

## THE ACTOR'S TOOLKIT – MIND

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### Imagination

- The imagination is one of the actors most important tools. It is the foundation on which they build their role.
- An actor must build an image in their mind. They must build this invention on facts by asking themselves the following questions:
  - When
  - what
  - where
  - why
  - how
- Imagination shouldn't be passive it needs to compel action.
- Stanislavsky's "Magic If" – actors ask themselves "what if" questions to help activate their imagination. Stanislavsky says "if" is a stimulus to the creative subconscious. "If" acts as a lever to lift us out of the world of actuality into the realm of imagination
- Actors must tap into their "inner child"
- Movement and Dialogue must be driven by an actor's imagination.

### Concentration & Focus

- Actors MUST possess concentration of attention. They must not focus on the audience or other external factors.
- It takes effort to concentrate onstage.
- Circles of attention
  - Small, Medium and Large
  - As your circle grows the boundary of your attention must also grow
  - If you reach the limits of your attention, you must quickly move your attention to a smaller circle.
  - If your attention totally slips you must redirect your attention to a single object onstage.
- An actor must learn how to look, see and hear things on stage
- **Inner attention** - centers on things you can hear, see, touch and feel in imaginary circumstances (covers all 5 senses)
- A good/strong imagination can help maintain focus and attention.
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### Building a Character

- Actors **must find the truth of a role.** "A role built on truth will grow a role built on a stereotype will shrivel."

- Be careful about the “mirror”. Actors must not spend too much time on the external/physical factors of building a character.
- Acting as Art
  - Mechanical-Acting - specific gestures, intonations for specific settings, cliches
  - Over-Acting/Forced-Acting - absurd, over exaggerated, first thoughts that come into the mind
  - Art of Representation (partially identified with Stanislavsky's method) - lives the part to reach a specific level of creation, then mechanically reproduces. Stanislavsky, however, says you must relive the part new and fresh every time
- Given Circumstances – is the information from the playwright about a character’s condition and environment that can be gained by the actor from the script.
- The Given Circumstances PLUS the Magic If = the inner stimulus for a role according to Stanislavsky
- Characters must be made fuller and deeper by the actor through the imagination and given Circumstances.
- How can an actor gain emotional material for a role?
  - Directly
  - By being an onlooker
  - By hearing and reading about others experiences
- Objectives, Obstacles & Actions
  - **Objectives** - The objective is a goal that a character wants to achieve. This is often worded in a question form as “What do I want?” An objective should be action-oriented, as opposed to an internal goal, in order to encourage character interaction onstage. The objective does not necessarily have to be achieved by the character and can be as simple as the script permits. For example, an objective for a particular character may simply be ‘to pour a mug of tea.’ For each scene, the actor must discover the character’s objective. Every objective is different for each actor involved because they are based on the characters of the script.
  - **Super-Objectives** - A super-objective, in contrast, focuses on the entire play as a whole. A super-objective can direct and connect an actor’s choice of objectives from scene to scene. The super-objective serves as the final goal that a character wishes to achieve within the script.
  - **Obstacles** - Obstacles are the aspects that will stop or hinder a character from achieving his or her individual objective. For example, while the character searches for tea bags to make the mug of tea, they find that there are no teabags in the tin.
  - **Tools/Methods** - Tools or methods are the different techniques that a character uses to surpass obstacles and achieve their objective. For example, the character

searches around the kitchen, they walk to the shops, or they call on the neighbor to be able to make the tea to pour.

- **Actions** - Actions are referred to as how the character is going to say or do something. More specifically, it as an objective for each line. Actions are how a character is going to achieve their objective. For example, a line in the script may read, '(whilst on the phone) "Hello, Sally. It's Bill from next door. You wouldn't happen to have any spare tea bags, would you? I know how well-organized you are." The Action for this line may be 'to flatter' in order to achieve the Objective of collecting the tea bags. Actions will be different for every single actor based on their character choices.
- Stanislavsky's 7 Questions –
  - **1. Who am I?**

Start with the basics and then fill in the gaps with your imagination. Pick apart the script to find out what type of person your character is; what they look like, what they believe, how others describe them and so on. Think about your character's past and the significant events/people that influenced them and made them who they are in the script.
  - **2. Where am I?**

The script will usually tell you where you are but the important thing for an actor is to consider how the character feels about the place they are in. Characters act differently in public than they do in private. People move differently when they are cold vs. when they are too hot. The space your character occupies can determine how they behave during a scene.
  - **3. What time is it?**

Year, season, month, day, and time of day should all be described. Then, think about how the specific time of the play changes the character's action. If it's set in Victorian England, voice and proper etiquette will be different than San Francisco in the 1960s.
  - **4. What do I want?**

This is a character's primary motivation for everything they do in a scene. All actions should be executed with the goal of getting what you want from the other characters in the scene. This is also called a character's objective.
  - **5. Why do I want it?**

There must be a driving force behind your objectives on stage and on screen and that is your justification. We all having reasons for doing what we do and characters are no different. Give your character a convincing reason for acting and you automatically generate high stakes which leads to tension.
  - **6. How will I get what I want?**

Use your dialogue, movements, and gestures to try to influence the other characters to give you what you want i.e. accomplish your objective. This is also called a character's tactic. If one tactic fails, try a new one and see if that works.

○ **7. What must I overcome to get what I want?**

There is always something stopping you from achieving your objective. Usually, there is someone or something in the outside world impeding a character's advancement and also some internal conflict with which they struggle. Find what it/they are and fight against them with the scene. This is also called a character's obstacle.