

MasterClass



SAMUEL L. JACKSON



Teaches Acting

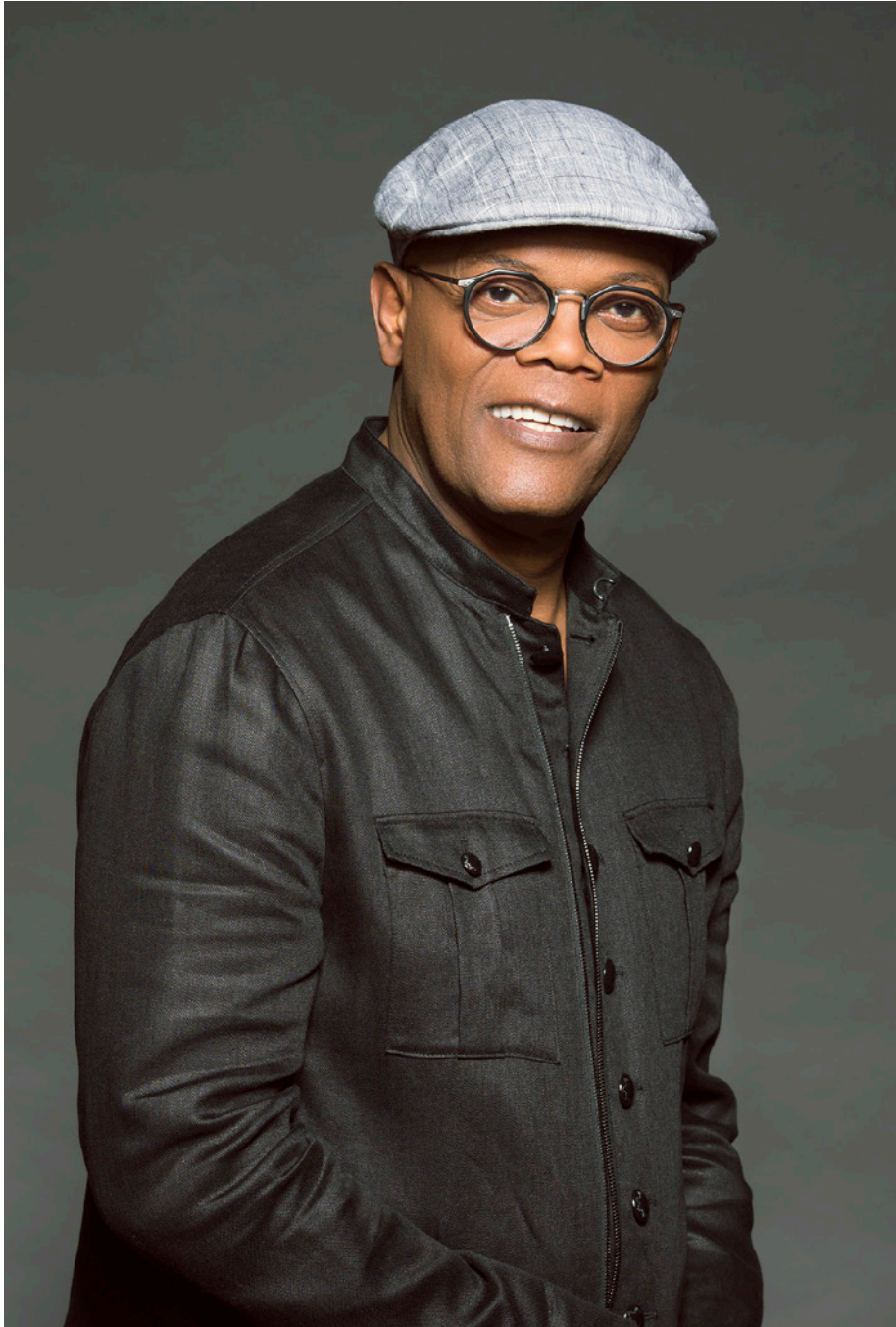




ABOUT

SAMUEL L. JACKSON

Samuel L. Jackson was born in 1948 and raised in Chattanooga, Tennessee. A studious youth, Sam developed a love of novels and film early in life. His aunt Edna, who was a schoolteacher, first introduced him to acting. He attended Morehouse College in Atlanta and studied acting with Dr. Baldwin Burroughs at Spelman. He and his wife LaTanya Richardson moved to New York City on Halloween night, 1976, where he joined the Negro Ensemble Theater Company and enjoyed a robust stage career. Sam found breakout success in film when he played Gator in Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*, and went on to earn an Oscar nomination for his performance as Jules in *Pulp Fiction*. Since then, he's acted in more than 100 films.



1. **INTRODUCTION**

CLASS WORKBOOK

Sam's Workbook supplements each lesson with a Chapter Review, Take It Further opportunity, and Assignment. This printable PDF is filled with places for you to take notes as you go.

