

GLOSSARY 2015

KNOW YOUR WORDS - *CHOOSE YOUR WORDS*

**Terms preceded by an asterisk are native to this class. Do not expect other artists to recognize them. Other terms are widely used in filmmaking and dramatic arts and in comedy. I am supplying you with my own, idiosyncratic, definitions and explications.*
BK

A

A 180

A 180 degree turn is a perfect switch – a move in a completely opposite direction. A character reversing himself in such a severe and sudden manner is either treacherous or humorous. See also “Turn”

***Absorptive:**

This refers to a tendency on an actor’s part to take in and absorb things that happen to his/her character e.g. to feel and dwell upon pain. This “absorptive quality” makes an actor a poor candidate for playing comedy which requires a “reflective” or resilient quality.

Actor:

An actor practices the craft of mimesis, the imitation of behavior. The art of the actor is to behave truthfully under given, fictional, circumstances. The actor's purpose is to create and maintain moment-to-moment life.

Actions:

Actions are things (deeds) a character does in pursuit of an objective. Even seemingly passive behavior when done with intention is active, and constitutes an action. In dramatic storytelling, even more than through utterances, we understand a character by following his or her actions. Different acting schools may refer to actions as “objectives”, “intentions” or “wants”. These terms are synonymous.

In seeking to determine and define a characters action in a scene one might ask, “What does she want to do?” The answer would be expressed in verb form, e.g, “She wants to punish him”. In this case her characters action would be “to punish.” Actions are always expressed in verb form.

Active Verbs:

Active verbs are wants that one can act upon. They are the opposite of passive wishes. They are “playable.” Actors must be encouraged to choose active verbs.

Activity:

An activity is purposeful behavior in which a character engages. For example, in one memorable scene in *Annie Hall* Alvy Singer (Woody Allen) and Annie Hall (Diane Keaton) carry cartons full of Annie’s possessions into Alvy’s apartment. Alvy’s “activity” is “moving Annie in”. By ironic contrast, his “action” is “to prevent” her from moving in.

Adjustment:

An adjustment is anything a director does or says intended to alter or refine an actor’s behavior. It is a direction given to an actor intended to change, correct or adjust a performance.

Ad Lib:

Short form of the Latin *ad libitum*, “ad lib” refers to unprepared, spontaneous, “off-the-cuff” utterances. The term is sometimes used, rather sloppily, as synonymous with “improvisation.” An improvisation, or “improv” uses a formal premise as inspiration for unplanned speech or behavior. An entire scene may, thus, be improvised. An “ad lib” by contrast, refers to an extra, unscripted utterance or behavior within the context of scripted dialogue and staging. It denotes a departure from scripted dialogue.

Agenda

An agenda is another way of referring to a character’s objective or intention in a scene. Mel Brooks said: “There’s always a secret agenda you must have which is emotional. That secret agenda is your objective.” see also “Action” and “Objective”.

Anticipating:

Acting with an awareness of what is about to happen in the scene but has not yet occurred. Actors must guard against anticipating. They have to work to not be ahead of their characters. The actor’s problem is that he knows the outcome of a scene, but he must pursue goals with commitment as if he did not know. What would a basketball game look like if the team was told, “You’re gonna lose. Now go out there and give it your all?” This is what actors have to do. It is the challenge actors face.

Anticipating a Laugh:

This refers to an acting misdemeanor wherein the actor knows that a joke is about to be delivered and acts in conscious expectation of receiving a laugh. Anticipating can be a way of “killing the joke.” In a famous story about the great acting couple of

Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontaine relates: One night after a performance on Broadway Lunt was perturbed. He complained to Fontaine, "Every night since we opened, when I'd ask for the teacup I'd get an enormous laugh. For the past three nights I asked for the teacup and nothing, silence! Why aren't I getting my laugh?" To which his wife replied, "Try asking for the teacup, and not for the laugh."

Anticipation:

In comedy, anticipation functions the way suspense does in drama. It is the build up of tension in the audience in positive expectation of a comic release. As an old Vaudeville saying goes: "Make them laugh, make them cry, but make them wait!"

