



THE JASON BENNETT
ACTOR'S WORKSHOP

SUPERIOR ACTOR TRAINING

The World Is Your Acting Class
(Volume 1 of 10)

by Jason Bennett

All the world's a free acting class! In this new 10 part article series, you will learn things you can do on your own to develop your instrument and craft.

We receive emails from all over the world from actors and acting teachers who wish they could come to New York and study with our faculty. Of course, not everyone can. But because I appreciate the emails and questions we receive from all of you, this series of articles is for you.

Personal Inventory

The most fundamental thing you can do each day is take Personal Inventory -- of your feelings, your body, and your voice, while noticing your inner images. Great actors know themselves well. As an actor, perhaps you change your mind, voice and body to "go to character," but you are still using yourself when you work. In acting, *you* are the instrument being played! Personal Inventory is basic to becoming an expert on your Instrument.

Personal Inventory is a spontaneous, moment-to-moment flow of feelings and responses to the world. This is the basic structure of Personal Inventory: Ask yourself out-loud, "How do I feel?" And answer, "I feel...(whatever comes out of your mouth)" Ask again, "How do I feel?" and answer again. Do this over and over, expressing yourself in a stream-of-consciousness fashion. This means you express a flow of impulses, in a "blurting" fashion. It's a brilliant technique originally created by Master acting teacher Eric Morris.* In our classes, we have evolved many variations of this exercise.

You do this exercise out-loud. This is because hearing yourself ask the question and answer it causes the exercise to go deeper. You also do it out-loud to work on physicalizing and vocalizing your impulses. As you do this exercise, you increasingly connect to your unconscious. Your unconscious is where 98% of your talent is. The more you answer from your unconscious, in this "blurting" fashion, the more your impulses are spontaneous, surprising, filled with life and constantly evolving.

Here is an example of Personal Inventory: "How do I feel? I feel lonely. How do I feel? I feel tired. My arms are heavy. My jaw feels lazy. How do I feel? I feel sad, I miss my grandmother. I feel angry. How do I feel? I feel angry! How do I feel? I feel silly. How do I feel? I feel scared. I notice tension in my stomach. I'm hungry. How

do I feel? I feel happy. How do I feel? I feel happy and a little horny. I'm looking around the room now. How do I feel? I'm sitting here typing. I feel annoyed. I take a deep breath. I want to talk to my brother. How does that make me feel? I feel sad. I feel tension in my throat. I wish I were in the mountains! I feel sad. I feel desperate. I long to be in the mountains. I remember my grandmother. How do I feel? I feel sad. I feel love. How do I feel? I notice someone checking me out, I feel sexy. I feel horny. I feel a little tingling in my cheeks as I smile. How do I feel? I feel mad at myself for not going to the gym yet. AHHH! How do I feel? I notice that person over there is chubby. That makes me giggle. I feel silly. I feel embarrassed. I feel ashamed of myself. How do I feel? I feel happy."

Avoid long, intellectual answers. The reasons you feel what you feel are unimportant in this exercise. Here is a bad example of Personal Inventory: "How do I feel? Well I feel like I ought to be taking out the trash because the garbage smells bad and I should have taken out the trash this morning, but maybe no one will notice because no one is here."

These are thoughts, not feelings. What we're interested in are the feelings under the thoughts. So it might go like this: "How do I feel? I see the trashcan. I feel mad. I feel mad at myself. I feel lazy. I feel disgusted. I feel relieved." Those are possible feelings that underlie the thoughts about taking out the garbage.

Personal Inventory is about spontaneous, short expressions of feelings and images. Thoughts, especially long ones, are irrelevant and distracting to the point of Personal Inventory. Great acting comes from your imaginative and experiential world, not your intellect. Leave out the thoughts while doing Personal Inventory.

I suggest doing this exercise whenever you think about it throughout your day. The more you do it, the better. Notice how people, places and things make you feel. You will be amazed at how rapidly your state-of-being changes if you follow your inner stream of impulses. Your unconscious is racing with responses to the world, in feelings and images. This exercise begins to open the door again to that awesome, creative world -- a world that children have easy access to before they are socialized into conformity.