SUPPLIES AND MATERIALS

To be an active participant in Sam's MasterClass, you'll need a camera to record yourself. Throughout, we'll encourage you to upload your recordings to [The Hub](#) to get constructive feedback from your classmates.

LESSON DISCUSSIONS

Share your works in progress and ask your peers for help and support if you've hit a roadblock.

THE HUB

Continue connecting with your MasterClass peers by using our community features.

HOW TO USE SAM'S MASTERCLASS

The exercises in this workbook are designed to foster strong foundational work, including deep text analysis and development of character, to hone an audition piece to perfection. Even if your auditions usually consist of reading sides provided by the casting director, it's always a good idea to have an audition monologue in your pocket.

CREATING CHARACTERS

“It’s incumbent upon me to create a human being that’s inside that story that has a full life.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Create a Whole Person
- Start With Your Character’s Goal
- Analyze Your Character’s Relationships
- Make Thoughtful Choices
- Give the Audience Something to Latch Onto
- Creating a Relatable Character in *Die Hard*
- Don’t Judge Your Characters

CHAPTER REVIEW

Acting is about having a series of goals. It’s about getting from point A to point C with no anticipation of what the outcome will be. Whenever Sam is on stage or on camera—even if it’s only for a few minutes—he makes sure his character’s goal is completely embodied.

Source material is a great place to start when working on a new script or character, if it’s available. If there’s no source material to draw from, it’s your job to create a full backstory for your character. A thorough biography must include life experiences and personality traits that will inform the way your character thinks, speaks, and behaves on stage or on screen. Begin deducing these biographical details by examining your character’s relationships with other characters in the script. Be sure not to discount any clues given to you in the actual text.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Sam believes you should never approach your characters with moral judgment. Who is the most detestable character you’ve ever seen in a film? Study that script as if you were preparing to play the role, asking yourself, “Why does this character do what they do? What elements of their past or personality have brought them to their present actions?” Challenge yourself to create a rich backstory for the character using clues in the script, such as their relationships and actions. This will ultimately give you empathy for the character and will allow you to view the world through their lens.

2.

CREATING CHARACTERS

ASSIGNMENTS

- It's time for you to select a new audition piece. But before you pick a specific monologue, just choose a script you want to work with. Don't pick your favorite movie or play — select a story unfamiliar to you. You'll stretch your imagination and you won't be influenced by the choices other actors have already made. You'll work on breaking down this script and its characters throughout this class. Read the script several times over. Which character captures your attention? Zero in on them. Map out their goals, learn their relationships, and start thinking about a biography that could explain their present and future actions. Write down your discoveries.
- Sam finds creating biographies incredibly important when crafting a character. Try this method out by creating a biography of the character you know best: yourself. What life-events informed your morals and influenced your goals? What do you want, and how do you go about getting it? As you ruminate, do you find that you're judging yourself? Write the first page of your own character biography.

3.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERIZATION

“Be as creative as you wanna be. Go as far as you can go...Change yourself as many ways as you possibly can.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Use Physical Characteristics to Make Your Character Different
- Think About Dress As an Expression of Character
- Become Proficient in Your Character's Skill
- Change Yourself As Much As You Can

CHAPTER REVIEW

There are two ways actors can use their physicality to reflect their character: their actual physical appearance and the way that they move and carry themselves. Sam advocates that actors be as creative as possible with both elements in order to create a multi-dimensional character.

When creating his character's physicality, Sam considers their body posture as a manifestation of their psychology. If they have a physical condition or infirmity, he researches what those look like. If they have specialized skills, he researches and practices those so that he can perform them with authenticity. Putting this level of preparation into a role connects you to the character more deeply, earns the audience's trust and belief in your performance, and helps them connect to your character.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Screen some of Sam's films and observe how he physically characterizes each performance. Ask yourself, “How does Sam reveal personality with posture? What wardrobe or makeup elements might've helped him?” In this chapter, Sam mentions his roles in:
 - *One Eight Seven*
 - *A Time to Kill*
 - *The Caveman's Valentine*
 - *Shaft*
 - *Unbreakable*
 - *The Red Violin*
 - *Black Snake Moan*
 - *S.W.A.T.*

3.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERIZATION

ASSIGNMENTS

- In the script you chose, do any of the characters have a specialized skill, or profession? If so, research them. Try finding a classmate who can offer you insight about your character's skills. Practice those skills where possible. Watch films that feature characters with those skills, or professions. Do you think they're portrayed accurately and authentically? Share what you've discovered with your classmates in [The Hub](#).
- Begin developing your chosen character's physicality. There's no limit to what you can bring. Since it's easier to dial back a performance than to add more to one, explore varying levels of extremity. If your character has a limp, how exaggerated is it? What part of their body do they lead with? What kind of shoes do they wear? What kind of clothes do they wear? Both of those choices will also inform your movement. Try all of this on, and experiment to determine what's not enough, what's too much, and what's just right. If you need help, ask your classmates for feedback.