As If:

"As If" is a directing formulation, short for "act as if...". It asks for an actor to apply imaginary circumstances* to his behavior. For example, a director might request that an actor enter "as if you've been stuck in traffic for an hour." The addition of these "as if" circumstances – not contained in the script but applied by the director – is intended to cause an adjustment* in the actor's behavior, without asking the actor for a specific result.*

Attitude:

Like "indicating"*, when an actor plays an "attitude" he plays an overall effect contrived to communicate to the audience an opinion about the proceedings. Attitudes tend to violate the requirements of moment-to-moment reality as they are visible to other actors in the scene but often have to be ignored for the scene to continue.

Audience:

The audience is the group to whom a dramatic performance is directed; those to whom a story is told. Leo Tolstoy said, "Art is the transfer of emotion from one person to another. The audience is the "other person" in the dramatic transfer. The purpose of the director's work must be to move the audience.

James Cameron described the transfer this way:

"I think the heart of the cinematic experience is the group experience. It's the psychology of sitting in a dark room with a bunch of people and reacting to something, and feeling like your reaction is the same as the rest of the group, a way of proof checking your emotions are normal... filmmaking is...about storytelling. It's about humans playing humans. It's about close-ups of actors. It's about those actors somehow saying the words and playing the moment in a way that gets in contact with the audience's hearts."

Audition:

“Audition” is the process by which a director determines an actor’s suitability for casting. The techniques employed in this process vary widely, from the standard “reading from the script” to extended improvisation, to meeting and conversations, to screening of the actor’s past work.

B

Backstory:

A history devised for a fictional character or characters intended to shed light on present actions.

Beat: (noun)

A Beat is a decisive moment in a scene. It is a moment where change must occur or the scene would end. It is an inflection point - a turning point in a journey. The culminating beat of a scene is what we call the “Emotional Event” or “The Event of the Scene”. It is the job of the director, working with the actors, to excavate and define the moments, the beats and the event of the scene.

a phrase - as in a phrase in music, a down in a possession, a place where the scene could end if nothing changes

Musical phrase – where do we pick it up;

Until they can’t – until it stops working...that suggests you’ve arrived at a beat – a place where you either stop doing something or the scene ends

Beat (verb)

In the language of punch-up, To Improve as in “to Beat the joke”

***Beginning:**

The moment in time and point in space at which something starts; the specific manner in which something begins. We seek the inception of a scene or action in order to comprehend how exactly it could come about.

Behavior:

Behavior is observable conduct manifested by a character. It includes the doing of tasks in pursuit of objectives. Elia Kazan famously said that directing involved “turning psychology into behavior”.

Belief:

The belief that an audience invests in a fictional narrative is different than the belief that one might place in a real world fact or proposition. An audience's "belief" is more akin to a willingness to go along with a hypothetical proposition or thought experiment in the hope of gaining insight or pleasure. An actor's belief in her character is similar. It is a readiness to initiate action and commit to behavior based on a fiction proposition. It is a commitment to action and not a delusional or mystical acceptance of a fiction as fact on the part of the actor. Some schools of acting employ techniques intended to help the actor "believe". I think these exercises are misguided and are directed at the wrong (unnecessary and impossible) type of "belief". Belief is instant, and depends on immediate acceptance of the circumstances. It's like playing house. I say: "You be the daddy, and I'll be the mommy," and then I begin. It is less important that I "believe" that I am a mommy than that I accept you as the daddy.

Bit:

Short for a "bit of business". A "bit" refers to business that has been practiced and made routine. A bit may start as random or spontaneous behavior – once it has been incorporated into performance or staging it is called a "bit". A bit does not advance the action, but is performed for its inherent entertainment value. Synonyms: "routine", *shtick* (Yiddish), *lazzo* pl. *lazzi* (Italian from *Commedia dell Arte*.) See also "Business."

***Black Hole of Comedy:**

An "absorptive" actor with no "bounce".

Blocking:

The staging (positioning and movement) of actors so as to realize the action of a scene.

