

ACTING

ONE

SECOND EDITION

ROBERT COHEN

ACTING ONE

SECOND EDITION

Robert Cohen

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章



MAYFIELD PUBLISHING COMPANY

MOUNTAIN VIEW, CALIFORNIA

LONDON • TORONTO

Copyright © 1992 by Robert Cohen

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cohen, Robert

Acting one / Robert Cohen. — 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 1-55934-119-X

1. Acting. I. Title.

PN2061.C579 1991

792'.028—dc20

91-23265

CIP

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6

Mayfield Publishing Company

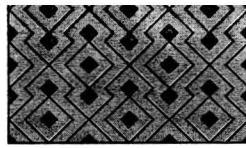
1240 Villa Street

Mountain View, California 94041

Sponsoring editor, C. Lansing Hays; *production editor*, Lynn Rabin Bauer; *manuscript editor*, Colleen O'Brien; *text and cover designer*, Paula Shuhert. This text was set in 10/12 Sabon by ExecuStaff and printed on 50# Text White Opaque by Maple-Vail.

Credits

Pages 46, 76–77, 141, 179 excerpts from *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. Copyright 1949 by Arthur Miller. Copyright renewed © 1976 by Arthur Miller. Reprinted by permission of Viking Penguin Inc. Page 62 from *A View from the Bridge* by Arthur Miller. Copyright © 1955, 1957, 1960 by Arthur Miller. Copyright renewed © 1983 by Arthur Miller. Reprinted by permission of Viking Penguin Inc. Page 63, Edward Albee, from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Copyright © 1962 by Edward Albee. Reprinted with the permission of Atheneum Publishers. Pages 127, 187 excerpts from *Betrayer* by Harold Pinter. Copyright © 1978 by Harold Pinter. Reprinted by permission of Grove Press Inc. Pages 141, 178, 181–183, 196–197 from *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams. Copyright 1945 by Tennessee Williams and Edwina D. Williams and renewed 1973 by Tennessee Williams. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc. Page 170 reprinted by permission of Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc. Excerpt from *The Rimers of Eldritch* by Lanford Wilson. Copyright © 1967 by Lanford Wilson.



P R E F A C E

This book is expressly intended for the beginning acting student. The twenty-five lessons comprise basic material for what could be a one-year or two-year course in acting fundamentals. The amount of time needed to cover them will vary to the degree proficiency is sought or expected, for while the material is presented as an introduction to acting, these are the fundamentals that professional actors spend their lives exploring and perfecting. None of these twenty-five lessons can ever be fully learned, not even in a lifetime.

Except for a comment in the afterword (L'Envoi), matters of characterization and style are not covered because these are not beginning subjects in acting. Young actors may wish to leap into the classics and into the extremes of farce and tragedy well before they have even begun to master the basics of talking, listening, tactical interplay, physicalizing, building scenes, and making good choices. The fundamentals, however, should be set down first. What is in these pages will hold true for Shakespearean acting, for comedy acting, or for television acting; these lessons should serve as a basis for all advanced acting skills. Get a good handle on these twenty-five lessons—on the fundamentals of acting—and you will be able to move into more advanced acting problems with confidence.

There are many exercises in the first half of the book; there are fewer in the latter half, where it is expected that the student will be working on scenes from plays. Suggestions for choosing those scenes and for choosing roles are given in Part Two. In general, you are advised to find dramatic material from your own time and culture, and characters close to you in age and essential experience.

On several occasions, I have referred to “the young actor,” or “the beginning actor,” with the implication that student actors are necessarily young and awkward. I apologize in advance if I hurt anybody’s feelings in this regard; there are young and beginning actors who can act with great skill and eloquence. On the other hand, most student actors are somewhat at sea when they go out on stage, and the experienced teacher, or director, or audience member can spot this long before the student can. That’s because you can’t see or hear yourself while acting, and student actors rarely have the experience to achieve the kind of objectivity about their performance that veteran professionals do. The student actor may *feel* something and be quite satisfied

(if not overjoyed) at the intensity of that feeling while still not coming within miles of the intensity a more experienced professional actor would achieve with the same material. It is actually helpful for the beginning actor to remember that he or she is a beginner. It takes the pressure off, and you can try to advance one step at a time rather than taking on the entire artistic community every time you step onto the stage. This book is designed to start that process and carry the beginner into some fairly advanced steps.

