

Part One: THOUGHTS

Thought (noun): *intention, purpose, expectation, imagine, consideration, opinion, belief, reasoning power, application of mental attention*

THOUGHTS is the category that encompasses both character thinking as well as actor thinking. Thoughts include the character's objective in life, the span of the story, the scene, and even the minute moment-to-moment actions in the script. Thoughts represent the character's self reflections, sense of identity, reactions, beliefs, justifications, back-story, personal obstacles and desires. The category of Thoughts also tracks the actor's process for preparing a role, for the decisions an actor makes in rehearsal as well as in performance, and how an actor reviews the performance and receives critical feedback. The actor's thoughts and the character's thoughts all influence the final manifested performance. This chapter addresses Thoughts by discussing the sub categories within thoughts; such as character **needs, objectives, goals, victories**, and the use of **action words** and their relationships to these areas of character thoughts in preparing a role. Later in the Manifestation chapter, you will learn more about how thoughts are revealed in individual behaviors through embodiment techniques.

The first lesson in preparing a role and learning more about your character's thoughts is to understand the character's **objective**. As you read on and learn more about how objectives affect acting, consider this, "If the bare essence of acting with someone in a scene is to know why your character stays in a room with another character, what keeps your character in the room? Why not leave?" The answer is in the objective.

Objectives

The first most important Thoughts step in preparing a role is determining the character's objectives, also often called intentions. Objectives motivate all the character's actions, for objectives are the core driving forces behind human behavior. Would you get in a car and start the engine if you didn't know where you were going and for what reason? If you continued in the car down the road, with no objective in mind, you would find yourself aimlessly driving down random streets floundering in your own indecision. Would you walk into a meeting that you scheduled with someone if you didn't have a goal for the discussion and outcome? How strange would it be if you started putting ingredients in a bowl without knowing what you intended to make? These examples may appear absurd, yet stepping into an acting role requires the same clarity—an objective. Stanislavski referred to objectives as "buoys to mark the channel" guiding the actor through the proverbial creative waterways of the play's action. He recognizes that

many actors skip this process or are unable to analyze a script for playable actions and so they "find themselves forced to handle a multitude of superficial, unrelated details, so many that they become confused and lose all sense of the larger whole."

Time and time again a beginning actor makes the mistake of walking into a scene without determining an objective or having selected a weak objective. When asked, "What is your objective?" the beginning actor rarely has an answer, or she states an inactive objective that lacks passionate drive, dedication, or a specific outcome. Laurence Olivier once said that the actor's job was to, "lead the audience by the nose to the thought." An actor without a plan for action is simply lost, unprepared, and a passive victim of the circumstances. How interesting would that be to watch?

Searching For the Lost Puppy

*I watch auditions for our upcoming production of Neil Labute's *The Shape of Things*, searching for the right actor to play the part of Adam, an intelligent yet geeky lost soul college student willing to do nearly anything to be loved. I tell the actors that I am looking for someone to capture the lost puppy quality in Adam that motivates this character to do anything and everything that his girlfriend, Evelyn, asks him to do. I tell them, "He wants more than anything to be loved and accepted by a beautiful woman, but he is awkward about all his attempts – like a puppy who has not yet grown into his paws."*

The actors auditioning struggle to play this complex character. Scene after scene I watch these young actors portray depressed or angry men who sulk around the stage trapped in inactive choices, playing only the emotions of being lost, rather than pursuing the objective of being found and accepted. They weakly attempt the objectives I suggest or they focus only on the emotions of being lost. Their performances come across stiff, withdrawn, and repetitively mundane as they mope around scenes without truly investing in the moment to moment actions and reactions of a character in pursuit of something positive – like love, affection, and acceptance. They seem unable to honestly react to what others in the scene do or say since their focus is so internally anchored on the inertia of dwelling on self involved emotions, rather than the pursuit of wants and desires.

I sigh as I watch these proceedings, offering side coaching in hopes that one of these actors will have the skill to truly connect with this character's desires and objectives. I sit and worry, "Will I find an actor who can fully personify this character's desires?" (This story is continued later in this chapter.)

Try This:

The next time you watch a good movie, go back and re-watch scenes that were particularly engaging. Focus your attention on the character that appears to be the driving force of action in that scene. Then ask yourself, "What does she want?" and "Is this scene interesting to me because she is sincerely dedicated to obtaining what she wants?" Most likely you will be pinpointing the actor's objective in that role. Can you figure out the objectives of the other characters in the scene and how their objectives are also making the scene so engaging?

Opposing Objectives Create Conflict

The key to drama is conflict or opposing actions. Therefore without driven passionate actions, conflict is non-existent. The well regarded acting coach, Michael Shurtleff, once said of conflict, *"An actor is looking for conflict. Conflict is what creates drama. We are taught to avoid trouble [so] actors don't realize they must go looking for it. Plays are written about...the extraordinary, the unusual, the climaxes. The more conflict actors find, the more interesting the performance."* Conflict will only rise out of a situation where people are truly dedicated to their own outcomes, pitched against others who have opposing desires. Clear, active objectives are absolutely necessary in creating fully dimensional and fervently driven characters. They result in dynamic performances reflecting the epitome of the human condition. Yet actors struggle constantly to pinpoint the strongest choice for an objective. In order to identify strong objectives an actor must work like a detective, searching for clues in the script, determining the modus operandi of the character, and concluding with a strong active motive. Eventually, with practice in this area, this process and its conclusions will arrive quickly as the actor fine tunes the ability to select strong active objectives that match with the script's intentions and given circumstances. However, for now, it will take time to develop these skills and learn to avoid the common pitfalls of weak choices and inactive objectives.

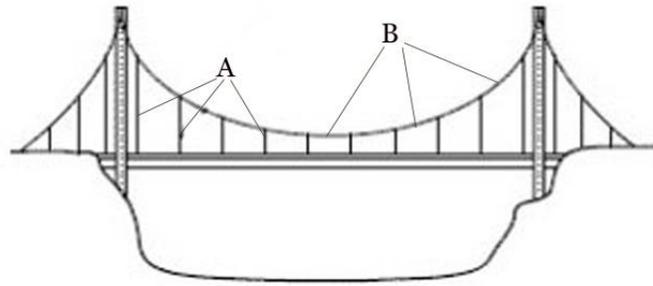
Three Types of Objectives

There are three types of objectives: Scene Objective, Play or Main Objective, and Super Objective. The difference between these objectives is the expanse of time over which the objective influences the character's actions. The Super Objective is what the character wants for her life. For example, in David Auburn's play *Proof*, Catherine is the daughter of a world-renowned mathematician who suffered from mental illness late in his life and has recently died. Catherine's Super Objective could be *to achieve recognition for my own superior talents in math.*

(Notice that objective statements are always written in first person, to reflect the character's point of view). She grew up in the shadow of her father's success, struggling all her life to make her own mark.

This Super Objective would easily span the duration of much of Catherine's life. However, during the course of the play *Proof*, her sister Claire consistently suspects Catherine of exhibiting tendencies for the same mental illness their father had; meanwhile, Catherine keeps seeing and speaking to her dead father who appears periodically in the play. Although Catherine still continues to be driven by her Super Objective, the opposing forces of her questionable sanity require immediate attention during the period of the play. During the play's action, Catherine must resolve these questions of her sanity and hopefully continue on the path of her personal quest. Therefore, Catherine's focus for the duration of the play, and her Main Objective, is *to prove to everyone, including myself, that I am sane*. She still has the overall drive to be recognized as a mathematician, but her need for clarity concerning her sanity supercedes the Super Objective because the urgency to resolve this conflict is greater than the overall career goal.

The Scene Objective is a smaller unit of urgency and action determined by the given circumstances in a scene. The Scene Objective is still motivated by the needs of the Super Objective and Main Objective; however, when a character deals with the given circumstances of each scene, rising immediate priorities must be solved first before continuing on the path to the Main Objective. For example, during the play *Proof*, Catherine becomes attracted to her father's graduate level research assistant, Hal. He tells her that he has always been attracted to her, and after a night of lovemaking Catherine feels she can trust him with a secret, a groundbreaking mathematical proof she wrote. Her Scene Objective could be *to build a trusting relationship with Hal by sharing my secret*. However, Hal questions whether she wrote the proof, claiming that it could have been written by her father. Later on Catherine tries to convince Hal and Claire that she did indeed write the proof herself, desperate to have one of them believe her. In this scene her Scene Objective could be *to make them believe me*. Both examples of Scene Objectives still serve as supporting actions for the Main Objective and Super Objective.



Compare the structure of objectives in a play to the structural support of a suspension bridge. Like the many support beams (*A in the diagram above*) over which a suspension bridge is stretched, the Scene Objectives have their own immediate duty: to support their particular area of the bridge's structure. However, the Main Objective is like the long stretch of cable across the top of the bridge (*B in the diagram above*), stretching across the great divide, bringing the character from one destination to the next, and yet supported by the individual structures that make up the entire bridge. The main objective in a script is often referred to as the Through-Line for the character. Much like that main cable stretching the distance of the bridge, the main objective drives the character's needs and desires through the entire script. The Super Objective is the overall journey the character wants to take. By reaching the other side of the bridge (the goal of the Main Objective) your character is that much closer to her Super Objective, which is still far off in the distance on the horizon. This figurative bridge of supportive actions helps you get one big step closer to that ultimate goal – the Super Objective.

Try This:

Since these basic acting theories are rooted in true human behavior, take a moment to consider your own life. What would your Super Objective be? Now think back on a time when you worked hard to accomplish a goal that would take you further in this direction. It could be a time span of a few days or weeks. Can you identify this as your Main Objective at the time? Create a phrase with an action word and one subject, like *to acquire a well-paid job* or *to earn a degree*, for this Main Objective and see how it would support your Super Objective. Then, recall a short moment within the time frame of the Main Objective event where a different urgency arose that needed resolving before you could continue with the Main Objective. This would be your own real life Scene Objective. See if you can identify other Scene Objectives within the time frame of the Main Objective.

Selecting Strong Objectives

In order to select objectives with high stakes, driven by a sense of urgency, and to provide ongoing, sustained dedication through an entire scene or play, the objective must be strongly rooted in basic human needs. This also creates a universal quality to the objective, allowing any witness of the performance to immediately recognize and relate to this need, thereby strengthening audience empathy of the performance. There are a number of human needs theories and models of understanding basic human needs and motivations. One well-regarded model is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, developed by Abraham Maslow and first published in 1954 with five basic needs. Later developments, made by Maslow and other psychologists and theorists, added more layers to the original five-layered hierarchy, eventually concluding with eight basic needs. Maslow's Hierarchy, in the final version published in 1990, is displayed here in its traditional triangle diagram form.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Body Needs form the base of the triangle, representing the most basic physiological needs for all human survival. According to Maslow's theory, as we satisfy each basic need, starting at the bottom of the triangle, we can work our way up the triangle to higher needs. For example, a

person who is starving must satisfy the Body Need first before he can satisfy the higher Cognitive or Beauty needs, like furthering his education or creating art. Likewise, a person who does not feel safe will satisfy his Security needs before he can address his Ultimate Fulfillment needs, like going on a book tour to celebrate his new book, or going up for partner at his law firm.

