

Improv Jam Plan - Session 2

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Base Reality Refresh + Commitment

Date Created: November 20, 2025

Duration: 120 minutes (2 hours main work)

Chapters: 1-2

Group Size: 6-10 people

Focus: Strengthen base reality foundations, then explore commitment

Session Overview

This session focuses on thoroughly refreshing the fundamentals of base reality (Who/What/Where, object work, talking about something else) before moving into commitment work from Chapter 2. Based on feedback from Session 1, we'll emphasize structured, supportive feedback throughout.

Key Learning Goals:

- Reinforce platform building (Who/What/Where)
- Practice detailed object work and space awareness
- Understand and apply commitment to realistic behavior
- Build confidence through supportive, structured feedback

Feedback Principles for the Entire Session

Apply these guidelines during all exercise debriefs:

1. **One person gives feedback at a time** - No simultaneous feedback or group pile-ons
2. **Adapt to sensitivity** - Some players prefer soft, supportive feedback; others want direct technical notes. Ask or observe what works for each person
3. **Focus on observable behavior** - Describe what you saw, not personality judgments
4. **Frame as "what to try next"** - Even critical feedback should point toward actionable improvements
5. **Celebrate what worked** - Always acknowledge strong choices before suggesting alternatives

Block 1: Platform Building (35-40 minutes)

Concept: Who/What/Where + Base Reality

What is it:

The foundation of every scene. Establish three essential elements immediately:

- **Who** are the characters (relationship, not names)
- **What** are they doing (specific activity)
- **Where** are they (specific location)

Why it matters:

Without a clear platform, scenes drift into abstract talking heads. A strong platform gives players something concrete to work with and makes the scene feel real.

How to apply:

- Make strong initiations that include at least 2 of the 3 elements
- Confirm and build on your partner's platform choices
- Use the first 3 lines to establish all three elements clearly

Exercise: THREE LINE SCENES

Purpose:

Practice establishing Who/What/Where quickly and clearly in just three lines of dialogue.

Instructions:

1. Setup: Two players at a time. Everyone else watches and gives feedback.

2. Format: Each pair will do a scene that is EXACTLY three lines long:

- Player A: First line (should establish at least 1-2 platform elements)
- Player B: Second line (confirms and adds information)
- Player A: Third line (completes the platform)

3. After three lines: Scene ends. Group discusses:

- Do we know Who/What/Where?
- What was clear? What was missing?
- Were the choices specific and realistic?

4. Repeat: Each pair does 2-3 quick three-line scenes to practice different initiations.

5. Group size adaptation: With 6-10 people, pair up and rotate quickly. Each person should do at least 2-3 scenes.

Time: ~15 minutes

Feedback reminder: One person at a time. Focus on what was clear vs. unclear, not whether it was "good" or "bad."

Block 2: Object Work & Space (55-60 minutes)

Concept: Character of the Space + Show Don't Tell

What is it:

The physical environment shapes behavior. Different spaces have different rules, atmospheres, and expectations that affect how characters move and interact.

Why it matters:

When players honor the character of the space, scenes feel grounded and real. The environment becomes a third player in the scene.

How to apply:

- Let the location dictate your behavior (library = quiet, gym = energetic)
- Show the space through your physical choices, not by talking about it
- Use object work to make the environment tangible

Concept: Talk About Something Else

What is it:

In real life, people rarely discuss their relationships or emotions directly. They talk about mundane things while the real relationship plays out underneath.

Why it matters:

Talking directly about feelings or the relationship kills scenes. Talking about something else (the task at hand, the weather, what's for dinner) keeps scenes grounded and lets emotion emerge naturally.

How to apply:

- Focus on the activity you're doing

- Let relationship and emotion show through HOW you do the activity, not through discussion
- Resist the urge to talk about your feelings

Exercise: CHARACTER OF THE SPACE

Purpose:

Practice letting the environment dictate your behavior and physicality.

Instructions:

1. Setup: Whole group together in the space.

2. Round 1 - Silent exploration:

- Facilitator calls out a location (e.g., "Library")
- Everyone moves through the space as if they're in that location
- No talking - just physical behavior
- Notice how your body changes, your pace, your energy

3. Locations to try:

- Library
- Gym
- Church
- Nightclub
- Hospital waiting room
- Fancy restaurant

4. Round 2 - With activity:

- Same location, but now everyone has a specific task
- Example: In a library, you're looking for a specific book
- Still mostly silent, but can whisper if needed

5. Debrief: How did each space feel different? What changed in your body?

Time: ~15 minutes

Exercise: SILENT OBJECT WORK (from CHARACTER OF THE SPACE)

Purpose:

Practice establishing and confirming object work nonverbally. This builds the foundation for detailed, realistic object work.

Instructions:

One improviser will, in silence, make a choice that establishes one of the following aspects of the character of the space: activity (playing pool, fishing, stretching, folding laundry, etc.), location (automobile, prison cell, supermarket, etc.), or environmental condition (zero gravity, hot/cold, bright lights, etc.).

A second improviser will join the scene and nonverbally agree with the choice that has been made.

Examples from the book:

- **Activity:** Player 1 steps out into the scene and begins folding laundry. Player 2 joins in by putting dirty laundry into a washing machine.
- **Location:** Player 1 steps out and mimes holding onto prison cell bars. Player 2 stands next to them and holds out a mirror to see down the row of cells.
- **Environmental Condition:** Player 1 steps out squinting with hand in front of face. Player 2 simply mirrors this behavior.

Group adaptation (6-10 people):

- Have 3-4 pairs doing this simultaneously
- Each pair does 2-3 quick rounds with different scenarios
- Rotate partners
- Debrief: Was the object work clear? Did the second person successfully confirm/join the reality?

