

## **Beginning Acting**

Meisner Approach - Sanford Meisner, major New York Acting Teacher of the 1940's, 1950's, 1960's, 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's. Home: Neighborhood Playhouse.

**Technique: The reality of the actor's (character's) choice is based in the behavior of the other.**

**The primary four steps of this approach include:**

### **Step #1 - Reading behavior - Repetition exercise.**

Meisner repetition exercise: Simply put, the actor begins by reading the behavior of the other actor on a simple level. Gradually, the actor moves beneath the surface, finding the nuances of the other actor's behavior. All the time actors repeat a phrase like "you're nodding your head," and "I'm nodding my head," back and forth until one or the other actor feels it's time to say another phrase. The exercise has several goals: to focus on the other actor, to get out of self-consciousness, to react to stimuli, to heighten listening skills and perception, hone concentration, and sharpen the actor's timing. Technically actors repeat the phrase until the phrase itself becomes less important. Instead, what is beneath the phrase becomes significant. The actor responds without too much thinking; rather than trying to figure out what the other actor is doing, he/she merely says what they see.

### **Step #2 - Incorporating the body into repetition.**

While still using the Meisner Repetition exercise, the actors try to beckon each other to their side of the room. The simple "objective" is to get the partner to cross an imaginary line, which we determine in the space before beginning the exercise.

### **Step #3 - Improvisations using a subtextual "I want" - to be spoken aloud.**

While on your side of the room, the Repetition Phrase is dropped, and in its place actors use an "I want" phrase. For example, "hug me," or "appreciate me," or "take me away from here." This becomes a mantra of sorts. The idea is to continue to "read" behavior, but now there is something at stake. The actor is not merely repeating a phrase, which can become static, but incorporates an active task. The "I want" still uses the idea of drawing the other actor in.

### **Step #4 - Incorporating 6 basic actions:**

- a. to beg, or plead
- b. to seduce
- c. to dominate
- d. to destroy
- e. to celebrate
- f. to accuse

There are, of course, many more actions an actor can play. But these six are called "basic" because they are 1) bold and theatrical, and 2) they are not tied to a text, or story. First, it is bolder to celebrate another person than it is to enjoy them; celebrate implies an expansive, physical activity, rather than a passive action. To seduce is bolder than to charm or cajole, etc. And second, to steal, for example, suggests a text of sorts; stealing what, from whom, etc. It implies that there is a story involved. But these six can be performed immediately and theatrically; you don't need a story to support the reading behind the action.