

DANCE IMPROVISATION EXERCISES

BY HANNAH PICKETT



Dance Improvisation is the process of simultaneously creating and performing dance movement without pre-planning*. Therefore, it is producing spontaneous movement in the moment, inspired from a stimulus or idea. Dancers and teachers use scores, which are instructions and tasks for a individual to generate and explore movement.

This document outlines a selection of dance improvisation scores that young dancers can do on their own at home. Each score has a theme to explore (in blue) and questions for the dancers to think about while improvising (in grey). These scores have been adapted from Hannah Pickett's teaching with improvisation and inspired from well renowned improvisers, such as Nancy Stark Smith, Mary Overlie and Deborah Hay.

If you want to research more into these dance improvisers there are links and recommended books to read at the end.

*Defintaion based on the book: The Moment of Movement by Lynne Anne Blom and L.Tarin Chaplin

Body Part Improv

Warm up

This exercise is a good warm up and introduction into improvising for beginners to practice at home. Choose a body part and start to find the range of movement. Think of interesting and different options to explore this movement. Experiment with directions, levels, speeds, or circular or linear movements.

You can repeat this task with other body parts as a warm up. Or use a 5-minute timer to start with one body part then expand and explore to a number different body parts.

Challenge: Choose a body part that you would not usually think of first, e.g. spine, top of your head, sole of your foot.

If you get stuck: Use one body part only, slow down and keep on returning to your first body part.

Questions:

*How can one body part affect the whole of your body?
How can you continue thinking of interesting and different ways to move your body part?*

Your Moves Solo

Exploration

This is a score for you to identify your favourite movement and your habitual way of moving that you fall back on when improvising. Use a 3 to 5-minute timer and continuously move and explore your favourite way of moving.

Challenge: Become aware of your style of moving and if you are repeating any movements.

If you get stuck: Slow down or think about a mixture of levels, direction or body parts.

Questions:

What movements feel good in your body? What movement do you enjoy? How does your body instinctively move?

Your Moves Solo Opposite

Exploration

This score is a chance for you to go against how you instinctively move. Think about movement options which may be different for you. Think about your dance style and how you can find the opposite approach to creating movement. Use a 3 to 5-minute timer and explore different movement that may not feel instinctive.

Challenge: Try not to do any of your favourite or habitual movement. If this happens, allow yourself to recognise this and change the movement.

If you get stuck: Slow down or think about a mixture of levels, direction or body parts.

Questions:

How can you move in a different way? How can you create different and interesting movement? Can you continuously go against your instinctive style?

Using Music

Music

This is a task for a dancer to create movement by reacting and responding to music. Choose two tracks - you may want someone else, with a different music taste, to choose the second track. Listen to the music and let it affect the way you move. Think about using a mixture of body parts, levels and directions.

Then repeat the task with the second track. Allow yourself to recognise the change in movement quality.

Challenge: Choose music tracks that you are not familiar with.

If you get stuck: Slow down and focus on one body part.

Questions:

How does the music affect the way you move? How do you move to the tempo and rhyme of the music? Does the way you move change with the second track?

Every Cell in your Body

Body

This score is inspired from Deborah Hay 'Performance Practices'. In her practice, she says "I imagine every cell in my body invites being seen perceiving no movement wrong, out of place, or out of character"*.

Imagine that you could be seen in every cell in your body.
Use a 3 to 5-minute timer and explore how you can move and be seen in every cell including cells inside and outside your skin.

Challenge: Imagine that there is a audience all around you.
Think about different viewpoints - birds eye view, from the floor, behind you.

If you get stuck: Think about the cells in your skin only or focus on one part of the body.

Questions:
*How can you move and be seen in every cell in your body?
Can you be seen by all angles?
Can you use parts of the body that are not usually seen? How can you move to show the cells inside your body?*

*My Body, The Buddhist by Deborah Hay pg 103-4 (1985)

Hands

Body

This is an improvisation task only using your hands. Use a 3 to 5-minute timer and explore and create movement with your hands - Think about your palms, fingers, back of the hands and wrists.

