

“Although Aristotle believed that plot was the most important part of a story, *characters and their interrelationships dominate television stories*” (Victoria O’Donnell, *Television Criticism*, p. 80).



WHAT IS TELEVISION ACTING?

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, acting is “the art or practice of representing a character on a stage or before cameras.” A more suggestive definition reminds us that acting involves the physical and emotional labor required to portray a character within a storytelling medium. As one particular type of storytelling medium, television presents certain challenges for actors, who are required to interpret their characters in front of cameras and for the screen over a sustained period of time (weeks/months/years). Indeed, as many media scholars have pointed out, the camera is the single element that most radically differentiates the TV actor’s performance from the stage actor’s performance. Also, a comparative lack of lengthy rehearsal time (which is a necessity in theater as opposed to film and television) and a reliance on out-of-continuity shooting (in which scenes are filmed in a different order in which they appear in the finished film) distinguish screen acting.



Having already devoted time to the study of *mise-en-scène*, we now turn our attention to one of the key elements of this all-encompassing term, focusing on the ways that actors’ gestures, facial expressions, costumes, makeup, and performative decisions contribute to the meaning-making experience unique to television.

Before undertaking this assignment, you should complete the following: [1] watch the first six episodes of *BoJack Horseman* (season one); [2] watch the first episode of *Flaked*; [3] watch the first two episodes of *Arrested Development* (season four); and [4] read the assigned chapter from Jason Mittell’s book *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. That chapter, entitled “Characters,” can be found in the Readings folder on Canvas, and it concerns an often-ignored aspect of television. Specifically, Mittell asks us to consider the centrality of TV characters (and the performance of TV actors) in the creation of complex, compelling narratives. Focusing on the three distinct performances given by actor Will Arnett in the abovementioned Netflix programs, you should explain how your own understanding of those shows is impacted by his (and his characters’) actions, behaviors, and words.

