



## Actor's Workout Guide©

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### Using Michael Chekhov Techniques

*By Lisa Dalton*

No Certified Chekhov Teacher to lead you? Create your own Chekhov workout ensemble. The following is a set of guidelines and suggested syllabus for a complete workshop in Michael Chekhov Techniques. Get a copy of the Lisa Dalton's Rock & Roll Workout DVD from the NMCA Store ([chekhov.net/products.html](http://chekhov.net/products.html)) and use this to remind yourself of the use of the basic Michael Chekhov tools. You can even use this DVD as the leader of your exercises.

#### **Basic Guidelines:**

##### A. Objectives:

1. Increase / strengthen the psycho-physical (mind-body) connection.
2. Deepen understanding of technique and self by strengthening the higher ego.
3. Develop a true sense of ensemble with Ease, form, beauty, and wholeness.
4. Prepare ourselves to share our ideals, our gifts, with the world.

##### B. The Form (e.g. Ball Toss, Stacato / Legato)

###### 1. The Beginning (Preparation)

###### Objective:

- a. To bring the ensemble to one focus, clear the outside world.
- b. To exercised concentration, activate radiation and receiving.
- c. To warm up the physical form while utilizing images of energy; to provoke imagination.
- d. To frame the workout, to activate the energies needed for the "middle" leading to the "end" of the workout.

###### 2. The Middle (Action) (Pick a tool; use the DVD)

###### Objective:

- a. To explore deeply a particular aspect of the technique
  - 1) The individual works to grasp the concept
  - 2) Then to execute the "tool" in its fullest physical expression, to experience the concept in all three realms of mind: thinking/feeling/willing.
  - 3) Then to veil the physical expression while strengthening the harmony formed by the image and the body.
  - 4) To bring this level of skill to interaction with partners, to develop "partnering" skills.
- b. To apply the above to: (Host's Choice or Ensemble's Theme)
  - 1) Improvisation
  - 2) Monologues
  - 3) Cold Readings
  - 4) Scenes

###### 3. The End (Sustain)

###### Objective:

- a. To Fly *Back* over the work:
  - 1) What did I like overall?
  - 2) What would I do differently?

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- 3) What was my favorite moment?
- 4) What questions remain?
- 5) How can I continue to deepen what I've learned?
- b. To frame the workout by providing closure
  - 1) Express appreciation for the work you have shared.
  - 2) Establish intent for the future highest good.
- c. To set future goals / time / place for upcoming events.

### C. The Rules Of Play ( The Form)

1. All activities must embody the 4 brothers of Art:
  - a. Ease,
  - b. Form,
  - c. Beauty, and
  - d. Wholeness.
2. Establish a Team Captain(s), designate duration of reign.
  - a. Captain for a day, month, part of day, or aspect of each workout. "The warm up, the spy back".
  - b. Captain guides the ensemble through the exercises, with ease and form, taking care for safety and wholeness. Clarifies what actors are working for (the task or the grounds)
  - c. Captain guides any spy back. Fellow classmates may spy back only after actor has completed his/her own spy back and only if that actor requests spy backs from others, Spy back must only address the task prior to exercise.
  - d. Any comments from one actor to another about that actor's work should be given
    - 1) Only on requests
    - 2) Only during designated "spy back time"
    - 3) Only in the form of *What I Liked most about your work was... and I would suggest next time that you try...*
    - 4) All comments must spring from a wish for that actor's highest good.
    - 5) Refrain from side discussions occurring outside of the established form
    - 6) Avoid disagreeing with another observation. Simply state your suggestion. It will be obvious that it is unique from another's and the individual has the task of discerning how to integrate the observations.
    - 7) Captain must limit discussion if debate occurs.
    - 8) One conversation at a time with no cross talk. This violates the form of wholeness and divides the ensemble.
    - 9) Make sure the task for the exercise. Say, "What were you working for?" are clear before the spy back begins. Actor's spy back is about how well they executed they're established task.
3. Integrate the feeling of beauty into every moment.
  - a. No matter how differently an exercise is being led, avoid criticizing inwardly. Accept each leader's images as a beautiful opportunity to look at the tool in a new way and unlike the other way.
  - b. Have the courage to lead the ensemble with a feeling of ease, trust your knowledge.
  - c. Work towards relying strictly on your "higher ego" for your spy back.
  - d. Avoid lower ego behavior which includes:
    - 1) sexual innuendo
    - 2) Clique like small group inside jokes
    - 3) Defending your superior knowledge
    - 4) Profanity
    - 5) Gossip
    - 6) Overt Self Criticism
    - 7) Competition

