

The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual

Matt Besser

The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual: Matt Besser's Guide to Unleashing Your Inner Comedian

The Upright Citizens Brigade (UCB) is a legendary comedy institution, and its influence extends far beyond its New York and Los Angeles theaters. Matt Besser, a founding member of the UCB, has distilled years of experience and innovative teaching into *The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual*. This comprehensive guide offers a unique approach to improv, moving beyond basic exercises to explore the deeper creative and performance aspects of the art form. This article will delve into the manual's core principles, practical applications, and lasting impact on the world of comedic improvisation. We'll examine its key features, benefits for both beginners and experienced improvisers, and answer frequently asked questions.

Understanding the UCB Approach: Beyond the Games

Besser's manual doesn't just present a series of improv games; it offers a philosophy. The UCB style prioritizes **character work**, **storytelling**, and **group dynamics**, moving beyond simple "yes, and..." to a more nuanced understanding of scene construction. The book emphasizes the importance of listening actively, committing fully to your character's choices, and embracing the unexpected. Unlike some improv manuals that focus solely on techniques, Besser grounds his teachings in a deep understanding of comedic structure and audience engagement. This focus on **narrative improvisation** is a crucial differentiator.

Key Features and Benefits of the Manual

- **Comprehensive Curriculum:** The manual isn't a quick fix; it's a structured learning experience. It progresses logically, building upon foundational concepts to reach more advanced techniques. This makes it accessible to beginners while still offering valuable insights for experienced improvisers.
- **Emphasis on Character Development:** Besser stresses the importance of creating believable and engaging characters. The manual provides exercises and techniques to help improvisers develop unique character voices, physicalities, and backstories – crucial elements for compelling scenes.
- **Game Selection and Adaptation:** While introducing various improv games, the book encourages adaptability and modification. Besser highlights how to tailor games to specific group dynamics and creative goals, fostering a more flexible and personalized approach.
- **Practical Exercises and Techniques:** The manual is replete with practical exercises that readers can use for self-study or group practice. This hands-on approach makes the learning experience engaging and memorable.
- **Understanding of Scene Structure:** The book goes beyond simple scene work, teaching students how to build a narrative arc, develop conflict, and create satisfying resolutions. This elevates improv from simple gags to cohesive storytelling.

Practical Application and Implementation Strategies

The *UCB Comedy Improvisation Manual* is more than just a reading assignment; it's a tool for active learning. To fully benefit from the manual, readers should:

- **Practice Regularly:** Consistent practice is crucial for developing improv skills. The book provides ample material for self-study and group practice sessions.
- **Form an Improv Group:** Working with others enhances the learning experience and provides valuable feedback. The dynamic of a group setting mirrors real-world improv performance.
- **Record and Review Performances:** Recording improv sessions allows for self-reflection and improvement. Identifying areas for growth and refining techniques is integral to progress.
- **Attend Workshops or Classes:** While the book is comprehensive, attending live workshops complements the learning process. The opportunity to receive feedback from experienced improvisers adds significant value.
- **Apply Principles to Daily Life:** Improv techniques are transferable to other areas of life. The focus on listening, collaboration, and creative problem-solving provides valuable life skills.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of Besser's manual lies in its holistic approach. It doesn't simply teach games; it teaches the underlying principles of comedic creation, character development, and collaborative storytelling. However, the book's comprehensive nature might feel overwhelming to some beginners. The material is densely packed, and a significant time commitment is needed to fully absorb the concepts. Furthermore, while the book is heavily based on the UCB style, it may not necessarily be the perfect fit for every improviser's preferences or performance styles. Some might find the focus on narrative improv less appealing than styles emphasizing spontaneity or game-based approaches.

Conclusion: Unleashing Your Improvisational Potential

The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual by Matt Besser is a valuable resource for anyone interested in mastering the art of comedic improvisation. Its comprehensive approach, practical exercises, and emphasis on character and storytelling provide a solid foundation for building a strong improv skillset. While the dense content might require dedication, the rewards are significant – a deeper understanding of comedic performance, improved collaborative skills, and the ability to unleash your inner comedic genius. The manual empowers improvisers to not just perform, but to truly create and connect with audiences on a deeper level.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q1: Is this manual only for beginners?

A1: No, while the manual is structured progressively, experienced improvisers will find valuable insights and advanced techniques within its pages. Besser's approach often challenges preconceived notions and offers new perspectives even for seasoned performers. Many professional improvisers find the focus on character work and narrative structure to be incredibly beneficial, regardless of their experience level.

Q2: Do I need a group to use this manual?