***Bounce:**

"Bounce" refers to a reflective, resilient quality that a comic actor must possess. The comic pursuit of an objective requires an actor to quickly bounce back from adversity and, to some extent, register, but not dwell, on pain.

Business:

"Business", short for "Stage Business", is a term referring to activities performed by a character. Beyond the general activity – in the Annie Hall scene referred to above, carrying cartons – if Woody chose to play that the boxes were inordinately heavy and he struggled, repeatedly jogging them up with his knee while talking, that specific, singular behavior might be referred to as "a bit of business."

Buy:

Verb: “Buy” as in the colloquial expression, “I buy that” meaning I believe what is being presented to me.

Noun: A “buy” in storytelling refers to something the creators of a fiction have to make the audience accept. Usually refers to an implausibility that the performers have to get the audience to ignore.

C

Callback:

Casting Callback:

The practice of asking an actor to audition a second or third time for a role. Screen Actors’ Guild has rules which govern how many callbacks an actor can be asked to do.

Joke Callback

In comedy writing a “callback” refers to a reference or joke that repeats a joke or reference that was made earlier, with the intention of building the comedic effect.

Casting:

Casting is the selection of actors for roles in a fictional narrative dramatization. The infinite form of the verb is “to cast.” Note that the past tense of cast is also “cast”, not “casted”.

Character:

An individual in the *dramatis personae* of a play, film or television show; a person who takes part in the action of the narrative.

*** Chasing Two Rabbits**

An expression used to caution against trying to tell two jokes or pursue two comic targets at the same time. The warning is that if you attempt to chase two rabbits at the same time you will catch neither.

Choice:

Every element of a dramatized story is a product of choice. The writer chooses the words with which to convey the story to his collaborators. Every action, activity and bit of behavior and actor performs is arrived at by choice.

The principal tool in the director's kit is the Power of Choice. The director exercises the power of choice in each and every aspect of storytelling. The director guides every member of the creative collaboration – actors, designers, cinematographers etc – in make choices that tell the story. The director is – as George W. Bush famously said, “The Decider.” The director chooses among the choices being offered by his or her collaborators. Choice is inevitable. There is no escaping choice. Anything appearing in the frame will impact the storytelling and be perceived as being there by choice. The director must take responsibility for all the choices that are in the frame.

Directing is about making choices from the right place, inside you– the place that wants to tell the story, the place that wants to communicate to somebody else– THAT'S what directing is all about.

Choices are not absolutes. They are not hard, provable facts. They are decisions made in order to shape, focus and drive a scene. Select the choice that best propels the action toward the identified goal.

Circumstances:

Given Circumstances:

Circumstances, or “given circumstances,” are the facts or conditions we (those who participate in the story: the actors, the director, the audience) must accept pertain to the character or predicament. All action proceeds from these immutable given circumstances.

Imaginary Circumstances:

Imaginary circumstances would be hypothetical facts pertaining to the characters and their situation that are not specified by the script, but are imagined by the actors and director. They may not contradict the given circumstances laid out by the author but are meant to augment the actors' reality. As they are likely to influence the characters' behavior they should be chosen carefully based on their usefulness to the storytelling, and not merely for embellishment. Since they are optional they may be altered at any time.

Comedy:

Comedy a form of entertainment or storytelling whose chief object is to elicit recognition from its audience by provoking laughter.

***Comic Contract**

Common reference points and common understanding of the rules are central to the Comic Contract between storyteller (joke teller) and audience.

Comic Cues:

Clues or signals to the audience that make them feel they have permission to laugh.

Commitment:

The strong and authoritative embracing and execution of a choice. A choice is doomed to fail if it is agreed to intellectually, but not committed through decisive execution.

***Concentric Circles:**

***Counterweight:**

***Cover:**

Crickets:

The sound you hear when no one is laughing.

D

Deadpan:

Details:

Director:

Doing:

Drama:

Dramatization:

Dramatization is the art of making something emotional happen in space and time. It must be understood in contrast to description, illustration and narration. When something is dramatized it occurs in front of us (the audience) and involves us emotionally. From witnessing that occurrence we experience an emotional event* and draw meaning. The purpose of dramatization is to enact a meaningful emotional event that causes change.