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e. Cultivate Higher Ego activities such as:

- 1) Welcoming new comers, encouraging, assuring and supporting them, enable them to make friends with the group, the space, the purpose, and the guidelines.
- 2) Sharing insights which you discover because of another's interpretation appreciate and express it.
- 3) Include any special needs for health and safety.
- 4) Create networking support.
- 5) Gather to read plays together.
- 6) Rehearse scenes.
- 7) Develop a script.
- 8) Put on a show!
- 9) Have Fun – humor (not at another's expense) is part of the higher ego ... if it isn't fun it isn't Chekhov!
- 10) Be prompt, ready to work, dressed appropriately, bring beverages and snacks, respect property – recycle.
- 11) Donate \$1 towards utilities. Give to the host.

f. Safety – physical and emotional – is a priority. Each person must assume liability for themselves. You must assume legal liability and responsibility for your health and safety.



## Actors Workout Commitment

Host Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Actor Name	Signature	Date
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## Workout Tools Glossary

### **Ball Toss**

With own name, with receivers name and other variations, moving in circle/ reverse, throw and go, repeat the pattern with multiple balls, word association.

### **Ex/Con**

Find neutral IAC, fill the form with light and expand out, move into large abstract movement, add dialogue, begin contraction into the smallest amount of possible space, stand with contraction, try abstract movement with dialogue, gradually veil the outer physical expression while heightening inner ex/con, practice different speeds of ex/con.

### **Archetypal Gestures**

Push, pull, lift, smash, tear, throw, gather, drag, penetrate, do largest physical movement with clear Beginning, middle and end with PASS, do half gesture with full inner, do mini, do fully veiled, add dialogue, work with partner.

### **Staccato / Legato**

Center energy, radiate with quick staccato thrust to right, left, up, down, back, and forward, three times with increasing precision and tempo. Then move immediately through the space with this quality - improvise dialogue.

**Legato** - slowly, smoothly repeat same sequence as above, alternate qualities while improvising. Partner and concentrate on verbal application of staccato / legato. Take a nursery rhyme or monologue and recite it very slow and legato, connected.

Repeat very slow and staccato, choppy.

Repeat very fast and legato, connected.

Repeat very fast and staccato, choppy.

### **Qualities of Movement**

Molding (sculpting) – Earth / Clay

Flowing (Floating) – Water / Wave

Flying – Air / Wind

Radiating – Sun / light / laser

Partner with qualities of movement, select quality for improvisation or use with monologue / nursery rhyme exercise.

### **Four Brothers of Art**

Divide into small groups or individually with one chair per group. Within the group, one person at a time for approximately one minute explores the chair with a Feeling of Ease. Keep the face neutral. Breathe. Use the entire body. Being original is of no interest to us.

Continue with the same process for Feelings of Form and Beauty. Remember that in the feeling of form, the groups can reflect and interact by changing the form surrounding the actor working with the chair.

Take little pauses in feeling of form to experience the actual feeling of each form you create. Keep your quality of ease.

For feeling of the whole, each actor makes one short sequence of movements concentrating on just being clear on where they begin, what is the middle, and where is the end. After the actor has completed their work, the group identifies what the beginning and ending where. Then the actor states where they were. If all are in agreement, the task has been accomplished. If not, it is most likely the actor's thoughts were unclear, uncommitted, or not reflected distinctly in the form. Distinct tempo and rhythm changes will most clearly mark the sequence.



### **IAC-Impulse**

Envision the presence of energy in this special place which is filled with a golden white light. Imagine an impulse shoots from this center to a part of the body and compels in to move. Release the movement when the impulse fades. Explore this for a few minutes. Now, when the impulse moves a part of the body, hold the body where it fades, then allow a new impulse to carry it to another place, creating a second movement following the first. Eventually add more impulses until the body actually walks with all impulses coming from this ideal center. Imagine there are no joints or bones in the body, rather that you have only one connecting point, much like a scissors. You are a body of light, like in “Cocoon”.

### **Movable Centers**

Try various centers, change the qualities, colors, etc., improvise, then go to scenes or monologues.

