

7 Levels of Tension Exercise

This exercise encourages students to think about the different ways of performing or conveying multiple states in performance, and is a really fun warm up.

This type of exercise is used by companies like Complicite and is a Lecoq developed method.

It's a really good way of focussing on different states of energy. If students come to direct an argumentative scene for example, they can use this exercise to develop the scene from argument brewing to argument happening, to argument ending, using the different levels to convey this.

This exercise is good for character development, because it encourages improvisation and play.

- Students will be inhabiting 7 levels of tension, from level 1 (catatonic) to level 7 (tragic)
- They will inhabit each tension as you talk them through the levels
- Ask students to lie on their backs with their eyes closed. When you get to level 2 students are free to move around the room, interacting with each other
- Level 1 - Students are **catatonic**, like jellyfish. They are in a desert, it's so hot, they are struggling to move. They have lazy limbs
- Level 2 - Laid back, we call this "**The Californian**". You're on the beach, it's sunny, you're chilled out and relaxed. Say hi to each other in this state - How do you walk around to convey "The Californian"?
- Level 3 - **Neutral**, normal. Efficient. No urgency but functional, economy of movement
- Level 4 - Alert/**Curious**. You are interested in the room. You notice other people. How does your movement/pace start to change here?
- Level 5 - Suspense, **melodrama**. Is there a threat in the room? State of suspicion
- Level 6 - Passionate state. This is the state of **opera**. There **IS** a threat in the room, heightened state, movements are quicker, more irrational. The room is noisy, in this state you gesticulate wildly, you want to get away from the threat
- Level 7 - A **tragic** state. You are a rabbit in the headlights, balancing on a knife-edge, your body is tense, you are contained. The state of Oedipus learning the truth about Jocasta, the state of Haemon seeing Antigone dead. How does this affect your movement? What happens next? Do you cry, do you scream, do you walk away?
- Discussion questions: Which level is the most fun to embody? What levels of tension could you use to direct a scene with Creon and Teiresias in Antigone, for example?

NB: You can play with this exercise by moving back and forth between the states - From 2 to 6, back down to 3, up to 5 etc. Students can create a short scene which works through some of the different states. What states particularly work well? Why?

NB: You could use this exercise to direct text 7 - Creon, Ismene and Antigone, identifying and performing the different states. Would the scene work if it was performed in a Californian state? Try it to see. How do the different states change the meaning of the scene?

Useful Links:

<https://infograph.venngage.com/p/160442/7-levels-of-tension-lecoq>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AdzFN8qNlo>