Challenge: Use a range of movement, levels and speeds. Allow the movement from your hands to affect the rest of the body.

If you get stuck: Slow down or restart.

Questions:
How can your hands affect the rest of your body? How can you use your focus to explore the movement?

Architecture of the Space

Environment

This score is inspired from Mary Overlie's exploration of space in her teachings of 'The Six Viewpoints'. She uses the space and environment that she is in to create improvisation.

Choose a room to improvise in. Take a minute to examine the details and architecture of the space - Look at the ceiling, floor, lines and obstacles in the space. Explore movements using whole and part of your body to show the space that you are in.

Challenge: Use a range of body parts and levels to explore all angles of the space.

If you get stuck: Allow moments to stop and examine the space again. Think about a range of body parts to explore the space.

Questions:
How can you use the lines and curves of the space to create movement? How can you use your focus to create instant movement?

Balloon

Focus

You will need a balloon or light ball for this task. This is a great focus task and an introduction to contact improvisation. To find out more about contact improvisation there are links at the bottom of the page.

Focus on the balloon and start to move. Create a duet with the balloon - play with balancing the balloon on different parts of your body or lightly tapping the balloon.

Challenge: Think about different types of touch and with a range of body parts.

If you get stuck: Allow yourself to refocus on the balloon and restart.

Questions:

How can you keep you focus on the balloon? How can you explore movement and create a duet with an object? Can you think about using different body part in contact with the balloon?

Say What You Are Doing

Exploration

This task enables your unconscious movement to become conscious. When you are improvising become the narrator or commentator of what you are doing. Speak out loud, saying the actions that your are performing whilst continuously moving.

Challenge: Notice when you pause – what are you thinking? Notice if you are repeating what you are doing. Are you falling back on ‘your moves’ again?

If you get stuck: Keep on going and make the movement simpler.

Questions:

How can you make it easier for you to narrate and move at the same time? Are you thinking consciously or unconsciously about what you are instantly creating?

Mirroring (Partner)

Focus

This is a partner task. Choose who is going to be the leader and follower. The leader then starts to move while the follower mirrors the movement. Use a range of levels and body parts.

Challenge: Use soft focus to follow each other. The task could develop into no one being the leader or follower and both dancers use soft focus to copy and mirror one another.

If you get stuck: Keep the movement slow so that the follower can easily mirror the movement.

Questions:

How can you make it easier for you to narrate and move at the same time? Are you thinking consciously or unconsciously about what you are instantly creating?

Improvisers to research:

Deborah Hay
Nancy Stark Smith
Steve Paxton
Mary Overlie
Rick Nodine
Kirstie Simson

Books to Read:

The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation by Lynne Anne Bloom and L.Tarin Chaplin
Composing While Dancing: An Improviser's Companion by Melinda Buckwalter
A Choreographer's Handbook by Jonathan Burrows
My Body, The Buddhist By Deborah Hay
The Intimate Act of Choreography by Lynne Bloom

No time to Fly (2010) - A solo dance score written by Deborah Hay (PDF booklet)

About Hannah Pickett and Pickett Improv

Hannah Pickett is a dance artist, choreographer and teacher based in Milton Keynes. She has taught and performed improvisation performance and contact improvisation nationally and internationally in different festivals and platforms. She has trained and danced with contact improvisers and improvisers such as Nancy Stark Smith, Ray Chung, Lalitaraja, Katie Duck, Kirstie Simson and Julyan Hamilton. Her choreographic work and improvisational performances have been performed in London, Brighton, Spain and Amsterdam.

www.hannahpickettdance.com

PICKETT IMPROV are a group of contemporary dancers and a musician who perform live improvisation work. Their work, **Score10**, is a live collaboration of contemporary dance and electrical and percussive music, which was developed from Hannah's research into improvisational composition and a rehearsal process with the group.

www.hannahpickettdance.com/project/score-10/