Time: ~10 minutes

Feedback reminder: Focus on whether the object work was detailed and realistic. Did both players commit to the same reality?

Exercise: TALK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE

Purpose:

In real life, you are usually doing one thing and talking about another. For example, if you're folding laundry, you are most likely not talking about folding laundry. This exercise will help you to better mirror this reality of life in your scenes.

Instructions:

Two improvisers take the stage.

One improviser will initiate with some sort of physical activity that can be done continuously throughout the scene (sorting mail, washing dishes, having dinner, playing golf, setting up a camp site, folding laundry, etc.).

The other improviser should immediately join in with this activity.

When either improviser starts speaking, they must talk about something other than what they are doing.

Group adaptation (6-10 people):

- Have 2-3 pairs performing simultaneously
- Each pair gets a different activity
- Scenes run for 1-2 minutes
- Rotate so everyone gets multiple turns
- Debrief after each round: Did they talk about the activity or something else? Was the object work detailed and realistic?

Time: ~20 minutes

Feedback reminder: One person at a time. Celebrate when people successfully talked about something else. Note when they slipped into talking about the activity itself.

Block 3: Commitment (25-30 minutes)

Concept: Commitment

What is it:

In simplest terms, commitment is good acting. A Long Form improviser is expected to invest in the reality of the scene in such a way that the audience doesn't see an improviser, but a believable character on stage. You must commit to the character you are playing and your reality, and never sell it out for a laugh or out of fear of not getting a laugh.

Why it matters:

Commitment allows your audience to suspend disbelief and fully experience a fictional reality. The antithesis of commitment is detachment. Detachment makes the audience aware that you are a comedian performing a scene as opposed to a character within the fictional reality of a scene.

Two forms of detachment to avoid:

- **Unintentional detachment:** Making choices but playing them in a half-hearted way (bad acting)
- **Ironic detachment:** Consciously not committing to get a laugh (commenting)

How to apply:

- Play at the top of your intelligence: respond truthfully to any stimulus within a scene
- Marry your verbal response with an emotional one
- Commit completely to your characters - the more you commit, the more engaging the scene will be

Exercise: GIVE THE SETUP

Purpose:

Give you a chance to focus on playing the reality of the scene in a believable way. If you are able to successfully portray characters and situations that feel real and grounded, the absurd element of the scene will stand out better in contrast.

Instructions:

Part One: Playing Yourselves

Two improvisers take the stage.

Instead of receiving a suggestion, every scene will start with the two improvisers having a conversation as their actual selves. The improvisers in this scene should focus on playing the scene in a grounded, realistic, and truthful way. The scene should have a casual or conversational tone.

A third improviser will stop them if they feel that either improviser is "performing" or not acting realistically in any way. This third improviser should be asking themselves, "Is this really what either of these people would say?"

Once the "unreal" moment has been discussed, the improvisers should back up and play the moment again in a way that is more realistic.

Part Two: Simple Relatable Scenarios

Now each pair of improvisers will be given a simple, specific, and relatable scenario or "set-up" to start with (e.g. two parents watching their kids in a little league game, a second date at a familiar chain restaurant, etc.).

Again, the improvisers should play close to themselves in these scenes. Their focus should once again be on playing themselves in a grounded, realistic, and truthful way.

A third improviser should look to stop the scene any time either performer in the scene is not acting realistically.

Part Three: Character Archetypes (Possible in Real Life)

Now each pair should be given the suggestion of two character archetypes that will be different from their actual selves, but within the realm of possibility in real life (e.g. two astronauts, the Pope and a Cardinal, the President and the First Lady, etc.).

The goal of both players in these scenes is to play these character archetypes in the same grounded, realistic, and truthful manner that they played themselves in Part One.

Part Four: Character Archetypes (Requiring Voice/Physicality Changes)

For the final section of this exercise, each pair should be given the suggestion of two character archetypes that are so fundamentally different from their actual selves that they could not "be" them in real life. These character archetypes should require the improvisers to alter their voices and physicality (e.g. two elderly people, two Russian immigrants, etc.).

Again, the goal of both players in these scenes is to play these characters in the same, grounded, realistic, and truthful manner that they played themselves in Part One.

Additional Tips:

- Start your scenes "in the middle" - initiate with a specific statement
- Remember "TALK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE" - don't just talk about what you're doing
- The third improviser watching should stop scenes when they become unrealistic

Time: ~25 minutes (about 5-6 minutes per step)

Feedback reminder: This is vulnerable work. Be especially supportive. Celebrate commitment even when it's not perfect. One person at a time with feedback.

Closing Notes (5 minutes)

Quick reflection:

- What felt easier this time compared to last session?
- What still feels challenging?
- Any questions or observations?

Looking ahead:

Next session we'll continue building on commitment and start exploring more complex relationship dynamics.

Reminder:

The goal is not perfection - it's practice. Every scene is a learning opportunity. Be kind to yourself and each other.

Facilitator Reference Notes

Timing flexibility:

- These are rough estimates - adjust based on group energy
- If an exercise is really clicking, give it more time
- If something isn't working, move on rather than forcing it

Common issues from Session 1:

- Feedback pile-ons made people feel attacked → Use structured one-at-a-time feedback
- Some exercises worked great (fold laundry, three-line scenes) → Repeat these
- Need more base reality work before advancing → Hence the heavy Block 1 and 2 focus

Energy management:

- Block 1 is high energy (quick rotations)
- Block 2 is medium energy (detailed work)
- Block 3 is vulnerable (commitment work) - keep supportive

What to watch for:

- Are platforms getting clearer?
- Is object work becoming more detailed?
- Are people talking about the task or about feelings?
- Is commitment full-body or just facial?