### **Zip Zap Zop**

Objective: Keep all together

Objective: To win

### **Atmospheres**

Imagine various atmospheres as humans walking through them, select a brief mundane activity like tying your shoe or washing a dish. Repeat it, trying to keep your movements in harmony with the atmosphere. After each activity, spy back inwardly to determine how well your movements harmonized with the atmosphere and how did they differ from previous atmospheres.

Improvise the same atmospheres as molecules of energy using full body and voice. Remember you are physicalizing an abstract idea not a human one. Use every part of your body. Take turns with some people becoming humans who are permeated by the molecules of atmosphere.

Return group to full humanity and re imagine these atmospheres and repeat the sequence of activity, “tying your shoe”. Add a line of dialogue unrelated to the activity or sensation (Hi, how are you).

See if it in greater harmony with the atmosphere now that you can more strongly imagine the gesture which lives invisibly around you.

### **Sensations**

Imagine your hands are filling with a sensation of “...”

Choices-Joy, Violence, caution, pink, black, anxiety, anticipation, hope, weariness, fuzziness, prickliness, fear, etc., end with positive energy.

Move the body in large abstract gestures filled with each sensation. Repeat the above sequence of activity with each new sensation. Add a line of dialogue unrelated to the activity or sensation.

### **Three Sisters**

Play with various ways to fall, balance, and float and experience these sensations related to our equilibrium-gravity-levity and the struggle between them. Then repeat the above activity (tying your shoe) with each one separately.

Then try moving between the three sisters as you execute the activity. Try the lines of unrelated dialogue.

### **Impulse Circle**

Instead of the ball being tossed, an energy impulse is sent around, across, etc. It can be changed each time or you can designate that it must be a precise imitation of what was sent. You can go in a circle, reverse, etc., add sound or extract the sound. Try to get the impulses flying with as little intellect as possible. Use whole form. Use word association.

### **Thinking, Feeling, Willing**

Physically explore the various qualities of each of the three elements which compose the actor’s psychology.

**National  
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Association**



Pair up with a partner and improvise a dinner conversation while eating as a thinking, then feeling, then willing character.

Create three different qualities of thought and exercise them with an activity and dialogue. (Thick, lightning, deliberate)

Create three different qualities of feeling and exercise them with an activity and dialogue. (Expressive, repressed, mercurial)

Create three different qualities of willing and exercise them with an activity and dialogue. (Tortoise, hare, paralyzed, twisted, eager)

**Imaginary Body**

Create and put on three different imaginary bodies. Execute the same activity and dialogue as above. Improvise.

**Ensemble movement with MFFR**

Begin as a group with no leader in a tight circle. Allow a movement in molding to emerge, gradually transition to flowing, flying and radiating until a final moment of silent sculpture is achieved. Be careful not to impose your ideas on others. Remember the sequence and be sure to really float and fly full force as an ensemble. Trust your ending.

**Ensemble Movement with 4 Brothers and chairs**

Begin as an ensemble with one or two chairs working for ease then form, beauty and wholeness as in last exercise. No leader. Find ending moment. Be very careful with safety!

**Ensemble Improv**

Depending on size, break into groups of about 5-6 actors. Captain or team designates a topic and sequence of qualities of movement. Example - Car accident, flying, molding, flowing. Ten actors improvise a scene about the topic starting with the first quality and transition into second, third, etc. Vary this by having different actors in same scene starting with different qualities.

**Palace of Atmospheres – Joy / Awe / Hate / Fear**

The inner sanctum is Joy surrounded by a circle of Awe which is surrounded by Hate. Outer periphery is Fear. No touching is allowed except in Inner Circle by common agreement. If you do not want to be touched in inner circle please state so before exercise begins. NO words are permitted though sound is encouraged. Make full emotional and physical commitment. Everyone must enter all circles. Do not relate to any other actor outside of the Circle of Joy. Think of yourself as non-human in the outer two circles. Avoid directing hate and fear towards living beings. Avoid personal images. Begin and end with ensemble in center. At end, expand circle of Joy / Love to transform Awe, Hate, and Fear into atmosphere of Joy / Love.

Explore Joy/Awe/Hate/Fear as inner sensations then add two gestures – push / pull, etc.  
Try simple dialogue with partner with gesture and sensation.