The last section of this book, on acting technique, involves some topics not always taught in a beginning acting class. Technique is not always taught because it often proves difficult for young actors to understand how acting can involve emotional and psychological reality and controlled acting “technique” at the same time. It can. Indeed, all fine actors are able to integrate the emotions in a role with a technical ability to perform the role. It is true that some actors (usually American) worry more about feelings, and some actors (usually British or French) worry more about technique, but you do not need to make a choice. There is nothing at all inconsistent between deep and honest emotional responsiveness on the one hand and a superior acting technique on the other. In every section of this book I have tried to indicate the honest relationships between genuine feeling and controlled acting technique, and between human reality and the art of the theatre.

I have tried to use ordinary terminology throughout this text. Acting books, including some of my own, have often wrestled uncomfortably with semantics; acting discussions are often mired in semantic quarrels of bewildering complexity. This confusion is perhaps understandable since acting has given the world its jargon for both psychology (*role playing*, *acting out*) and philosophy (*tragedy*, *persona*, and the like). Therefore I have stayed with words long in the theatrical lexicon (words which themselves are not precisely defined in all cases), except that I sometimes use *goal* when others use *intention*, and that I sometimes use the acronym GOTE as a memory tool to help you remember the words *Goal*, *Other*, *Tactics*, and *Expectation* in the most useful order.

I have also kept this book as free as possible from considerations of theory. Students looking for a more theoretical basis for the lessons in this text might wish to explore them in my *Acting Power* (Mayfield, 1978). That book (which does deal with characterization and style) conceptualizes a comprehensive system of acting, which might serve as a sequel to this volume. The interested reader is also directed to my *Acting in Shakespeare* (Mayfield, 1991) for lessons, built directly upon those in the present volume, on acting in the works of that dramatist.

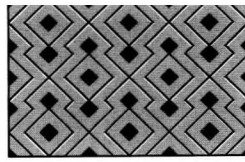
Finally, no one is more aware than I that acting cannot be taught by a book. Acting can most certainly be taught—and the change over the past two decades in American acting has largely been the result of an explosion of actor-training nationwide—but the key ingredient in actor-teaching is the

teacher. I have tried to keep this book open ended and suggestive rather than narrow and prescriptive so that it might stimulate, not stultify, the crucial work of the classroom. Acting and actor-training are individual arts within a collective and collaborative craft process. The actor must find his or her way into the self, as well as into the craft, for the art of the theatre is made out of both ingredients. This book is blind to its readers' individualities; it teaches only as interpreted and implemented by you, the actor, or you, the teacher. I have tried to leave as much room as possible for that interaction, which I value as highly as any in the arts.

I am extremely happy to have had the opportunity to revise this text from its 1984 predecessor. Among other things, the revision has enabled me to fortify the structure in several ways and to augment the text with various teaching points I have developed during the intervening years. I have also seized the opportunity to add a lesson in preparing monologues and soliloquies, as this work is often included in a beginning acting curriculum.

Readers of the first edition of this book may recall that I used the term *victory* instead of *goal* in the earlier work (and VOTE instead of GOTE); I have, however, subsequently found the simpler *goal* more practical in the classroom, and hence I have incorporated it in my writing.

I am particularly pleased to acknowledge the tremendously valuable advice I've received from the expert professional readers of the first edition, so thoughtfully solicited by Lansing Hays, supervising editor of this volume. Their critical counsel has helped to shape and, I believe, improve every lesson in the book. With their permission, I would like to name them here: Susan Anthony, SUNY, Binghamton; Virginia Drake, West Valley College; Katherine H. Ingram, SUNY, New Paltz; Gregory W. Justice, Virginia Tech University; Ann Klausch, University of Michigan; Jerry Krasser, University of Connecticut; Tom O. Mitchell, University of Illinois; Marc Powers, Winthrop College; Jeffrey Smart, University of Minnesota, Duluth; Dennis Smith, Southern Oregon State College; Samuel W. Williams, Central Michigan University; and Kathleen Worley, Reed College.