For example, if we have a character who is a lawyer with the main objective, *to become a partner in my law firm*, but he has a client who threatens his life just before he is going into a meeting with the law firm partners, his immediate need would change to a security need, *to save my life*, which temporarily supersedes his ultimate fulfillment need, *to become a partner*.

The lower, more biological needs will most likely override the higher, social, and self-fulfilling needs even if a person was already in pursuit of satisfying the higher need. In most cases, the urgency of the immediate lower need rising up will demand attention and satisfaction before the higher needs can be addressed again.

In some cases the character's basic physiological needs do not over-ride the higher needs like self-fulfillment or transcendence, particularly if they are using a base need as a strong tactical choice to get them to a higher need. For example, in Ben Kingsley's portrayal of Gandhi in the movie *Gandhi* he depicts the true story of a man who goes on a hunger strike as a heroic tactic to stop hatred and war. Here we have an example of a conscious device used to override a basic human need in order to obtain a higher need.

Needs Are Interpreted Individually

It is important to understand that these needs are individually interpreted by considering the given circumstances and the person experiencing the need. Maslow's diagram, although a very reliable basic needs model, receives critical reviews and minor reorganization as one considers the given circumstances of varying cultures, socio-economic conditions, religious beliefs, or even how one perceives sex as a biological need, or social need, or community building need. Additionally, one person's need and her understanding of when that need is satisfied can be quite different than another person's interpretation of need satisfaction. For example, in the situation where someone is satisfying the Cognitive need for education, one person may feel that she has learned enough once she has satisfied society's requirement of a high school education. She may choose to move on to satisfy her Beauty needs of the nice car and pleasant living conditions. This person will then put her actions into gaining enough income to satisfy this level of need and give far less attention to the Cognitive need. However, another person may interpret her

Cognitive need as being unsatisfied until she gains a college or graduate school degree. This person will put more attention and action into satisfying that need, and delay gratification of the higher Beauty need of the big house, beautiful furniture, and nice car until she achieves her own interpreted level of satisfaction in the Cognitive need. When working on character analysis, like a detective, you must determine what your character's individual needs are and if they have been met, as you consider the values of your own character. This may at times be challenging when your character's values contradict your own, or if these values are far removed from your own life experience. For example, some may assume that anyone who is homeless would not be able to pursue the higher level needs. However, keeping in mind that all these levels are individually interpreted by each person's own beliefs, values, cultural background and levels of personal tolerance, then we realize that there are infinite possibilities to consider for each character's need-based-objectives.

The Underground

I am acting in a new play written and directed by one of my professors in graduate school. It is a story about homeless people living in the New York City underground tunnels connecting subways, maintenance tunnels, and deserted pathways for old trains. I play a woman in the underground who is constantly organizing protests and public demonstrations concerning employee rights, taxes, and anything associated with government or big business control issues.

As a young actress still developing my craft, I struggled with my portrayal of this character. I kept dwelling on her homeless situation, preferring to focus on her poor living conditions basing this choice on my own interpretation of her lack. My director kept pushing me to be more active, to find the joy in her speeches and the blissful excitement of her protests. However, in my own short-sightedness, I kept connecting her grandstanding with angry rebellion and sadness and was failing to see how the role could be played the way the director and playwright indicated.

One day, outside of rehearsal, I studied and pondered the script with a good friend and director, Robert, who always seemed to help me see what I was missing in my acting. He pointed out to me that this woman, who used to own a big health food store in the city, had become frustrated with the bureaucracy of business and government and decided to give it all up and to live "on the streets." He pointed out that this was her decision – not something she perceived as a condition that was forced upon her. She likes not having to pay taxes, rent, utility bills, or put her energies into managing a business. She revels in the freedom found in the underground and now can focus her attention on social action, rallying other homeless individuals to change policies while she also works on writing a healthy cookbook—all things she could not do when she was struggling to keep her business going and pay bills. This realization that she was not acting

like a victim of her homeless situation and was indeed reveling in its freedom suddenly opened my mind to an entirely new understanding of my character's motivations.

*To support her Body needs of food, drink, and warmth she manages to make an income by collecting cans and bottles off the street and turning them in for refunds at the local recycle center. She satisfies her Security and Social needs by creating her own supportive family of homeless individuals who develop a security protocol so that all in the underground feel a sense of order and safety. With her lower needs met to **her** satisfaction, she is able to focus on her Ultimate Fulfillment pursuits.*

Once I made this discovery I was able to find all the joy, enthusiasm, and vitality in my need-based objective pursuits. My director was thrilled and I was liberated in my acting of this unique role.

An actor who bases the character's objectives in clearly identified basic needs, interpreted and justified by the character's given circumstances alone, will have a strong active basis for her acting throughout the story. Although there are other human needs theories besides Maslow's Hierarchy, his model is still highly regarded as a clear model of basic human needs and how humans may prioritize one need over the other. Basic human needs are universal, regardless of variations in theoretical models, and provide a reliable strategy for an actor to use in detecting and developing strong objectives.

Try This:

Considering your own life, what needs are you addressing with your actions? Looking at Maslow's Hierarchy, see if you can identify a basic need you are working on as you read this text. What need are you generally satisfying this week or during a few days of this week? What need do you feel you are trying to satisfy with your long-range goals? As you answer these questions you are identifying your own need-base for a personal Scene Objective, Main Objective, and Super Objective. Practice this self-observation occasionally as you are in the midst of an action. Ask yourself, "What basic human need am I working to satisfy right now?" The more you practice this observation, the more easily it will come to you when you are investigating character's needs in an acting role.

Victories Motivate Objectives

Whenever we approach an important moment in our lives, we might visualize the desired outcome before we enter the situation. This visualization is an inner monologue, and the specifically detailed events of the outcome would be the victory. This inner monologue can be running in our minds before the event occurs, creating visualizations of the desired outcome. The visualizations can also run like video tapes in our minds during the important moment, as real-time commentary of the current event and our thoughts and feelings about ourselves, others, and our given circumstances. By keeping our thoughts focused on this very detailed and highly desired victory, our actions become motivated towards a specific outcome, and we will try many different tactics to get to this specific victory, by keeping our eye-on-the-prize.

When an actor is having a difficult time determining what her scene objective is, I will simply ask the actor, "What specific thing could the other character in the scene with you do or say that would be the ultimate win for your character?" The answer to this question would be an example of a victory. Often the actor can state this example of a victory far more easily than she can state her objective statement, because it is a clear vision of a desired outcome. From this point, I can often get the actor to create an objective statement.

Consider a time when you were going to see someone you have not seen in a long time. You might have visualized in your mind how that person would look, act, what they would say when they saw you, what you two would do together, as well as what you hoped to gain by such a visit. As you meet up with your friend, these visualizations will greatly affect how you behave as you interact in the situation. Such visualizations and their influences on our actions are common in human behavior, projecting personal strategies and desired outcomes.

EXAMPLE: A Scene about Visiting an Old Friend

Consider these simple events, or scenes around the premise of Visiting An Old Friend. Here are three possible activities a person might engage in while visiting with an old friend.

- (1) Visit with my friend in his new house
- (2) Indulge in a fancy dinner at our favorite restaurant
- (3) Play a game of basketball together

Now, consider how you would conduct yourself if you had the following victories, or specific desired outcomes, attached to these scenarios.

(1a) Visit with my friend in his new house - (Victory) "He will say he always loved me."

(2a) Indulge in a fancy dinner at our favorite restaurant – (Victory) "She will remember my birthday and treat dinner"

(3a) Play a game of basketball together – (Victory) "I will finally beat him in the game"

Can you see how this visualized victory could affect your actions? Now, consider completely different victories for all three situations.

(1b) Visit with my friend in his new house - (Victory) "He will help me buy a house in his exclusive neighborhood."

(2b) Indulge in a fancy dinner at our favorite restaurant – (Victory) "She will apologize for our fight, putting it all behind us."

(3b) Play a game of basketball together – (Victory) "He will give me news of my ex-girlfriend"

Even if all the circumstances in scenes 1a and 1b were the same—same dialogue, same blocking—the actions and outcomes would none the less be dramatically different. All of this is due to your needs, objectives, and perceived victory. The victory is a more specific outcome to the objective. The victory must be in line with the needs and desires of the objective and simply provides a specific cap or ending point for the objective. Pursuing an objective without knowing when the action should end leaves an actor with no vision, no horizon to focus on, and no perceived ending point for her actions. It is important for an actor to conceive of a clear victory for the character's objective. Ideally the objective statement will allude to this victory in the very wording of the objective statement. For example, here are objective statements for the possible scenes and victories mentioned above in Visiting An Old Friend.

(1-a) Visit with my friend in his new house

(Objective in Social Need) To charm him back into my life

(Victory) He will say he always loved me.

(2-a) Indulge in a fancy dinner at our favorite restaurant

(Objective in Social Need) To celebrate my birthday with an old friend

(Victory) She will remember my birthday and treat dinner.

(3-a) Play a game of basketball together

(Objective in Ego Need) To distinguish myself as the better athlete

(Victory) He will lose the game.

(1-b) Visit with my friend in his new house

(Objective in Ego Need) To acquire real estate advice from my successful friend

(Victory) He will agree to help me buy a house in his exclusive neighborhood.

(2-b) Indulge in a fancy dinner at our favorite restaurant

(Objective in Social Need) To repair my friendship

(Victory) She will apologize for our fight, putting it all behind us.

(3-b) Play a game of basketball together

(Objective in Social Need) To soothe my broken heart with a game of basketball

(Victory) He will give me news of my ex-girlfriend.

We have taken several common events and created distinctly different scenes filled with entirely new behaviors based solely on objectives and desired victories. The selection of the victory is as important as finding clear active wording for the objective statement. For example, in scene (1-a) *Visit with my friend in his new house*, with the Objective in Social Need, *To charm him back into my life*, consider a different victory: *He will ask me out for dinner tonight*. This victory, although still based in a Social Need, has less urgency than does a confession of love. It is a bit more casual, yet still focused on a desired outcome for building a relationship. Your behavior in this scene would be different than if you were searching for love. Now – consider this victory for the same scene, “We will have passionate sex together this afternoon.” Can you see how your character will behave quite differently during interactions in this scene with the desired outcome placed in physical sex rather than the verbal, sentimental outcome of *He will tell me that he has always loved me*. Also notice that the basic human need motivating the actions has shifted by assigning this victory to the scene. *To have sex* is more of a Body need, and *To get him to say he loves me* is more of a Social need. If you are driven by a Body Need, your actions will be much more physical, using much more flirtatious touch and signals for sex. However, if you are motivated by the Social Need of love, a deeper and higher-level social need, your interactions are motivated more from the head with sentimental, romantic, or thoughtful behaviors, and they would be less physical. Selecting a specific victory for your objective directly affects the types of action tactics and emotion tactics (covered in later chapters) you will attempt throughout the scene.