A2: While group practice enhances the learning experience, the manual provides exercises that can be practiced solo. However, the collaborative aspect of improv is crucial, so finding a partner or forming a group is highly recommended for maximizing the benefits.

Q3: What's the difference between this manual and other improv books?

A3: Many improv books focus primarily on games and exercises. Besser's manual delves deeper, emphasizing character development, storytelling, and the underlying principles of comedic performance. It focuses on the UCB style, known for its emphasis on narrative and detailed character work, making it distinct from manuals promoting other styles.

Q4: How long does it take to master the techniques in the book?

A4: "Mastering" improv is a lifelong journey. The manual provides a strong foundation, but consistent practice and dedicated study are key. The time it takes will vary depending on individual learning styles and commitment levels.

Q5: Can the skills learned from this manual be applied outside of improv?

A5: Absolutely! The skills developed – active listening, quick thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and creative thinking – are transferable to many aspects of life, from public speaking to professional collaborations.

Q6: Is this manual suitable for online learning?

A6: Yes, the manual's structure and exercises are adaptable to online learning environments. Video conferencing can facilitate group practice and feedback sessions, while the exercises can be practiced individually and then discussed online.

Q7: Are there any specific pre-requisites for using this manual?

A7: No specific prerequisites are required. The book starts with fundamental concepts and progressively builds upon them. A basic understanding of improv is helpful but not essential. A willingness to learn, participate actively, and embrace the unpredictable is crucial.

Q8: Where can I purchase the *Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual*?

A8: The manual is widely available online through major book retailers and from the UCB website itself. Check Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or other online booksellers for the most current pricing and availability.

Decoding the UCB Comedy Improv Manual: A Deep Dive into Matt Besser's Masterclass

Matt Besser's "The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual" isn't just a guide; it's a roadmap for navigating the chaotic world of comedic improvisation. This isn't your average how-to; it's a treasure trove of techniques, exercises, and philosophies honed over decades of experience at the legendary Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre. For aspiring improvisers, this tome offers a singular chance to comprehend the essence of what makes improv so powerful. This article will examine the matter of Besser's manual, offering insights into its format and practical applications.

The guide's power lies in its systematic approach to a often perceived as random art form. Besser doesn't simply provide a array of exercises; he constructs a framework upon which improvisers can grow their skills. He starts with the essentials: the value of "Yes, and...", the power of listening, and the skill of building upon others' ideas. These are not merely conceptual concepts; they're practical tools illustrated through lucid explanations and interesting examples.

One of the most important components of the manual is its focus on game. Besser defines game as the underlying dynamic of a scene, the implicit agreement between improvisers about the type of the interaction. Understanding game allows improvisers to create scenes that are both coherent and unexpected. He offers practical exercises to help develop this crucial skill, guiding the reader through the process of spotting and controlling game within an improv scene.

Beyond the mechanical aspects, the manual also tackles the emotional challenges inherent in improv. Besser recognizes the risk involved in putting oneself on the spot, and offers advice on how to overcome self-doubt and welcome the unexpected. He emphasizes the importance of collaboration, consideration for fellow improvisers, and a upbeat approach.

The guide's merit extends beyond simply improving improv skills. The principles Besser outlines – listening, collaboration, quick thinking, and adaptability – are applicable to a wide spectrum of contexts in life. The ability to think on your feet, react spontaneously, and build upon others' ideas are essential assets in both professional and personal settings.

In conclusion, Matt Besser's "The Upright Citizens Brigade Comedy Improvisation Manual" is a engrossing and valuable resource for anyone interested in learning the art of comedic improvisation. Its organized approach, lucid explanations, and useful exercises make it an invaluable tool for both beginners and experienced improvisers alike. The principles within extend far beyond the stage, offering a structure for professional growth and development.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

- **Q: Is this manual only for experienced improvisers?**
 - **A:** No, the manual is designed for improvisers of all levels. It begins with foundational concepts and gradually introduces more advanced techniques.
- **Q: Can I learn improv solely from this manual?**
 - **A:** While the manual is comprehensive, it's most effective when combined with practical experience. Taking an improv class or joining a group is highly recommended.
- **Q: What makes this manual different from other improv books?**
 - **A:** Besser's manual provides a structured, systematic approach, focusing on core principles and building upon them gradually. It emphasizes game and the emotional aspects of improvisation more than some other books.
- **Q: Is this manual suitable for those who aren't aiming for a stage career?**
 - **A:** Absolutely! The skills learned – communication, quick thinking, adaptability – are beneficial in any field and in everyday life.

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