C O N T E N T S

Preface	xv
Introduction: Preparation for Acting	1
Relaxation	2
Trust	3
<i>Exercise 1: Spine Lengthening</i>	4
Discipline	5
Criticism	5
A Playful Attitude	6
Freedom	6
Preparation	7
Summary	8
 PART I	
THE ACTOR'S APPROACH	9
 LESSON 1	
Goal and Obstacle	11
Fundamental Principle	11
<i>Exercise 1-1: Reaching</i>	12
<i>Exercise 1-2: Reaching for Goals</i>	12
<i>Exercise 1-3: Overcoming an Obstacle</i>	13
Self-Consciousness	13
<i>Exercise 1-4: Doing vs. Being</i>	14
Projection	14
<i>Exercise 1-5: Resonating</i>	15

	<i>Exercise 1–6: Resonating (A Continuation)</i>	16
	<i>Exercise 1–7: Goals</i>	16
	Summary	17
LESSON 2	Acting with the “Other”	19
	The Other	19
	<i>Exercise 2–1: Making Your Partner Smile</i>	19
	Interactive Dynamics	20
	<i>Exercise 2–2: Vulnerability</i>	21
	<i>Exercise 2–3: Discovery</i>	22
	The Character	23
	Tactics	24
	<i>Exercise 2–4: Using Tactics</i>	24
	<i>Exercise 2–5: One Two Three Four Five Six Seven</i>	25
	Summary	25
LESSON 3	Beginning to Act	27
	Contentless Scene	27
	<i>Exercise 3–1: Contentless Scene I</i>	28
	Intensifiers	30
	<i>Exercise 3–2: Intensifying</i>	30
	Physicalizers	31
	<i>Exercise 3–3: Varying Locale or Action</i>	31
	<i>Exercise 3–4: Contentless Scene II</i>	32
	Summary	33
LESSON 4	Tactics	35
	Punishment and Reward	35
	Playing Tactics	36

Contents		vii
	<i>Exercise 4-1: Frighten Your Partner</i>	36
	<i>Exercise 4-2: Building Intensity</i>	36
	<i>Exercise 4-3: Try to Make Your Partner Get a Tear in His/Her Eye</i>	37
	<i>Exercise 4-4: Movement and Contact</i>	37
	<i>Exercise 4-5: Encourage Your Partner</i>	38
	Alternating Tactics	39
	<i>Exercise 4-6: Mixing Tactics</i>	39
	The Middle Ranges	40
	<i>Exercise 4-7: Eliminating the Extremes</i>	40
	Summary	41
LESSON 5	Expectations	43
	Expecting Victory	43
	<i>Exercise 5-1: Playing Bored</i>	44
	Positive Objectives	45
	<i>Exercise 5-2: Enthusiasm</i>	46
	<i>Exercise 5-3: Try the Impossible</i>	48
	<i>Exercise 5-4: Tactics and Expectations</i>	48
	Summary	49
LESSON 6	GOTE	51
	A Basic Method	51
	“Get Your Character’s GOTE”	53
	<i>Exercise 6-1: The GOTESheet</i>	54
	Summary	55
PART II	THE ACTOR’S TASKS	57
LESSON 7	Preparing a Role	59