Victories and Objectives Rarely Achieved

It is important to recognize that victories, and even objectives are rarely achieved in many scenes and for many characters. Remember that the core of dramatic action is conflict, and so if the victory is achieved, the conflict is over. The structure of most scripts delays the winning of

victories until the very end of the story, and then only certain characters will achieve such victories. An actor needs to recognize this important element of dramatic structure when selecting objectives and victories remaining aware of when the character is still searching and working towards a win, and celebrating when the character has won a victory. The audience is well aware of this struggle-and-win pattern. Consider any play or movie where you have watched a character that you considered at the beginning of the story to be an underdog. As the story progressed and you empathized with his struggle to overcome great obstacles you could probably tell exactly what his objective was and perhaps even guess at the specific vision of his victory. If the actor who played the underdog was doing his acting well, you could tell exactly when he felt he had finally achieved that victory moment, for not only would he have a cathartic moment or meaningful recognition for this great achievement, but so would you in recognition as an audience member who took the journey with him.

What You Want – NOT What you Don't Want

An objective should be stated in terms of what you, the character, want to achieve – not focused on what you don't want. Too often an actor will select an objective statement that focuses all his energy on what he does not want to happen, not realizing that this keeps him from truly understanding what his character does want. By doing this, he is putting all his energy into his. Later on in the actor process it is important to identify these ever-present obstacles as blocks to the overall objective and find smaller actions to overcome these obstacles. However, when initially approaching a role, the character's story, and the individual scenes that make up the entire story, the actor must first understand what it is that his character needs and wants throughout that entire story, which is his character's objective. Later, he can identify what gets in his character's way. Otherwise his character will get bogged down by the negative aspects of the character's journey, leaving the actor and the audience in a place where they are unable to identify what drives the character. Such a choice in the end will provide a performance that is inactive, displaying no apparent passion or drive towards anything. Remember that conflict is the core of all good dramatic action. Where is the conflict with inaction? It does not exist. Therefore, making an inactive, negative choice for an objective is a poor choice.

Victory Statement Check List

- Is the victory placed in the actions of your scene partner?
- Is the victory stated in the second person, "He will..." or "She will..."?
- Is the victory stated in positive terms of what will be done, not what won't be done?
- Is the statement kept to one simple sentence with one action verb and one subject?
- Is the victory in line with the intentions of the Scene Objective?

- ❑ Is the victory extremely difficult to achieve, but conceivable?
- ❑ If the victory is accomplished, is it achieved by the very end of the scene?

Searching For the Lost Puppy Story (Continued from earlier in the chapter)

*As a director of the play, *The Shape of Things*, I am frustrated by the actors auditioning who keep dwelling on what the character doesn't want. Adam doesn't want to be alone any more, but these actors keep making choices that isolate him from other characters in the scenes. Adam wants to be liked, but their delivery of Adam's joke lines are filled with sarcasm and anger. They are focusing on the negatives, and not the true wants and desires of Adam.*

Finally, a handsome, slightly overweight forty-year-old man gets up to read. He interprets Adam with a shy smile, eyes and shoulders slightly downcast, yet exhibiting a soft yet eager "I want to be liked" quality. He gently fumbles through actions in scenes, listening intently to the actress with whom he reads, always exuding a low level of flirtatiousness, followed by a nervous giggle whenever he receives a compliment. This actor knew how to portray a man who truly wanted to be liked, who wanted to please others, but who also had personal obstacles of physical and social awkwardness that he was attempting to overcome through humor and intellect. This actor had all the parts of the TEAM aligned towards the directorial coaching, "He wants more than anything to be loved and accepted by a beautiful woman, but he is awkward about all his attempts – like a puppy who has not yet grown into his paws." This actor allowed Adam's thoughts, emotions, and actions to be modified from moment to moment due to the ever changing and shifting events around him, but these actions were constantly based in the pursuit of satisfying this social need of love and affection. I had my Adam! This actor could fully embody all the necessary levels of this character so that the audience would empathize with his struggle and sweet desperation to be loved. This actor could – and did – do that.

Applying Basic Needs to Objective Development

Refer back to the objectives listed for Catherine in *Proof*. Notice her Super Objective, *to achieve recognition for my own superior talents in math*, is an Ultimate Fulfillment Need (#7 level) satisfying her need to show her own ultimate potential. Catherine's Main Objective, *to prove to everyone, including myself, that I am sane*, can be identified as an Ego Need (#4 level) which then supports and brings her closer to her Super Objective, "to achieve recognition." Her Scene Objectives, *to build a trusting relationship with Hal*, and *to make them believe me*, are Social Needs (#3 level), satisfying relationship and acceptance needs, which also bring her closer to these goals of self validation and recognition. When Catherine's character is in line with her Super Objective and "keeping her eye-on-the-prize" (the Super Objective) her needs-based-

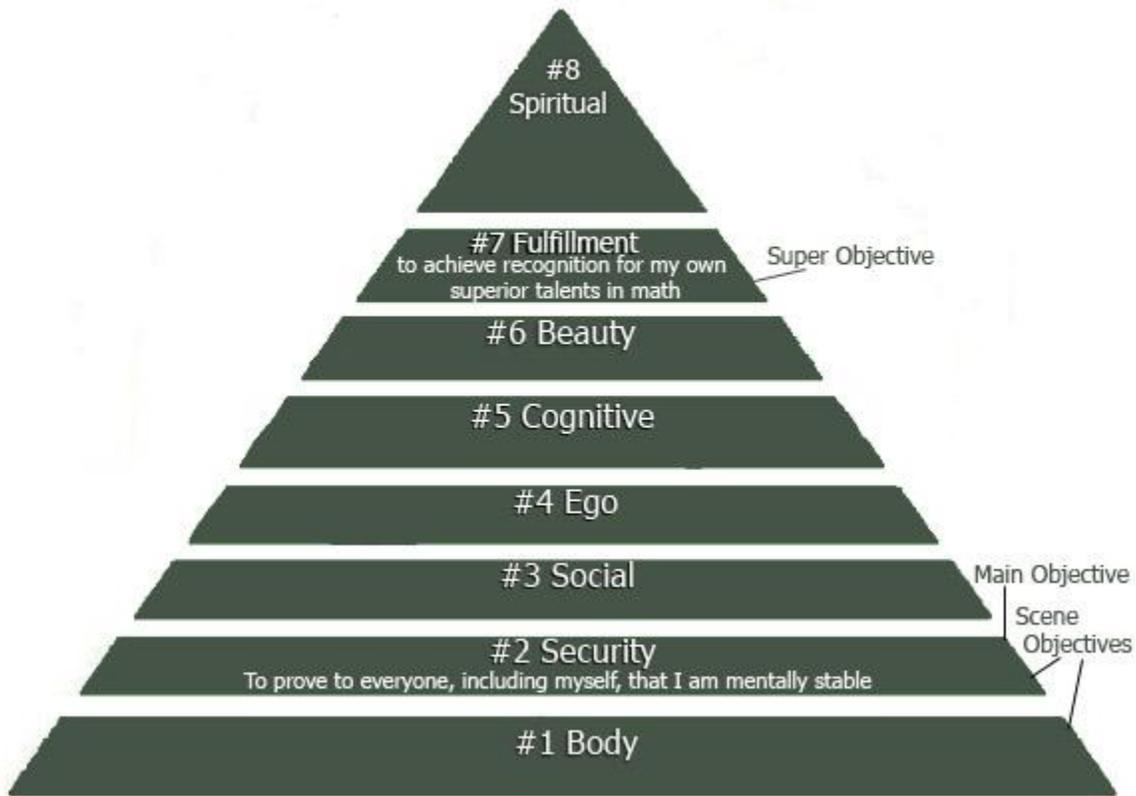
objectives could be stretched out in a numerically ascending order: Scene Objectives (#3 Level), Main Objective (#4 Level), and Super Objective (#7 Level). Occasionally - a scene objective will come along that is based in a lower level of the needs, as discussed earlier when lower level needs rises up and must be satisfied. For example, there are many times throughout the play that Catherine fears others may think she truly is insane, and so her need shifts temporarily in a scene to that of a Security Need (#2 Level), like in this objective, "to convince Claire that I am mentally stable." Fearing she may be institutionalized, she works to regain her security, and then once gained, she returns to her previous place on the hierarchy as she works again towards that ultimate goal of achieving recognition. Catherine's objectives would look like this on the hierarchy.



The Super Objective is based in a need that is higher in the hierarchy than the Main Objective and Scene Objectives. The lower basic needs (Levels #1, #2, #3) manifest a greater urgency for satisfaction. A person who is starving, or feels unsafe, or who has lost the support of a loved one will not be concerned with beauty or knowledge until the lower level need has been satisfied, or at least stabilized. When low level needs emerge in scenes, they will temporarily supersede the Super Objective and Main Objective. Knowing this hierarchy can help the actor ascertain

basic needs and why these needs vary from scene to scene, and why a character temporarily strays from the goals of the Main Objective.

If an actor chooses to identify the main objective as a lower level need, then the urgency to accomplish this objective is raised, providing a high level of urgency to the Through-Line of the play for that character. However, the actor must realize that with this choice the scene objectives will be limited to one or two categories of needs. For example, if an actor makes the choice that Catherine is trying to satisfy a Security need (Level #2) throughout the play of *Proof* and the actor believes that throughout the play Catherine's Main Objective is *to convince everyone, including myself, that I am mentally stable*, then she must not only justify that choice in the text, but also realize how it will affect her acting choices in all scenes throughout the play. The actor who makes this choice as the Through Line for the entire play then consciously limits her acting levels to the hierarchy needs in Level #2 and below. This choice, although highly emotional, does not allow for much variation, growth, or depth in her acting or portrayal of the character. In addition to this self-chosen limited range of expression, the actor has now placed the Main Objective so far away from the Super Objective, that even looking at the diagram, the Super Objective appears unreachable, unattainable, and so makes its potential victory even more in-active. Even the Super Objective should have a sense of being achievable and conceivable to the character. This limited hierarchy of character development for Catherine described here would look like this on Maslow's hierarchy.



