


Improv for Student Success: Building Communication, Confidence, and Community in the Classroom

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Why Use Improv in the Humanities Classroom?

- Encourages spontaneous thinking and discussion
 - Makes space for risk-taking and creativity in a safe environment
 - Builds empathy, responsiveness, and trust among students
 - Supports student-centered learning and inclusive participation
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Immediate Benefits of Improv



ENHANCES
COMMUNICATION SKILLS



ENCOURAGES
CREATIVITY



BUILDS COLLABORATION
AND TEAMWORK

Long Term Impact of Improv

Teaches students to be more outgoing and gregarious

Encourages positive thinking and idea-building

Reduces the fear of failure

Makes them WANT to come to class

Helps students become better human beings

What Improv Is NOT



SKETCH COMEDY, OR
ONLY A MEANS TO
TELL JOKES.



A SKILL THAT
REQUIRES A THEATRE
DEGREE TO TEACH.



SOMETHING TO BE
AFRAID OF.



BORING!

Improv for Media & Communication



MIMICS REAL-
WORLD MEDIA
PRODUCTION
COLLABORATION



ENHANCES
STORYTELLING
AND NARRATIVE
DEVELOPMENT



STRENGTHENS
VERBAL AND
NON-VERBAL
COMMUNICATION
SKILLS




IMPROV
REFLECTS THE
DYNAMIC,
UNPREDICTABLE
NATURE OF
MEDIA WORK

Today's Activities

I've chosen improv games that can be played individually, or in pairs.



These are games that don't require instructors to moderate, and they allow students to let go and have fun.



These are very broad activities that can fit into many different types of classes.

Building
Spontaneity:
Wrong
Name Game

It's Simply
Pointing and
Naming
things!

Round 1: Name the object you're pointing at

Round 2: Name the previous object you pointed at

Round 3: Name anything but the object

Reduces overthinking and encourages fast, creative responses

ONE RULE: You cannot point at another person.

Takeaways from the Wrong Name Game

Builds spontaneity and reduces fear of mistakes

Encourages non-linear thinking, key in developing innovative ideas

Promotes quick responses and adaptability in communication

Opens up the student's mind and gives them a door into their creative self.

Improving Listening Skills: First Word, Last Word

Played in pairs as a “normal” conversation.

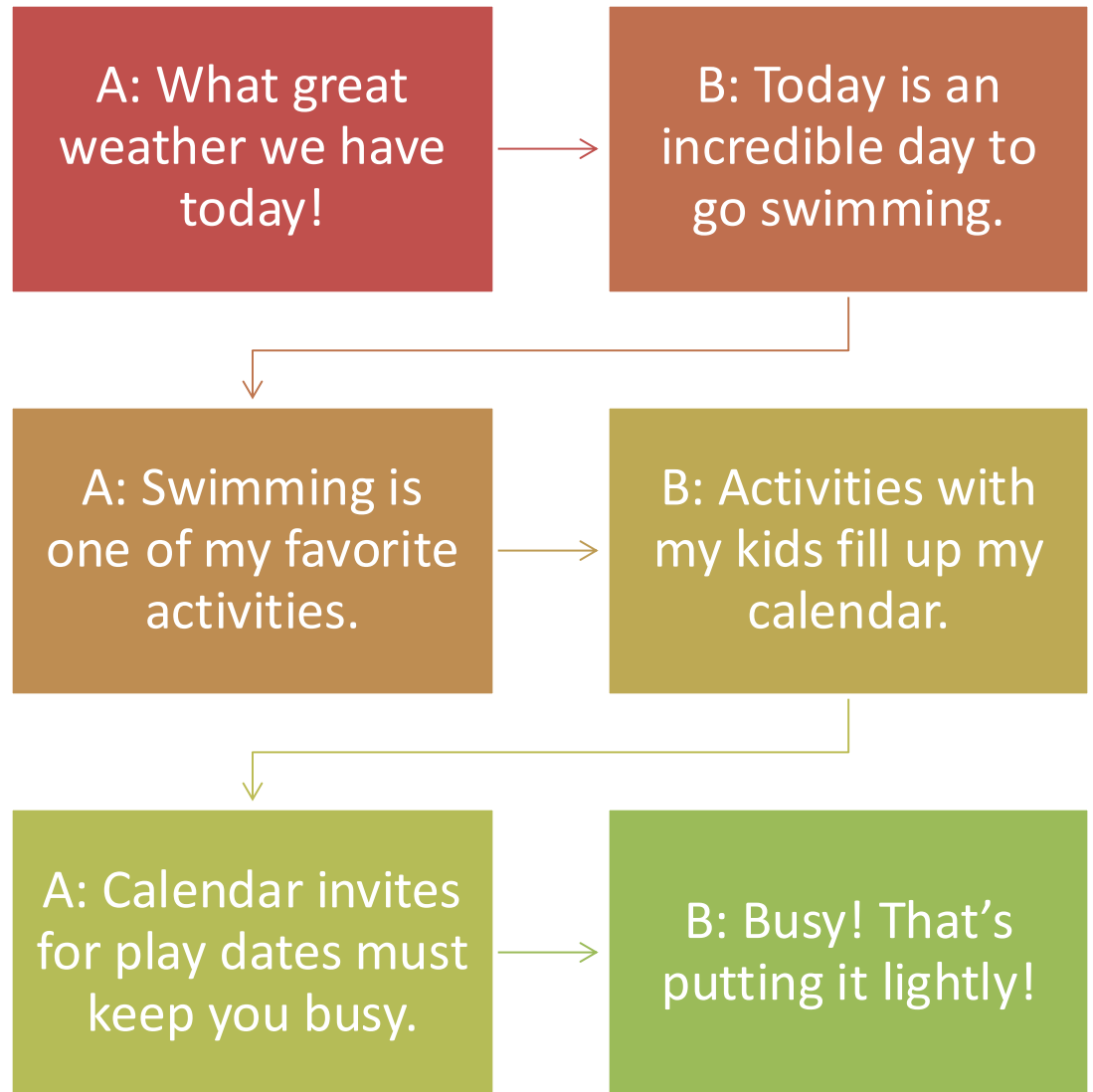
Player A starts a conversation with a sentence.

