

## CREATE ENSEMBLE

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Promote the ensemble approach in your cast!

### What Is An Ensemble Actor?

**Look and Listen:** An ensemble actor is always paying attention on stage and off with their eyes and ears.

**Support:** An ensemble actor, since they are looking and listening, is ready to support their fellow actor. If something is missing they're on it. If someone drops a line, they don't just stare into space, they help.

**Community:** It's not about me or I, it's about us and we. We belong to a community. Make a community of your company. Make it about the production, the whole play. Work together to make the play, not the I or the me, the best it can be.

### Ensemble Exercises

From informal improv to Viola Spolin, there are many exercises to create ensemble. Find what works for your cast to create the above three principals of *Looking/Listening*, *Support*, and *Community*. Here are a few examples:

#### Warm Up

Use warm ups that require spacial awareness – actors moving in space, changing direction. They need to focus on where they are going and focus on not bumping into one another. This will be helpful when they have to move with purpose in a play. **Some suggestions** are to have them walk around the room in different environments, at different speeds and levels, leading with different body parts. **Tip!** Encourage students to walk in a grid pattern. Move in straight lines, with sharp 90 degree turns when they want to change direction. This will circumvent the “circle of doom” where everyone wanders in the same direction.

#### Perfect Circle

Actors work together to form a perfect circle. Let them do whatever it takes to get the shape. Once they've accomplished that, they must break apart by running to the edges of the room. They then try to re-form the circle, this time without speaking. How do they communicate without words? Next, try different shapes – square, star, lines of descending height.

#### Group Mirror

This is an extension of the pairs mirror exercise very common in drama classes. Start by doing mirror in pairs. A is the leader of the action, B is the follower – the mirror image. Then, have each pair join another forming a group of four standing in a circle. One by one, each person in the group is the Leader and the others follow. Try silently changing leaders, letting the flow of action dictate when one leader hands off to another. Next change the shape: make the shape a diamond, so that the leader stands at

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one point, (A in the below diagram) facing away and the others stand behind like this:



Now the leader has to make larger gestures above and out to the side so that the followers can see. Anything done in front of the chest won't read. When the leader is ready to hand off, they make a quarter turn to the left, as do the others in the group. Looking at the above diagram, now B is the leader.

When B is ready to hand off they make a quarter turn and now D is the leader. Again, try to make these changes without words.

Once everyone becomes proficient in the four person mirror, make groups of eight. NOW there are is more than one leader at the front and everyone has to watch and work together to make the mirror flow. Can you do groups of 12? The whole cast?

### ***Object Pick Up***

The group is in a circle. Tell the group that there is an object in the middle of the circle that they all have to work together to pick up, raise to shoulder height and then return to the floor. The aim of the exercise is to maintain the shape, weight, and size of the object (refrigerator, cabinet, boulder, giant manhole cover) no matter what. Once the group gets the rhythm of picking up the object change the weight. Change the size (go from a full size and weight refrigerator to a toy one). Then see if the group can pick up the object without verbal communication. Can they do it without words?

### ***Horse Race***

Or any race that requires an audience to follow a start point, all the way through to a finish line. Each group starts by forming a tableau of characters watching a race. Encourage everyone to come up with specific characters and relationships between characters. We should know as well what stake each person has in the race: down on their luck gambler, bored girlfriend, horse owner and so on. The aim of the exercise is to show the characters and the race from start to finish without sound. That means every participant has to focus on the start point, and "watch" the race as if it were actually happening. How do the actors work together to time that race so the audience believes they are all watching the same thing? Each character must have a reaction to the finish. Who wins? Who loses? What's their response?

### ***One Word Story***

This improv game takes a lot of listening skills and requires everyone to work together to get the story from beginning to end. The group is given a title (e.g. THE CHEAT, HOW THE FLAMINGO BECAME PINK, FINAL COUNTDOWN, ROBOT PROM DATE, ODD SOCK CONSPIRACY) and then the group as a whole has to come up with the story that goes with the title one word at a time.

### ***Unison Speaking***

If you want your cast to really get in the groove of an ensemble, practice unison speaking! It takes a lot of effort, and a great sense of community to have all actors breathing, speaking and listening at the same time. Use the poems in Lewis Carroll's THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS as practice pieces.