

Grading Criteria for Improvisation Ensemble

Overall criteria

1. Show Up – attendance is required at every session. The class is based on gaining supervised experience with improvisation. While you can practice skills outside of class, you cannot learn the skills just by reading about them or watching YouTube videos. This class is about YOU making YOUR OWN music, alone and in groups. You have to be in class to do this. Class participation grades will weight attendance heavily. If you play an instrument, be sure to bring it to class. Showing up means being in class on time, with an open mind, with your instrument ready (reeds soaked, strings tuned, drum heads tightened, amp cords working, etc.)
2. Pay Attention to What Has Heart and Meaning – the class will involve both playing and listening to others play. Give your classmates your full attention, and look for what you can learn from their examples. Notice your own tendencies to judge others; it will illuminate ways you also may judge yourself.
3. Tell the Truth Without Judgment or Blame – when you give feedback to your peers, consider the risks they have taken to play for you, and respond with both accuracy and compassion. We are aiming for a level of feedback that sustains an encouraging atmosphere. Take responsibility for whatever sounds you may not enjoy without telling anyone “that sucked.” If an improvisation or ensemble did not go well, find ways of inquiring and commenting that will keep the players wanting to try again.
4. Be Open to Outcome but Not Attached to Outcome – improvisations are inherently unpredictable. Allow yourself to be surprised, to respond in new ways, to open new ways of listening, and to feel and express things you may not have felt before. Let go of expectations for yourself and your colleagues. Improvisation requires you to cultivate a state of being in the moment. This can be valuable in many areas of your life outside of music.

* these four criteria are taken from the book *The Four-Fold Way* by Angeles Arrien

Criteria for presentations/performances

Musical presentations

Did the student play spontaneously rather than play pre-learned parts? Did the student employ the elements of music (sound and silence, pitch and harmony, pulse and rhythm, tone and contrast, listening and responsiveness)? Did the student “play well with others?” Did the student show flexibility and appropriateness in taking on solo and support roles? Did the student help his or her peers sound better? Was the student’s playing competent? Was there adequate intonation and control of timbre, volume, and timing? Did the student play with soul and feeling rather than mechanically?

Academic presentations

Did the student show evidence of completing the assigned or optional reading or viewing? Was the student able to demonstrate comprehension of the material through paraphrase and the capacity to communicate the content clearly to others? Was the student able to adapt the course content to a specific school-age population, instrument group, or ensemble setting?

Required reading and proof of completion

For each required reading, a reaction paper will be assigned of between 500-1000 words. The reaction paper should indicate that the entire reading was completed and understood. A reaction paper should not consist of chapter outlines, although outlining chapters is a reasonable way to take in the content of textbooks. A reaction paper should show that the student is integrating the reading with his or her prior knowledge and experience, and with other current areas of study or practice. Reaction papers are not research papers; the goal is to communicate the student’s personal thoughts, feelings and associative connections as triggered by the assigned reading, not report on the thoughts of other writers.