Dry:

In Acting:

When an actor is “dry” it means that he has forgotten his lines. (see also Up)

In Humor:

When humor or a person’s sense of humor or comic delivery is described as “dry” it means that it is subtle and absent of overt cues alerting the audience to it’s comic intent. Dry humor is often accompanied by a “deadpan” delivery.

E

Emotional Event:

An emotional event is something that brings about change in a character. If the character is exactly the same after as before it happens, then the character or story hasn’t moved forward emotionally. It hasn’t developed in a new direction.

Energy:

Entrances:

***Etiquette:**

Etiquette is our everyday way of referring to the Governing Social Obligation underlying an encounter. Where there’s etiquette there’s comedy. When we focus on the etiquette we focus the obstacle, the problem. And that’s funny. Being stuck in front of a problem (an obstacle) and trying to sneak around it is funny. See Governing Social Obligation

Event:

An event is an emotional occurrence that happens to the central character, usually setting him or her off in another direction. Events happen below the surface, where incidents become meaningful to the characters. The director's job is to make the event happen.

***Event of the Scene:**

The culminating beat of a scene is what we call the “Emotional Event” or “The Event of the Scene”. It is the job of the director, working with the actors, to excavate and define the moments, the beats and the event of the scene. “The event of the scene” is what we will call the happening of the central emotionally meaningful occurrence in

a scene. It is the scene's reason for being in the narrative. This is the moment that propels the central character into the next scene.

The director's role on set is the realization and delivery of the event of the scene. Once the event of the scene has been realized the scene's job has been accomplished and the scene should end as quickly as possible.

***Excess:**

Exaggeration:

Exits:

Exposition:

Expectations: *see Premise

Exploration:

Exposition/Expository Scene:

A scene in which nothing happens except the transfer of information is called an "expository scene". Raw exposition is to be avoided in any dramatic form. Information should always be artfully woven into and dispensed through a scene that is driven by action and emotional stakes. Sometimes, in complicated plot-driven dramatic forms, an expository scene might have to be tolerated...but never in a comedy!

F

Fact:

A fact is an element in a story, a given circumstance that we must accept. It cannot be altered by interpretation.

***Flag on the Play:**

In watching actors we always want to note the moment where they go off track. We don't have to know why it happened yet, just that it happened. That's where we throw down our Referee's penalty flag.

Flaw:

A comic character is funny as a function of his flaws. Flaws or failings or negative qualities within a person's attributes are aspects.... Flaws in the comic character work to open emotional distance between it, character and viewers or readers so that those viewers or readers can come to believe laugh at, say, someone slipping on a banana peel. Without this emotional distance, the truth and the pain of the situation hit too close to home for an audience to find funny. A thing is only funny if it happens to the other guy, and flaws in the character work to make him "the other guy" in a readers or viewers mind. Page 36 vorher

Fulcrum Riding:*G****Game:****General:*****GIGO**

This principle can be applied to human inquiry. We ask our minds to solve problems and riddles and answer questions. It follows then that the quality of the answers we can expect is dependant on the quality of the questions we ask ourselves. ...And what criterion do I use to judge the "quality" of a question? I judge it's value by its usefulness in producing a result or tool suitable for the task at hand. Like a proper lever or pulley to move the obstacle-object.

***Golden Retriever:**

Like the Golden Retriever's overwhelming desire to please his master, it is the actors' eagerness to please you that puts the quality of your work at risk. Retriever/Actors not only do whatever you ask of them...they also try to guess what you want them to do. It seems nice....but in fact what they should be doing is figuring out what their character **NEEDS TO DO** and attempting to do it. Retriever/Actors censor their impulses. Like when Jon said he had wanted the chair to be in its second position...but he didn't dare to make it happen for himself (for his character) because he assumed the director (I) wanted it where I put it. He was subconsciously helping the director, instead of his character. I pointed out a number of such instances last night. I also demonstrated the phenomenon by "making" Michael Starr hold his arm up in the air despite the pull of gravity. Your

goal is to free up your actors' impulses...not to reign them in to your preconceived directions.

