What is the difference between Improv4Life and Level 1: Setting the Scene? Which class should I start with?

**Short answer:** If you have minimal to no performance experience, and would like to learn the art of Short-Form Improv, take Improv4Life first. If you have some performance experience, and would like to learn the art of Long-Form Improv, take Level 1. If you are still unsure, you should start with Improv4Life. For more information, continue reading this article written by ASI co-founder, Gavin Hawk…

**Improv4Life teaches Short-Form Improv**, which is the style you see in shows like *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*. Short-Form is great fun, especially for beginning improvisers who little to no experience on stage. The main difference between **Long-Form Improv**, which we are working on in Levels 1 through 4, and Short-Form Improv is that in Short-Form Improv the **Game of the Scene** is announced and explained to the audience before the scene begins, and the Games are all ones where the improvisers understand the rules, and come from a list of surefire Games (another example of a Short-Form Game would be Party Quirks, which you can watch an example of at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkRvwiCA_h8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkRvwiCA_h8)). **Short-Form Games** often heavily rely on sight gags (like the Human Deck Chairs) and the wit of the performers, such as the quips that the improvisers make during the scene that make the audience laugh. Wit is something that is hard to teach, but doing Short-Form Games is a great way to learn how to become more witty. However, in **Long-Form Improv** we rely less on wit, and more on **comic patterns of behavior to make our audience laugh**.

In **Organic Long-Form Improv**, which is what we are learning in Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4, we learn to work together to create a **Game** that is not tried and true, that is in fact a brand new **Game** we are inventing on the spot. A good analogy for the difference between the two is that **Short-Form Improv** is like playing a game of Baseball - we all know the rules of the **Game** beforehand, and we play by those pre-determined rules, whereas **Long-Form Improv** is similar to the **Imagination Games** you might have made up when you were a kid, when someone would announce, "The floor is made out of lava!", which is **The First Unusual Thing**, and then someone **Heightens** that **First Unusual Thing** by saying, "All of the furniture is big rocks that you can stand on that will keep you from getting burned by the lava!". We still applied a sense of **logic** to the rules of the **Game** we invented as went along when we played those **Imagination Games** when we were kids that we were making up in the moment, just as there is a sense of **logic** to the rules of the game of Baseball. So, in the **Game of the Scene** of *The Floor is Lava*, it would be "**Off Game**" if someone announced during that **Game**, "And we're all Aliens who eat worms!" Making that choice isn't building on the **logic** of the **Game** that started with the **First Unusual Thing**. A better **Game Move**, which is also an **Exploration/Justification Move**, would be to say "And we're all astronauts whose ship has crash landed on this Lava Planet!".
If you are interested in learning more about **Short-Form Improv**, I'd recommend reading Keith Johnston's book *Improv for Storytellers*. Keith Johnston is considered one of the most well known pioneers of **Short-Form Improv**, which he developed as a theatrical form with his theatre company Loose Moose in Calgary in Canada, which he called Theatresports. There are now officially licensed Theatresports theatre companies all over the world. For more information, here's a link to their website: [https://theatresports.org/home/](https://theatresports.org/home/)

Inspired by Johnston's work, a group in Milwaukee created Comedysportz, which is similar to Theatresports, with the difference being that the focus was more on just playing **Short-Form Improv Games** to create comedic scenes, which was different than Johnston's Theatresports, which equally encourages dramatic and comedic scenes in their **Short-Form Improv Games**. Comedysportz also now has officially licensed theatres all over the world, and most of the performers on *Whose Line Is It Anyway* were picked for that show from teams they were on that performed at Comedysportz. For more information, here's a link to their website: [http://www.cszworldwide.com/comedysportz](http://www.cszworldwide.com/comedysportz)

American Stage’s primary focus as an arts organization is on powerful storytelling, so our **Long-Form** training program has developed and grown over the years. Improv4Life is a newer addition to American Stage Improv, and our first step toward Short-Form improv training.