The Depressed Catherine

I am watching a production of the play, Proof, produced by a professional theatre company. I have been excited all week about bringing my students to this performance of a play that my students have been reading and conducting in-depth scene studies of the needs and objectives of the characters in the play. As the play unravels I watch the actor playing Catherine mope around the stage, depressed, angry, forlorn and occasionally striking out at those around her. It becomes clear to me that she is basing her needs consistently in Security, and her preferred tactics are those of emotional withdrawal and self pity. Her performance quickly becomes mundane, inactive, and I lose empathy for her character, who has clearly given up on herself as well. However, her sister, Claire is riveting. Claire has not given up on her sister. She clearly has based her Main objective in the much higher Cognitive (#5) need to learn as much about her sister as possible. It is so clear to the audience that Claire truly wants to understand what is troubling Catherine and how Claire can help her, that Claire wins our empathy, our admiration, all our hearts. By the end of the play we would do anything for Claire, but Catherine - we had given up on just as she had given up on herself. My students learned some valuable acting lessons that day. Their lessons on paper and in class exercises about why it is important to have true passion and conviction in one's acting objectives was proven as vital to the

performance, as well as exciting for the audience member to watch, right before their very eyes.

Needs and the Main Objective

The Main Objective is an overall strategy that a character uses throughout the life of the play or movie to fulfill an unsatisfied need. The primary need of the character will vary depending on who the character is and what the character's given circumstances are in the story. One character in a story may be working hard on a Security Need while another is fulfilling a Cognitive Need. Each person's needs vary greatly depending on their thoughts and beliefs about their given circumstances. The basis of these beliefs and needs is the main source of dramatic conflict. By building your Main Objective on a specific and vital basic need, you will guarantee that your scene objectives and supportive behaviors have the potential for action, passion, and urgency.

The foundation of human behavior is need. Needs are both biological and psychological. The biological needs are the lowest three levels in the hierarchy: Body, Security, Love/Affection. The higher levels are psychological: Ego, Knowledge, Beauty, Fulfillment, and Spiritual. The majority of the needs are psychological. Therefore, our thoughts and beliefs are the greatest source behind our actions. In addition, even in the biological needs we respond to these needs by forming thoughts about how to satisfy these needs. For example we have thoughts about how we should and should not satisfy our needs for love and affection, food consumption, and appropriate shelter. We can surmise then that the character's thoughts and beliefs are truly a strong basis and ultimately a Through-Line in the process of building the character's TEAM Approach.

Look at any play or movie genre and you will find common basic needs themes. A romance commonly utilizes Social needs. Thrillers and those with war themes are based in Security needs. Detective stories have many roots in the Cognitive needs. Competitive sports and tales based in high competition employ Ultimate Fulfillment needs. Inspirational stories are often driven by the highest level needs of Fulfillment and Spirituality.

Identifying the needs of a character is actually quite simple when you narrow the list down to the basic eight areas of all human needs. With practice, this process will come easily, and determining your character's Main Objective will become considerably easier than the mysterious elusive objective it may have seemed previously.

To identify the Main Objective for your character:

- (1) While reading the play, look for common themes in the scenes objectives, and consider how they might point towards an overall goal for the duration of the play
- (2) Make note of any specific goals and desires that your character states, or that other characters refer to about your character, that would lead you to a better understanding of what your character is trying to achieve throughout the time frame of the play
- (3) Ask yourself, "Is there something specific that someone important to my character would do or say that would provide a clear victory for my character?"
- (4) Compose a Main Objective Statement using the Main Objective Check list

Main Objective Check List

- Is it anchored in a basic human need?
- Does it focus on one single outcome?
- Does it utilize only one action word?
- Does it motivate your actions throughout the action of the play/movie?
- Is it supported by the events in your character's scenes?
- Is it stated in positive terms, focusing on what you want, not what you don't want?
- Is it a short, single-subject phrase, stated in the first-person?
- Is the achievement of the outcome difficult, taking the entire action of the play/movie to accomplish, if accomplished at all?
- Is there a specific victory that would end all actions towards this outcome?

Talking About the Character Using "I"

As soon as you can, talk about your character using first person, "I think I am searching for...", "I want this from him" or "I am not sure why I act like this in the scene." By talking about your character in the first person, you are already beginning the embodiment process by using wording that projects the belief that you are the character. Whenever I hear an actor talking about his character using "he" I can tell he is still distancing himself from the life of the character, and I encourage him to discuss scene work and character development using "I." You will notice that all objective and victory statements are worded in first person to support this embodiment transformation process.

EXERCISE: Basic Needs Motivating Objectives

Below are examples of Main and Scene Objectives for characters in plays and movies. Identify the need in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs on which the objective is based.

1. To make him to love me _____ Need
2. To protect her from herself _____ Need
3. To prove that this painting is a valued piece of art _____ Need
4. To verify that God is my baby's father _____ Need
5. To win the race with honor. _____ Need
6. To do whatever it takes to get him to feed me _____ Need
7. To protect my young witness from the murderers _____ Need
8. To discover groundbreaking research left by my mentor _____ Need
9. To teach her that all things in life are based in numbers _____ Need
10. To create a provocative and daring thesis project _____ Need
11. To empower my troops to make history by winning the battle _____ Need
12. To make a baby with my best friend's willing husband _____ Need
13. To convince them that I am refreshing company _____ Need
14. To regain control over my home and sanctuary _____ Need
15. To secure my new position by befriending a senior faculty member _____ Need

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

1. BODY NEEDS - Physiological/Biological: hunger, thirst, sleep, sex, physical comfort
2. SECURITY NEEDS - Safety/Security: shelter, order, law and governance, limits, stability
3. SOCIAL NEEDS - Belongingness/Love: relationships with family, co-workers, friends, acceptance, affection
4. EGO NEEDS - Esteem: achievement, competence, independence, recognition, prestige
5. COGNITIVE NEEDS - Knowledge: education, logic, learning new things
6. BEAUTY NEEDS - Aesthetic: beauty, comfortable surroundings, pleasing the senses
7. ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT NEEDS - Self-Actualization: fulfillment, ultimate potential, peak experiences
8. SPIRITUAL NEEDS - Transcendence: Spirituality, nirvana, helping others achieve self actualization

While you were filling in the needs for the objectives above, you might have struggled as you considered a couple options for needs in some of the objective statements. This is a natural response when attempting to identify need based only in an action statement. We are missing vital information surrounding the focus of the action—the given circumstances. Below is a list of the character's name and title of the story associated with each of the objectives listed above, followed by a brief description of the character's given circumstances. With this information, try

identifying the needs for each objective statement again. Is it easier to do this task when you know more about the character's situation and beliefs?

1. **To make him to love me** _____ Need
Julie in *Miss Julie*. Julie is a wealthy young lady who is attempting to win the affection of the butler, Jean.
2. **To protect her from herself** _____ Need
Claire in *Proof*. Claire is concerned that her sister, Catherine, is mentally disabled like their father was.
3. **To prove that this painting is a valued piece of art** _____ Need
Serge in *Art*. Serge purchased a very expensive painting and is trying to convince his friends that it was worth the money he spent on it because it is art.
4. **To verify that God is my baby's father** _____ Need
Agnes in *Agnes of God*. Agnes is a young girl in a nunnery who recently and mysteriously gave birth to a baby. She is being questioned by a psychologist throughout the play about her situation.
5. **To win the race with honor.** _____ Need
Harold Abraham in *Chariots of Fire*. Harold is an Olympic runner who desperately wants to win in the Olympics and honor his Jewish heritage.
6. **To do whatever it takes to get him to feed me** _____ Need
Kate in *Taming of the Shrew*. Kate has been married off to Petruccio who is determined to tame the shrew in her. After their long journey to her new home with him, he denies her food as he attempts to get her to speak sweetly to him.
7. **To protect my young witness from the murderers** _____ Need
John Book in *Witness*. John is a NYC detective who is protecting a young Amish boy who witnessed a murder. They are hiding in Amish country with the boy and his family while he heals from a serious gun shot wound.
8. **To discover groundbreaking research left by my mentor** _____ Need
Hal in *Proof*. Hal's mentor recently died and left an office filled with paperwork on his recent mathematical research. Hal offers to go through the paperwork to see if there is anything important left behind by his mentor.
9. **To teach her that all things in life are based in numbers** _____ Need
Robert in *Proof*. Robert is the father of Catherine, a young woman who could be the next mathematical genius, but is not motivated to pursue her true talents.
10. **To create a provocative and daring thesis project** _____ Need
Evelyn in *The Shape of Things*. Evelyn is a graduate student in Art who has an edgy and daring idea for a thesis project, which requires a naïve human subject.
11. **To empower my troops to make history by winning the battle** _____ Need

- King Henry in *Henry V*. King Henry is delivering an inspiring speech about how these men will be honored generations to come for their bravery and valor on this day, Saint Crispin's Day.
12. **To make a baby with my best friend's willing husband** _____ Need
Meg Jones in *The Big Chill*. Meg is a single woman who wants to be a mother. She asks her friend if she would be willing to let her husband sleep with her once, just so she can have a baby.
13. **To convince them that I am refreshing company** _____ Need
Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche, an overly affected and delicate southern lady, is seeking refuge at her sister's rustic and cramped living quarters in New Orleans. She attempts to win the support and affection of her sister's husband and his friends by showing that she brings class and style to their dismal existence.
14. **To regain control over my home and sanctuary** _____ Need
Shrek in *Shrek*. Shrek is an ogre who wants to regain his isolated living conditions, but he is inundated with unwelcome visitors disrupting his peace.
15. **To secure my new position by befriending a senior faculty member** _____ Need
Nick in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Nick is a new faculty member at a private college. He and his wife are visiting the house of a senior faculty member and his wife, who happens to be the eccentric daughter of the college president.

These objective statement examples list situations for characters in plays and movies that range from the most revered dramatic stories like Shakespeare's *Henry V* to a simple children's animated movie like *Shrek* so that one can see that the process of identifying needs as a driving force for objectives is universal in all stories. No matter what the genre or how complicated or simple the plot is, once an actor recognizes that initially all thoughts are based in basic needs, and that these needs are the driving force behind thought, action, and emotion—then the actor has found a clear and reliable process for acting a role.

Possible answers for the Basic Needs Motivating Objectives Exercise: (1) Social (2) Security (3) Beauty (4) Spiritual (5) Ego (6) Body (7) Security (8) Ego (9) Cognitive (10) Ego (11) Fulfillment (12) Body (13) Social (14) Security (15) Social

Try This:

Consider some characters in your own favorite plays and movies. See if you can determine the character's main need, according to Maslow's Hierarchy, and assign a Main Objective to the need. Then look at individual scenes and identify the needs of your character from scene to scene and try wording a Scene Objective based on each need.

Objectives vs. Action Tactics

Beginning actors commonly mistake minor action tactics for Scene Objectives. An *action tactic* is the small action a character takes in order to achieve his Scene Objective. In a given scene, a character will attempt many different tactics in order to achieve his Scene Objective. Much like in life, when you are working hard to accomplish a difficult task, you will try many different approaches to accomplish this task and to overcome any obstacles that get in your way. For example, look at this very simple scene that could happen in your own life.