***Governing Social Obligation:**

We ask ourselves "what is the governing social obligation in this scene." The governing social obligation is the rules of the game. In life there are social obligations underlying every encounter. We are schooled in them from the earliest age. They are so culturally "understood" that most of the time we are unconscious of them, even while observing them. We are automatically somewhat deferential to elders. We behave one way with police and another with employees. Another version of Governing Social Obligation is "Etiquette." We understand what we mean by "restaurant etiquette" or "hospital etiquette". Sometimes the tension of living with obligation and etiquette makes things funny. In our scene analysis we need to recognize the rules of the encounter – the governing social obligation.

H

Hat on a Hat:

Putting a hat on top of a hat that you are already wearing is clearly unnecessary. The expression "putting a hat on a hat" refers to underlining or repeating a joke already made. Sometimes it's called "a joke on a joke". Overdoing a narrative point or moment outside the context of comedy may be called "piling on" or "gilding the lily." see also Tonnage

House Number:

House number refers to the standard way of doing a story beat or crafting the joke. It's an acknowledged cliché - it's a pitch or a joke that will never make it into the script, but it's an example of what the joke could be .

(The) Humors:

Humorous Character:

Has a super abundance of one of the humors (fluids) that give a character an exaggeration of attributes sufficient to provoke laughter

I

***Ideal Audience**

The director's brain in audience mode.

Illustration:

An illustration shows us a picture of what happens -- but doesn't actually make it happen. It's like show and tell. It announces what the author wants us to feel rather than creating the Event that calls forth the feeling. An illustration is like a sign post – a poster that says "Vote for Obama" -- it tells us what to do without involving us in a way that makes us want to do it. Now think of the HOPE poster of Obama. It evoked a feeling. It was designed to make you FEEL HOPEFUL. It made you want to PARTICIPATE in the moment of Obama looking out and imagining better things than exist now. That kind of response is EMOTIONAL rather than DIDACTIC.

The purpose of illustration is to explain something – to make it clear and explicit.

The purpose of illustration is to EXPLAIN to make something clear, explicit.

The purpose of dramatization is to excavate a meaningful emotional event that marks a change.*****

Illustrative Scene:

An illustrative scene is an expository scene without words. They give information, but they don't convey emotion. A guy gets out of his car and walks up a pathway to a house. A dog is sleeping on the porch and he pats it on the head. This scene is there to illustrate that he is a "nice guy" because he is kind to dogs.

Improvisation:

An improv uses a formal premise as inspiration for unplanned speech or behavior. An entire scene may, thus, be improvised. "One of the best things about improv is that it teaches you to listen" Steve Carrell

Incidents:

Incidents are observable surface occurrences. They don't have meaning in and of themselves. Events happen below the surface, where incidents become meaningful to the characters.

Indicating:

Refers to a bad acting practice wherein an actor shows the audience something that his or her scene partner supposedly does not see (has to pretend not to see).

Information:

In life we seldom, merely, give information. Which is to say we rarely state facts without communicating our attitude about the fact, or using the fact as a vehicle to impose our will or influence someone else. We are seldom literal.

To find the life of a character an actor must make a choice as to why and how he is saying each line. An actor or director who embraces the principle that a real person seldom "gives information" is prompted to explore the intentions underneath their lines as well as "the doings" on their surface.

Intention:

An intention is an underlying purpose for saying a line. Similar to an objective it points the line toward an achievable or desired target. The intention may be apparent or obscure. It is safe to say that the more covert or obscure the intention is the more interesting the line is likely to be. See also "Action"

Interpretation:

Invisibility:

Irony: "The satirist's most effective weapon is irony. Its aim is to defeat the opponent on his own ground by pretending to accept his premises, his values, his methods of reasoning, in order to expose their implicit absurdity" – Arthur Koestler
"Irony's been called the glory of slaves" Christopher Hitchens

J

Joke:

