Uta Hagen Exercises  
Acting & Drama  

General Information

• With each exercise, you will define and then re-create two seemingly routine minutes of life when alone at home. These two minutes are spent in the execution of a simple task in pursuit of a normal objective.

• Your exercise is based on a thorough examination of the six essential questions (see handout).

• Remember to define the physical and psychological sensations inherent in the circumstances.

• The exercises will all take place in your re-created room - where you live now. Do not set them in any other environment.

• When rehearsing in the privacy of your own home, you should already be making considerations for your selected actions, avoiding those that cannot be transferred to the classroom.

• Use real objects, endowing them with the physical and psychological properties that will make them your own. Avoid anything that will force you into pantomimed actions. Be sure to use these objects as tools to further your actions, not as "props."

• As in all art, you will need to be highly selective about what you incorporate into your exercise. Choose only what you need to communicate your intention. Learn how to select pertinent behavior, finding meaningful actions.

• The exercises are not intended to be mute. If you discover that you sigh, grunt, or groan, use expletives or otherwise verbalize your wishes, don't hesitate to include such responses in your exercise. However, keep it true to your own behavior under the given circumstances. Do not use language to explain what you are doing.

• Keep it simple by avoiding melodramatic situations.

• You should rehearse the exercise at home for at least one hour. This means doing it, not just thinking about it!

• Time the exercise. They should be two to three minutes in length, no more, no less. If it is too long, reevaluate the need for the actions, sharpen the selections, pare down everything you don't need to fulfill your objectives.

• The most important criteria used in evaluating the exercise will be the question of belief: was the execution believable?
Uta Hagen Exercises
Written Assignment Format
(To be completed for each exercise and turned in prior to the presentation)

Each written exercise consists of three parts:

I. Objective

Very simply, this is what you want in the exercise. Think in terms of needs; the more dynamic and essential the need, the more fuel you'll have to make your story interesting and compelling. There should be two objectives: one that is a long-term, overriding objective, the other should reflect a short term objective that you will attempt to accomplish over the course of the exercise that will help you move closer to achieving the larger objective. This section can -- and should -- be stated in two sentence: "I want to __________. In order to get this, I have to _______________."

II. Obstacles

What is in the way of you getting what you want? There are two segments to this that should be clearly and explicitly identified: internal and external. External refers to all of the things outside of yourself that keep you from achieving your objective. Internal refers to those things inside of you that get in your way. Internal obstacles are usually best thought of in terms of fear, i.e., what you are afraid will happen if you achieve your objective. All obstacles work toward creating tension and conflict, which are essential to an interesting story.

III. The Scenario

This is a beat-by-beat account of the story you are telling. Tell it in the first person, present tense, making it as active as you possibly can. In other words, this story is happening to you and it is happening now. Your scenario should begin prior to the start of the exercise and continue past the end point of your exercise. In writing the scenario, the more detailed you are, the better, but make sure that all of the details contribute in a significant way to the telling of the story. While there are many ways to tell a story, your story should, in some way, address the following questions:

1. WHO AM I?

For the Uta Hagen exercises, you will always be yourself. But in life, you are always different, depending on the very specific circumstances that you're engaged in. Who are you this time? What is your present state of being? How do you perceive yourself? What are you wearing and how does that affect how you perceive yourself?

2. WHAT ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES?

Basically, this is everything that affects the story that you are telling. Be very thorough and specific in your exploration of the circumstances that surround the story you are telling. Explore questions such as

• What time is it? (The year, the season, the day? At what time does your selected life begin?)

• Where are you? For the Hagen exercises, your story should always take place in doors in a room that you are very familiar with, preferably a room in your house, apartment or dorm.
• **What surrounds you?** (The immediate landscape? The weather? The condition of the place and the nature of the objects in it?)

• **What are the immediate circumstances?** (What has just happened prior to the start of your story? What do you expect or plan to happen next and later on?)

3. **WHAT ARE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS?**

These include *everything* that surrounds you, including the *people* who affect the story that you're telling. It also includes your relationship to the circumstances, the place and the objects that you connect with during the course of your story.