4.

CASE STUDY: CAVEMAN'S VALENTINE

“If you were forced to be on the street, isolated, without love, companionship, how long would it take you to lose your mind? And what parts of your mind would you keep if you were there?”

—Samuel L. Jackson

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam breaks down his performance of two homeless characters with very different personal histories, who deal with their homelessness in opposite ways. Sam uses specific references from people he has encountered or observed throughout his life to inform his portrayal of otherwise unrelatable characters. He also pushes himself to answer a challenging list of questions about a character’s psychology, which demonstrates how deep you must go in your characterization process to create a “whole person.” This influences his specific acting choices—such as his distinct vocalizations—which are specific and grounded, rooted in both his imagination and given circumstances of the script.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Watch *The Caveman’s Valentine* and *Resurrecting the Champ*. How does Sam differentiate both characters? How is his portrayal different or similar to other homeless characters you’ve seen in movies or on television? What makes Sam’s characterization effective?

4.

CASE STUDY: CAVEMAN'S VALENTINE

ASSIGNMENTS

- Find a character who is down on their luck, mentally ill, homeless, or facing a similar condition; find a monologue if possible, even if you have to go outside of your chosen script. Record yourself doing a first read as that character. Then, push yourself to answer Sam's list of questions about how that character would react to their situation:

What are the clothes that you either got from a shelter or that might have been yours?

Do you go to the shelter to eat? Or do you dumpster dive?

Are you that kind of person that would stand on the street and hold your hand out begging for money and holding a sign? Or would you go around, pick up cans and bottles, taking them to the recycling place to get money so you could eat?

If you were a shell of yourself who remembered only fragments of who you once were, what would those fragments be? What are the fragments that you would hold onto if you were forced to be on the street, isolated, without love, or companionship?

Record yourself again. Do you see a difference in the emotional quality of your work? Write down what was different about it. Share both recordings in [The Hub](#).

- Start a character reference notebook. Go out to a public space—like a coffee shop, park, or public transit—and choose a person to observe in detail. Watch them for a few hours, writing every detail about them, including how they're dressed, how they walk, and how they hold themselves. What emotions did their appearance elicit? Create a short backstory of their life. Share your observations with your classmates in [The Hub](#).

5+6.

STUDENT SESSION: BREAKING DOWN A SCRIPT PTS. 1+2

“I think every scene has a goal...What am I doing in this scene for the story? Am I moving the story along to a certain place? Am I moving the story to a logical conclusion?”

—Samuel L. Jackson

CHAPTER REVIEW

To show you his characterization techniques in action, Sam workshops the diner scene from *Pulp Fiction* with a group of actors. He challenges the group to learn each character’s lines so that everyone can act every part.

For Sam, every performance is rooted in a deep understanding of the text. He breaks down what the Ezekiel passage means to Jules at this moment in the film, and how Jules’s history and personal psychology informs how he delivers that passage in this scene. He guides the actors as they work to understand Jules’s goal in that scene and how it moves the entire story to a conclusion so that they can act with stronger intentions. He also reminds the actors of the moment before the scene, and what happened to him that day, which informs Jules’s intention during the diner scene.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Knowing how to uncover your character’s goal and the subtext of their lines is an integral skill you must develop as an actor. Check out [tips](#) on breaking down scenes to hone your own process.
- When an actor receives scene revisions on set, Sam says they are required to buckle down and learn the new material quickly. Practice [memorization techniques](#) to develop a process that works for you. Share what you learned with your classmates in [The Hub](#) and see if any of the processes they’ve developed work for you.

5+6.

STUDENT SESSION: BREAKING DOWN A SCRIPT PTS. 1+2

ASSIGNMENTS

- Using the character you selected in Chapter 2, start developing an understanding of their journey through the story. Does their goal remain constant throughout the script or does it change? Where in the script do these goals change and why? Is there one overarching goal (or “super objective”) that remains constant while each scene has its own set of goals? Do they get what they want?
- An important step in learning a monologue is to break down the subtext of the piece and make the words on the page your own. Select your character’s most compelling monologue and analyze it. What does this monologue mean in the greater context of the story? What’s at stake? Is there subtext? What aspects of the character’s personality and history inform how they deliver this monologue? What is the specific goal of this monologue? Who is the character talking to? Where are you? Be specific. Practice your monologue several times until it feels natural and embodied. Make sure it’s as memorized as possible, then film your performance and share it with your classmates in [The Hub](#).

7.