Player B responds, but the first word of their sentence has to be the last word of Player A's Sentence.

Player A responds back, using the last word of Player B's sentence as their first word.

The game continues as long as you want.

Example



Takeaways from First Word, Last Word Game

Encourages listening to the entire message

Slows down conversations, allowing for depth

Builds connection between listening and responding, crucial for job interviews.

Great exercise for anyone who speaks faster than they can think.

Building Cooperation: The 'Yes, and...' Game



- A classic improv game teaching collaboration, played in pairs.
- Player A makes an initial statement, Then B Responds, and A responds back... Keep on going.
- Every responding sentence starts with "Yes, and..."
- Each statement builds and escalates the scene
- Encourages accepting and expanding upon others' ideas

'Yes, and...' Game - Example

A: "The river is full of fish."

B: "Yes, and one of them is enormous."

A: "Yes, and he's swimming toward us."

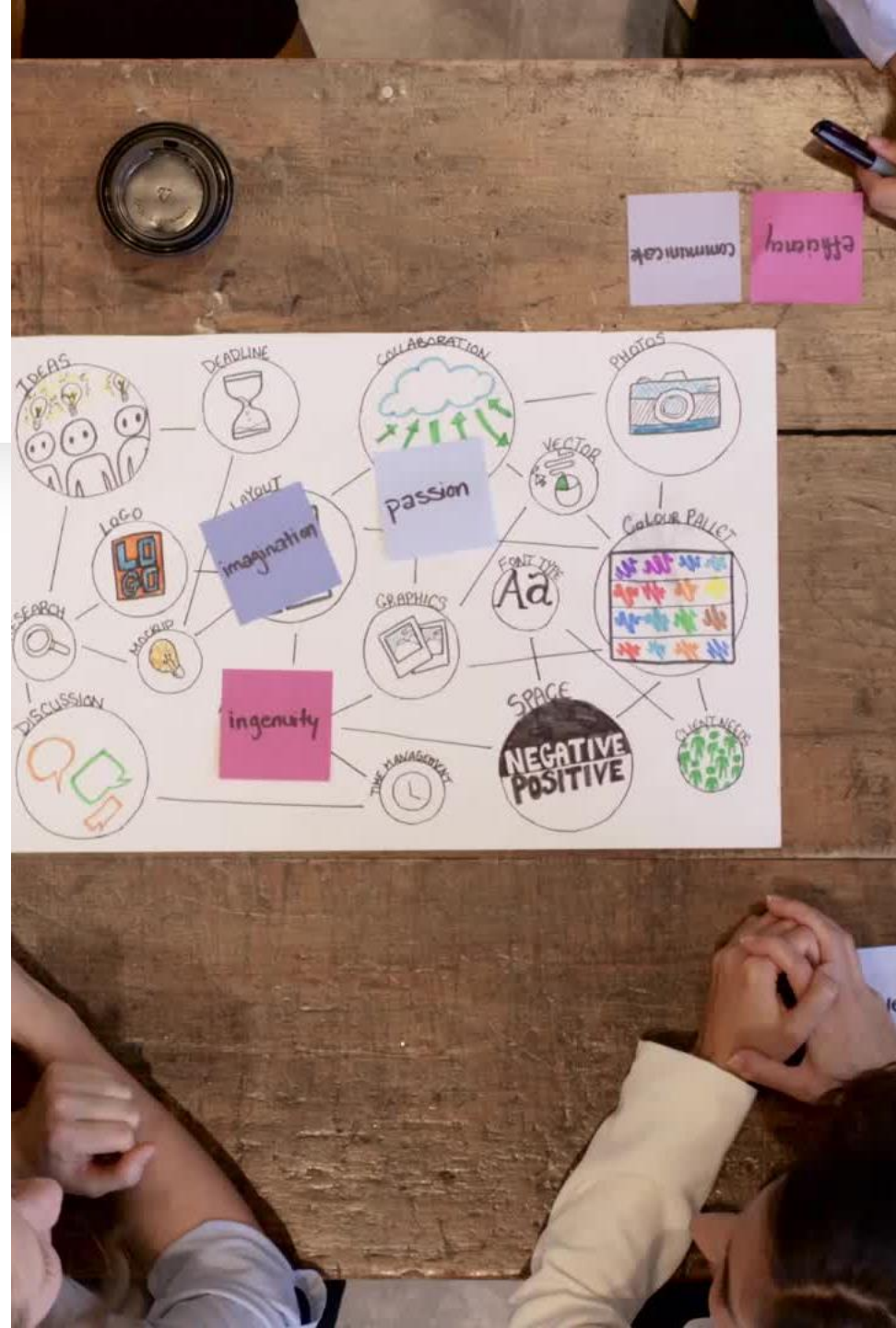
B: "Yes, and he looks hungry."

A: "Yes, and we are trapped in this boat."

B: "Yes, and he looks more like a whale than a fish."

Takeaways from the 'Yes, and...' Game

- Teaches the value of accepting and building on ideas
- Encourages positive, cooperative interactions
- Highlights how accepting ideas fosters creativity
- Builds confidence and teamwork in professional settings



Rock Paper Scissors Thunderdome

Everyone finds a partner for Rock Paper Scissors. The loser becomes the cheering section for the winner and walks around behind them chanting their name and applauding wildly as the winner goes on to challenge another winner. Every time a player wins, she adds the losing player (and their cheering section) to her cheering section.

By the end there should be two surviving players going head to head with massive cheering sections behind each of them. When one of them becomes the ultimate champion, everyone cheers wildly and chants their name.

RPS Thunderdome Takeaways



ISN'T IT SO FUN TO HAVE SO MUCH
SUPPORT FROM YOUR CLASSMATES?
WHEN ELSE IN LIFE DO WE CHEER ON
OUR CLASSMATES LIKE THIS?



EXCELLENT FOR FOSTERING POSITIVITY
IN CLASSROOMS WHERE THERE HAS
BEEN TENSION OR NEGATIVITY.



EVERYONE LOVES THIS GAME.

