

## THE PRINCIPLES OF DOING

The simple fact of it is: acting is *doing*. It's not feeling, it's not "show and tell" for the audience. Acting is the "doing" of fictional deeds. Properly speaking, acting is *enacting*. To act one has to emotionally commit to doing a character's deeds, and perform them in a fictional space.

That's what Sanford Meisner meant when he said:

"The foundation of acting is the reality of doing."

Mira Rostova was another great acting teacher and one of Meisner's contemporaries. Rostova organized her teaching around behaviors she called "Doings and Shows", which she said must be performed while following these principles and precepts:

- Act in terms of what is happening NOW
- Make Choices in terms of the other person – not oneself
- Play that which you wish to be seen by the other person
- Choices must concern only what you wish to express to the other
- All hidden motives are kept underneath – not acted, not shown
- People speak in thoughts – not words – often not even sentences
- Don't be specific with the words – express thought
- People rarely give information – they *express* feelings (vs. HAVE feelings)
- Finish each thought and let the next one overtake you
- Insult, Hurt etc. are understood through the script; they should not be played
- Characterization: What picture do you wish to present to others?
- Find the "Doings" or "Shows" for each thought

"Doings" and "Shows" are what Rostova called the behaviors we do for each other.

We live life and act in a social context. When we encounter other people we behave according to how we want them to experience us – not according to what we *feel* inside. Rostova's teaching stresses this point, which is often over-looked in other acting training. Actors who focus on their feelings may neglect the social responsibility we feel in real life to keep other people engaged. Doings and Shows are what we do in real life to engage people with our needs, and win them over to our purposes.

All acting choices can be broken down into one or another of these Doings and Shows:

### THE DOINGS:

**TO ADMIT** – to acknowledge the truth, refer to common knowledge, to say the way things are with you. “To be or not to be, that is the question” is not to inform the listener of something he doesn’t know but rather to admit the common plight.

**TO LAMENT** – Not necessarily sad...it is to express our feelings about something beyond our control. “Goodnight sweet prince...etc.”

**TO CHIDE** (a personal attack) - Means to express our disapproval, often with the desire to punish the listener. If someone is annoying you might say, “Stop that!”

**TO BAWL OUT** - (not a personal attack) – Louder but less severe than a “Chide”...the most loving of yells. A sergeant barks at his troops” “You guys are a bunch of nuts.”

**TO CONVINC**E – Used when someone doesn’t believe or isn’t likely to believe. Describing a fish one might say “it was four feet long!”

**TO DEFY** – A challenge for the others to do something e.g. “Sue me.”

Rostova said that in life the most common Doing is To Admit. By admitting we establish and maintain common ground with others.

She also said that To Chide was the Doing most over-used by actors. In life, when we feel chided we want to end an encounter. A scene in which actors chide one another may seem full of conflict, but it begs the question “why doesn’t one of them leave”?

In real life we mix our communication up with a variety of Doings. They are the supple tactics we use to pursue our objectives.

### THE SHOWS :

To Show SURPRISE

To Show ANGER

To Show WONDER

To Show UNDERSTANDING

To Show DISDAIN

To Show DELIGHT

To Show AGREEMENT

### THE PRINCIPLES

The following principles guide the use of “Doing”

## DO IT WITH HUMOR:

“Doings” and “Shows” may be done for a joke, without or without humor.  
Humor is correlated with intelligence. If you can do it with humor...do it with humor!

## GIVING CREDIT:

We must always give our characters credit for at least as much intelligence as we possess ourselves. Give whomever you are speaking to credit that they will understand what you are speaking of. Assume their intelligence. Assume the intelligence of the audience as well. When we give them credit for knowing or understanding they are no longer being *told* things, talked down to; they are *included*.

## COMMON KNOWLEDGE:

If others already know what you are saying, include that fact in the way you say it. The unspoken thought is: “As you know...” For example: the opening line of Chekhov’s *The Three Sisters*, “Father died a year ago today...”

## NO THINKING:

There should be no thinking within thoughts

## NO SELF PITY:

Try saying “I have never been able to love anybody”. In real life your concern will be with the palatability of your words to the listener...not on your private pain. Therefore you might choose the “Doing” *To Admit*...or even, *To Admit with humor*.

## LISTENING:

Truly listening promotes moment-to-moment acting. It keeps the actor from “getting ahead” of the moment (aka “Anticipating”. ) It also prevents “misplaced emphasis”. We never misplace emphasis in life because we **hear** what has been said to us.

## TRANSITIONS:

Transitions don’t exist in life. They are an acting myth.

## BELIEF:

Belief is simple. It is automatically achieved by accepting the circumstances. “You be the mommy and I’ll be the daddy”. The key to belief is in believing the other person, not oneself.