STUDENT SESSION: CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

“We are living in a world of make believe...If you have a personal biography for your character, that’s one of the things that makes people interested in you when you show up on-screen, ’cause that character came from somewhere.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam demonstrates how character biographies are necessary when you’re acting in a complex or high-stakes scene, or playing a character that is far away from yourself. In order to achieve a strong emotional impact in your performance, you have to understand what your character has been through. Sam emphasizes that you have the freedom to equip your character with whatever backstory you want, as long as it fits within the given circumstances in the script. For details that aren’t available, use your imagination!

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Sam received an Academy Award nomination for his portrayal of Jules in *Pulp Fiction*. Watch the film and find the two instances where Sam delivers the Ezekiel 25:17 monologue. Compare how he delivers the speech in the apartment scene near the beginning of the film and in the diner scene at the end. Note the differences in tone, movement, and energy. How do Sam’s choices convey Jules’s growth as a character? Do you think his goal has changed for each one?

ASSIGNMENT

- It’s time to create a character biography for your chosen character. Using the goals you mapped out in Chapter 2, start creating a narrative about your character’s childhood, family, friends, career, hopes, dreams, and anything else you feel necessary to explain who they are in the present moment of the script. Continue to use the script for clues about what type of backstory your character deserves.

8.

STUDENT SESSION: MAKE IT YOUR OWN

“You heard that was freedom that you could come in here and be any ol’ person that you wanted to be named ‘Jules,’ you know, and do it. And that’s what you did.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam encourages our student actors to take ownership of their characters. Remember that you aren’t bound by what other actors have done before you when portraying similar roles. You have creative freedom to take a one-dimensional character on the page of a script and bring them to life as a whole person.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Read [these tips](#) on character building and think about what quality you can bring to your characters that extends beyond the obvious.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Reimagine a character from a classic script (Shakespeare, for example). What if they were a different gender, a different nationality, and/or from a different background? Pick one, and create a backstory for that character from this new perspective. Record yourself reading one of the character’s monologue from the script in a reimagined way. Try to clear your mind and start with an empty slate. Do your best not to imitate what other actors have done before you.
- Sam demonstrates for the student actors that they can play Jules as any person they want. Practice performing the monologue you broke down in chapters 3 and 4 in different ways. Change the character’s goals, not just the inflections in their voice. The different versions of performance will come from changing the intention. Does the context of the monologue change if you act it differently? Do the stakes of the monologue change? Film your performances and share them in [The Hub](#), then provide feedback to your classmates.

VOICE AND CHARACTER

“Because I stuttered when I was a kid, I know people have this thing about people’s speech patterns. And they think less of you when you have [a speech impediment].”

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Overcoming a Stutter
- Creating a Lisp for Valentine in *Kingsman*
- Using Vocal References in *The Mountaintop*
- Develop a Vocalization Plan
- Vocal Warmups
- Creating Different Characters in Voice-Over Acting
- Creating a Universal Voice in *I Am Not Your Negro*
- Play With Energy to Reach Youthful Audiences

CHAPTER REVIEW

Few people know that Sam struggled with a stutter as a child. He shares that “motherfucker” was his “Elmer Fudd word” that helped him get past phrases or sounds that blocked him. Overcoming a stutter taught Sam that speech impediments affect how people view a person, and he leveraged this knowledge when playing *Kingsman: The Secret Service* super-villain, Richmond Valentine. When preparing for his role as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in *The Mountaintop*, he called upon his exposure to Southern preachers.

It’s essential to have an idea of your character’s use of their voice in advance of rehearsal. Sam studies his lines, noting areas of emphasis, loudness, softness, and emotional charge; he then formulates a plan in his head for how his character will speak. Sam also anticipates a discovery process once he begins rehearsing, when the reality of performing the scene with props and other actors can change the pacing or dynamics of a scene. It is especially important to keep in mind that rehearsing with another actor will change the nature of these choices and to have flexibility within them to stay truthful in the moment with your partner.

When you approach any kind of voiceover work, think about who your character is—or what type of narrator you need to be—and the audience you’re performing for. Are you speaking to children? Are you providing voiceover for images in a documentary? What kind of voice will help the audience connect to your character and the film? Be specific and know your audience in order to develop a vocal plan that complements the story you’re trying to convey.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Study [different accents](#).
- Watch *I Am Not Your Negro*. How does Sam encourage the audience to absorb the images onscreen with his narration? What is it about the intonation, etc. of his voice that make it effective. Is it the pacing, inflection, or depth?

VOICE AND CHARACTER

TAKE IT FURTHER (CONT'D)

- Narrating audiobooks is unique to other types of voiceover acting, as you need to differentiate how each character sounds and switch from one voice to the next without pause. Sam provided his voice for the audiobook of Chester Himes's *A Rage in Harlem*. Listen to the audiobook and note how Sam uses tone, inflection, and mood to convey emotion. Observe how Sam differentiates character with his voice.
- Screen some of Sam's animated films and note how Sam employs a higher pitch to gratify younger audiences: *The Incredibles*, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, and *Turbo*.

