

Creative Experiences' guide to IMPROV: What is it, and what are the basic rules?

(Scroll to the bottom for games and their instructions)

Improvisation is finding a stage anywhere and performing without preparation or planning. Like mindfulness exercises, practicing IMPROV helps you live in the moment!

All games have at least some rules; improv isn't any different. Thankfully the rules to IMPROV very simple.

The main rule in improv is that the players must remain in agreement with one another...otherwise known as the "yes, AND..." rule. Players must be in agreement to forward the action of the scene.

The "yes, AND..." rule simply means that whenever two actors are on stage (the "stage" can be in your living room, or anywhere else in your home with enough space to move around a bit), they agree with each other no matter what. If one asks the other a question, the other must respond positively, and then provide additional information, no matter how small: "yes, I think you're right, and I also think we should..."

Answering "no" leads nowhere in developing a scene:

A: Do you want to go to the movies?

B: "No."

Even a positive answer alone isn't enough:

A: "Do you want to go to the movies?"

B: "Yes."

The "yes, AND..." rule will lead players to their scene:

A: Do you want to go to the movies?"

B: Yes, and we can take my new rocket powered skateboard, Hop on.

-or-

B: Yes, I heard the theater is giving away live lobsters to each ticket holder!

With "Yes, AND..." there are unlimited scenic possibilities, because each player continues to supply information.

In this way, one step at a time, each player provides a building block, until they have easily, painlessly, constructed a scene. Answering "yes, but..." stops continued growth, while a flat "no" stops the scene in its tracks. Agreeing, or practicing the "yes, AND..." approach is a very relaxing way in which to work together. A player knows that anything

they say on stage or during a game, will be immediately accepted by their fellow player, and treated as if it was the best idea ever announced. Their partner then adds onto the idea, and moment by moment, the two of them have created a scene that neither one of them had planned.

When improvisers meet on stage, they agree to accept each other's initiations; they must completely commit to the reality they create for each other without a moment's hesitation. No matter how silly or ridiculous the line has become, if the first player says "well, here we are on the surface of the moon," then everyone accepts that they are indeed on the moon. The next player may say "look out for that alien." And everyone is in the path of a charging space alien. And so the scene is built.

"Life is what happens while you're busy making other plans." Be in the moment- you can't be aware of the moment if you're busy trying to steer the action or plan on something specific.

Support and trust go hand in hand for performers; they must trust their fellow players will support them. If everyone is doing their job, no one should stand out. The best way for an improviser to look good, is by making their fellow players look good."

Another big rule in improv- don't try to make jokes. If you focus on telling jokes, chances are you aren't in the present moment, scene or game. *Jokes can get laughs, but not all laughs come from jokes.*

A truly funny scene isn't the result of someone trying to be funny, or steal laughs at the expense of what's going on but finding the humor in the reality of the moment.

A scene is almost never almost never about what the players think it's going to be about. Be in the moment and see where it takes you!

See our Improv List on the following pages for numerous games to try with your friends and family. Some of these games have been time tested in popular media and by established improvisational theaters, while others have been made up during Creative Experiences' afterschool IMPROV program.

Be sure to check back; new games will be added weekly!

Have a game you'd like to add to this list? Email: Jason.stankowski@glastonbury-ct.gov

Alphabet Scenes (2 or more players)

This game takes a given scene suggestion and requires everyone in the group to exchange dialogue in which the first word spoken by each player must begin with the next letter of the alphabet, starting with which ever letter is elected, and finishing at the letter just before. For example, a scene starting with the letter Z, would finish with a sentence that had an A at the beginning.

Going out to dinner together

Watching a parade

Fishing on a boat in the ocean

Doing each other's nails

Trying to catch a poisonous snake loose in the house

Describing the scene of a crime

Star gazing on a mountain top

Children at a birthday party

Because I Said So!! (3 or more players)

A line of players is made just off stage. Three players start, one on either side of a chair placed in the middle of the stage. Player A sits in the chair and asks a (sillier the better) question to player B. After player B's answer, the person in the chair (player A) asks player C "Why?" After C's response, B asks player A "Why?" This goes back and forth until one of the two players cannot come up with a quick and response, and yells: "Because I said so!" That player is now the one sitting in the chair to lead off with the next question.