One evening while you are trying to study for a very important test, your good friend visits and wants to talk with you. Throughout the following scene you: mention you need to study for an important test tomorrow; suggest a few other exciting things she can do this evening; invite her to go out to dinner tomorrow night; confess that you are tired this evening; ignore her stories at times and stare intently down at your books; push her to the point where she definitely addresses that she came to talk about how she really wants to date a male friend of yours; ask her to go pick up some take-out for dinner; call the male friend that she is interested in and put her on the phone with him; and ask if she would be willing to help you study.

Looking at the scene mentioned above, what would you identify as your Scene Objective? Too often an actor might say her character's objective is *to get my friend to leave*, *to get my friend a date*, or *to ignore my friend*, or weaker still – *to be left alone*. The first clue that these are not strong scene objectives is that they are not rooted in a basic human need for your character. *To be left alone* or *to ignore* is certainly not one of the needs on the hierarchy. *To get your friend a date* may provide your friend with a social need, but it does not serve *your* character's needs – so it would not be *your* objective. The second clue that these are not scene objectives is that they do not motivate all the actions in the scene from beginning to end. If you said your objective was *to be left alone*, you still have not pinpointed the proper Scene Objective because, at one point in the scene, you ask her to help you study.

Another mistake an actor might make in identifying the objective for this scene is to make the objective too complex, for example: *to study for my test and get my friend to leave me alone; to visit with my friend but also study for my test*, and *to get my friend a date while I study for my test*. All of these examples are trying to accomplish more than one thing, which will divide your focus and keep you from fully committing to one objective for the scene. These examples are combining objectives with action tactics. The key here is to keep the objective statement to one singular action, which would include one action word and one subject, both in one short, direct

phrase. Keep it simple. Any other actions you notice in the scene are important tactics that help you obtain your objective, but they are not the primary objective for the scene. A Scene Objective should be stated actively and succinctly so you can easily translate the objective into action. If you keep it simple and direct, you can remember it. Then, you can say it over and over in your head before you go into a scene, essentially willing it into action, influencing everything you do in the scene.

Now review the scene mentioned above while you consider the **Scene Objective Check List** below to determine your Scene Objective.

Scene Objective Check List

- Is it anchored in a basic human need?
- Does it focus on one single outcome?
- Does it utilize only one action word?
- Does it motivate your actions throughout the entire scene?
- Does it contribute to your character's Main Objective?
- Does it include the need for your scene partner(s) participation?
- Is it stated in positive terms, focusing on what you want, not what you don't want?
- Is it a short, single-subject phrase, stated in the first-person?
- Does the desire for the outcome have great immediate urgency?
- Is the achievement of the outcome very difficult, but conceivable?
- Is there a specific victory that would end all actions towards this outcome?

The Scene Objective for the scene described above could then be stated as, *to gain her support for my study time tonight*. Notice the objective statement includes; (1) a Cognitive need – to learn, (2) motivation for all the actions in the scene, (3) your friend's participation in the needs of the objective, (4) one active simple word - *to gain*, (5) and the implication of urgency by stating, *tonight*. Depending on the specific victory you select for the scene, if your friend allows you to study for your test by either helping you, leaving you alone, or quietly supporting you by getting dinner and doing something else until you are done – you will have a victory. An important lesson to learn in identifying your Scene Objective: Don't allow action tactics to mislead your identification of an active Scene Objective. Action tactics are the tools for the job, not the goal of the job.

Digging for Deeper Reasons

I sit puzzled as I watch an actor run around the stage in hot pursuit of Mrs. Saunders in Caryl Churchill's play Cloud Nine. The actor playing Clive leers and paws at the attractive woman who is reluctantly seeking safety at his family's British Colony home in South Africa during a recent uprising. The actor is very active in his lusty pursuit of this woman whenever his wife and children are not looking, however, there appears to be something missing in how he pursues her. His actions don't seem to be motivated by anything more than the mere lust of an attractive woman.

I ask the actor, "Why do you want Mrs. Saunders?" He responds with a wry smile, "She's hot! Can't that be enough of a reason?"

I tell the actor that his pursuit of Mrs. Saunders must be very different than how the character of Harry pursues sex. I add, "Harry is having sex with nearly everyone, and Clive disapproves of Harry's actions. Why is Clive only pursuing Mrs. Saunders, and then when Clive's wife finds out about the affair and attacks Mrs. Saunders, why does Clive cast Mrs. Saunders away so easily?" The actor playing Clive looks at me with a blank stare, "I hadn't thought about all that."

I schedule a time when the actor and I can sit and talk about the details of Clive's motivations and wonder – "Can I get him and the other actors in this play to connect with deeper more meaningful reasons for pursuing the multitude of sexual relationships presented in this wild yet poignant play?" Sitting with the actors for a table discussion concerning their objective statements for the sexual relationships in the play, I ask each to search through the list of basic human needs and align one of the basic needs with the reason they are seeking the relationships they pursue.

The actor playing Harry, the wild bachelor adventurer, decides that his character, who is without a societal attachment, uses his sexual advances with nearly everyone in Clive's household as attempts at finding Belongingness. This Thought discovery helps the actor a great deal – particularly in understanding why his character pursues relations with Clive, as well as Clive's young son, Edward.

The actress playing Mrs. Saunders investigates the character's lines and realizes that her reason for having an affair with Clive is Security. She is looking for a safe haven in the violent uprisings occurring in their British colony and, by satisfying Clive's desires for her, she can remain in the protection of his household, even though she does so with distain, ultimately wanting to be on her own.

Finally – the actor playing Clive, after some detailed exploration of motivations, needs, and desires, realizes that he pursues Mrs. Saunders out of Ego needs. Clive is a British pioneer in the wild country of South Africa during the late 1800s. He has settled a colony there, he has an obedient family, a compliant soft

wife who attends to his every need—but he needs more of a challenge to satisfy his ego need of the adventurer and conqueror. Clive likes things wild and challenging, and he misses that spark in his life. Mrs. Saunders represents a wild mare who stomps about and insists on being free. Her feral behavior is erotically attractive to Clive’s ego. He tries to reconnect with his own feral desires by having relations with her. When his wife ferociously attacks Mrs. Saunders in a knock-down-drag-out cat fight, Clive is tantalized by seeing this wild side of his wife. Re-attracted to her again, he can easily dismiss Mrs. Saunders.

Since this particularly adventurous actor is very willing to embody his characters, taking physical and emotional leaps easily and unabashedly, all he needed was a clear motivating source for those emotions and actions. Fueled with this new knowledge of the character’s thoughts and beliefs about his relationship with Mrs. Saunders and his wife, the actor easily connected those thoughts into his actions and emotions and was able to produce the strong domineering ego-centered character of Clive.

Try This:

Watch a movie you have not seen before, on a DVD where you can stop the action and take notes. During the opening scenes or exposition, where you might learn about the primary characters’ objectives through their words and behavior, notice all the minor actions: eye contact with others, small tasks, treatment of objects, minor accommodations with others in conversation, basic body language, etc. To you, the witness, they are clues to the unfolding story, the set up, the inciting actions that start to drive the story, or little mysteries yet to be solved. To the actor playing the role, these are predominantly tactics the actor is using to achieve the character’s objective. Make notes of these minor actions and, before you progress with the movie, try to determine the primary characters’ objectives for the opening scenes and then for the entire movie. Then—watch the rest of the movie and learn what the characters were actually trying to achieve and see if their motivations match with your predictions.

The Super Objective

A character’s Super Objective, or what they want out of life, forms much of a character’s identity. Consider some people you know well. Could you identify their Super Objectives? Do those objectives contribute to your perception of their identities and impressions on others? Are you basing your assumption of their Super Objective on knowledge of their past, as well as their present experiences? The same holds true for the Super Objective of dramatic characters. The

Super Objective is a strong character frame in real life, as well as for dramatic characters in plays and films. Our own back-stories, or life histories, contribute to our Super Objective just like it does for a character. Therefore, identifying your character's Super Objective is an important process in identifying motivations and actions.

It is best to determine your character's Super Objective after you investigate the entire script, establishing the Main Objective as well as many Scene Objectives. Key pieces of information about the character's past and present experiences will be found in such an investigation, as well as clues to the future aspirations. After such a detailed investigation you have a much clearer sense of not only what your character is saying and doing, but also a better view of the larger picture for your character's overall actions. A total view includes not only what your character says and does, but also what other characters throughout the play state about your character's life in the past, present, and future.

The Super Objective influences your character's personality, reputation, personal internal drive, and ability to make big decisions. In your own life, your ultimate goal may be *to own my very own restaurant, to win at my sport in the Olympics, to parent successful children, to achieve head cardiac surgeon status in a hospital, or to own a beautiful house with a large piece of property*. Whatever the life goal you may have, it will certainly reflect who you are, how you represent yourself to others, and what choices you make in your immediate and long-term plans. However, depending on the type of Super Objective you have, if you are meeting with an old friend at the time, many of the Super Objectives listed above will have a much smaller impact on the immediate scene than the overriding Social or Ego need in the moment. That is unless of course that old friend could be your future husband/wife and your Super Objective is *to parent successful children*, or the old friend is an owner of a restaurant you hope to buy someday and your Super Objective is *to own my very own restaurant*.

Investigating the script thoroughly for clues about your character's wishes and dreams, ultimately creating his/her Super Objective, will then help you line up your Main Objective and Scene Objectives. The order of objective identification may vary from actor to actor. Depending on the actor's preferred method of reasoning, he may instinctively understand the character's Super Objective after the first read of a play, and through deductive reasoning, can go back and establish the Main and Scene objectives. However, another actor may naturally use inductive reasoning, where she identifies the Scene Objectives first, and builds a case for the Main and Super Objectives. Regardless of the actor's investigation process (deductive vs. inductive), the clues are all in the script.

Determining the Super Objective will also help explain your character's behavior and bigger choices along the way. For example, imagine that your Super Objective was *to achieve head cardiac surgeon status in a hospital* and you are offered a well-paid, full-time job in a bank, with the possibility of advancement professionally in the future. This offer comes while you are secretly struggling with entry exam studies for medical school and you were working at a bank part-time to simply pay the bills. You turn down the job offer, because you know that by taking the job, although it would help you temporarily with money, it would impede your long-range goals and interfere with your current studies. Others around you may not understand why you turned down the job if they don't know your Super Objective, but *you* do, and this knowledge was highly influential in the decision.

To identify the Super Objective for your character:

- (1) Determine the Main Objective and a few Scene Objectives in the play/movie.
- (2) Make note of any personal wishes or dreams your character states or implies throughout the script.
- (3) Look for common themes in the Main and Scene objectives, and consider how they might point towards an overall life dream.
- (4) Compose a Super Objective Statement using the Super Objective Checklist.

