"Yes, and!" in a bioe grad proposal-writing course
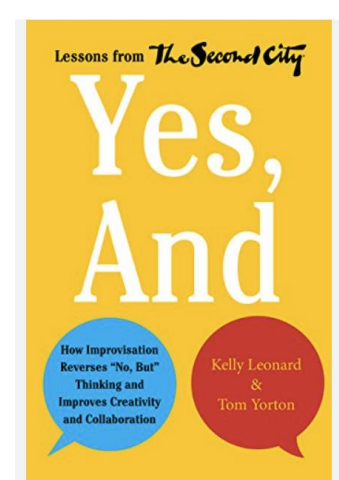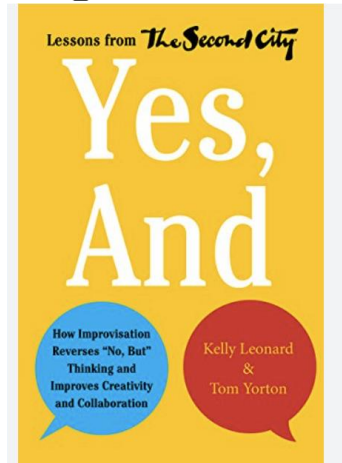
Alyssa Taylor, Associate Teaching Professor at UCSD, with a big shout-out to **Ester Kwon (Associate Professor of Bioengineering at UCSD)** for passing this on to me!

- Course centers on **communication** & **generating new ideas.**

- **Overall context for my application was for a proposal-writing class, where the students need to think of new ideas for their research plans. But this technique can have a broad set of applications – ice breakers, building teams, you can think of others!**

'Yes, and': Second City behavioral science group studies how improv can create better communication

By Savannah Eadens
Chicago Tribune • Jul 29, 2018 at 12:00 pm

- Yes, and! is a warmup exercise done in improvisational comedy.
- The University of Chicago partnered with The Second City (leading improv theater/training center) and found this exercise can improve communication.
- The purpose is to feed off each other positively – for the purpose of this exercise there is no such thing as a bad idea.

How it works:

- Each person, when it is their turn, will accept the previous statement and add new information related to the previous statement.

Why use it in class?

- Exercise shown to improve communication.

- The **"Yes"** portion **encourages the acceptance** of contributions added by others.

- The next step is to **add new information** into the narrative – using **"and"**

Yes, and! Example

"The river is full of fish."
- "Yes, and one of them is enormous."
- "Yes, and he's swimming toward us."
- "Yes, and he looks hungry."
- "Yes, and we are trapped in this boat."
- "Yes, and now the motor won't start."
- "Yes, and he's about to swallow us."
- "Yes and I just remembered that this boat is also a plane."
- "Yes and lucky for you I just got my pilot's license."

How it works:
Each person, when it is their turn, will **accept** the previous statement, and **add new information** related to previous statement.

Principles of Yes, and…

- The "Yes" portion **encourages the acceptance** of the contributions added by others…
- Rather than immediately judging the idea, as **judgment** has its place **later on** in the development process.
- The next step in the process is to **add new information** into the narrative. The concept of "and" is to sway away from directly changing the suggested material, **"and"** rather building upon it.

This approach is super useful across settings – from therapy to engineering design brainstorming to group work! I am sure you will notice that some of your favorite leaders use this technique.

Trying it out in your class…plan could look like:

Get in a group! with those in proximity, ~6 to 7 but the number is not strict.

Each group needs someone to go first, and then you can take turns going in a circle, or by just pointing at the next person.

Once everyone in your group has had a turn, you can start a new round (last person to go makes up a new prompt.)

I will start us off with first prompt.

Remember!
- Start your statement with **"Yes, and …"**
- Consider the previous statement, and add to it.

Why did we just do that?

- Important to **value each other's ideas** and **cooperate** with one another. Applicable in any work setting.

- As Engineers/scientists, we work in multiple modes. While constructive criticism is an important skill, so is **creativity**! And **effective communication** in teamwork!

- Consider situations when it's helpful to be critical (practice talk, manuscript draft, poster draft) and situations when it's helpful to be creative (project group meetings, proposals).

Personal Reflections:

My grad students loved this exercise; I was pleasantly surprised.