ASSIGNMENT

- Return to your character for your audition piece. Study one or two accents that fit the character, and try performing a scene using them. Notice how it changes your behavior. Record a performance with this new voice and post it in [The Hub](#). Ask your classmates if your voice influences the way they perceive your character.
- Select a book you're familiar with and choose a passage in which multiple characters are speaking to each other. Read it aloud several times, honing a unique voice for each character. Practice until you're comfortable, then stage a recording of the chapter. Upload the audio in [The Hub](#) and ask your classmates for feedback. What did you do well? Where could you improve? Could the audience keep track of which character was speaking?
- Develop your own vocal warm up routine. For starters, try some of [these exercises](#). Repeat the assignment above after warming up. Did your reading change?



10.

STUDENT SESSION: PLUMB YOUR EMOTIONAL DEPTHS

*“Let’s explore that depth of
‘it’s fucked up.’”*

—Samuel L. Jackson

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam directs the actors to perform a scene from *The Negotiator* in which Danny Roman talks to Farley on the phone while they’re waiting for a hostage negotiator to arrive. Danny is in control of the scene, while Farley makes a doomed effort to try to talk Danny down. Sam has the students do the scene in pairs, acting both parts in quick succession. The goals of the exercise are to experience the highs and lows of the two characters’ different statuses and to push the students to plumb their emotional depths to connect with both ends of the power spectrum.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Study [techniques](#) for playing high-stakes scenes.

ASSIGNMENT

- Find a partner and try out Sam’s exercise of acting a scene in which two characters are on opposite ends of the power spectrum. Perform it once and then immediately switch roles. How do you feel going from high status to low status, or vice versa? How did your body language change? Which felt better? Record your performance and share your experience with your classmates in [The Hub](#).

STUDENT SESSION: USE YOUR VOICE, USE YOUR BODY

“Find a place of power and be in it—whether you’re gonna stand there and be in it or sit here and be in it—but find that place of power and lock in and lock in on the target.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam analyzes the student actors’ choices of power positions when playing Danny and how movement and stillness can each convey power in a different way. Sam observes that when the students played Farley, they expressed more nervousness than pain. He challenges them to reach deeper into the relationship between Farley and Danny, which will then bring to light the devastation that Farley actually feels. Farley also takes into account his environment (being surrounded by other officers, etc.), which immediately gives him a sense of being inhibited. Remember that what your character wants will dictate how they physically hold themselves in a scene. Sam demonstrates how posture works on each side of the phone as each character is pushed to their individual limits, which also shows their growing difference in high and low status.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Sam learned acting fundamentals like power positions, positions of weakness, movement, and voice during his stage career. Find a local theatre company or college theater and volunteer to work in the box office or help build sets—any way you can get involved is great! Talk to the other actors about where they got their training and how they continue to grow and shape themselves as artists.

ASSIGNMENT

- Find your position of power, or your status. Return to your chosen script and find a scene in which one character (it doesn’t have to be yours) is controlling another character. Rehearse with status in mind, and notice how it changes your posturing and positioning in the scene, and how it changes your relationship as a whole. Act it out with a partner and record your performance. Notice what shifted and how that maybe changed the response of your partner.? Post what you did in [The Hub](#) and ask your classmates for feedback.

WORKING WITH DIRECTORS

“The one thing I do know about directors is that the majority of the time, on a movie set, the director is the person...[who] has been on the least number of movie sets.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Show Up With Too Much
- The Three Kinds of Directors
- Learn Your Director's Goals
- Resist the Need for External Validation
- The Director Isn't Always Right
- Learn From Good Directors

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam describes two methods of nurturing a solid actor–director relationship. The first is to make an effort to communicate and harmonize your choices about your character with the director’s overall vision and goal for the story. The second is to prove to the director that you’re invested in the film as an ensemble effort, not just in your own performance.

When the director gives you thoughtful notes on your performance, use them as an opportunity to learn and build trust. If the director doesn’t give you notes, don’t go looking for them—it means you’re giving them what they want.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Sam and Quentin Tarantino are longtime collaborators. Read up on the films they’ve done together such as *Pulp Fiction*, *The Hateful Eight*, and *Django Unchained*, and learn how they continue to nurture a professional relationship that extends nearly twenty-five years.
- Think of three of your favorite films. Who directed them? Out of the three types of directors Sam names, which do you think applies to the director(s) of these films? Research them to learn how they work with actors to create a film you admire.

12.