"A joke is a delivery system for information about ourselves and the world we live in. Often stuff we don't want to hear. 'Knock knock. Who's there? Death.'. And jokes provoke laughter... Lewis Black

"The thing that All Jokes have in common is that they work exactly the same way. All jokes are two stories...So the setup for a joke makes you make an assumption, that you find out is erroneous in the punchline.... The joke is the sudden revelation of a previously concealed fact. " Jimmy Carr

"Jokoid" – "a jokoid looks like a joke and sounds like a joke....except.. a jokoid looks like a joke and sounds like a joke. ... A jokoid fills the place on the page were genuinely funny joke will eventually go." John Vorhaus see also Placeholder and JTC

JTC – Joke to Come – a place-holding notation in a script in progress that a joke must be inserted here.

Justification:

A justification of a line of dialogue or a behavior or an action is the reasoning an actor finds for saying the line or taking the action.

K

L

Land:

To “land” a joke is what we call it when a joke hits its target. It’s the equivalent to a gymnast “sticking the landing.”

Line Readings:

Listening:

Listening in acting, as well as in life, is an art. We tend to take “listening” for granted. It is not to be confused with “hearing”. Listening refers to the actual receiving of what someone else says in an active, open and immediate way. It is hearing with urgency in a manner that makes it possible for another’s words to affect one. Actors must develop the ability to listen to words they have heard as if it is the first time they have heard them. Directors need to develop the ability to distinguish true listening from mere hearing.

Low Hanging Fruit:

“Low hanging fruit” identifies the subject of a cheap joke. It’s so easy to reach...so ripe for the picking. Pride makes most comedians refer to such “low hanging fruit” with disdain – as beneath their professional dignity to pick.

Lox:

A piece of cold fish that just lies there and doesn’t do anything, lox is a term used to disparage an actor who is thought to lack vitality or *brio*.

M

Misdirection:

This term, used by magicians, storytellers and comedians, refers to the trick of drawing an audience's attention in one direction so as to keep its attention off the true direction from which a surprise development or element will appear.

Mise en Scene:

A French term loosely translated as "setting the scene", but one that has resonance beyond the English equivalent. In fact in France one of the terms for "director" is *metteur en scene*, the one who does *mise en scene*.

Mislead:

Moment:

A "moment" is a behavioral marker in a scene. It is a place during or in between dialogue in which something registers or is noted. It may be revealed by a look, a pause, a thought behind the eyes or a gesture. A scene is made up of moments. Some decisive moments are designated as "beats". The culminating decisive moment/beat of the scene is called The Event of the Scene. This is the moment that propels the central character into the next scene.

Moment Before:

Moment to Moment:

in life, progress is made one moment at a time.

Stepping stones

***Moving the Furniture:**

When rehearsing the scene it's more important to me to find the right arrangement of furniture than it is to verbally correct the actors. I believe that if I can keep them "Talking and Listening" and if I can get the furniture right – they will find themselves in the proper place space and emotionally.

Mugging:

Mugging is the term commonly used to refer to actors making exaggerated faces in order to show emotion to an audience or to prompt an audience to laugh. In both cases the actor is stepping out of the reality of the scene to signal the audience.

N

O

Objective:

“There's always a secret agenda you must have which is emotional. That secret agenda is your objective.” Mel Brooks - See also Actions

Obstacles:

***Occasion:**

On The Nose (OTN):

***Operative Word**

Opposites:

Whatever the proposition, its opposite is the thing at the farthest remove.

Over the Top (OTT):

P

P's & K's:

Refers to the time-honored theory that plosive and hard consonants are funnier than soft-sounding ones. In “The Sunshine Boys” writer Neil Simon put this explanation into the mouth of Vaudevillian character: “57 years in this business, you learn a few things. You know what words are funny in which words are not funny. Alka-Seltzer is funny. You say Alka-Seltzer, you get a laugh. Words with K in them are funny. Casey Stengel, that’s a funny name Robert Taylor is not funny period cupcake is funny. Tomato is not funny. Cookie is funny. Cucumber is funny. Cleveland ...Cleveland is funny. Maryland is not funny.”

