



The Meisner Technique: Vocabulary and Core Concepts

This companion sheet provides foundational vocabulary for students studying Sanford Meisner's acting technique. The terms below emphasize concentration, behavioral responsiveness, truthful interaction, and the relationship between objective and emotional life.

Repetition Exercise

A foundational Meisner exercise in which two actors repeat simple behavioral observations back and forth. The purpose is not verbal creativity, but sustained concentration on the partner and truthful behavioral responsiveness.

Behavioral Observation

The actor's ability to notice specific external behavior such as shifts in posture, vocal rhythm, eye contact, tension, hesitation, or silence. Meisner training begins with outward attention.

Outward Attention

A core principle of Meisner training in which concentration moves away from self-monitoring and toward the behavior of the other person in the scene.

Moment-to-Moment Work

The practice of allowing behavior, timing, rhythm, and emotional response to develop continuously through live interaction instead of predetermined emotional planning.

Living Truthfully Under Imaginary Circumstances

Sanford Meisner's definition of acting. The phrase emphasizes truthful behavioral response inside fictional dramatic conditions.

“Pinch and Ouch”

A Meisner phrase illustrating that emotional response must emerge from behavioral cause. The actor cannot begin with emotional result before something has occurred to produce it.

Emotional Result

A predetermined emotional effect the actor attempts to demonstrate externally. Meisner discourages actors from pursuing emotional result directly.

Objective

What a character wants from another person in the scene. Objectives create playable action and organize actor concentration.

Playable Action

A concrete behavioral pursuit the actor can actively do in the scene, such as persuading, hiding, calming, confronting, seducing, or protecting.

Independent Activity

A difficult physical task with meaningful stakes performed during Meisner exercises. The activity generates concentration and behavioral truth.

Emotional Preparation

Preparation before entering a scene in which the actor imagines circumstances capable of affecting a specific emotional condition. Once interaction begins, attention returns outward toward the partner.

Behavioral Truth

Truthful response generated through live interaction, objective, circumstance, and concentration rather than emotional demonstration.

Self-Conscious Performance

Acting shaped primarily by self-monitoring, emotional presentation, or concern with appearance rather than truthful responsiveness.

Contact

The actor's live behavioral connection with another person in the scene. In Meisner training, truthful acting depends upon genuine contact rather than intellectual planning.

Impulsive Response

Behavior that emerges organically through interaction before the actor consciously plans it. Meisner training encourages actors to trust truthful impulse.

The Reality of Doing

Meisner's emphasis on concrete physical and behavioral action as the foundation of truthful psychological life onstage.

Subtext

The emotional, psychological, or relational meaning operating beneath spoken dialogue. Meisner actors learn to track subtext behaviorally rather than indicate it artificially.

Behavioral Responsiveness

The actor's ability to allow another person's behavior to alter timing, rhythm, objective, concentration, and emotional condition in real time.

Prepared as a companion resource to *The Meisner Technique and the Art of Paying Attention* by Jill Szoo Wilson.

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