4. **WHAT DO YOU DO TO GET WHAT YOU WANT?**

This is probably the most important aspect of your storytelling, for these are the actions that drive you toward achieving your objectives. This is what you *do*, moment by moment, in pursuit of your objective. It should also take into account how you adjust to what happens as you pursue your objective.
Finding Occupation While Waiting

A. Objective:

I want to buy coffee from the Rice Coffeehouse in order to keep myself awake so I can take my midterm for my Poli Sci seminar. I need to stay awake because I really want to do well on my test, since it is one third of my grade. I want to do well not only because I really enjoy the class, but I also respect the professor, and I don’t want to give him a bad impression.

B. The Obstacles

1. My exam is due in two and a half hours, and I know it will take me two hours. Therefore I don’t have a lot of time before I need to take my test. However, there is a line at the Coffeehouse, so I have to wait before I can get my coffee.

2. I am very tired and irritable, which makes me less willing to be patient. I know I can make coffee at home, but I just didn’t want to go to the trouble. I need the coffee but I’m not sure if my patience will last for this line.

C. The Scenario

1. Who am I?

I am a senior in college who is definitely ready to be done with classes. I have a hectic schedule and consequently tend to give up my sleep in order to get things done. I don’t get stressed about work, but at the same time, it means something to me when I can do well on a test or a paper. I am a good student, so I feel capable, but I also know that my mind can’t always reign supreme over my body; fatigue can definitely threaten my performance. To deal with this problem, I am a huge caffeine addict, almost to the point that without coffee, I feel less confident about what I can do. I am usually a pretty laid-back person, but sometimes my schedule makes me feel like I have to rush and be very efficient with every moment.

2. What are the circumstances?

What time is it?
It is 9:30 am on a Friday morning in November, 2000.

Where am I?
I am in the Student Center at Rice University; I’m standing in front of the Coffeehouse counter.

What surrounds me?
In front of me is the Coffeehouse, a small room with a counter and two students working behind the counter, making coffee. There is a big bulletin board next to the counter full of colorful fliers. Behind and to my left are the bookstore and the convenience center. To my left are tables and a clock on the wall. Outside the weather is slightly chilly, so inside the building is warm. Since it is rather early in the morning, there are very few people walking through the building. However, there is a line of 4 people between the counter and me.
What are the immediate circumstances?
I have spent most of the night in Fondren library studying for this midterm. The exam is worth one third of my grade; moreover, I really admire my professor, Dr. Ambler, and I really want to do well to show him that I m interested and that I m capable. The test will cover A LOT of information so I spent the whole time in the library reading over all of our material, making notes basically, cramming. I drank a lot of coffee to keep myself awake, and also my nervous energy and determination kept me going. I took a short nap to revive myself around 4 am but overall I am physically drained. Around 9 am I realized that I had to stop studying and go back to my room to take the test. As I closed up all of my books and papers, I felt satisfied that I had covered everything. However, I am still nervous about the test because I m not sure how much I will remember. Walking back from the library to my room, I decide I should get some coffee from the Coffeehouse in order to stay awake. It would be a little less trouble than making it in my room. The thought of drinking coffee makes me a little more energized, so I walk over to the student center.

D. What are my relationships?

1. The Two Coffeehouse Workers I know most of the people that work at the Coffeehouse (they are all Rice students) but I don t know these two people. All of the people that work there, however, tend to be pretty cool and laid-back and interesting. On this particular morning, however, I could care less. I just want them to be fast at what they do. I want them to be efficient machines. But they remain fun and cool and outgoing, talking to the people in line and moving around to the music from the stereo.

2. The People in Line I don t know any of the four people in line. Two of them look like random visitors, one is a grad student that I have seen around, and the other looks like a freshmen. Since I don t know them, and since all I want is coffee, they cease to be people to me. Instead, they are grouped together in my head as what stands between me and what I want. I can look at them to distract myself, but pretty soon they all just blur because I don t care about them at all.

