

# Technique Summary

## Introduction

*It is helpful if you can focus just on the job at hand, this scene, this call-back, this role – rather than worrying about the consequences of missing out on the job, or screwing up this role/ opportunity. Then you take the heat off and can just play. Having a technique means that you are focussed on the satisfying and ongoing task of honing your craft, which is something bigger than the task at hand, and so takes your mind off your worries.*

*Only you know what works for you. In the end we want to activate our instincts and imaginations and make strong choices in our acting that define the contribution we have to make. There are no verities or guarantees, and outcome is always more important than process. I'd only ever want you to use this technique if it resonated with you, and helped your results. All I ask is that for the period of our workshop you give it a go and see if it helps.*

*The Technique summarised here from A Practical Handbook for the Actor will help you bring your own personality to bear on each role, and by playing a simple action tune you in to the other actor, keeping your performance unselfconscious, spontaneous and true. It'll get you asking the right questions. Say Mamet and Macy say in the Handbook: "Always tell the truth, it's the easiest thing to remember."*

## Scene Analysis

*Once you know what a good action (also known as intention) entails (see below) you must learn to choose the best action for a scene. The following simple formula, if employed consistently, will always lead to a performable action in line with the intentions of the playwright.*

Ask yourself these three questions: -

1. **The Character's Action:** What is your character literally doing in the scene? – state this simply from your character's point of view i.e. in the third person (he, she)  
Example: Stanley is screaming for Stella to come back to him [All examples from 'A Streetcar named Desire,' the "Stella" scene, Act 5 Sc 3]

2. **Your Action (also called your want, or your intention):** what you want from the other person/ people in this scene? – your action is:

- Stated as a verb ('to convince,' 'to wake-up')
- What you are trying to accomplish in relation to the other character/s in the scene (NOT what the author says you are feeling)
- Have just one action for every scene that works for every line.
- Different from your literal description of the scene. The purpose of your action is to give you something more important, more interesting and fun to concentrate on than trying to believe the fiction of the script.

Example: (from the 'Stella' scene) To beg a loved one's forgiveness

*Your chosen action, as well as being in line with the intentions of the playwright, should also be influenced by the style of the play/ film AND what you know from the script of your character. Character comes primarily from the aggregate of actions you chose, and these should be obvious in the writing of each scene. Equally, sometimes the quality or intensity of your chosen action can be productively influenced by keeping what you know overall of your character in mind.*

### 3. What is that action like to me? It is “**as if...**”

The ‘as if’ grounds the action in your own experience, activating your sense of play:

- Your ‘as if’ should come out of your action, not the scene. It is a means to remind yourself what the action means to you in personal terms, so is also stated in the first person;
- Sets real stakes for the actor in the scene; reinforces the actor’s scene of play
- ‘As if’s’ that somehow aid another person can be more effective and more fun.

Example: (from ‘Stella’) It is as if I broke my mother’s prized family heirloom and she threw me out of the house. To be allowed back into my house I must beg her forgiveness.

### **Actions**

*Actions/ Intentions form the basis of your craft. An action expresses the essence of the scene for your character.*

A good action:

1. is physically capable of being done.
2. is fun to do.
3. is specific.
4. has its test in the other person.
5. is not an errand.
6. does not presuppose any physical or emotional state.
7. is not manipulative.
8. has a “cap.”
9. is in line with the intentions of the playwright, fits the style of the play and what you know of the character

### **The Tools of the Craft**

*Since we frequently refer to the various tools and skills that you have at your disposal, here is a list of them. Remember that it is within anyone’s power to obtain any one of these. All that’s involved is hard work and practice. Note: worry is not work.*

- A strong clear voice
- Good clear speech
- A strong supple body
- The ability to analyze a scene usefully
- Semantics—the ability to use words specifically in order to choose a good action
- Memorization by rote
- The ability to work off the other person
- The ability to act before you think (i.e., on your impulses)
- The ability to concentrate, developed by getting into the habit of: when it wanders it can only be tempted by a good action and placed lightly back on the task at hand.
- Bravery
- Will
- Common sense
- Skills: e.g. Accent practice

From A Practical Handbook for the Actor. Notes in italics by P Feeney