Pace:

Paraphrase:

***Pentimenti:**

Pentimenti is an Italian word, the plural of *pentimento*. It is a term used by experts who study paintings and it is defined as a visible trace of an earlier painting beneath a layer of paint on a canvas. These are the traces of decisions made and altered by the painter in the progress of getting to a finished work of art. Those *pentimenti* faintly show through and contribute to the work's texture and dimension.

In rehearsal we explore alternative behaviors and experience their implications. After an exploration is done the actor and director are in a better position to make an informed choice. They will also have excavated a trove of possible alternative behaviors that they have rejected. Having thought up and physically tried alternative choices, the actor has installed in his character's mind a databank of possible but rejected behaviors. This gives the character greater dimension. It makes him or her more lifelike because whenever we – in life – decide to do something, that decision is a product of having rejected alternatives. I call these rejected, alternative behaviors, *pentimenti*.

Permission:

Perspective:

Objective:

Subjective:

Piling On:

Place-holder:

an inferior joke inserted in a script in progress that the writer intends to replace with a sharper joke at a later time . see also "Joke to Come"

Play:

Play to Win:

Playable:

Playing it Straight:

Playing the Effect:

Playing the End:

Plot:

The writer E.M. Forster made this useful distinction between plot and story:

“A plot is: The king died and then the queen died. A story is: the king died, and then the queen died of a broken heart.”

The “meaning” of the king’s death is derived from the loss felt by the queen. Without this emotional component the king’s death is merely one of millions of mortal incidents befalling the earth’s creatures on any given day. The plot of a story is a list of the incidents that make up the narrative.

Premise:

A premise is an assumption - an understanding that precedes an action or encounter. This assumption carries with it certain expectations. Those expectations are based on our shared understanding of how the world works, or is supposed to work.

is an underlying assumption or unspoken dynamic that is in some measure known to and understood by the characters and is communicated to the audience without words. In drama it often drives the scene; in comedy it is frequently what makes the scene funny. To “Understand the Premise” is – in other words – to “Get the Joke

Comic Premise:

A comic premise is a premise that encompasses an irony, a paradox, an irreconcilable or an incongruity that despite its “wrongness” and imperfection we nevertheless recognize as true to life.

Process:

Props:

Punchline:

Punch up:

Q

***Qualities:**

A quality is a “thing” about a person. Something inescapable, unavoidable that “comes with the package. It’s a “read” that a person gives off.

R

Ramp up:

Read:

As in recognition - you are saying that the actor “reads” gay. That if he works honestly, moment to moment, talking and listening, something about his essential qualities will be associated by the audience with being gay.

Reality:

***Realization:**

“Realization” is the job of the director. To “realize” something means to make something emotional happen. This happening - this emotional component - is the thing that imparts meaning to a story. The director’s job is to see that each scene of a narrative is “realized”.

***Reflective:**

Rehearsal:

It is the purpose of rehearsal to explore alternative behaviors and experience their implications.

Resilience:

Resulting:

Result Acting – Playing the Result:

The guy is guilty, so the actor thinks that he has to come in and show you that he's guilty. But guess what? Are we stupid? We know he's guilty! We saw the whole movie. We saw what happened. He was guilty the moment he realized that he had overstayed at Jessica Lang's place, and left Sandy...right? That's when he was guilty, but that was then. Now, he's moved forward, right?

Result Direction:

A request made by the director to an actor asking for the actor to produce a specific effect. It requires the actor to act from outside the character and without internal motivation.

Reveal:

Reversal:

Ritual:

Routine:

See "Bit"

Rules:

Rule of Threes:

Run:

Run of Three:

Runner:

S

***Sand in the Oyster:**

Scene:

A scene is the enactment of a premise.

Comic Scene: A comic scene involves the enactment of a premise that has been set to fail.

Scene Analysis:

Scene Analysis is for preparing to rehearse. We imagine how the scene came to happen. We explore the beginning of the scene and research aimed toward identifying the event of the scene. It is also our homework for helping actors find active engagement in the scene.