E. What do I do to get what I want?

the SCENARIO I walk into the main lobby where the coffeehouse is located. I m eager to get my coffee, not only to keep myself awake but also because I ve been thinking about it. Just the idea of drinking coffee gives me a little more energy. But I am still pretty tired. My brain seems like it is going to explode with information, and my body is dragging from lack of sleep. As I enter the lobby I see that there is a line in front of the coffeehouse. Immediately my energy sags. Do I have time for this? I check the clock to my left as I get in line. I don t have very much time before I have to start taking my test. Arg! I just want to get this test over with but at the same time, I want to do really well. And in order to do really well, I need to be awake. I open my eyes really wide and tell myself I m awake. I m awake. I grab my mug out of my bag and put my bag on the table. It feels nice not to have the load on my shoulder. My muscles are kind of sore from fatigue. I rub my shoulder as I look at the workers behind the counter. I have to move a little to see the is de in order to see what they are doing, since there are people in front of me. I don t know the students behind the counter; otherwise I would think about going around the back and asking them for a favor (getting my coffee out of the line). I step back into place; it s not worth the energy to keep moving around in order to see what they are doing. It s obvious that they are just slow and taking their own sweet time. Arg! I am already getting irritated. I stop myself a little, knowing it is mostly due to the fact that I am tired and I feel nervous about this test. I rub my face. I m not tired. Wake up Sarah! I start going over some things in my head about the test. What did that one author say about the welfare state? What was his name? I stare into space as I think hard. What if I don t remember everything I stayed up studying? What if I fail? Ok, this line of thought is just making me feel paranoid. I stare at the fliers on the wall instead. There are so many things going on at Rice! It s incredible. There s a flier for the Wiess play, for tutoring, for a presentation the next day on investing. I rub my eyes; they feel dry from being awake and it almost feels like I m straining them just to read the fliers. All I know is that I m going to take a nap after this test is over! sheesh. The line moves up as one person pays and leaves. FINALLY! I take the step forward, trying
to make it seem as big physically as it seems mentally. One down, three to go. I bang my cup against my leg in an effort to keep myself stimulated and to express my impatience. What is going on? What are these people ordering? I move over again to try to see what the heck is taking so long. It seems like they are just making some sort of espresso drink. Mmm at least it smells good! Even the smell of coffee makes me feel just a tad better. I step back to my natural place, letting my posture slouch. I feel slightly pacified by the coffee smell. I pull my hands into the sleeves of my sweatshirt. It's so comfortable and soft. It makes me feel a little sleepy. No, no! I have to stay alert. This test is important! I stretch out my arms and shoulders as the line moves forward again. How long is this taking? I watch the person leave and then check the clock. Can I afford to stand here and wait much longer? I need to get back and take this test! I try to think of ways to eliminate my time standing here. I search my pocket for money. Maybe I could figure out exactly how much it will cost so I don't have to wait for change from the cashier. I lean over to see the menu and scan it for how much coffee costs. Then I look at the money in my hand. I'm slower with the math b/c my head just feels so foggy. Finally I realize that I don't have exact change and I'll just have to wait for change back. Sigh. I put it back in my pocket. I want to stay alert so I take off my sweatshirt and tie it around my waist. It's still rather warm in the student center so I don't feel cold. I look at the design on my mug, tracing the pattern with my finger. I wish I could just get my coffee and leave! It feels like every moment is lasting an eternity! I check the clock again. I shift my weight because it feels like my body is getting cramped up. And I continue to wait.
Uta Hagen Exercises
The First Exercise: Physical Destination

Purpose:

The purpose of this exercise is to test those things that send us from one place to another, that determine the logic of physical life.

Presentation:

Explore two to three minutes of your behavior in the pursuit of a simple task, taking into careful consideration the criteria set out in the exercise sheet. Choose circumstances that necessitate an entrance from the wings into the playing area and eventually an exit into the wings.

Keep in mind:

• While occupied with the task on stage, you may also choose to leave momentarily to get or leave something in another room before reentering the playing area.

• As in all of the exercises, your story should have a clear beginning, middle and end.

• In the examination of your selected actions, put your destinations under a microscope to discover how many are consciously motivated, how many occur by reflex, and which of them are subconsciously instigated.

Uta Hagen Exercises
The Second Exercise: The Fourth Side

Purpose:

The purpose of this exercise is to discover and test ways of creating the imagined fourth side of the playing space, one that is logical to it even as it embraces the audience area. This will ultimately help the actor to feel comfortable on stage, embracing the audience while maintaining the reality of the environment.

Presentation:

Use a telephone call as the premise for your two-minute exercise. After settling on the nature of the phone call, be sure to include all aspects of a basic exercise: time, place, circumstances, objectives and obstacles. Whether you are discovered at the phone in the beginning of the exercise, or decide to make a call after entering, or receive a call while otherwise occupied is unimportant. Make certain that the balance of the exercise concerns itself with a phone call. During the phone call, engage in the fourth side.