Super Objective Check List

- Is it anchored in a basic human need?
- Does it focus on one single outcome?
- Does it utilize only one action word?
- Does it motivate your actions throughout and well beyond the action of the play/movie?
- Is it supported by your character's Main Objective?
- Is it stated in positive terms, focusing on what you want, not what you don't want?
- Is it a short, single-subject phrase, stated in the first-person?
- Is the achievement of the outcome extremely difficult, taking nearly a lifetime to accomplish?

- Is there a specific victory that would end all actions towards this outcome?

Sample Super Objectives for Characters in *Proof*

See if you can determine which Super Objective connects with each of the four characters in *Proof*.

1. To create, for my entire family, an enviable life in Manhattan (Ego Need)
2. To establish myself world-wide as a top mathematician (Ego Need)
3. To triumph over my perceived mental illness by publishing an extraordinary proof (Fulfillment Need)
4. To awaken my genetic brilliance in my daughter (Spiritual)

Try This:

After reading a play or watching a movie, summarize a character's actions, commentary, and decisions throughout the story and see if you can determine the character's Super Objective. Follow the guidelines listed for identifying a Super Objective. Then, work backwards and identify the character's Main Objective and a few Scene Objectives, using the checklists previously provided. Now, select a second character in the play or movie and work from Scene Objectives, to Main Objective, to Super Objective in your script analysis process for this character. Which process worked best for you? Either order of investigation works, often determined by the actor's procedural preferences (inductive vs. deductive reasoning) or the style of play or movie investigated.

Using Action Words

The semantics of an actor's objective statement play a very important part in motivating her character's actions. The term Action Word will be used to describe a word that represents this action within the objective statement. In order to avoid any confusion over grammatical writing terms, such as passive and active verbs, we simply use the term *Action Word* throughout this discussion as the overarching term for a word that represents action.

Internal Actions vs. External Actions

When first selecting an Action Word for an objective statement it is important to realize that there is quite a difference in the possible action outcome of someone whose objective is *to be* vs.

to get, as well as *to want* vs. *to make*, and also *to know* vs. *to convince*. The first verbs in each set of examples are not action words, because *to be*, *to want*, and *to know* are all internal states of being – not external actions that motivate strong actions for yourself or others. They connote contemplation, stillness, and passivity. Certainly, in life we often act on *wants* and yearn *to be* and *to know*. However, for purposes of creating dramatic action, an actor must make choices that imply strong actions, even within the language of their character analysis. The second verb in each example (*to get*, *to make*, *to convince*) could replace each of the former verbs in order to create an objective statement based in more active terms. These words imply external actions and interactions with others. *To be* does not provide enough active motivation for an actor. Always focus on the doing – the action.

EXERCISES: Rewording Objective Statements

Below are examples of weak objective statements. They are rooted in different basic needs, but lack at least one of the recommended aspects of a strong objective statement. Reword the following examples, making them strong active choices. Refer to the objective check lists for helpful guidelines. Can you identify what makes them weak?

1. I want to be loved. _____
2. To know I am intelligent. _____
3. To be left alone. _____
4. I don't want him to ask me out. _____
5. I want to be rich and for him to marry me. _____
6. To avoid being made fun of. _____
7. To get her to sign her autograph on my program and agree to go out with me.

8. To eat. _____
9. To protect myself. _____
10. I want to be beautiful. _____

Answers:

- (1) This statement uses "to be" and does not include a subject, referring to from whom the person wants love.
- (2) This statement uses "to know" and does not include a subject that is based in anyone else, making it too internal.

- (3) This statement uses "to be" and does not include a subject that is based in the actions of anyone else, making it inactive.
- (4) This statement refers to what the characters does not want, putting too much emphasis on the negative.
- (5) This statement uses "want" and "to be," both inactive words denying external actions, the statement also includes two subjects "to be rich" and "for him to marry me" causing a divided focus.
- (6) This statement indirectly refers to something the character does not want, and is more of a tactic than an objective. It also does not refer to a subject that includes action with others.
- (7) This statement is active and includes the necessary actions of another, however there are two desired outcomes. One is a tactic used towards the ultimate desired outcome, and one is the true objective.
- (8) This statement does not include the necessary actions of anyone else, missing a subject and a stated urgency.
- (9) This statement does not include a subject. From whom or what must the character be protected?
- (10) This statement uses "want" as an inactive word choice, as well as not including a subject that causes interaction with others.

Possible Rewording of Weak Objective Statements

1. I want to be loved. To make him say he loves me before our date ends. _____
2. To know I am intelligent. To convince her that I am intelligent. _____
3. To be left alone. To persuade the group to honor my need to concentrate right now. _____
4. I don't want him ask me out. To get him to agree that we are better off as friends. _____
5. I want to be rich and for him to marry me. To achieve an enviable life style. _____
6. To avoid being made fun of. To gain their respect for my nonconformist ways. _____
7. To get her to sign her autograph on my program and agree to go out with me.
To get her to agree to go out with me tonight. _____
8. To eat. To coerce her into giving me her lunch bag before the bus stops. _____
9. To protect myself. To free myself from his attack. _____
10. I want to be beautiful. To gain their acknowledgement of my beauty. _____

Selecting Action Words

Actors struggle all the time to find the most active word suited to the needs of their objectives. Here are two clear steps to make this process easier.

(1) Select an action word that implies a clear and finite outcome.

(2) Select an action word that relates to a basic need.

The first step, **Select an action word that implies a clear and finite outcome**, refers to using words that point the action towards something that can be completed. For example the words: *acquire, seduce, guard, possess, solve, create, master, and liberate* all imply a victory within the very word choice. Won't you know when you have successfully guarded, acquired, possessed, mastered, or created something? The outcome of *seduction* is obvious, and when one liberates or solves something, there is a clearly implied ending to the action. However, other word choices do not imply a clear ending or are infinite, such as *evaluate, beg, tantalize, bluff, draw, grope, joke, mock, nurture, needle, try, and urge*. All can be ongoing actions, but lack clear endings. How do you know in a given situation if you have begged, evaluated, bluffed, even groped enough? These words do not have an implied outcome and, although they are certainly active, they do not help to build a strong objective. They are, however, excellent action words well suited for action tactics, which we will get into later in the process of selecting action tactics. For now, your strongest choice for an action word in an objective is one that helps you see the potential for an ending to the action – a victory.

Steer clear of words that are highly intellectual, emotional, or existential. Keep your word choices simple and easy to understand. If the word is too intellectual like, *to ruminare, to exonerate, to cogitate*, and so on, you could end up caught in a net of semantic deciphering, rather than simply applying a strong action. Don't try to apply emotional content to the objective with such actions as *to yell, to joke, to envy*, etc. This will limit your objective to one emotional tone or delivery. Later on in the script analysis you will apply plenty of emotionally colorful words, or emotional tactics, that will guide your delivery. However, they do not belong in the overall objective. As noted above, the use of *to be* is not advisable, as it comes across more existential in your interpretation, prompting the actor to internalize the objective inside his head. Other such existential words to avoid are: *to wish, to want, to dream, to crave* etc. None of these words prompt outward action, and instead are more rooted in needs and desires.

The second step in selecting an action word for your objective is to **(2) select an action word that relates to a basic need**. Since you already rooted your objective in a basic human need, keep going with this clear analysis process by matching a word that compliments the need. If your basic need is a Body Need of sex, then a strong word match for this action is *to seduce*. However if your need is an Ego Need of recognition, then actions like *to prevail, to claim, to convince, and to exploit* would make excellent choices.

Action Words to Consider

The following are eight basic human needs matched with action words that imply clear outcomes. Many of the words easily interchange from one need to the next, so there is some repetition from list to list. The categorizing is meant as a general guide to help simplify the action word selection process. Do not consider these lists as ironclad boundaries or rules, but as supportive groupings. Refer to these words as a beginning guide for creating your objective statements.

Body Needs

To warm
To cool
To find
To get
To dry
To take
To satisfy

To comfort
To repair
To satiate
To rejuvenate
To heal
To seduce
To quench
To climax

Security Needs

To regain
To stabilize
To confront
To overcome
To cast off
To shelter
To prepare
To protect
To avenge

To hold
To escape
To break
To guard
To capture
To conquer
To secure
To restore
To establish
To provide

Social Needs

To find
To gain
To acquire
To beguile
To reject
To co-operate
To obtain
To build
To strengthen
To choose
To repair
To celebrate

To convince
To establish
To get
To soothe
To confess
To seduce
To keep
To hold
To select
To lure
To charm
To ally
To conspire

Ego Needs

To win
To exploit

To possess
To regain
To prevail
To gain

To make
To save
To dominate
To convince
To seize
To undermine
To defend
To bury
To captivate

To claim
To intimidate
To distinguish
To recommend
To persuade
To achieve
To attain
To accomplish
To complete

Cognitive Needs

To solve
To unmask
To search
To uncover
To predict
To plan
To guide
To challenge
To prepare
To define

To teach
To probe
To infuse
To expose
To mold
To quell
To acquire
To gain
To earn
To learn
To decipher

Beauty Needs

To afford
To acquire
To obtain
To create
To make
To inspire
To satisfy
To decorate
To revel
To captivate

To generate
To relish
To take
To beautify
To increase
To gain
To purchase
To prove
To fashion
To enhance
To expand

Fulfillment Needs

To achieve
To rule
To regain
To master
To succeed
To dominate
To reveal
To satisfy
To fulfill
To surmount

To overcome
To lead
To triumph
To discover
To pull off
To trap
To conquer
To reach
To accomplish
To implement
To prevail

Spiritual Needs

To free
To release

To awaken
To enlighten
To revel

To trust
To inspire
To share
To seek
To open
To celebrate
To embrace

To arouse
To allow
To enthuse
To motivate
To liberate
To honor

Sample Objective Statements

Here is a list of objective statements using the process described above. Each objective is motivated by a basic human need and utilizes an action word that implies an outcome.