One moment you might feel sexy, the next moment very lonely. This is usually perfectly normal. Welcome to being a human being and especially to being an actor. We live in a culture where multi-billion dollar corporations tell us in advertisements that our feelings are mental illnesses and should be muted with drugs. But as actors, we need to fully embrace our feelings and impulses in order to create.

Personal Inventory is a shocking exercise for many aspiring actors, who have no idea how they feel about the world around them. You may discover your thoughts

easily distract you, while you ignore your feelings. Or you may discover you have no idea how you feel. Or you may discover that certain feelings come up over and over, while others never seem to come up.

This exercise can quickly reveal what kinds of emotions you will not allow yourself to express. You may even keep yourself from realizing you have certain kinds of feelings. Finding a teacher who has access to “all” their feelings is important, so they can reflect back to you the emotional colors missing from your inventory. Find an acting teacher who does not label you or judge you for any of your feelings and reactions to the world. The more an acting teacher accepts themselves, the more accepting they are of their students. There are great acting teachers all over the world.

Saying the words of what you feel is a giant step for many aspiring actors. But it isn't enough. What you also must do in Personal Inventory is encourage yourself to take responsibility for what you are saying -- to physicalize and vocalize your impulses. This means you allow your voice and body to change as your impulses change. You don't *try* to do this, you don't push anything out with any effort. You simply *allow* your voice and body to change as your impulses flow. There is a “feeling of ease” in Personal Inventory.

If you feel silly, you might spontaneously laugh or giggle. If you feel sexy, you might sway your pelvis, your voice might go deep and you might look down in a seductive way. If you say, "I feel scared," allow yourself to feel the feeling, and to show that in your body and voice. Again, pushing anything out will seem fake. This is about gently allowing the impulses to more fully manifest in your body and voice.

After you ask yourself what you feel, then ask yourself, "Am I expressing how I feel?" And try and find a way to let your voice and body increasingly reflect your moment-to-moment impulses.

We could call this kind of exercise an Instrumental Liberation exercise! You are liberating your psyche, feelings, body and voice. As an actor, you have to know how you actually feel. If you don't, you cannot know whether you are anywhere near where the character is supposed to be. If you don't know where you are now, you can't have any idea what acting tools to use to get you to the material. If you are shut down or emotionally unaware, your auditions will suffer and your acting will never be great.

Be careful with this exercise. It is powerful. It can begin to open you up again to the vast, infinite universe of your imagination and feelings. It's not a good idea to demonstrate this to strangers or at your office job. It probably won't go over well. Protect your feelings and imaginative impulses by being discreet in the world as

you do this exercise. And respect other people in the process, too.

It is hard to do this exercise justice in an article. When you come to our school, you'll do this kind of exercise in front of other professional actors. For even the most trained actors who come to our school, this exercise alone can completely change scene or monologue work, almost instantly. This is the kind of exercise that usually takes a lot of "side-coaching" by a teacher, as it is easy for us to hide from our own feelings and not even realize it. As you are working on Personal Inventory, inhibit any repetitive physical movements and let go of any tension in your body.

Repetitive physical movements and tension in your body are a result of blocked feelings. Examples of repetitive movements are tapping your foot rapidly or biting your nails. If you let the tension go and stop the repetitive movements, more feelings will probably come up in Personal Inventory. I've seen actors release an avalanche of tears after simply relaxing an eyebrow, or erupt with rage after relaxing their jaw.

Part of the unmatched joy of being an actor is the infinite journey of self-exploration – the exploration of what it means to be alive in the world today.

Oscar Wilde said, "[The theatre is] the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being."

The more free and aware you are -- the more conscious you are -- the more you can deeply investigate characters and scripts. This is an investigation of humanity. It all starts with this exercise. Do it every day.

* - Personal Inventory, along with many other exercises, can be found in *No Acting, Please* by Eric Morris.