



Acting for the Camera: Revised Edition

Tony Barr , Edward Asner (Foreword by)

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Culled from Tony Barr's 40 years' experience as a performer, director and acting teacher in Hollywood, this highly praised handbook provides readers with the practical knowledge they need when performing in front of the camera. This updated edition includes plenty of new exercises for honing on-camera skills; additional chapters on imagination and movement; and fresh material on character development, monologues, visual focus, playing comedy and working with directors. Inside tips on the studio system and acting guilds make it particularly helpful for people new to the business, and numerous anecdotes from actors such as Morgan Freeman and Anthony Hopkins and examples from current movies illustrate its many lessons. It is perfect for acting classes, workshops, all actors who work in front of the camera -- and all those who want to.

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Sara says

Film Actors: I can't recommend this book enough. It covers literally everything you could think of, including pesky film business jargon to nailing cold reads. I swear half the pages are dog-eared now. Bonus: It has exercises in the back. I'm not 100% sure, but it seems to favor Meisner technique over Method acting.

Randy Babbs says

Important read for actors working stage and camera gigs. Keeps techniques compartmentalized.

Gracie says

"Acting for the Camera" includes many different sections valuable not only to the film actor, but any actor, especially those trained in theatre but transitioning to film. Tony Barr begins with the art of acting and finding objective, listening, and reacting to stimuli instead of picking up cues. The book then transitions to tools, and then the business of film and helpful film references and vocabulary, as well as helpful tips on things such as cold reading. Throughout, the author compares theatre to film acting in a way that is helpful to those theatre performers seeking film. The book also contains a large section of film/camera exercises to use to improve one's work. This book tends to be occasionally redundant, although that may also be a plus, seeing as then the information can really 'stick' to the reader. I will definitely refer back to this book many times!

Charisse Nichole says

Once of the best acting books I've read so far. It covers a lot of topics thoroughly and accurately. I found it immensely helpful and informative. I refer to it first when the occasion arises. Highly recommend it for those in the field. Even though I gave it four stars, it was a pretty good read. It didn't keep my attention very well but it's not there to entertain me; it's there to inform me. And it did that very well. So give it a read if you need to study up on the topic!

Glenn Bruce says

I was lucky enough to study briefly at Tony Barr's studio. I liked him a lot. He had a very direct approach for teaching film acting. I still use his book as a teaching guide for students. An astute man, he made the process accessible but never empty.

Nikki says

a great tool. I will probably read it again for acting help.

Amit Bolakani says

Insightful for screen actors. Simple and useful tips.

Will Bellais says

I read this book many years ago in manuscript. I felt it was one of the most important books written for an actor at the time. The revision, the new edition, only confirms my original observation. I have been using this book to teach actors since the late 1970s. Tony Barr approaches the craft of acting in such an honest fashion that when his approach is applied you ask, why didn't I know this before. The truth is -- you did and didn't know you did. Tony puts aside all the mumbo jumbo and implores us to understand what acting truly is: acting is responding to stimuli in an imaginary circumstance, in an imaginative and dynamic and manner that is truthful to the character and the character's environment so as to transmit ideas and emotions to an audience. That is what acting is and there is no other definition. Tony has done it all. The new exercises by a former teacher, Eric Kline, truly help in developing an understanding of the craft of film performance.

Sun says

Simple, direct guide to understanding the aims of acting. Insightful, clear and informative. Makes acting sound easy!

Maria says

This is a book I have been assigned for my newest class (with the original name: Acting for the Camera). Hope it is brilliant. I'm going to review it piecemeal as I read the five parts. I'm just going to pull out the parts that were interesting to me, not necessarily the meat of the work. Hopefully recapping will also help me to remember and integrate the tips into my own work. So I guess this is less like a review and more like homework notes.

Part 1: Acting

*In film, your "quality", or the impression people get of you, can be more important than your technique.

*It is important to have a "free instrument" so that emotions and reactions to stimuli come to you quickly and naturally. Part of having a free and energetic instrument is treating your body well.

*80% of acting is listening. Listening is perhaps more accurately defined as "sensing" and means using all senses to understand your scene partner.

