

# The Most Important Quality For A Career As An Actor

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## Why “Everyone Works Every Class” is Wrong

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let's get visceral

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## rami malek on playing freddie mercury

NPR did a [nice interview](#) with Rami Malek about his work on the role of Freddie Mercury in Bohemian Rhapsody. I particularly like this bit:

*Malek speculates that the singer's showmanship sprung from a desire to find his place in the world. Born in Zanzibar as Farrokh Bulsara, Mercury had buck teeth and was called “Bucky” by most of the kids at the boarding school he*

*attended in India. When Mercury returned to Zanzibar after boarding school, the country was in the midst of a revolution and his family had to immigrate to London. "At that point, trying to identify himself, [he] feels like a fish out of water," Malek says.*

*But in front of a crowd, it was a different story: "When [Mercury] gets out on the stage, he holds everyone's attention and says, 'Hey, I may have been an outcast and a misfit, and I may feel like I don't belong, but here on this stage, we belong together,'" Malek says. "It is the most beautiful thing to see realized."*

You see what he did there? He identified a couple of gaping wounds from Mercury's past (having buck teeth and being teased for it, having to immigrate to London as a young adult and feeling like a fish out of water) that produces a need (for belonging) that he as the actor can pursue throughout the film. This is exactly how we break things down in class: we look at the character's past to identify moments or periods of profound loss (which we call **gashes** or **tumors**, respectively), and also moments of triumph or completeness (which we call **trophy moments**), and then try to articulate what the **need** is that arises from those past events. In this way, we find a need that can be pursued under all circumstances, which we call the **underlying objective**. Then the question arises, with regard to a particular scene: how can this underlying objective be productively **pursued** in the situation of the scene?

No wonder Malek was so good!

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# one of the most important things you can learn in an acting class

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## even movie stars have to deal with anxiety

Came across [this piece](#) recently in the *Hollywood Reporter*, in which the remarkable Chloe Grace Moretz is profiled. She's had a big year: she starred in [The Miseducation of Cameron Post](#), which won the Grand Jury prize at Sundance, and also in the much anticipated [remake of Suspiria](#). She is a truly gifted actor; if you've never seen [Let Me In](#), the British remake of [Let the Right One In](#), do yourself a favor.

Anyway, one of the things I liked in the profile was her discussion of coping with anxiety:

*Do you still struggle with anxiety?*

*Meditation has really, really helped me, and just getting on a workout schedule. Working out is something that really helps with my anxiety. But I know that the minute I fall off of that, for sure.*

*But I think as a woman, it's very difficult to deal with the hormonal fluxes that we deal with monthly. I deal with so much anxiety hormonally from my cycle. Your cycle doesn't know when you are going to be on the red carpet for a gala. So partner that with a lack of sleep and jet lag, and it's*

*like a total spiral.*

*So for me, I just make an effort to make sure that I give myself 30 minutes a day to walk away. That just means shutting a bathroom door and just standing there for a second and focusing on my breathing, and focusing on my brain, and reconnecting to my heart and understanding who I am. That gets rid of the anxiety for me. But I think that, yeah, as an adult, it's never not going to be a struggle. There's so much societal influx around you, and there are so many people who need something from you.*

Performing is a kind of test: we want to be found to be a good actor when we're done. In that sense, our identity as an actor is at stake every time we do it. This produced anxiety in many of us, and we each have to go on our own journey in learning to contend with that anxiety. A former student and working actor I know created a whole regimen that she does before every audition to help her with her anxiety, a regimen that involves yoga, eating bananas (for the tryptophan), and even medication.

What I liked about Moretz's comments is that they remind us that success doesn't mean the end of anxiety. In fact, it can often exacerbate it: if I screw up now, everything I've worked so hard to achieve will be taken away. So finding out how to face down the demon of anxiety is something that most of us performers will have to contend with our whole lives long. It's not something that we graduate from. I remember hearing a story about Josh Brolin and George Clooney making plans to get together at Clooney's house to work on the Coen Brothers movie *Hail, Caesar!* together. Brolin, so the story goes, drove to Clooney's house, parked in his car, and then sat in the car for an hour trying to muster the courage to go in. When he finally did, he confessed his anxiety to Clooney, saying "I'm scared to work with you. You're George Clooney." To which Clooney replied, "I'm scared to work with you. You're

Josh Brolin.”

Moretz’s open discussion of her struggles with anxiety is generous in that it makes room for the rest of us to feel ok about having similar struggles. If someone with her talent and skill still feels scared, then it’s no wonder that we sometimes do as well.

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## **the most important thing you can do in your first year in LA as an actor**

The AWAS YouTube channel has launched! Watch, share and subscribe!

