An Action Must:

1. Be physically capable of being done.

At any moment you should be able to begin doing it. For example “pleading for help” is something you can begin to do immediately. However, “pursuing the American dream” is not something you can pick up and DO at a moment’s notice. To say something is physically capable of being done does not necessarily involve intense physical activity jumping up and down. “Pleading for help” can be accomplished while sitting absolutely still in a chair. *An action MUST be something the actor can actually accomplish in time.*

1. Be interesting/fun to do.

You’ll learn in scene analysis that any number of actions can be correct for a particular scene. Common sense dictates that you figure out the one that you, the actor, want to do, since you are the one who will have to do it over and over again.  “Fun doesn’t necessarily mean something that makes you laugh but something that compels you. This might include things you might never do off camera but that appeal to your sense of play. If you’ve ever really wanted to tell someone off, for instance, here’s your chance. The more VITAL, ACTIVE and GUTSY the language of your action is the more life you will bring to your action. Descriptors matter! You want your action to be exciting to you. What’s more fun: “get someone to give me information” or “talk a friend into spilling the beans” or “interrogate the enemy”? The way you speak to yourself is the way you will act. If you are clear, specific, and strong with yourself then that is how you will be on camera.

1. Be specific.

Stanislavsky said, “Generality is the enemy of all art”. If your action is general and basic then everything you do on camera will be general and basic. The specificity of an action such as “extricating a crucial answer” will bring you to life much more than “finding something out”. A specific action will provide you with a clear path to follow during the scene.

1. Have its test in the other person.

Your specific goal must have something to do with the other person in the scene. By looking at that person you should be able to tell how close you are to completing your action. This can aslo help to make you less self-conscious and allow you to concentrate on something infinitely more interesting than how well you are performing. If your action is “forcing and enemy to surrender”, you should be able to look at them and see how close they are to surrendering.

1. Not be an errand.

“Delivering a message” is not a good action because you do not have to look at your partner to see if you have accomplished it. Also, it can be done with a line then you’ll have nothing to do. An errand is boring for you to perform and for the audience to watch. The action must be something you can FAIL at.

1. Not presuppose any physical or emotional state.

If you try to work yourself up into a certain state for a scene, you risk that your attention will be entirely on the creation and maintenance of that state rather than on your action.  You will be acting a lie. We have looked at briefly and will examine closer later the sense that there is no such thing as a correct emotion for any scene. “Making a jerk know how mad I am at him” is a bad action because you have no control over their understanding and you cannot do it unless you are angry. A better action might be “putting a jerk in his place.” You do not presuppose an emotional or physical state because you cannot presuppose another actors action or reaction. You want your action to inform you not the other way around.

1. Not be manipulative.

A manipulative action is one that is chosen to produce an effect on your partner. This lends itself to the mentality of “I can do what I want to you but nothing you do will affect me.”  You make up your mind how you are going to play the scene and allow nothing to change you. “Making someone cry” is manipulative. A better one might be “forcing a friend to face the facts.”  A manipulative action can cause you to act in a predetermined way instead of dealing truthfully with what is happening in the other person.

1. Have a “cap”.

You must be able to tell if you have finished doing your action. “to get a friend’s forgiveness” has a cap because you can tell they have forgiven you by their actions towards you. “Maintaining someone’s interest” has no cap. Depending on the scene, you might never be able to see if you achieve your action.

1. Be in line with the intentions of the script.

Extremely important and is rather interlocked with scene analysis. Once you identify the scripts intentions the actions you choose must be true to those intentions. Don’t think of this as a limitation but rather as an aid to make better choices that make sense.