Clemson University
Actor
Handbook
Introduction

This is a handbook for Clemson University Performing Arts majors, minors and departmental participants (i.e. students from a different major who are taking advantage of acting opportunities within the department).

We are a training facility. We are not a summer camp. We are not simply a hobby. We are home to students who consider acting a career that is just as serious and important as medicine, law and physics. If you are a major and you don’t feel that acting is this important, I encourage you to reevaluate why you are here. If you are not a major, know that we still expect you to approach your acting work with the respect and seriousness that we demand of our majors. If you are studying to be an actor, curious about acting, just having fun outside of your major ... whatever the reason you are here working as an actor ... remember that.

Yes, our craft and profession is fun. Yes, it is thrilling to show your work to an audience. But the main reason you are here is to learn more about acting, respect the craft and be a servant to whatever script you are presenting.

We have an amazing job. Along with other castmates, our director, design team and the entire crew, we have the exceptional and exhilarating responsibility of telling great stories. We get to explore what it means to be human and share that with our audience. We are lucky, lucky artists and our responsibility as storytellers should be respected and honored at all times.

The following guidelines will help you navigate your work as an actor here at Clemson University. Not only will these guidelines serve you during your time at Clemson, but after you leave campus and begin auditioning professionally. Your professional career has already begun even though you are still in school. You are meeting your future references, your future collaborators.

One of the true tricks of this business is being someone that people want to work with more than once. Be that person.
**Situations and expectations**

1. **Auditions**
   a. Know the play you are auditioning for. Read it. Be familiar with it.
   b. Know what is expected of you at the audition. If you need to present a contemporary comic monologue, you’d better have one. If you are singing, make sure you have the proper sheet music or audio accompaniment (make sure you know if one is preferred over the other, as well!).
   c. Memorize it. Prepare it. If you know there will be sides, see if you can get them early (or at least arrive at auditions early) and familiarize yourself with them.
   d. Bring your planner! You will be asked if you have conflicts with the rehearsal and production calendar. Be up front and honest with your conflicts. (Note to majors … you really shouldn’t have any conflicts. This is your priority. Actors have to miss weddings, vacations, baby showers and the like. This is part of your life now. Accept it. Better yet, embrace it.)
   e. Don’t ever audition for a show where you aren’t willing to take any role if offered. This takes away from your credibility and suggests that you are only in this profession for yourself, not to honor stories.
   f. If you are unwilling to change your appearance or if you are uncomfortable with the show’s material (i.e. if one of the characters disrobes, shares a romantic/explicit scene, uses adult language, smokes, etc.), make this clear in the audition process.
   g. When in the audition – be it a monologue, song or cold reading – make the moments happen. Use verbs. Connect with your partner (physical or your “imaginary other” within the context of your monologue). As the great Stella Adler said, “Your talent lies in your choices.” If you aren’t making choices, we have no idea of your talent.

2. **Casting**
   a. Use good sense and common courtesy when casting occurs.
      i. If you are cast … don’t gloat. It’s ugly. And word gets around fast in this building and in this business. Be humble (you are lucky, after all … how many people get to do what we do?). Be proud of yourself. Be grateful. Then get to work.
      ii. If you weren’t cast. Don’t trash the director, the people who were cast, the play or yourself. Again, it’s ugly and word gets around. If you are nasty when you aren’t cast, directors hear and this makes them even less likely to cast you in the future. This business is more about resilience than anything. Every audition is a learning experience.
3. In rehearsal
   a. Rehearsal is a safe place to try out all of your ideas. It is a room for
      creativity, vulnerability and bravery. If you ignore the following
      guidelines, you immediately take away from the trust in the rehearsal
      room.
         i. It is your responsibility to be at every rehearsal for which you
            are called/on the schedule.
         ii. It is completely unacceptable to ask for a night off after
             rehearsals begin. If you have a conflict, it should have been
             noted in the audition process.
         iii. You should be on time to rehearsal and ready to begin working
              at the scheduled rehearsal time. (i.e If rehearsal begins at 6
              p.m., you should be ready to begin working at 6 p.m. For a 6
              p.m. rehearsal, it is advisable to arrive at 5:30. This gives you
              time to warm up, put on rehearsal clothing when necessary
              and get in the right mindset for the work.)
         iv. When given direction ... try it wholeheartedly. The director is
             there to guide you, trust them and take their direction.
         v. If you are ever asked to do something that you feel is unsafe or
            makes you uncomfortable, it is 100% within your rights to
            express your concern with your director immediately. In such
            situations, operate with politeness and respect, but make your
            concerns known immediately.
         vi. You are part of an ensemble when you are rehearsing (that
             ensemble includes your director, cast and entire crew). Treat
             everyone respectfully.
   b. Your work with designers
      1. It is not your place to design the show. That is the job of
         the designers. If you see something you like, feel free to
         compliment a designer. If you see something you don’t
         like, keep your mouth shut. The designers have a
         process just like that of an actor. Imagine if you were
         one week into rehearsal and someone approached you
         about all the things that are missing from your
         performance. If you comment on a designers work and
         make suggestions when the work is still in process it is
         tremendously rude.
      2. As an actor, you seldom have any say in the design
         process. If you are given a costume, wear it and make it
         work. If you are working on a set, use it and make it
         work. If you are unsure of how the lights or sound are
         working, trust your designers and director and make it
         work.
      3. It is within your rights to say something if a design
         aspect is in any way putting you in a
dangerous/uncomfortable situation. (i.e. the lights are
such that you can’t see to get onstage or something scenically presents a safety hazard or if you feel that your costume may result in a “wardrobe malfunction.”