Player A: Where do bananas come from?

Player B: Bananas come from trees that grow in tropical regions.

Player A: Why do bananas grow in tropical regions?

Player C: Because banana trees can't survive in colder climate zones.

Player A: Why can't bananas trees survive in colder climate zones?

Player B: Because banana trees don't wear snow pants.

Player A: Why don't banana trees wear snow pants?

Player C: Because they don't have hands to pull them up with.

Player A: Why don't banana trees have hands?

Player B: BECAUSE I SAID SO!!!

Bench Sitters (at least 3 players)

This game consists of a “bench sitter” and a newcomer. It is the job of each newcomer to find a creative way to get the bench sitter off of the bench so they might take the spot as the new sole bench sitter. The more creative, the better. Resist the urge to engage in physical contact. Some tactics may include scaring the bench sitter, grossing them out, trickery... use your imagination! The bench sitter may try to make the game challenging by being resistant, but if you resist too much, you risk ruining the flow of the game.

Changing Fortunes (2 or more)

Everyone in the group sits or stand in a circle and is given an initial action that they are pursuing together. The first person starts the game by mentioning something that is fortunate about the situation, and the following person mentions something that is unfortunate. This continues to alternate around the group finishing with the person who started. As an example: The initial action/location is trying on clothing at the mall. The first person may say “Fortunately, there are a lot of really great sales happening today.” The second person might reply: “Unfortunately, none of the clothes seem to be in our size.” To that the third person replies “Fortunately, the clothes are super stretchy so we should be able to squeeze into them.” And so it goes around the circle. If playing with a small group (say 2-5 people), you can limit each round’s play to a 30 second timer.

Building a sandcastle

Assessing the damage after a storm

Trying on clothes

Announcing a boxing match

Studying for a test

Reading the morning announcements at school

In a police car

Coming home to a horse in the house

Fixing a broken toilet

Baby sitting

Trying to start a fire

Writing a letter home from summer camp

Baking cupcakes for a party

Getting caught in the rain

Conducted story: (4 or more)

One player stands in the middle of a circle and points to a player. The player who has been pointed to starts telling a story until the conductor points to someone else to continue telling where the last person left off. The conductor may only move on to a new player after the previous person pointed to has completed at least one whole sentence to the story.

Conducted Character story: Same rules apply as conducted story, but each player is assigned a character to play. Player's must tell the story using their character's voice and point of view.

Ex: Sponge bob Squarepants
Billy Holiday
Mike Tyson

Elmo
Ron Swanson
Mary Berry

Crowded elevator (4 people)

One person starts off walking into an elevator, pressing the button for a floor, and then the elevator stops and on the next floor and someone else gets in. This person must choose an emotion to exemplify before getting on the elevator, and greet whoever is on the elevator with that emotion. Everyone on the elevator takes on the new emotion. Once four people are in the elevator, the last person on must announce that they need to get off at the next floor, give a reason why, and leave. Then everyone assumes the emotion of the next most recent rider. Then they announce that they need to get off, give a reason why, and depart on their next floor. The scene is over once its back to the original rider.

"Curses, Foiled Again" (two or more)

Two lines are formed on either side of the stage (Line A & B) One person steps forward from each line. Person A (a supervillain) says "Oh no, it's _____!" (and says the name of a superhero that person B must become). Person B (the superhero) becomes that hero and exclaims, "I have finally found you _____!" (and names the super villain). The supervillain says, "You will never stop me from _____" (describing what crime they will commit with their superpower). The hero says, "I will stop you by _____" and says how they will stop them using their super power. If the super hero comes up with a good plan, the villain exclaims. "Curses, foiled again." but if the super hero falters then the villain laughs maniacally. Then switch roles!

A: "Oh no, its Dr. Cupcake hands!"

B: "I've finally found you, Perfectly pressed shirt Man!"

A: "You'll never stop me from looking professional wherever I go!"

B: "I will stop you by "SMEARING YOUR SHIRT WITH STRAWBERRY FROSTING!"

A "Curses, foiled again!"