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## **Super Bowl MVP Nick Foles on the importance of failure**

In a [press conference](#), Most Valuable Player Nick Foles of the Philadelphia Eagles had the following to say about failure, when asked what inspiration he wanted people to take from his journey :

*Don't be afraid to fail. I'm not Superman. We all have daily struggles in our life. Embrace the struggles and grow.*

*Instagram, Twitter- it's all a highlight reel. Failure is part of life. It's part of building character and growing. I wouldn't be up here if I hadn't fallen thousands of times, made mistakes. We all are human, we all have weaknesses. Without failure, I wouldn't be up here.*

Such a profound message. Actors get told that they need to have the courage to fail, and they might think "Yeah, I get that", but actually doing it, actually failing, sucks. But it's through that painful, disappointing process of failing that we are invited to confront our limitations and transcend them.

Being in a class in which everyone is patted on the head and told that they did good work will not afford you the opportunity to experience this kind of productive failure. This is not to say that acting teachers need to administer feedback in a harsh or cruel way. Not at all. But teachers do need to hold students to a high standard, a standard that is high enough that they will not always be able to meet it. It's only in this kind of environment that people really grow.

As another wise man once [said](#):

*We learn wisdom from failure much more than from success. We often discover what will do, by finding out what will not do; and probably he who never made a mistake never made a discovery,*

If you're in a class where you're not being told when you're doing strong, fulfilled work and when you're not, and further, what you can do to make work that is lacking better, then it's time to find a new class.

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# free things you can do for your acting

Everybody goes through times when there isn't a lot of broccoli in the crisper, for whatever reason. But that's no reason to stop doing work to develop yourself as an actor.

Here are some terrific things you can do to feed your creative soul or hone your craft while you're waiting for the financial picture to change.

1. **Read.** Acting is about bringing the word to pulsing, transfixing life. So getting to know said written word better is never a bad idea. Read books about acting, read biographies of actors. read great novels, read pulp novels, read poetry, read the newspaper. There are plenty of options. But in our media-saturated world, spending some time reading is never a bad idea, and if helps you develop your sensitivity to the extraordinary expressive power of language, that's even better.
2. **Study the Alexander Technique.** Wait, what? I thought you said this was a list of free stuff? The Alexander Technique is pricey high-end body-mind integration training. How do I get it for free? Well, it happens that there is an [Alexander Technique Training Institute](#) in Los Angeles, where people train to become teachers of the Alexander Technique. And such institutes often need people to serve as subjects for the teachers-in-training to practice on. So give them a call, and offer them the use of your body for their pedagogical purposes. There's a good chance you'll learn invaluable things about said body, for a song.
3. **Meditate.** Practice the fine art of paying attention. There are all kinds of places to learn to meditate in

Los Angeles. [Here](#) is one of my favorites, but there are many others.

4. **Study Pilates.** What does Pilates have to do with my acting? Well, acting as I teach it involves what Pilates people call core awareness. The actor's awareness should rest in the abdominal core, in order to achieve true visceral activation and the radiance that comes with it.

Pilates is a great way to work on that, because Pilates is about learning to use your abdominal core muscles in everything you do. Literally: everything. There are lots of how-to videos on Youtube, such as [this one](#).

5. **Journal.** "It's so funny, you go to acting school thinking you're going to learn how to be other people, but really it taught me how to be myself. Because it's in understanding yourself deeply that you can lend yourself to another person's circumstances and another person's experience."—Lupita Nyong'o

So get going! Writing a journal is a great way to develop intimacy with yourself, an invaluable asset for an actor.

6. **Read aloud.** Pick up some Shakespeare. Pick up some poetry that speaks to you. Read it aloud. Read it to yourself. Read it to your dog. Read it to your roommate. Read it to anyone who will listen. Savor the sounds of the words and the rhythm of the sentences.

7. **Improv.** Look on [Meetup](#) for an Improv group near you, and join in the fun.

8. **Make a game out of being rejected.** Like [this guy](#).

There will never be any shortage of people to reject you. If you have the nerve to do this one, your future as an actor looks bright.

9. **Go to the zoo.** Ok, this one isn't quite free. But if you can scrape together \$20, there are worse ways to spend it. Studying and learning to imitate animals is a hallowed form of actor training, and is wonderful for shedding inhibitions and exploring physical possibilities.

I'm sure there are others, and I'll add them as I think of them. But there should be some things here to get you started.

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## on acting in comedy, according to Michael McKean

Came across this gem in [a Slate interview with Michael McKean of Better Call Saul](#):

*I don't think that a comedy performance—You know, it's essentially the same job, no matter what. You find out what your character wants and then you go for it. That's really how to do anything. They're just going to write more jokes for you if it's a comedy.*

And he should know:

*Like Odenkirk, McKean is best known for comedy, with a career that stretches from Laverne & Shirley through his roles in This Is Spinal Tap, Waiting for Guffman, and Clue. But his dramatic talents are on full view at the moment, both on TV and on stage, where he's appearing in the Tony-winning production of The Little Foxes at the Manhattan Theatre Club.*

The defense rests.



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