a. Do not discuss this directly with the designer.
b. Report this issue to your stage manager and/or your director and they will deal with the situation.

viii. At the end of every rehearsal, it is your responsibility to make sure that your costume and props are put away neatly and in the appropriate place.

ix. Keep the drama onstage where it belongs. Gossiping, creating cliques and any other disrespectful behavior only makes you look bad. Don’t become someone with whom no one wants to work.

1. If you have an interpersonal issue with someone in the cast or crew, either speak with them directly or go to your director.

4. In performance

a. Be on time for your call.
b. Check your props and costumes before the stage manager opens the house. Stage management will set everything before the show … it is your duty to check it. If your prop isn’t where it needs to be, it is no one’s fault but your own if you didn’t check your props.
c. Perform your role as you did it in rehearsal. Yes, your work will grow through the process of performing … but it should always stay true to the vision of the role as discovered in the rehearsal process.
d. The audience typically only gets to see a show once, it is your job to approach every performance with energy, focus, clarity and passion.
e. This is not a time or place for practical jokes or intentionally trying to trip up your fellow actors.
f. Some audiences will respond how you want them to. Other audiences will not. Don’t change your work for the audience. Stand behind what was built in rehearsal. Don’t milk the laughs you are getting on a particular. Don’t force the laughs that aren’t happening that night.
g. If, during the run, something breaks, rips or becomes unsafe it is your job to report it. This includes damage to a costume, set or prop.
h. Never (I repeat, NEVER) go into the lobby to greet audience members while you are still in costume. If you have people you want to see after the show, quickly change out of your costume and into your street clothes before socializing.
i. At the end of every performance, it is your responsibility to make sure that your costume and props are put away neatly and in the appropriate place.
5. In the audience
   a. Face it. We all know when each other is in the audience. When you are an actor within this department (as a major/minor or extracurricularly) it is your job while you are in the theatre to support the work.
   b. You are going to have opinions about the play, the production and the performances. That is good. Make sure that when you express these opinions that you do so with grace, not bile. When you dislike an aspect of the show, think about why. When you think about what works and what may not have worked – allow it to guide you as an artist (i.e. “That actor was so vulnerable in that moment. What do I have to do to get there?” or “The vulnerability in that moment was missing for me … what could they have done differently?”)
   c. When dealing with the cast after the show, show support. If you loved it … say it. If you didn’t love it, you can still be supportive. Don’t express a negative opinion to a cast member unless you are asked. And if you are asked, express yourself in a way that you are willing to stand behind if your opinion finds its way to the ears of others.
The following is a story from the L.A. Times that you should read and adhere to along with the above guidelines. Let this story along with the above guidelines steer your work as an actor at Clemson University and in your professional career as an artist.