The students asked to do additional rounds, and I'm glad I incorporated it, even though it was outside my comfort zone.
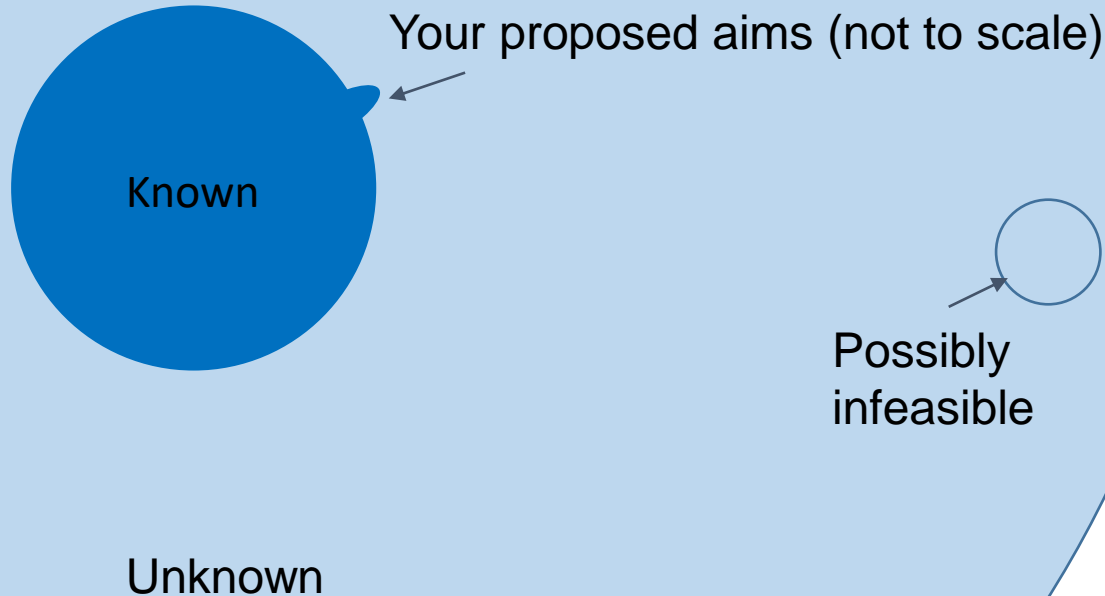
Thanks so much! Would love to hear from others who have tried similar approaches!

Alyssa Taylor, UC San Diego atayloramos@ucsd.edu

Slides from Class

How do we think of new ideas?

- First step is to be very familiar with what has already been done**.

Your proposed aims (not to scale)
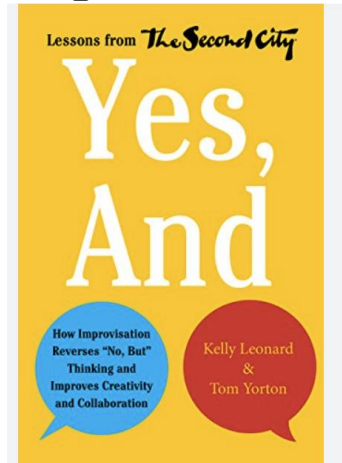
Known

Possibly infeasible

Unknown

How do we think of new ideas?

- What are some possible ways to generate new ideas?
  - <u>Exhaustive</u> understanding of the field identifies logical 'next steps' that require study
  - <u>Intelligent</u> application of approaches/concepts across fields ("interdisciplinary" approach)
  - <u>Emergent</u> technical capability creates new possibilities

'Yes, and': Second City behavioral science group studies how improv can create better communication

By Savannah Eadens
Chicago Tribune • Jul 29, 2018 at 12:00 pm

- Yes, and! is a warmup exercise done in improvisational comedy.
- The University of Chicago partnered with The Second City (leading improv theater/training center) and found this exercise can improve communication.
- The purpose is to feed off each other positively – for the purpose of this exercise there is no such thing as a bad idea.

How it works:

- Each person, when it is their turn, will accept the previous statement and add new information related to the previous statement.

Yes, and! Example

- "The river is full of fish."
- "Yes, and one of them is enormous."
- "Yes, and he's swimming toward us."
- "Yes, and he looks hungry."
- "Yes, and we are trapped in this boat."
- "Yes, and he looks more like a whale than a fish."
- "Yes, and now the motor won't start."
- "Yes, and he's about to swallow us."
- "Yes and I just remembered that this boat is also a plane."
- "Yes and lucky for you I just got my pilot's license."

Principles of Yes, and…

- The "Yes" portion **encourages the acceptance** of the contributions added by others.

- Rather than immediately judging the idea, as **judgment** has its place **later on** in the development process.

- The next step in the process is to **add new information** into the narrative. The concept of "and" is to sway away from directly changing the suggested material, **"and"** rather building upon it.

This approach is super useful across settings – from therapy to engineering design brainstorming to group work! I am sure you will notice that some of your favorite leaders use this technique.

Improve lesson from Tina Fey

Exercise

Get in a rough circle. If we have large #s we'll split into two groups. As a group, I will start us off and point to the next person. Make a statement and point at a random person.

Do!
- Start your statement with "Yes, and …"
- Consider the previous statement and add to it.

Don't!
- Say "Yes, and!" and then directly changing the subje
- Saying "Yes, and!" and negating the previous statement

Why did we just do that?

- Important to **value each other's ideas** and **cooperate** with one another. This is in any work setting.

- As engineers/scientists we work in multiple modes. While constructive criticism is an important skill, so is creativity. So is effective communication in team work!

- Consider situations when it's helpful to be critical (practice talk, manuscript drafts, poster drafts, etc.) and situations when it's helpful to be creative (group meetings, project meetings).

Thanks for participating =)