Body Need

To rejuvenate my energy with a game of tennis
To reach a climax with her at the same time
To warm my children before they perish from the cold
To satiate my relentless hunger for his coveted truffles
To find a comfortable place to rest our weary bodies

Security Need

To stabilize our boat so we don't capsize
To restore order by ending their feud
To confront my assailant unexpectedly
To escape from his territorial reign
To avenge my father's death

Social Need

To ally with her so we can work well together
To gain his regard for my mothering skills
To charm her into marrying me
To confess my weaknesses to my insecure husband
To build a trust with her

Ego Need

To seize control of this disorganized business meeting
To save her from her pitiful debts
To exploit the band under my company's title
To bury my sordid past far from his knowledge
To achieve a prestigious position in his company

Cognitive Need

To solve the riddle in our treasure hunt
To challenge his logic
To earn a good grade on our project
To quell her fears of technology
To predict the inevitable outcome of his weak plan

Beauty Need

To afford our overextended vacation
To enhance his looks with a few changes
To increase my home's value with her landscaping skills

To inspire him to play in our band
To captivate him with my new look

Ultimate Fulfillment Need

To surmount my formidable opponent
To implement my superior plan for the company
To reach the finish line before everyone else
To triumph with my family at the end of this long feud
To accomplish my greatest work, ever

Spiritual Need

To open their hearts to salvation
To inspire a winning attitude in my team
To release my doubts of the cause
To allow my thoughts and actions to reflect a higher purpose
To trust in the laws of the universe

EXERCISE: Build an Objective Statement

Below are brief descriptions of scenes from plays or movies. See whether you can determine a Scene Objective for each. Use Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and match Action Words with those needs from the Action Words lists. Write the objective as if you were playing the role – in first-person point of view.

(1) **A man** and his younger girlfriend wait in a cosmetic surgeon’s waiting room. He is there because his girlfriend suggested he get a nose job. While they wait for his call; he jokes about nose jobs and how absurd they are, he mentions how other handsome men have big noses, he talks about how great their relationship is right now, and he offers to show her a tattoo he had done for her.

Basic Need: _____

Action Word: _____

Scene Objective _____

(2) **A woman** who shares her home with her elderly mother busies herself around the house urgently organizing her mother’s medication schedule, her favorite foods, phone numbers of people to call for anything she might need, and reminds her where everything is in the house. She also asks her mother if she knows where the handgun is kept. The woman acts with determination and focuses on the details like a shopping list. By the end of the scene the woman tells her mother, very matter-of-factly, that she

wants to spend a nice day with her mother, but then this evening she will commit suicide by shooting herself.

Basic Need: _____

Action Word: _____

Scene Objective _____

(3) **A boxer**, with a wife and three children living during the Depression Era, has no money to pay for electricity, food or heat and his children are starving and getting sick from such conditions. His wife sent the children off to distant family members in order to protect them from the elements, but he promised his son they would stay together. In this scene, he goes to a men's club where businessmen, who used to regard him highly and for whom he fought to fill their purses, are enjoying afternoon drinks and smokes. He humbles himself before them and publicly announces his predicament asking for assistance.

Basic Need: _____

Action Word: _____

Scene Objective _____

(4) **A woman** who has lost almost everything she has and is living in her sister's cramped apartment desperately needs to feel like her former self again. It is a very hot day, and the entire environment from the neighborhood to the apartment is fully distasteful to her. Despite her brother-in-laws complaints of her lengthy time in the bathroom and use of water, she takes a long bath, dresses in her best dress, reminisces of old times when she had many admirers, and does her hair.

Basic Need: _____

Action Word: _____

Scene Objective _____

(5) **A senior martial artist** is asked to teach his superior skills to a boy being harassed by very dangerous young martial artists. However – the elderly man sees that the boy is impatient and at times disrespectful of the disciplined process required to learn such a skill. So when the boy arrives for a lesson, the man gives him tasks to do around the house like painting his fence and washing and waxing his car. Whenever the boy

questions the task or asks when they will begin karate lessons, the man calmly reminds him of the task at hand and how to do it well. Unbeknownst to the soon enraged boy, the elderly man is helping the boy gain valuable muscle, balance, and movement skills by completing these very simple tasks.

Basic Need: _____

Action Word: _____

Scene Objective _____

(6) **A young woman** has a brother who has fallen to his death while leading a bloody siege against their city and king. The king decides to make an example of her brother's crime and display the consequences to anyone who attempts to do the same. The king forbids anyone to bury the brother – leaving him to rot in the street. He further decrees that anyone who tries to bury him will be publicly stoned to death. In the scene, the young woman meets secretly with her sister and tells her of her plan to bury her brother. The woman reminds her sister it is a worse crime against the Gods and the spirit of her brother to leave him unburied and without ceremony. The woman begs her sister to help her. When her sister declines with fear, the woman rebukes her with anger and bravely states she will attempt it herself.

Basic Need: _____

Action Word: _____

Scene Objective _____

(7) **An older man** who has led a prestigious life in the world of mathematics is struggling with dementia. In his more lucid moments he recognizes that his days may be numbered and so he dedicates all his time to working on math problems. Day and night he fills notebooks with problems, believing he is on the brink of making his greatest discovery yet. In this scene his daughter comes home to visit, worried for his health and well-being. He has reached a point in his work that he feels is particularly remarkable and is so absorbed in the work that he doesn't even notice the cold as he writes outside in the winter weather. He tells his daughter of his groundbreaking discovery and asks her to read it. He watches her intently as she reacts with confusion while she reads his findings.

Basic Need: _____

Action Word: _____

Scene Objective _____

(8) **An aristocratic woman** returns from her long honeymoon to a new house her husband purchased for them, thinking it would make her happy. She is bored with her husband, unhappy with the new house, and dreading the thought of soon being a mother. In this scene the husband's aunt comes to visit, focusing her attention on the husband, his writings, and his potential for a new position at a university. The aunt also learns that the aristocratic woman is pregnant and promises to come by regularly to check on the future family. The aristocratic woman treats the aunt coldly while the aunt dotes about their new home. At one point, the woman complains that one of the maids left her old hat on a chair, knowing full well it was the aunt's hat.

Basic Need: _____

Action Word: _____

Scene Objective _____

Possible Answers for Discussion

- (1) Social Need, To gain – To gain her acceptance as I appear now. (From the play, *The Shape of Things*)
- (2) Security Need, To prepare – To prepare her for survival after my suicide. (From the play, *Night Mother*)
- (3) Body Need, To get – To get help for my family's survival from those who should step up now (From the movie, *Cinderella Man*)
- (4) Beauty Need, To enhance – To enhance this pitiful situation with beauty before I go mad (From the play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*)
- (5) Cognitive Need, To teach – To teach the boy the skills he needs before he starts training (From the movie, *The Karate Kid*)
- (6) Spiritual Need, To motivate – To motivate my sister to help me in this risky deed (From the play *Antigone*)
- (7) Ultimate Fulfillment Need, To reveal – To reveal my secret life-affirming discovery to my proud daughter (From the play, *Proof*)
- (8) Ego Need, To regain – To regain my superior standing by undermining the aunt encroaching on my new territory (From the play, *Hedda Gabler*)

Conditions vs. Objectives

Many times actors will confuse the character's conditions, like an emotional state, physical limitation, and environmental given circumstances for objectives. For an example, in the play

Proof the character of Catherine has a scene where her sister, Claire, has thrown a party at the house after their father's funeral. Hal, a graduate student who studied with her father, comes out onto the porch to talk with Catherine. The scene at first appears to be light dialogue about her father, her dress, and talk about famous mathematicians. Catherine has a large collection of thoughts to sift through in this scene and throughout the play, To name a few, Catherine contemplates her own sanity, wonders if Hal's intentions are honorable, weighs heavily over what to do next with her life, needs to define her own independence from her overbearing sister, and has built up months of emotions over her father's slow mental deterioration and final death. Far too often an actress will get caught up in Catherine's condition of mourning the loss of her father – playing only this condition and not a true active objective. Granted, mourning the loss of her father is a thought that Catherine has – however, these thoughts are not motivated out of a need nor are they actively in pursuit of something from another person in the room. Therefore, this would be a poor and inactive choice for a scene objective. The mourning, depression, and fear are all valid conditions that color Catherine's actions. However, the primary thought that requires the actor's focus is the thought that provides a clear objective based in a human need that is directed towards another individual in the scene. Catherine could be testing Hal to see what his intentions are with her, or she could be trying to find out if Hal is capable of believing that she could indeed be a brilliant mathematician. Any of these choices, and more would be far more active than to simply want Hal to leave so she can wallow in a condition of mourning.

EXERCISE: Doorway Visualizations to Victories

Look at a scene in a play or movie where a character is entering a room with a very important objective to accomplish—for example: *to convince the board that I can lead them well, to empower my team to win the championship, to tell her I want to marry her, or to confess I stole money from them.* Then, imagine this character is literally standing in the doorway, before the scene begins. What would your character visualize for the upcoming scene's outcome? Write a *Doorway Visualization* using the guidelines below. After you complete the visualization, see if you can determine the Victory Statement for the scene.

Expressing the inner monologue of your character's thoughts, compose a paragraph including:

"During the following scene I visualize...."

- How I will appear to those witnessing my actions
- What they will think of me
- What I will do
- What they will do in return

- ❑ What I will say
- ❑ What they will say in return
- ❑ What I will get in the end

EXAMPLE

Objective: *to convince the board that I can lead them well*

Doorway Visualization: I am standing in the hall, before I enter the boardroom.

During the following scene I visualize that when I enter the room they will be impressed by the impeccable outfit I planned to wear, that screams, "Leader!" with its power colors and strong masculine lines. They will be a little skeptical of my ability to lead them, and I will need to convince them that I can. They will think I am too young and too inexperienced for the job. So, I will astound them my expert advice, extremely well organized presentation, and factual support of all examples presented. They will gradually let go of all doubts in my ability to lead them and lean forward, eager to hear my plans for our future. They will express their surprise and delight in my great ideas. I will end the presentation by asking them, "Are you with me 100% in the plans?" and they will unanimously agree and shake my hand. I will end the meeting knowing that I have their full support of my leadership.

Victory Statement: They will honestly say they back my ideas 100%

EXERCISE: Creating Victory Statements

Using the eight scenes described previously in the **Build an Objective Statement** exercise, build on the Scene Objectives you created for these scenes and write a Victory Statement for each scene. Refer to the **Victory Statement Check List** as a guide.

(1) **A man** and his younger girlfriend wait in a cosmetic surgeon's waiting room before he is to get a nose job.

Scene Objective_____

Victory Statement_____

(2) **A woman** who shares her home with her elderly mother busies herself around the house urgently organizing her mother's things.

Scene Objective_____

Victory Statement_____

(3) **A boxer** with a wife and three children during the Depression Era, confronts his rich colleagues at the men’s club.

Scene Objective _____

Victory Statement _____

(4) **A woman** who has lost almost everything she has and is living in her sister’s cramped apartment takes a long bath and beautifies herself despite her brother-in-law’s complaints.

Scene Objective _____

Victory Statement _____

(5) **A senior martial artist** in the process of teaching a boy karate gives him tasks to do around the house like painting his fence and washing and waxing his car.

Scene Objective _____

Victory Statement _____

(6) **A young woman** meets secretly with her sister and tells her sister of her plan to bury their dead brother, which is against the king’s command.

Scene Objective _____

Victory Statement _____

(7) **An older man** tells his daughter of his groundbreaking mathematical discovery and asks her to read his notes to confirm the news.