A 1945 Code of Ethics for Theatre Workers Surfaces

by Janet Thielke | August 11, 2009

While appearing on Broadway in her Tony-nominated role of Jeanette in *The Full Monty* in August, 2001, Equity member Kathleen Freeman died of lung cancer. Equity Councillor Jane A. Johnston, a longtime friend and executrix for Ms. Freeman’s estate, later discovered among Ms. Freeman’s papers a document containing A Code of Ethics for Theatre Workers. Ms. Freeman was a daughter of a small time vaudevillian team. Her childhood experience of touring with her parents inspired this Code of Ethics, Ms. Johnston writes. She also notes: “What is particularly interesting about this list of dos and don’ts for the theatre is that it was written in 1945 when Kathleen was establishing one of the first small theatres in Los Angeles and she was 24 years old. I wish I had been told some of ‘the rules’ when I was a young actress instead of having to pick them up as I went along.”

The theatre was the Circle Players (with Charlie Chaplin among its backers), which later evolved into the Players’ Ring. Although there is no record that either company used an Equity contract (they certainly pre-dated the 99-Seat Code in Los Angeles), Ms. Johnston confirms that all the participants were professionals.

Foreword to the Code

“A part of the great tradition of the theatre is the code of ethics which belongs to every worker in the theatre. This code is not a superstition, nor a dogma, nor a ritual that is enforced by tribunals; it is an attitude toward your vocation, your fellow workers, your audiences and yourself. It is a kind of self-discipline which does not rob you of your invaluable individualism.

“Those of you who have been in show business know the full connotation of these precepts. Those of you who are new to show business will soon learn. The Circle Players, since its founding in 1945, has always striven to stand for the finest in theatre, and it will continue to do so. Therefore, it is with the sincere purpose of continued dedication to the great traditions of the theatre that these items are here presented.”

The “rules” follow:

1. I shall never miss a performance.
2. I shall play every performance with energy, enthusiasm and to the best of my ability regardless of size of audience, personal illness, bad weather, accident, or even death in my family.
3. I shall forego all social activities which interfere with rehearsals or any other scheduled work at the theatre, and I shall always be on time.
4. I shall never make a curtain late by my failure to be ready on time.
5. I shall never miss an entrance.
6. I shall never leave the theatre building or the stage area until I have completed my performance, unless I am specifically excused by the stage manager; curtain calls are a part of the show.
7. I shall not let the comments of friends, relatives or critics change any phase of my work without proper consultation; I shall not change lines, business, lights, properties, settings or costumes or any phase of the production without consultation with and permission of my director or producer or their agents, and I shall inform all people concerned.
8. I shall forego the gratification of my ego for the demands of the play.
9. I shall remember my business is to create illusion; therefore, I shall not break the illusion by appearing in costume and makeup off-stage or outside the theatre.
10. I shall accept my director’s and producer’s advice and counsel in the spirit in which it is given, for they can see the production as a whole and my work from the front.
11. I shall never “put on an act” while viewing other artists’ work as a member of an audience, nor shall I make caustic criticism from jealousy or for the sake of being smart.
12. I shall respect the play and the playwright and, remembering that “a work of art is not a work of art until it is finished,” I shall not condemn a play while it is in rehearsal.
13. I shall not spread rumor or gossip which is malicious and tends to reflect discredit on my show, the theatre, or any personnel connected with them—either to people inside or outside the group.
14. Since I respect the theatre in which I work, I shall do my best to keep it looking clean, orderly and attractive regardless of whether I am specifically assigned to such work or not.
15. I shall handle stage properties and costumes with care for I know they are part of the tools of my trade and are a vital part of the physical production.
16. I shall follow rules of courtesy, deportment and common decency applicable in all walks of life (and especially in a business in close contact with the public) when I am in the theatre, and I shall observe the rules and regulations of any specific theatre where I work.
17. I shall never lose my enthusiasm for theatre because of disappointments.

In addition, the document continued:

“I understand that membership in the Circle Theatre entitles me to the privilege of working, when I am so assigned, in any of the phases of a production, including: props, lights, sound, construction, house management, box office, publicity and stage managing—as well as acting. I realize it is possible I may not be cast in a part for many months, but I will not allow this to dampen my enthusiasm or desire to work, since I realize without my willingness to do all other phases of theatre work, there would be no theatre for me to act in.”

All members of the Circle Theatre were required to sign this document. And they must have—because the theatre, and the group into which it evolved, was successful for many years.