	Finding Your Role	59
	Editing a Scene	60
	Memorization Methods	60
	Cues	62
	Studying the Part	64
	<i>Exercise 7-1: The Baron's Farewell I</i>	65
	Summary	67
LESSON 8	Rehearsing	69
	Rehearsals	69
	Undirected Rehearsals	69
	Rehearsal Alternatives	72
	<i>Exercise 8-1: The Baron's Farewell II</i>	73
	Summary	74
LESSON 9	Staging the Scene	75
	Stage Directions	75
	Creating the Locale	75
	Movement and Stage Business	77
	Interesting Positions	79
	Reaching the Audience	79
	<i>Exercise 9-1: Setting the Stage</i>	80
	Summary	81
LESSON 10	Choices	83
	The Need for Choices	83
	Good Choices	84
	<i>Exercise 10-1: Bold Choices</i>	90
	Summary	91

Contents		ix
LESSON 11	Performing	93
	Stage Fright	93
	Classroom Performance	94
	Play for Results—In the Other Character	95
	Summary	97
LESSON 12	Evaluation and Improvement	99
	Helpful Criticism	99
	Reworking	102
	<i>Exercise 12–1: Scene Presentation</i>	103
	Summary	103
PART III	THE ACTOR’S INSTRUMENT	105
LESSON 13	The Actor’s Voice	107
	Breathing	107
	<i>Exercise 13–1: Breathing from the Abdomen</i>	108
	Phonation: Making Sounds	108
	<i>Exercise 13–2: Sounding</i>	109
	Resonance	109
	<i>Exercise 13–3: Exploring Resonance</i>	111
	Pitch	112
	<i>Exercise 13–4: Exploring Your Pitch Range</i>	112
	A Stageworthy Voice	112
	<i>Exercise 13–5: Speaking with Resonance</i>	113
	Summary	114
LESSON 14	Stage Speech	115
	Good Diction	115
	Speech Sounds	116

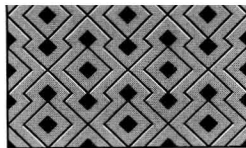
	<i>Exercise 14-1: Vowels</i>	117
	<i>Exercise 14-2: Repeating Syllables</i>	118
	<i>Exercise 14-3: Consonants</i>	120
	<i>Exercise 14-4: Speeches</i>	121
	Summary	122
LESSON 15	Using the Voice	123
	Liberation	123
	<i>Exercise 15-1: Rude Chants</i>	124
	<i>Exercise 15-2: Rude Cheering</i>	125
	<i>Exercise 15-3: Fancy Talk</i>	125
	<i>Exercise 15-4: Address a Group</i>	127
	Purposefulness	128
	<i>Exercise 15-5: Adding Purpose</i>	129
	Summary	129
LESSON 16	The Actor's Body	131
	Agility	131
	<i>Exercise 16-1: Fast Warm-Up</i>	132
	Alignment	133
	<i>Exercise 16-2: Improving Alignment</i>	133
	Velocity: Accelerating, Decelerating, and Constant	134
	<i>Exercise 16-3: Acceleration/Deceleration</i>	135
	Counterpoise	136
	<i>Exercise 16-4: Contraposto</i>	136
	<i>Exercise 16-5: Contraction/Extension</i>	137
	Summary	137
LESSON 17	Voice and Body Integration	139

	Coordination	139
	<i>Exercise 17-1: Commands</i>	140
	<i>Exercise 17-2: Speeches with Business</i>	140
	<i>Exercise 17-3: Physical Punctuation</i>	142
	<i>Exercise 17-4: Physical Rhythms</i>	143
	<i>Exercise 17-5: Verbal Rhythms</i>	143
	Tempo	144
	<i>Exercise 17-6: Speech/Movement Timing</i>	144
	Actors with Disabilities	145
	Summary	145
LESSON 18	Imagination and Discipline	147
	Fantasy	147
	Self-Exploration	148
	<i>Exercise 18-1: Cold/Hot</i>	149
	<i>Exercise 18-2: Age Regression/Advancement</i>	149
	Emotional Recall	150
	<i>Exercise 18-3: Remembering Your Feelings</i>	151
	Discipline	151
	Summary	152
PART IV	THE ACTOR'S TECHNIQUE	153
LESSON 19	Phrasing	155
	Diction	155
	Open-Mouthed Speaking	157
	<i>Exercise 19-1A: Acting with Your Teeth</i>	157
	<i>Exercise 19-1B</i>	157
	<i>Exercise 19-1C</i>	158