Collaborative Storytelling: Word at a Time Story

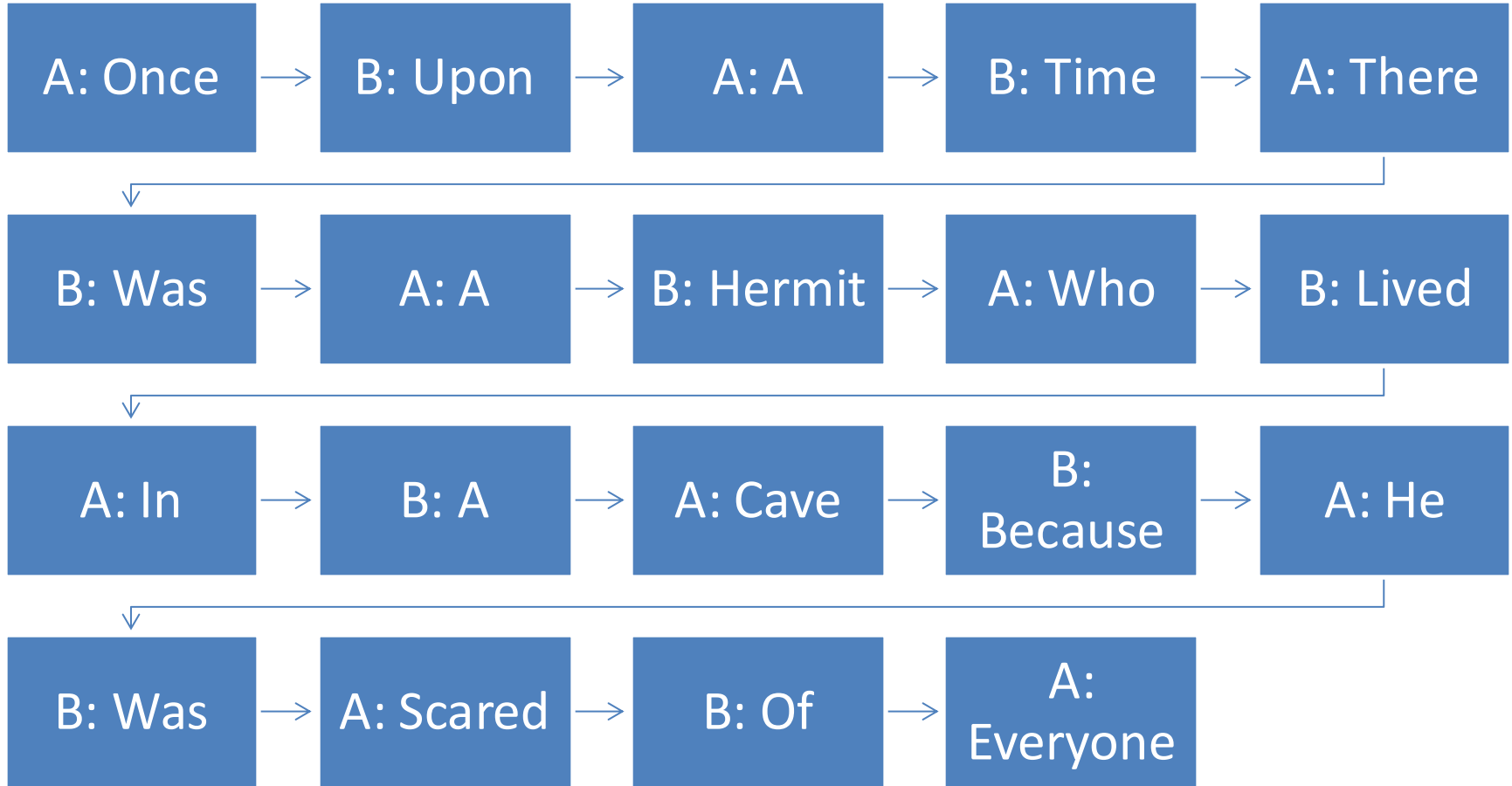
Players create a story one word at a time.
Can be done in pairs or in groups.

One player says the first word, the next says the second word etc.

At first you can start with “Once, Upon, A, Time...” or “One, Day..” and then move on to different starting sentences.

Encourage students to have a character, a location, and something at stake. (Basic elements of storytelling)

Example



Takeaways from Word at a Time Story

- Teaches collaboration and building on others' ideas
- Highlights the balance between structure and spontaneity
- Helps participants let go of control, essential for teamwork
- “Things happen, People Change” – If players get stuck in a loop that goes nowhere (and the dog ate a treat, then the dog took a nap, then the dog went for a walk), it shows that them that Occurrence \neq Action.
- Action=The dog ate a treat, and liked it so much it begged for more. Then the owner realized the dog liked these treats, so he bought more of them



Why Professors Should Use Improv



Enhances student engagement in discussions and classroom life.



Strengthens problem-solving and confidence



Helps students step outside comfort zones, preparing for real-world professional scenarios

Key Takeaways for Professors



Active Listening: Critical for group projects



Spontaneity: Key for creative problem solving



Collaboration: Reflects the teamwork needed in professional environments



Creativity: Encourages out-of-the-box thinking for storytelling and innovation

Final Thoughts on Improv in the Classroom

Improv builds
essential skills for
all students

Fosters better
communication,
creativity, and
collaboration

Encourages
students to engage
more confidently
and openly

Try one improv
activity in your
next class!



Questions & Discussion



Thank You!

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Thank you for your time!