trip	Upsidedown	Maternity	McDonalds
Post Office	Triathlon	Date	World	Ward	Cemetery
Camp	Star Trek	Mountain	Giant piece of	Haunted	Pet Cemetery
Port	Convention	Volcano	Cheese	House	Plane Crash
Zoo	Court Case	Island	Cloud	Crowded	Nut
Amusement	Garage Sale	Raft	Submarine	Room	House/Asylum
Park	Court-martial		Ocean Floor	City	Large
Race	Buck's Night		Episode of Big	Foreign	Stomach
	Supermarket		Brother	Country	Bushfire
				Cave	Submarine

## CONTEXTS

<u>Before A...</u>	<u>During A...</u>	<u>After A...</u>
Wedding	Business meeting	Play
Funeral	Factory Closure	Dismissal
Sporting match	Buying a New Car	Shipwreck
Birth	Flood	Operation
Engagement	Fire	Earthquake
Date	Tornado	Dental Appt.
Robbery	Escape from the Zoo	Shower
Award ceremony	Doctor's Appt	Nightmare
Birthday	Speeding Ticket	Dream
Anniversary	Audition	Movie
Job Interview	Jury/Court Case	Operation
Detention	Performance	Tattoo
Sales pitch	Fireworks Show	Breakfast

## GENRES

<u>Film / TV</u>	<u>Theatre</u>	<u>Song</u>
Film Noir	Naturalism	Country & Western
Western	Epic Theatre (Brecht)	Rap
Sci-Fi	Melodrama	Opera
Silent Movie	Farce	Pop
Action	Broadway Musical	Hip-Hop
Comedy	Ancient Greek	Dance/Techno
Drama	Kabuki	Elevator Music
Musical	School Play	Rhythm & Blues
Sitcom	Kindergarten Christmas	Boy Band
Cop Show	Pageant	Blues
Courtroom	Commedia del'arte	Classical
Hospital Drama (ER)	Medieval Mystery Play	Muzak
50's (Leave It To Beaver)	Absurdism	National Anthem
Children's Show	Expressionism	Liturgical/Sacred
Lifestyle Program	Realism	Nursery Rhyme
Documentary	Puppetry	Punk
Gardening Program	Noh Theatre	Funk
Six O'clock News	Pantomime	Jazz
Soap Opera	Mime	Bebop
Jungle Film (Tarzan)		Swing
Period Piece		Ragtime
Animated Fairytale		
Who Dunit		
Soap Opera		
Slapstick		
Ben Hur Epic		
Benny Hill Chase		
Quentin Tarantino		
Woody Allen		
Tim Burton		

## FIRST LINES / LAST LINES

### First Lines

I knew it was going to be a disaster.

I find that hard to believe.

You didn't?

Do you really think it's that simple?

I'm sorry but I can't go.

I'm sure you didn't mean it.

It's not fair!

It's going to be very difficult.

It's very disappointing.

You don't believe me, do you?

Yes, I heard what you said.

Believe it or not, it is true.

What's wrong with two-timing someone?

I hate vegetarians! They're boring!

Please don't tell a soul.

Where did you get it?

That is so like you!

You can't keep your mouth shut.

Why did you do that?

Don't you like anymore?

What's the point? I'm fed up!

When I was a boy, things were different.

Shhh! This is a library!

Not everybody thinks you're an idiot.

I'm into acupuncture. See this needle...

Do you always dress like that?

If you think you're going out like that...

You won't guess who I got a letter from.

Are you going to the reunion?

My secret formula works!

I once served in the Navy.

I finally discovered it!

Captain, we're going to crash!

You have beautiful blue eyes.

I'm going for a swim in the lake.

Red is not your colour.

I'm afraid you owe me money.

Don't run with scissors.

Is that your poodle?

Is this your first African safari?

You have the time?

You come here often?

Can I buy you a drink?

I've seen monkeys with more intelligence.

Roses are red, violets are blue...

It itches!

Why do I stick by you?

Well, here we are, stuck on an island.

If you elect me as Prime Minister, I will...

## Last Lines

And that's how I got this scar.

I do!

Well, fancy that!

No, I don't.

Are you sure?

Sorry, I can't.

So what?

I loved it.

Where are you going?

That's very nice.

Yes, it's a lovely day.

Well, I'm going anyway.

I think so.

Let's do lunch.

Shall we go?

Never ever do it!

If you leave, don't come back.

I don't believe a word of it.

Well, nobody said it would work.

I did it my way.

And that's how I got this scar.

Sold to the lady in the blue.

That's game, set and match.

You didn't look Swedish.

Well, it takes all types.

I've had it! I'm going on holiday.

That something you don't see everyday.

If you build it, he will come.

It's the next big thing.

That's why I believe in UFOs.

That's the worst pickup line ever.

This is my stop – I'm off then.

About you play the blues.

This looks nothing like a pergola

But I didn't order that.

Any port in a storm.

I never said I was a supermodel.

You have screw loose.

Well didn't see that coming.

Lucky country my foot.

Still, better than a snake bite.

You should tell someone who cares.

You should join a band.

And that's how I lost my job.

Another day in the life of Mr Average.

That's why I took up knitting.

Stupid Cupid.

You are like a bull in a China Shop.