WORKING WITH DIRECTORS

ASSIGNMENT

- Try running a scene with a partner, taking turns giving direction. As director, begin with a clear vision of how you want your actor to perform, and do your best to communicate clearly with them about their goals, stakes, and status. When you're the actor, also begin with a clear vision of who you want your character to be, then harmonize your expectations with the director's. If your director gives you a confusing or contradictory note, let them know, and ask to try it another way. If the actor doesn't seem to change in their performance, talk about why. At the end, discuss your individual choices and why you think they work. If you want to go all-out, record the exercise and share the results in [The Hub](#).

13.

ON-SET COLLABORATION

“Everybody’s there doin’ the same job...You’re no better than the guy that’s sweepin’ the floor at night when you leave. Just remember that.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- The On-Set Environment
- Be Punctual and Prepared
- It’s Acting, Not Living
- Help the Editor Do Their Job
- Make the Set Inclusive
- Be Nice to Everyone
- What Not to Do

CHAPTER REVIEW

Over the course of his career, Sam has realized that it truly takes a village to make a movie set work and that his contribution is just as important as everyone else’s. In some ways, the actors are the least important part of the process. Sam always makes an effort to build respectful relationships with everyone on-set and let his level of preparedness be a model for the rest of the cast.

The rules for on-set behavior are simple: arrive early, know your lines, don’t waste people’s time, and don’t overstep the boundaries of your role. Fight the impulse to think that your contribution as “the talent” means more than the contribution of the crew, your fellow cast members, or the PAs. Remember that everybody is working toward the same goal.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Do you have any on-set experience? Share your stories in [The Hub](#) for your classmates and talk about the positive/negative behaviors you’ve encountered. Analyze what the person behaving negatively could have done instead to contribute to a positive environment. If you haven’t experienced a set before, find a local production and ask to join the crew. Share your adventures with your classmates.

14+15.

STUDENT SESSIONS: DEVELOPING CHARACTERIZATION + MAKING BOLD CHOICES

“It’s easier to let go of shit than it is to try and have somebody pull some shit out of you. You want to bring as much to the table as you can...when you show up. Have a full bag of shit!”
—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Establish Your Persona
- Create a Physical Quirk
- Bring Everything to the Table

CHAPTER REVIEW

On the surface, the dinner scene in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is a simple conversation between two characters. The actors’ task is to dig deeper, access the subtext of the exchange, and create characters who will make the otherwise “bland” dialogue more interesting. When Sam acted the role of Valentine in the film, he chose to manifest his character’s persona through a lisp. He challenges the actors to come up with their own quirks that will add interest to their characters, while staying true to the goal of the story and each of the characters’ goals.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Watch *Kingsman: The Secret Service* and observe how Sam uses his voice to convey Valentine’s persona. Think about how Valentine’s lisp and quirky physicality inform your perception of him. How does Sam’s choice enhance the character?
- Actors must develop the ability not only to read scripts, but to also interpret the subtext hidden beneath their lines. Read the *Kingsman: The Secret Service* script and identify/annotate the subtext throughout the dinner scene. As you develop your own process, collaborate with your classmates and see how your interpretations aligned with theirs.

ASSIGNMENT

- Refer back to the character reference notebook that you created in Chapter 4. Revisit your chosen character, and get weird. Use your references and make some crazy choices. Don’t half-ass it: go all out! Record this. Do you discover anything you might want to use when acting this character in an audition? If yes, pare it down and make it super specific so it fits in truthfully while also enhancing your character. Record it again and notice the difference. Discuss what you found with your classmates in [The Hub](#).

ENRICHING YOUR ACTING PRACTICE

CHAPTER REVIEW

“Go to places where there are people that aren’t like you specifically, so that you can see who those people are. Look at how they dress. Look at how they carry themselves. Look at how they interact with each other. It’s a life of observance, so that you can pull something from somewhere.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

Nurturing a keen sense of curiosity about worlds and customs different from his own is a key component of Sam’s mastery of character.

Push yourself to explore cultures and customs that are different from your own. It will help you build a library of experiences to draw from and bring interesting characteristics into your performance. Read fiction and watch foreign films. Exploring stories set in worlds that you are unfamiliar with will enable you to expand your acting choices when the time comes to craft a new character. Go to the theater and watch how other actors perform.

Endeavor to learn from the best actors—what qualities make their performances great? Watch yourself onscreen, even if it makes you uncomfortable. Being an honest critic of your own work is a cornerstone of becoming an exceptional actor.

SUBCHAPTERS

- Actively Observe the World Around You
- Read Novels
- Learn From Doing Theater
- Analyze the Work of Other Actors
- Watch Yourself On-Screen

ASSIGNMENTS

- Find a place where you can observe people who have a different cultural background than your own. What physical and verbal qualities can you adapt for your character? Add these to your notebook of character references.
- Deepen your understanding of your character by finding and reading a novel that features a character similar to them in some way. Jot down biographical details in your reference notebook that you can use to strengthen your character.