	<i>Developing Diction</i>	158
	<i>Exercise 19–2: Repeated Sentences</i>	158
	<i>Exercise 19–3: Shaw Speech</i>	159
	Emphasis	159
	<i>Exercise 19–4: Change of Emphasis</i>	160
	<i>Exercise 19–5: Punctuate with Emphasis</i>	161
	Inflection	161
	<i>Exercise 19–6: I Pledge Allegiance</i>	163
	Phrasing	164
	Summary	165
LESSON 20	Attack	167
	The First Word	167
	Physical Attack	169
	Turn-Taking	169
	<i>Exercise 20–1: Turn-Taking Dialog</i>	169
	Preparing Strong Attacks	172
	<i>Exercise 20–2: Action Cues</i>	173
	Summary	173
LESSON 21	Follow-Through	175
	The “Hook”	175
	Questions as Questions	175
	Statements as Questions	177
	<i>Exercise 21–1: Making Questions</i>	177
	Statements as Statements	178
	<i>Exercise 21–2: Argument-Enders</i>	179
	Trail-Offs	180
	Summary	180

Contents		xiii
LESSON 22	Line Linkage	181
	Analyzing Dialog	181
	Rising End-Inflections	184
	Falling End-Inflections	185
	Attack Inflections	186
	Pauses	187
	Long Speeches	188
	<i>Exercise 22–1: Line Linking</i>	189
	<i>Exercise 22–2: The Long Speech</i>	189
	Line Linking in Practice	189
	Summary	190
LESSON 23	Scene Structure	191
	Breaking Down a Script	191
	Choosing a Scene to Do in Class	192
	Structural Characteristics	192
	Transitions	194
	Scene Breakdown	194
	<i>Exercise 23–1: Scene Structure in Action</i>	198
	Summary	199
LESSON 24	Building a Scene	201
	Building and Topping	201
	<i>Exercise 24–1: Standard Build I</i>	202
	<i>Exercise 24–2: Standard Build II</i>	202
	<i>Exercise 24–3: Standard Build III</i>	202
	Cutting Back	203
	Getting on Top	204

	Pacing a Build	204
	Complex Builds	205
	<i>Exercise 24-4: I Detest Monday</i>	205
	<i>Exercise 24-5: I Detest January</i>	206
	<i>Exercise 24-6: Come Here</i>	206
	<i>Exercise 24-7: Building Molière</i>	207
	Summary	208
LESSON 25	Creating a Monologue	209
	Going It Alone	209
	The Monologue to Someone Else	210
	The Soliloquy	210
	Playing a Monologue or Soliloquy	212
	<i>Exercise 25-1: Prepare a Monologue</i>	212
	Summary	213
	L'Envoi	215
	Index	217



Introduction: Preparation for Acting

Can acting be taught?

Yes, of course acting can be taught. In the United States, acting is taught regularly in literally thousands of colleges, conservatories, workshops, and professional studios. Virtually all young actors coming into the profession in the present era have studied acting in some formal manner, and many professional actors continue their training for years beyond their successful entry into the profession. So acting is not only taught, it is learned.

Of course, reading any certain list of books, or studying with any particular teacher or teachers, or enrolling in any particular training program will not guarantee that you will become a great actor, or even a fair one. Fine acting demands a rare combination of talents: intelligence, imagination, psychological freedom, physical dexterity, vocal strength and flexibility, emotional depth, and an ability to learn from mistakes, criticism, and observation. It also requires certain personal prowess, which might appear from time to time as wit, charm, self-confidence, assuredness, honesty, audacity, charisma, passionate intensity, and compelling candor. These cannot be taught, directly, in anything resembling their entirety: They are acquired, if at all, as much through life experience as by training for the stage.

What can be taught, therefore, is a beginning to the art of acting. This is something more than merely pointing you at the stage and something less than giving you a fully codified set of rules and regulations. It is a method of helping you to get the most out of yourself and to train your acting