Keep in mind:

• Rehearse the call; don't improvise it. While you shouldn't write out the dialogue, you must know exactly to whom and about what you are speaking, as well as the content of what is being said to you.
**Uta Hagen Exercises**

*The Third Exercise: Changes in Self, Part I*

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this exercise is to expand your sense of self.

**Presentation:**

Find circumstances under which you will make a phone call or calls during which you speak to at least three people. Make sure that your relationship to each of them is *markedly* different from the others. The change in your sense of self and how differently you present yourself to each person will manifest itself while you are dealing with the content of what you are saying to each other, in your tone of voice, verbal idiom, even in bodily adjustments.

**Keep in mind:**

- It is unimportant whether you talk to three people in the course of the same call, make three separate short calls, or are interrupted by incoming calls.

**Uta Hagen Exercises**

*The Third Exercise: Changes in Self, Part II*

**Note:** Because of the personal nature of this exercise, if you object to the exercise *on moral grounds*, you may be excused from the exercise as a participant and/or observer. You will still be required to write the paper and to rehearse the exercise in the privacy of your own home.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this exercise is to expand your sense of self.

**Presentation:**

Select specific circumstances for a two- to three-minute event, during which you get dressed for a particular occasion. Be sure to re-create the sense of privacy that allows you to follow through on changes in self-perception. The sensorially suggestive aspect of a garment is what most often instigates the role-play and how you consequently imagine yourself. This is what you need to explore in this exercise.

**Keep in mind:**

- Avoid making the use of a mirror central to your event.
- Avoid judging the garment itself.
- Avoid attire that you usually wear to class.
• It is important that you are comfortable presenting this exercise, so determine how great a change in clothing you are comfortable executing in performance and design your exercise accordingly.

**Hagen Exercises**  
*The Fourth Exercise: Moment to Moment*

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this exercise is to help the actor address one of the most difficult technical problems: how to repeat selected actions at every performance from moment to moment, as if for the first time. It is achieved by a suspension of knowledge of what is to come, by "forgetting" everything except what is needed *at the moment* with the profound innocence that is part of an actor's soul.

**Presentation:**

Select specific circumstances for a two- to three-minute event, during which you will search for -- and eventually find -- and object that you have mislaid or believe to be lost.

**Keep in mind:**

• The final presentation of this exercise should truly test your ability to direct your full attention to one need at a time. Make yourself believe in the existence of each new moment.

• Be sure that the missing object has meaning to you, so that your stakes remain high while looking for it.

**Uta Hagen Exercises**  
*The Fifth Exercise: Re-creating Physical Sensations, Part I*

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this exercise is to help the actor understand that by endowing the objects and the conditions prescribed by the playwright with imagined realities, he can produce sensations at will. In part one, you will learn to test sensory responses to visible and tangible objects that have been imaginatively endowed with properties that cannot or should not be real on stage.

**Presentation:**

Select specific circumstances for a two- to three-minute event, during which you will endow at least three visible and tangible objects with properties that are not real.

**Keep in mind:**

• This exercise deals with objects that are considered "dangerous" on stage, i.e., objects that the actor cannot have *total* control over an object in using it for a needed purpose on the stage. Whatever is actually dangerous must be exchanged for an imagined reality.

• Do not rehearse with truly dangerous objects in order to create the experience that you will later recreate. For example, if you are endowing water as an alcoholic beverage, don't drink real alcohol to determine how you'd behave.
Uta Hagen Exercises
The Fifth Exercise: Re-creating Physical Sensations, Part II

Purpose:

The purpose of this exercise is to help the actor understand that by endowing the objects and the conditions prescribed by the playwright with imagined realities, he can produce sensations at will. In part two, you will learn to imaginatively stimulate sense memories by the conditions that are part of the playwright's given circumstances.

Presentation:

Select an event during which you must deal with three or more conditions. Start by determining an even the same as you would for any exercise. You will rehearse, as always, making sure that everything has been particularized. When it is real to you and can be repeated with spontaneity, rework it by adding one condition. When such a condition truly affects you and has become truthfully incorporated, add another condition to the exercise. When this condition is real to you, add the third condition.

Keep in mind:

• Keep in mind that these are conditions of the event and not the primary function of a scene.