

HOW TO “SUCCEED” IN BARNET’S CLASS

By Jeremy Cohen

*This class is about process. It ASSUMES that you're not a perfect director, that you can become a better director. Embrace the notion that your work is always a work-in-progress and always can get better.

*Do not expect that your scenes will be something for your professional reel. Take the class as an opportunity to grow and learn as a director because that opportunity exists almost nowhere else.

*Your scenes for this class won't be perfect. They will be critiqued. Expect that. Your critique is an opportunity for you and the whole class to learn.

*Your scene will not be judged on how pretty it looks. Barnet doesn't worry about lighting or fancy camera moves. So stop stressing about how pretty it looks. It's about the acting!

There are many ways to direct and many schools of thought with their own terminology. Barnet teaches what works for him and what he's learned from years of practice. Barnet doesn't claim that his way is the only way, and maybe you've learned about directing before. But let's stick to Barnet's terminology and process in this class so that we can learn together and so that you can gain the most possible from Barnet's experience.

*Don't think you can make the wrong actor work for your scene. Even the best director finds that task nearly impossible. A major goal of this class is to teach good casting. Do everything in your power to find the perfect actors for your scene.

*Don't expect coddling. The opportunity of this class is to learn how to become a better director. Even if Barnet tells you that something is wrong with your scene or your directing technique, it's never a personal attack or a judgment of your character. If you want to do professional work, expect to be spoken to as an adult.

Reading and analyzing the script is a crucial element of this class. You'll need to read and re-read the script. You need to know it inside and out. We'll constantly refer to the circumstances laid forth in the script. You can't properly participate in the class if you're not fluent in the circumstances of the script.

*Your 532/476 scene is NOT a "standalone scene." It's not a short film. It will NEVER be judged as an independent piece. Do not rationalize your choices by claiming that you were approaching your scene as something to stand on its own. The goal of the class is to treat your scene as if it were a part of a larger whole as indicated by the circumstances of the script.

Excuses won't be tolerated. If something's unclear, ask. If you're going to be late, warn the SA in advance. You have plenty of time to do your work, so don't claim that technology problems have held you up.

*Barnet will be able to tell if you've rehearsed or not prior to your actors' performance in class. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse! It's not an inconvenience; it's an opportunity for you to learn your craft. If you don't have the time to rehearse, don't take the class this semester.

*Make sure that your actors know that rehearsal outside of class is a part of this class before you cast them.

*Let your actors know how our class works before they come. Don't let a critique of their work surprise them!

Nothing we do in this class is about controlling your actors. Allow yourself to think of them as partners in creating your scene. They are not obstacles to conquer.

The precepts of directing are simple. But it's very difficult to be a great director. You need to learn in what cases to apply the precepts of directing. So much of this class is about pointing out those cases in critiques of everyone's work. By observing problems together, we learn when to apply the rules. It's very difficult and takes a great deal of practice to be able to find when to apply the rules properly, though.

*Focus on your focus. Work on your powers of observation. This class will ask you to watch scenes like you never have before. Try to improve your focus on actors' performance every single class. This takes practice and is a process like everything else.

*This class is simple. Ultimately you'll be rehearsing in class for about an hour and screening less than ten minutes of filmed material, and no one is out to trick you. But it's incredibly difficult work and it should not be easy to do a great job! Treat this class as the most serious class you've ever taken. What you're expected to do in this class is challenging for the most talented and experienced directors in the world. Try to live up to that challenge.