AUDITIONING

“Go in there and present your best self. Take it as, ‘this is a day I get to act for somebody else.’ And be happy about it and be joyous about it. Be confident in it, and go in there and rock the house.”
—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Make a Lasting Impression
- Don't Improvise Unless Asked
- Rules to Audition By
- Ditch Unflattering Resumes
- Student Q&A: Auditioning

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam may not have to go out and audition anymore, but the wisdom he gained from years of pounding the pavement for opportunities is timeless. His rules for auditioning are simple. Know your lines and don't change them. Plumb your emotional depths and have an arc—know where you're starting, where you came from, and where you'll end up. Enunciate. Resist the urge to improvise, unless you're asked to. Don't show up in costume, but do wear something that suggests the character you're playing.. Always step into an audition with a plan of who you want your character to be. You want to take everyone in the room with you on your journey through the scene.

The most important objective is to make a lasting impression, so that the director/producer/casting director want to follow your character out of the room. Remember that you're an actor and this is a “look-at-me” business, so make them look at you—keeping in mind of course, the given circumstances of the scene and character. Be your best self.

Sometimes the outcome of an audition is not related to your performance. You might not have “the look” that the director wants. It's a tough truth, but accept that you're not meant for every job. Try not to dwell on the parts you don't get.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Going to auditions is the first step in becoming an actor. Browse local theatre companies' websites and see if any have postings for upcoming auditions. Remember: it's okay if you don't get the part—it's the experience that matters.

AUDITIONING

ASSIGNMENTS

- Time to get into gear with your new audition piece. Select a compelling monologue from your character in your chosen script and start workshopping it. Figure out what the goal in the speech is, what your character wants, who you are talking to, and what your relationship is with that other character. Through this, emotional depth will be brought to light. Don't layer anything onto it other than those things, and try to keep it simple. Once you have the material memorized, record your audition, then view the recording. Note areas where you excelled and where you need to improve.
- Practice your audition again, then record a second take. Post the second take in [The Hub](#) and give feedback on your classmates' monologues.
- Add one "quirk"—a speech impediment or change of posture perhaps, then record it again and see how it changes your performance. Remember to keep your goal in mind throughout the piece even with your added "quirk." Post your final recording in [The Hub](#) and provide feedback to your classmates.

GROWING YOUR ACTING CAREER

“Don’t just not do something because you’re sick of seein’ that image. If you’re sick of it, then change the way, or change the rules, or change the purpose that sent you into that situation.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Student Q&A: Take Every Chance to Act
- Student Q&A: Getting Un-Stuck
- Choose Your Roles Thoughtfully
- Get Creative in Stereotypical Roles
- Set Rules for Your Agent
- Prioritize Getting a Manager
- Stick-to-it-iveness
- Your Responsibility As an Actor
- Everything Leads to Something Else

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam encourages the students to seize any opportunity to act, as those small roles they accept today may lead to big breaks tomorrow. If you’re struggling with a stereotypical role, try injecting that ordinary character with an extraordinary quality. In *Coming to America*, Sam imbued an otherwise stereotypical robber with an idiosyncratic goal and backstory that informed his character’s thoughts and behavior. Treating small characters with the same degree of care and consideration that you would a larger role can impress the director and producers with your acting ability and make them remember you.

Finding an agent is an important step to kickstarting your professional acting career, but scoring representation can be difficult. Today, the best way to get in front of a casting director is to put yourself on tape for a role you know you’re right for, and try to get it to them via email. Even though the process for getting in front of a casting director has changed, the spirit of Sam’s advice remains the same: be persistent and get creative. Put yourself out there, network, and follow up. If you’re cast, remember that everyone, from the producers to the audience, holds you to the expectation that you will do your job well.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Watch how Sam played the robber from *Coming to America* and study how his choices informed the way he manifested his character’s psychology. What would this character have looked like if Sam had chosen to play him as a stereotypical junkie?
- Sam doesn’t chase award bait. He feels like his biggest reward is knowing that people want to watch him act. Put some thought into what kind of roles you’re drawn to and why. Then make a list.

ASSIGNMENTS

18.

GROWING YOUR ACTING CAREER

- Revisit the small roles in your chosen script. Are any of them rooted in racial, ethnic, or gender stereotypes? Using what you learned in previous lessons, approach the character as if you had been cast. How could you make this minor character interesting? Write an imagined backstory for them and give them a goal. What are they doing in the scene? What are they trying to accomplish? What moments in their lives prompted them to be there?
- Make a list of your top ten dream agencies. Who do they represent that you like? Know that setting your sights on a bigger and top tier agency sometimes is not the best when starting your career, because those agents are only interested in your bankability, not in helping you build an acting career. You'll be better off searching for a boutique agency with a smaller roster.
- Make a list of your top ten dream managers. Who do they represent that you like?
- Pick two agencies and two managers from this list and write them a query letter. Be sure to follow up!