Scene Objective _____

Victory Statement _____

(8) **An aristocratic woman** treats her new husband’s aunt coldly and complains that one of the maids left her old hat on a chair, knowing full well it was the aunt’s hat.

Scene Objective _____

Victory Statement _____

Possible Victory Statement Answers for Discussion

Although the Victory Statement can vary slightly depending on the choices made by the actor, here are some suggested answers for the Creating a Victory Statement exercise.

1. She will tell me she loves me as I am now.

2. She will tell me she will manage without me.
3. They will graciously give me money
4. He will be captivated by my transformation.
5. He will thank me for my wise teaching methods.
6. She will agree to help me, no matter the consequences.
7. She will offer to help me further develop this masterful discovery.
8. She will apologize for interfering in my marriage.

Raising the Stakes

It is important to select a victory that is extremely difficult to achieve, by doing so you *Raise the Stakes* of the scene, or infuse the scene with urgency and conflict. A game or a challenge is always much more interesting to watch if we know the odds against winning are very high. When a character achieves a victory, it is a major accomplishment in the life of the character. So much so, that the victory is rarely accomplished. The character's constant urgent motivation for this victory is what drives her actions in a scene. If a character accomplishes her victory, the given scene is over, and the scene ends with her reveling in her victory. When selecting a victory for your scene, make sure the victory is so difficult to achieve that it may never actually happen. As you look at the scene, ask yourself if your character appears to have won something big by the end of the scene. If so, she has achieved her victory and you need to simply determine what that was. However, in most cases, your character is still struggling at the end of the scene, with the action being cut off by a shift to a new scene. In most cases the victory is not easily offered up by the script, and so determining your victory will take a bit more imagination and detective work.

Summary of Objective Use

Let us return to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter, "If the bare essence of acting with someone in a scene is to know why your character stays in a room with another character, what keeps your character in the room? Why not leave?" You now know that a need-based-objective focused on receiving something from the other in the scene is the answer.

Looking further into this simple example of scene study, we also know that the key to good drama is conflict. Therefore, in order to maintain conflict we can surmise that throughout this scene about staying in the room with another, once a person gets what they want—the scene is over. So throughout the scene, the characters must be met with obstacles that prevent them from getting what they want.

Consider this—if we boiled down the most basic subtext coming out of need-based-objectives while encountering obstacles throughout the scene—we might be able to say the scene could simply be the following dialogue between characters A and B of basic thoughts:

A: Give it to me.

B: No.

B: Give it to me.

A: No.

(Etc. until someone says "Yes" or someone gives up on this particular objective.)

Looking back at the eight example scenes provided in this chapter, can you see this simple pattern underneath the detailed given circumstances in the scenes?

(1) *The Shape of Things*

Situation: A man and his younger girlfriend wait in a cosmetic surgeon's waiting room.

He is there because his girlfriend suggested he get a nose job. While they wait for his call; he jokes about nose jobs and how absurd they are, he mentions how other handsome men have big noses, he talks about how great their relationship is right now, and he offers to show her a tattoo he had done for her.

1. *A young man's "Give it to me" is his desire to gain his girlfriend's acceptance as he appears now.*
2. *He receives "No" from his girlfriend as she insists on the nose surgery*
3. *The girlfriend's "Give it to me" is her desire to change him*
4. *She receives "No" from him as he provides examples of others who are considered handsome with big noses*

(2) *Night Mother*

A woman who shares her home with her elderly mother busies herself around the house urgently organizing her mother's medication schedule, her favorite foods, phone numbers of people to call for anything she might need, and reminds her where everything is in the house. She also asks her mother if she knows where the handgun is kept. The woman acts with determination and focuses on the details like a shopping list. By the end of the scene the woman tells her mother, very matter-of-factly, that she wants to spend a nice day with her mother, but then this evening she will commit suicide by shooting herself.

1. A woman's "Give it to me" is her need of proof that her elderly dependent mother will survive on her own after the young woman's suicide.
2. She receives "No" from her mother as her mother realizes that if she constantly provides messages of "No" that she may be able to prevent her daughter from committing suicide.
3. The mother's "Give it to me" is her need to convince her daughter that there is a reason to live.
4. The mother receives "No" responses as the daughter explains all the reasons she has for wanting to end it all.

(3) Cinderella Man

A boxer, with a wife and three children living during the Depression Era, has no money to pay for electricity, food or heat and his children are starving and getting sick from such conditions. His wife sent the children off to distant family members in order to protect them from the elements, but he promised his son they would stay together. In this scene, he goes to a men's club where businessmen, who used to regard him highly and for whom he fought to fill their purses, are enjoying afternoon drinks and smokes. He humbles himself before them and publicly announces his predicament asking for assistance.

1. A man's "Give it to me" is to get financial help from the wealthy men at the club
2. He receives "No" from the men's initial silence and disdain for his begging
3. The men's "Give it to me" is their need for this man resolve his problem on his own so they don't have to face the truth of the recession's impact
4. The men receive a "No" from the boxer as he refuses to leave until they help him

Continue This Exercise On Your Own

See if you can fill in the "Give it to me" motivations and "No" reactions for the following situations. Ideally you would read these plays or watch these movies before completing this exercise in order to fully understand the characters and scenes being described in their short forms below. However, many assumptions of basic human behavior needs and scene conflicts can already be made within the general scenarios described.

(4) A Streetcar Named Desire

Situation: A woman who has lost almost everything she has and is living in her sister's cramped apartment desperately needs to feel like her former self again. It is a very hot day, and the entire environment from the neighborhood to the apartment is fully distasteful to her. Despite her brother-in-laws complaints of her lengthy time in the bathroom and use of

water, she takes a long bath, dresses in her best dress, reminisces of old times when she had many admirers, and does her hair.

1. A woman's "Give it to me" is _____
2. She receives "No" from _____
3. The man's "Give it to me" is _____
4. The man receives "No" from _____

(5) The Karate Kid

Situation: A senior martial artist is asked to teach his superior skills to a boy being harassed by very dangerous young martial artists. However – the elderly man sees that the boy is impatient and at times disrespectful of the disciplined process required to learn such a skill. So when the boy arrives for a lesson, the man gives him tasks to do around the house like painting his fence and washing and waxing his car. Whenever the boy questions the task or asks when they will begin karate lessons, the man calmly reminds him of the task at hand and how to do it well. Unbeknownst to the soon enraged boy, the elderly man is helping the boy gain valuable muscle, balance, and movement skills by completing these very simple tasks.

1. The teacher's "Give it to me" is _____
2. He receives "No" from _____
3. The boy's "Give it to me" is _____
4. The boy receives "No" from _____

(6) Antigone

Situation: A young woman has a brother who has fallen to his death while leading a bloody siege against their city and king. The king decides to make an example of her brother's crime and display the consequences to anyone who attempts to do the same. The king forbids anyone to bury the brother – leaving him to rot in the street. He further decrees that anyone who tries to bury him will be publicly stoned to death. In the scene, the young woman meets secretly with her sister and tells her of her plan to bury her brother. The woman reminds her sister it is a worse crime against the Gods and the spirit of her brother to leave him unburied and without ceremony. The woman begs her sister to help her. When her sister declines with fear, the woman rebukes her with anger and bravely states she will attempt it herself.

1. A woman's "Give it to me" is _____
2. She receives "No" from _____
3. The sister's "Give it to me" is _____
4. The sister receives "No" from _____

(7) Proof

Situation: An older man who has led a prestigious life in the world of mathematics is struggling with dementia. In his more lucid moments he recognizes that his days may be numbered and so he dedicates all his time to working on math problems. Day and night he fills notebooks with problems, believing he is on the brink of making his greatest discovery yet. In this scene his daughter comes home to visit, worried for his health and well-being. He has reached a point in his work that he feels is particularly remarkable and is so absorbed in the work that he doesn't even notice the cold as he writes outside in the winter weather. He tells his daughter of his groundbreaking discovery and asks her to read it. He watches her intently as she reacts with confusion while she reads his findings.

1. The father's "Give it to me" is _____
2. He receives "No" from _____
3. The daughter's "Give it to me" is _____
4. The daughter receives "No" from _____

(8) Hedda Gabler

Situation: An aristocratic woman returns from her long honeymoon to a new house her husband purchased for them, thinking it would make her happy. She is bored with her husband, unhappy with the new house, and dreading the thought of soon being a mother. In this scene the husband's aunt comes to visit, focusing her attention on the husband, his writings, and his potential for a new position at a university. The aunt also learns that the aristocratic woman is pregnant and promises to come by regularly to check on the future family. The aristocratic woman treats the aunt coldly while the aunt dotes about their new home. At one point, the woman complains that one of the maids left her old hat on a chair, knowing full well it was the aunt's hat.

1. A woman's "Give it to me" is _____
2. She receives "No" from _____
3. The aunt's "Give it to me" is _____
4. The aunt receives "No" from _____

Conclusion of Thoughts in a Scene

Consider any scene you are currently rehearsing or have rehearsed in the past. Can you also break this scene down into this simple pattern of "Give it to me" and "No"? Can you recognize that dramatic action is based around this idea of (1) a character in need, who acts on that need by (2) devising a plan to obtain (3) something specific from others ("Give it to me") in order to

satisfy that need, however they don't easily obtain the thing they pursue because they are constantly (4) met with obstacles ("No") and so they (5) attempt many actions and behaviors in order to obtain the thing they desire.

In acting terminology these five areas are:

- (1) Need
- (2) Objective
- (3) Victory
- (4) Obstacles
- (5) Action Tactics and Emotional Tactics

THOUGHTS are the roots of needs and objectives. THOUGHTS can also provide the obstacles and tactics if you consider that some beliefs and reactive thoughts can be obstacles, and that strategically planned tactics require thoughts in advance of the actions and behaviors. Although the following chapters will investigate obstacles and tactics more as ACTIONS and EMOTIONS, remember that all parts of the TEAM are intrinsically tied together as mutual and reciprocal parts of a whole, supporting a fully embodied acting process.

In summary, THOUGHTS are the character's: *needs, desires, objectives, intentions, purpose, expectations, imagined victory, considerations, opinions, beliefs, and reasoning power application of mental attention*

For further study on THOUGHTS methods, exercises, and examples:

Constantine Stanislavski was the first acting teacher to clearly identify and explain an acting method based in psychological theories and script analysis of objectives, obstacles, and tactics. Many theories developed after Stanislavski's original developments are still based in his original theories. Reading these core texts by Stanislavski, or texts based in his original teachings, would provide additional information as well as a glimpse at the original sources of these terms.

1. *An Actor Prepares*, by Constantine Stanislavski
2. *The Stanislavski System*, by Sonia Moore
3. *Respect for Acting*, by Uta Hagen

For further information on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and their motivations for human interactions:

1. *Toward a Psychology of Being*, by Abraham Maslow
2. *Motivation and Personality*, by Abraham Maslow