Scene Breakdown:

A director breaks a scene into moments and beats. A moment is like a pearl in the life of a character. The actors find the pearls in their characters' behavior. And the

director strings these pearls into beats. So, why do we need beats? Beats form a kind of emotional pathway to the realization of this emotional event in a scene. My contention is that it's like...I don't know, when I'm talking about it, I'm always imagining some kind of slotted suspension bridge. I don't know why, but I actually have one in my mind that I always picture, which is not a suspension bridge over like, a chasm, but it happens to be over a swamp, over water. Something, in which you need a path of some sort because there is somewhere to fall. You need to follow the path, and the beats are the path through the scene, to the experience, to the emotional impact. By doing the moments, and being governed by the beats. In a way, ruled by the beats, in the way that a pathway rules our journey through a forest; guided by the beats. That keeps us from doing the whole scene at once, which is to say, it can't be done. It breaks the scene down. Literally, I've got to go one step at a time on a certain path. And at the end of this path, just like a real path in the woods, it's going to go as far as it can in a one direction, and it's still going to try to get somewhere else, but it has to turn in order to get there, because it hit a hillside. So, it's going to get stuck, or it has to find a way around it. It has to go this way this way for awhile, but it still needs to go over there (the final destination). So, it's a navigation through an experience, through an encounter. It gives it shape.

Schtick:

See "Bit"

Seesaw:

Set Dressing:

Set up:

Shoe Leather:

Sight Gag:

Specifics:

Stabbing the Frog:

In a writers' room someone will pitch a joke. We'll all laugh. Then someone will pick it apart. Someone else will want to change a word. A discussion might ensue. Variations proposed until finally no one can remember what the hell was funny in the first place. So when a staffer starts that, another might yell out "You're stabbing the frog!" Ken Levine

Staging:

The expression of dramatic movement through the positioning of actors

“Dramatic movement occurs when there is a change in the dynamic relationship between characters...only two overall dramatic movements (are) possible between characters, and both can be expressed spatially.”

Stakes:

Stock Casting

Story:

Structure:

A coherent form of organization. “Structure is the answer to the questions when, and in what order, to release bits of information.” Walter Mirsch

Style:

people talk about finding their directorial style– as if it's a kind of an outfit that you buy in a store, and what "look" you get depends on what store or what department of that store you go to. That's not where style comes from. Style is no more no less than the sum of your personal choices. and your choices, cannot be anything but personal.

Subtext:

Surface:

T

Tactics:

are the adjustments, moves, ploys, strategies that a character uses to achieve an objective. In a scene a character usually has only ONE OBJECTIVE, but may employ several tactics in his attempt to achieve his objective.

Talking and Listening:

Target:

Tee Up:

Telegraphing:

I don't need to watch – I know what the next moment will be

***Telephone:**

Throwaway:

Ticking Clock:

In order to build and maintain dramatic tension every scene needs a ticking clock. A scene without urgency will seem flaccid to the audience. A “ticking clock” is sometimes written into the script, or even stated. Stuff like: “The paper goes to press in ten minutes, I need that statement from the governor now!” But usually the urgency is less apparent. In these cases it is essential that the director explore underlying the circumstances that might provide a ticking clock, and plant those circumstances in the minds of the actors.

Timing:

Tonnage:

“Tonnage”, as in a lot of weight.” This refers to overdoing something and is related to “hat on a hat.” When you’ve made the same joke too often we say that you’ve got too much “tonnage” on that point. see also Hat on a Hat

Top:

Topper:

Tragedy:

Truth and Pain in Comedy:

Turn

As the name implies this denotes a turn or significant change in a character's behavior. A complete turn would be a 180 degree reversal in direction of behavior.

***Two-fer Scene:**

Typecasting

U

Up

“Up” is the term an actor uses to indicate that he has forgotten his lines. An actor might interrupt a take or performance by saying, “I’m up.” In another construction an actor is said to have “gone up on his lines.” (see also Dry)

V

***Value Added:**

***Vortex:**

the gravitational pull of the end of the scene We don't need to work toward that we have to work against it.

W

Want:

Wet:

X

Y

***Yay/Boo:**

Z