SAM'S JOURNEY FROM NEW YORK TO HOLLYWOOD

“When Ozzie shoots Gator and he dies there in the house on the floor—realistically in the movie, Gator’s dead. Cathartically, the ad-dict that was in me died on that floor. And it changed everything for me.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Finding a Nurturing Environment
- A Hollywood Disappointment
- Getting Sober
- Playing Gator in *Jungle Fever*
- Artistic and Box Office Success

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam didn’t build his career in a day. Before getting plucked to go to Hollywood, he had a robust theater career in New York, where he was a member of the Negro Ensemble Company alongside Denzel Washington and Morgan Freeman. Although he loved performing on stage, Sam had higher ambitions. He says it took him getting sober to gain success and longevity as a screen actor.

Ironically, his breakout role that caught the attention of Hollywood casting agents was his performance as the crack-addicted character Gator in Spike Lee’s *Jungle Fever*. After winning a special prize from the Cannes Film Festival jury for his performance, Sam’s film career took off. He earned an Oscar nomination for his performance as Jules in *Pulp Fiction*, cementing his reputation as an artist, and enjoyed worldwide recognition for his performance as Zeus in *Die Hard With a Vengeance*, proving that he was a box office goldmine.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- When it premiered in 1981, audiences praised *A Soldier’s Play* for its deft portrait of racism. It went on to win a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Sam played Private Louis Henson, part of an African-American unit of soldiers being investigated for a murder. Read *A Soldier’s Play*.
- Gator was the first role Sam played completely sober, and he recounts the powerful catharsis he experienced with the character. Watch *Jungle Fever* and observe how Sam’s personal experience helped him embody Gator. Can you draw from your personal experience as you create your audition piece character? Make a list of some specific things that you’ve experienced that you could write into your character’s biography.

HOLLYWOOD LESSONS

“Always do the things that you’ve done to be the creative person that you are when you go into a room with some people. Even if they tell you, ‘Well, we just want to hear what he sounds like. No, you don’t have to have the performance down, just let us hear him.’ That’s bullshit.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- You’re Never Too Good to Audition
- Your Best Moments Can Be Lost in the Editing Room
- Every Time You’re in Front of Somebody, You’re Being Judged

CHAPTER REVIEW

Sam shares three of his most valuable lessons for you to digest as your career begins to grow: Never think that you’re too good for an audition, remember that sometimes your best acting can get tossed on the cutting room floor, and never rest on your laurels as an artist. Even if you’ve been promised a role, or if a producer asks you to give a cursory read, always show up with your best self. No matter what a producer or casting director tells you, whenever you’re giving a performance, you’re being judged. This is part of being an actor—learn not to take it personally, they are looking for the best fit for the role.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Sam relied on his character creation techniques to swiftly prepare himself to audition for the role in *Pulp Fiction*. As an actor, you have to learn how to quickly break down and interpret characters. From this point forward, find a new script every week and practice breaking down a character to hone your process.

SAM’S FINAL

- For your last assignment, it’s time to audition! Look up casting calls and pick an audition. No matter how big or small the opportunity, take your audition as a chance to showcase your acting ability. Equip yourself for success by using Sam’s character creation techniques, and present your best self. Always strive to become a better actor, and persist through rejection. That’s how Sam acted his way to mastery. Good luck and happy auditioning!

20.

HOLLYWOOD LESSONS

EXTRA CREDIT

- Edit every recording you've made for Sam's MasterClass into a reel, and document your progression from the start of Sam's MasterClass to the end. How far have you come with your character? Where did you improve? What can you work on moving forward? Share your reels in [The Hub](#) and provide feedback to your classmates.

CONCLUSION

“You can’t be a great actor if you can’t understand and dissect the emotions of the people you’re tryin’ to interpret, and interpret them in a way that people understand and recognize.”

—Samuel L. Jackson

SUBCHAPTERS

- Student Q&A: Final Thoughts
- Parting Wisdom

CONGRATULATIONS!

You’ve finished your MasterClass with Sam! We hope you feel inspired to find an audition and seize your future acting opportunities. We want to make sure that your experience with Sam and your classmates doesn’t stop here.

You can stay in touch with your peers by:

- Joining [The Hub](#) to connect with your classmates
- Contributing to lesson discussions at the end of each video
- Uploading your assignments in [The Hub](#) for peer feedback
- Submitting an Office Hours question to Sam

ASSIGNMENT

- Tweet your thoughts to [@SamuelLJackson](#) and [@masterclass](#). Be sure to include [#SamuelLJacksonMasterClass](#) with your message.

MASTERCLASS