*"Bring to the role those parts of yourself that are congruent with what is written". I have always been confused by the tension between using myself and creating a character. This definition helps me a lot in terms of suggesting that I should always use genuine responses but I edit out responses that might be genuine for me but not for the character. Our teacher also suggested that, when acting, the characters reaction are the same as our own reactions but that they are triggered by different things than we would be triggered by. Or they may take more or less time to be triggered by something than we personally would.

*The most transformative chapter for me in the first part was on focus and concentration. Focus is at the heart of listening and the author recommends practicing concentrating on a single object for as long as possible to develop the skill. His hint for remaining focused is to study the object. (This can be applied in a scene by choosing the person or object that your character is focusing on.) This intense concentration has the added benefit of relaxing you because there is no excess energy spent worrying. Brilliant. I spent a long time that night examining the floral pattern on our quilt which turned out to be surprisingly complex. I guess this is what meditation is about. At any rate, this exercise seems to me to be the remedy for my most profound struggles as an actor; if I focus, I will relax, if I am relaxed the emotions will come naturally. I should probably re-read this chapter every day. As it stands I will commit to focusing at least on time a day.

*If your face is too animated, even if that is natural for you it can be unnatural on film.

*"Learn how to free your tear ducts so that they are available to you as an actor" Barr recommends seeing and acting coach or therapist if this is a problem. However, he also says that trying to cry often gets in the way of crying and that it is better to try to suppress the desire to cry since that is what we do in real life. This attempt apparently will allow a free instrument to cry. I was so glad for this discussion because not being able to cry is way at the top of my list of acting fears.

Part 2: Working on the Role

*Prepare well before stepping on set so that you don't have to think about the character but will just respond as the character naturally.

*You will probably have very little time to get into character before the cameras start to roll. The quickest way to get to the right emotional level is to spend 30-60 seconds moving or working with a prop in the appropriate rhythm for the upcoming scene.

*Highlight the stimulus for your line in the other character's line instead of your own lines.

*Barr recommends an interesting exercise for learning lines as well as finding similarities and differences between you and the character. His instructions call for you to work with a scene partner but I think it would work just as well alone. Read their line, and decide how it makes you feel, how you think they intend it, and respond. You then compare your response to what your actual line is. If it is the same, your response is how the character would respond. If it is different but the impetus behind the line is accurate you just have to make a minor adjustment in how you express the feeling as the character. If it is completely off base, you have found a way the character differs from you and you need to replace our instinctual response with one more appropriate to the character.

Jack says

Fantastic book for Actors. Lots of insight into researching a role and let's you know exactly what directors and casting directors want from you.

Emmie Mears says

The only thing that irked me about this book was the insistence on using "he" as a pronoun for everything. Being now used to the standard accepted style of varying between pronouns, this was surprisingly jarring and felt unreasonably exclusive, even though Barr mentions that he's doing it at the beginning (which is also weird, because it feels like "I'm going to exclude you implicitly, FYI, no offense," which...is a bizarre feeling to be told outright.) It feels like a relic of a former time, and an unwelcome one at that. It's also sort of symbolic of how women in Hollywood are sort of dismissed. I'm fine with the unmarked "actor" being used for everyone (I don't go around telling people I'm a "writeress" :P), but pronoun wise, this is just a pet peeve that is really indicative of keeping women in Hollywood aware that the industry is made for men, not for them too. I hope they do a revision of the book where they update the style in keeping with today's norm.

That said, that's a serious, serious nitpick and I'm only mentioning it because the information in the book is otherwise so comprehensive and really useful. If you want to act for the camera and are just starting out, there is a lot of fantastic work in here to go off of. It's really a great book. Excellent resources for learning terminology on film/television sets, how scenes are shot, and a lot of really excellent tools for people who want to use their bodies as an instrument to tell stories. Specifically his definition of acting and what it means, as well as his attention to differentiating between role and character as well as listening and responding to stimuli. Very, very good things for anyone wanting to develop acting as a craft.

Sam Figura says

I read this book for a camera acting class at Lane Community College. It helped so much and guided me through the difficult exercises and performances. I love the simplicity and the voice of this book.
