

Scene Group Guidelines

Here are some guidelines for running your own scene group, the fruits of my own experience of participating in scene groups over ten years. These are offers, not laws set in stone tablets. Sustaining a scene group is tricky at times; these guidelines can be a starting point for you to evolve from.

1 Start with a firm commitment from 8 to 12 people to run one full term.

There is no set group size, and advantages and disadvantages to both small and larger groups.

2 Stick to short terms.

A six to eight session term is a suggested initial length for people to commit to in advance. It allows everyone to work with everyone in the group about once. People are more than ready for a break after seven or eight weeks. In fact people usually start dropping off after three/ four weeks with work commitments and some such. Have a good break, then meet and talk about availability, new people, when where and how to start again.

3 Everyone should have one monologue up their sleeves for the term.

If their partner does not turn up *no dramas* pull out your monologue and do it. This way you always get to work every week. And it's good to practice your monologues. Alternatively you can get someone to read your scene against you – good audition practice.

4 Spread the load.

Often it is one person who steps up and makes a scene group happen. You owe a lot to this person. They are only ever an administrative leader however: your *uber-organiser*. Scene Groups are creative democracies. There are no 'leaders'.

As well as your acknowledged uber-organiser consider having a different convener every term to spread the load. The convener is someone who makes sure everyone has a partner each week, chases up absentees, collates and hands out contact details. This doesn't mean that everyone else sits on their bums' and takes no responsibility, but it is useful to have one central point of contact. Make sure everyone has a go at convening. Trial and error, you'll work out the best way for your group.

5 Get money up front for rent for your space.

Make it free for the convener and uber-organiser (who may be the same person...) to account for his/ her time, and maybe pay the main organizer \$50 per term is you wish. All up the cost should still be no more than \$10 per person per session, but all payable in advance at the first session. This gives people an incentive to attend regularly and makes collecting money easy. If you don't show you don't get your money back. Since you don't show usually cos you've found work that's no stress.

6 CHOOSING PEOPLE

The better the quality of participant the greater the challenge for each individual in the group. I CANT STRESS ENOUGH HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO GET THE BEST ACTORS YOU CAN FIND IN YOUR GROUP. It will lift everyone's game. When someone leaves, it is always opportunity to improve the overall caliber of the group. Ideally new participants start in at the beginning of each term. They should be nominated then decided on by the group, before they start. DO NOT JUST INVITE PEOPLE ALONG–RUN IT PAST THE GROUP FIRST-and don't be stingy: unless you have a good reason for excluding someone, LET THEM IN. If participants feel their suggestions are being consistently ignored they will leave.

7 Working Structure:

Start with the scene alignment structure you've learnt in the Workshops: best thing, ready for, or, in the new terminology, 'what did you like/ get out of it,' 'what

do you want to go for this time' – or in Latham Gaines' immortal instruction – “why don't-cha.” This structure is safe, simple, democratic, participatory, road tested AND seems to utilise the combined insight of the whole group in the most efficient manner. Evolve how you work over time if you feel the need, we should always be flexible to new approaches and suggestions. I do recommend that you stick to the following basic rules:

- Keep comments BRIEF: this is always more helpful for the actors, as it minimizes time between 'takes.'
- Try not to allow negativity or conflict to creep in, under any guise. It will kill the creativity. Appraise the work not the worker.
- In your 'best things' be positive but HONEST. Sometimes it's better to make a specific note on a detail rather than lavish generalized praise.
- Keep the atmosphere workmanlike and focused.
- No one should ever dominate.

8 Be cautious about drastic innovations.

Keep chatter to a minimum in the class – arrange to have a beer after the odd session to allow for broader discussion. Be careful about non-participants – directors, spectators, friends – attending. The space needs to be safe and secure to be challenging and effective.

9 Scene lengths tend to sneak up in size.

Which is fine, but have a rule of two runs for long scenes, three for shorter ones. Otherwise you may run short on time. Similarly if you have a lot of participants/ scenes/ monologues you should consider running everything just the twice. It kind of focuses us to do a smarter first run doesn't it?

Always have lines down.

10 At the end of each session pair up for the next.

It is the responsibility of each pair to find a scene for the next week. THERE IS NO POINT joining a scene group unless you are prepared to commit to, and enjoy, reading a lot of plays, films and scene books, in your ongoing search for good and challenging scenes for yourself. Get into the habit of visiting your local library, internet sites (Drew's Script-o-rama has most recent film scripts), the Performing Arts bookstore (Sydney) and Borders (Auckland) and other bookstores, building up your personal store of potential scenes/ monologues. There is an enormous personal benefit in this: as actors we need to be informed about what work has preceded us and is going on currently around us. It's a good idea to chose a scene quickly so you have more time to learn the lines before the next session. Better still bring it along to the scene before and run it by your partner. You can set goals for yourself in the accents and scenes you choose.

Don't work with someone twice in a term unless you have to - that is, you've already worked with everyone else.

11 Be self-reliant.

Each scene group relies on the self-responsibility and maturity of each member. It is not the convener's responsibility to run around after participants, helping them find scenes etc. Nor is it your scene partner's job to find your scene, but your own. Learn your lines thoroughly and meet with your scene partner to run them if you wish. If you have to skip a session contact your scene partner directly so they can prepare their monologue.

12 Be patient.

Scene groups build craft, confidence and flexibility *over time*. Commit to regular attendance and you will start to notice a difference in these areas.

Good Luck! - Peter Feeney - Scene Group - +6421455652 www.pfeeney.com