



## Meisner Activities

Sanford Meisner was an American born actor and acting teacher. The goal of the Meisner technique has often been described as getting actors to "live truthfully under imaginary circumstances. The technique emphasizes that in order to carry out an action truthfully on stage, it is necessary to let emotion and subtext build based on the truth of the action and on the other characters around them, rather than simply playing the action or playing the emotion. One of the best known exercises of the Meisner technique is called the Repetition exercise, where one person spontaneously makes a comment based on his or her partner, and the comment is repeated back and forth between the two actors in the same manner, until it changes on its own. The object is always to react truthfully, allowing the repetition to change naturally rather than by manipulation.

Another well-known technique is one in which one actor performs an activity that is difficult to do and is attached to imaginary circumstances that are compelling. The actor begins onstage alone, doing the activity. Another actor enters and begins making observations.

Many student actors have difficulty coming up with an 'activity' to do onstage. If you are teaching the Meisner technique, below is a long list of suggestions which you may hand out to your students! Remember to ask the students to come up with imaginary circumstances that include an important reason for doing the activity *right now!*

- For example: If a student chooses 'opening a coconut without the proper tools,' he may imagine that he has been on a deserted island for several days and has finally managed to retrieve a coconut. He is starving, weak, and must open the coconut in order to survive. In this scenario, the actor would start the scene alone. After a minute or two, another actor would enter the playing space and start naming the behaviors and making observations about the actor who is opening the coconut. The actor opening the coconut may simply repeat what his fellow player has said, or he may make observations of his own. NOTE: this is not an improv exercise in which the actors start to improvise dialogue in order to create a scene. The goal is to simply be present in the moment and respond authentically.

Observations may sound like this:

Actor A: You're trying to open a coconut.

Actor B: I'm trying to open a coconut.

Actor B: You're here with me!

Actor A: I'm here with you.

Actor A: You're frantic.

Actor B: I'm frantic.

And so on.

## Meisner Activities

- Trying to find the burned out bulb in a string of Christmas lights
- Cracking open walnuts (and keeping the nut intact)
- Scattering many pages of a report all over the room and putting the pages back in order
- Counting change by putting coins in stacks
- Threading tiny beads for a necklace
- Peeling an orange-keeping the peel in one piece
- Ironing an extremely wrinkly shirt-making it perfect
- Painting a paint-by-numbers picture
- Combing out a very knotted wig
- Learning to macramé
- Putting together a difficult puzzle
- Writing a letter
- Decorating the room with streamers
- Searching through a book to find one specific quote you had forgotten
- Carefully cutting out pictures of people from magazines
- Re-stringing an acoustic guitar
- Building a house of cards
- Making a friendship bracelet
- Opening a letter so that you can't tell it's been opened
- Sorting tiny beads by color
- Learning to juggle
- Opening a coconut without the proper tools
- Folding an origami swan while following directions
- Sorting game pieces that have all been mixed together (two or more games dumped into one box)
- Building a model car/boat
- Making and coloring in a perfect sign using a stencil
- Building a fire by rubbing two sticks together
- Making balloon animals
- Reassembling a letter that has been ripped to shreds
- Forging a signature that has to be perfect
- Making tissue paper flowers
- Learning to draw cartoon characters
- Untangling fishing line on a fishing pole
- Copying a map exactly
- Wrapping a perfect present
- Searching through a huge pile of receipts for one in particular
- Gluing a vase back together
- Fixing a pair of eyeglasses with a tiny screwdriver
- Building a Popsicle stick bridge or house
- Making bottle-cap jewelry
- Solving a Rubix Cube
- Sewing a rip in a piece of clothing
- Writing a poem
- Making a perfect flower arrangement
- Decorating an egg with rhinestones or beads
- Untangling kite string
- Adding several columns of numbers
- Putting on false eyelashes
- Learning to knit
- Working on a crossword puzzle
- Building a gingerbread house
- Putting together a Lego kit
- Decorating a cake
- Separating seeds by type (from a mixed packet)
- Removing a stain from an important piece of clothing
- Making a political rally sign
- Gluing tiny beads onto a Christmas ball
- Applying complicated stage makeup
- Picking a lock
- Making something out of pipe cleaners
- Measuring parts of an architectural drawing
- Searching for a tiny diamond dropped in the room
- Copying a drawing exactly
- Cutting out shapes perfectly
- Carving a pumpkin
- Tweezing eyebrows perfectly



- Peeling a label off of a bottle and keeping the label intact
- Repairing doll-house furniture
- Mastering yoga poses
- Cleaning a gun
- Getting out of handcuffs
- Following a recipe
- Carving a stone
- Making a mosaic
- Lifting weights
- Organizing coupons
- Filling in a tax form
- Packing a small suitcase for a month-long trip
- Examining photos with a magnifying glass
- Putting a list of numbers into a phone manually
- Disarming a bomb
- Looking for a contact lens
- Cutting a design with an Exacto knife
- Filing important papers in a portable file
- Making a sock puppet
- Hiding something in a backpack so that it cannot be found
- Solving an anagram
- Fixing a broken toaster
- Deciphering a secret code
- Giving yourself a manicure
- Filling out a complicated order form
- Putting together a piece of furniture
- Whittling a shape/object
- Practicing Tai Chi
- Repairing a stuffed animal
- Playing "Operation"
- Cutting string into perfect varying lengths
- Braiding hair into even rows
- Mixing chemicals
- Taking apart a small appliance
- Creating a ransom note out of letters in a magazine
- Locating a specific point based on longitude and latitude
- Removing paint from a frame/object using sandpaper
- Making something out of clay or molding putty
- Grading tests
- Finding a way out/escaping
- Looking for an important paper in a huge file
- Untying knotted rope

## **MOTIVATIONS/CIRCUMSTANCES**

### **Status**

Getting promoted  
 Being elected to an office/position  
 Winning an award  
 Winning a contest  
 Winning a role in a movie  
 Receiving a title

### **Money**

Losing life savings  
 Getting hired  
 Winning a bet/contest

### **Love**

Getting the girl/guy  
 Losing the guy/guy  
 Keeping the girl/guy  
 Winning the parent's approval

### **Security**

Losing money or possessions  
 Protecting self or family  
 Losing a job  
 Losing approval  
 Losing a relationship  
 Losing freedom  
 Losing good health  
 Losing shelter/home

