

Basic Improvisation Terms and Skills

(Summarised from "Theatresports Downunder" by Lyn Pierse)

*Blocking

A block occurs when an offer is stopped, rejected, negated or ignored. Blocking stops the action. It breaks down the communication and steals the focus from another offer. It grinds the story to a halt. It is the opposite of yielding (accepting) and usually occurs when a player is afraid of accepting another's ideas. A block creates a different focus or may split the focus.

E.g. Offer: "That dog has three legs."

Block: "That's not a dog"

Or "What dog?"

Saying "No" is not always a block.

Eg. Offer: "Stick 'em up!" (holding fingers as a gun)

Yield: "No, don't shoot" (hands up in surrender)

In this instance player B has agreed to be in danger, and yielded to the offer of the gun and the status of player A. Player B can overaccept the danger by adding, " The money is in my back pocket"

*Endowment

When players endow offers they give them value - for example size, weight, shape, attitudes, relationships. They endow their environment, weather, and other players. Endowment allows players to imagine, "What if this player were the queen/ a hairy monster/ my brother, etc. and treat the other player accordingly. Endowment encourages players to express opinions and deepens their commitment to the ideas and other players in the scene.

*Focus

The focus is the point of concentration shared by players and audience. It is what the players and audience see and hear. It is important that all players serve the focus in the scene at all times.

*Freeze

When players freeze, they stop their movement and hold their position as still as possible.

***Gibberish**

Gibberish is a language made up of vocal sounds of different pitches, accents and inflections. It is non-sensical in that no such language exists. But when players improvise in gibberish, they believe they understand everything that is said by themselves and other players.

***Improvisation**

When we improvise, we act spontaneously, without preplanning the future, using whatever is at hand to invent stories and characters to create a world of make-believe.

***Offer**

An offer provides a beginning through the first action that starts a scene. It may be verbal, non-verbal or both. It needs to be clear, simple and brief. Offers often continue to be made through the scene. To make an offer is to make a positive suggestion, movement, physical shape or expression (silent or spoken) that starts or develops a story or a scene.

There are 5 points to remember about an offer:

1. Make it
2. Yield to it
3. Name it
4. Extend it
5. Advance it

***Status**

When characters form a hierarchy the pecking order becomes clear and status relationships are formed. When the status of characters changes; there is a turning point and an advance in the scene. eg. Cinderella is fitted with the glass slipper.

***Subtext**

The subtext is the unspoken meaning that lies underneath the dialogue. It is conveyed through body language, tone of voice and mood.

***Task**

A task gives players something specific and active to do in a scene, eg hanging the washing on the line, making a hat.

***Wimping**

A wimp occurs when a player refuses to take their share for developing of a scene. A wimp usually results in:

1. An offer not being named:
Offer: "Look at that thing!"
Wimp: "Yeah look at it."
2. The over-description of an offer, rather than naming it:
Offer: "Look at that!"
Wimp: "Yes....it's green, hairy, brown and...."
3. An offer being made less of rather than being given real importance:
Offer: "Look at that incredible man-eating dog!"
Wimp: "Yes but it's not real."
4. A lack of emotional commitment to an offer:
Offer: "Look out, that car is going to hit that dog!"
Wimp: " Yes, it might"
5. Unnecessary questioning of an idea - 'passing the buck':
Offer: "Where do you think that dog came from?"
Wimp: " I don't know, what do you think?'
6. Unnecessary stalling, lack of physical commitment or not accepting the other player's sense of reality in developing a scene.

***Yield (Accept)**

A **Yield** is to accept an **Offer**. Yielding is saying "yes' to another person's ideas. Yielding enables players to share the scene. Yielding requires listening to an offer and giving an honest reaction. The opposite of yielding is **Blocking**

Offer: "Look, that dog's got three legs"

Yield: " Yes, and it's has three eyes too"

(*Block: "That's not a dog". Or "No it hasn't"*)

Or

Offer: "I feel sick in my stomach."

Yield: "Yes...and your face is turning pale too"

(*Block: "No you don't" or "You look fine to me"*)