

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 474 Intro to Stand Up Comedy

Fall 2018—Fridays—6pm to 8:50pm

Location: MCC 111

Instructor: Judith Shelton

Office: MCC 111

Office Hours: 1 to 1:50pm on Fridays or by appointment

**Contact Info: judiths@usc.edu - Monday-Thursday
626.390.3678 - Fridays (via text)**

Course Description and Overview

This course will offer a specific look at the art of Stand Up Comedy and serve as a laboratory for creating original stand up material: jokes, bits, chunks, sets, while discovering your truth and your voice. Students will practice bringing themselves to the stage with complete abandon and unashamed commitment to their own, unique sense of humor. We will explore the “rules” that facilitate a healthy stand up dynamic and draw on anything and everything for our work in class, ultimately delighting in the human connection through comedy.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, the student will have embodied and integrated the various components of stand up comedy in a live performance in front of a comedy club audience. The creative, physical, and academic ‘strands’ of study will come together for a final assessment.

Proposed Objectives

- Get familiar with a comic’s tools: notebook, mic and stand, “the light”, recording device
- Practice the basic stages of stand up: write, “get up”, record, evaluate, re-write, get back up
- Learn how to write for stand up comedy
- Examine elements of a joke: set up, punch, tags, toppers, callbacks
- Develop jokes, bits, chunks, sets, ultimately creating your act
- Take the stage with confidence, flexibility and a sense of play
- Develop an awareness of audience feedback using sight and sound
- Improvise in the moment, utilize crowd work, handle heckling, edit on the spot
- Review what works and why, what does not work and why
- Participate in constant, constructive evaluation of work
- Listen to and critique recordings, re-write material as needed, adding tags, adjusting order, cutting, etc.
- Investigate the concept of “writing onstage” vs. taking the stage with a set script
- Build a strong sense of your own point of view
- Explore your own stand up persona using physicality, personality, voice, repetition of themes, tempo, speech patterns, etc.
- Distinguish between persona and character
- Create a strong, broad, physical and vocal range
- Experience being an active listener, offering “pitches” and support
- View and discuss the history, style and contributions of seminal artists
- Learn to identify style, structure, point of view, and persona in the work we admire
- Produce a showcase of work

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

I Can't Make This Up: Life Lessons by Kevin Hart

Born Standing Up: A Comic's Life by Steve Martin

The Comedians: Drunks, Thieves, Scoundrels and the History of American Comedy by Kliph Nesteroff

Various stand up clips to be viewed and discussed in class

Recommended Reading

Daily Rituals: How Artists Work by Mason Currey

Comedy Writing for Late-Night TV by Joe Toplyn

Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy by Judd Apatow

Poking a Dead Frog: Conversations with Today's Top Comedy Writers by Mike Sacks

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying by Carol Leifer

Funny on Purpose: The Definitive Guide to an Unpredictable Career in Comedy: Standup + Improv + Sketch + TV + Writing + Directing + YouTube By Joe Randazzo

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Exercises and Assignments:

Grades are not dictated by the success of comedy presentations or the instructor's subjective opinion of talent or sense of humor.

Grades are dictated by:

Points. Each aspect of class has a point value: participation, exercises, assignments, presentations, Midterm and Final. I provide options to make up 8 points total per semester. Details listed under "Make-Up Options".

Participation:

- No more than 15% of your final grade may be based on participation
- In-class active student analysis of presented materials such as text and video clips
- Constructive feedback on classmates' comedy presentations
- Willingness to experiment and apply the constructive feedback of instructor and other students to one's own presentations
- If a student is late or leaves early, they will lose their participation point for that day

Exercises and Assignments:

- Due to the live performance aspect of stand up comedy, exercises and homework assignments will be presented in class, no electronic submissions accepted
- Student invests fully, striving to make a connection with the crowd and improve over time
- If a student misses an exercise or assignment, student accepts that they have missed their opportunity to perform (stage time) and will lose points which will impact their grade

Presentations:

- All presentations are given in class, no electronic submissions accepted
- If a student misses a presentation, student accepts that they will lose valuable points

Midterm:

- The Midterm presentation is worth 14 points
- The Midterm is presented in class with no paper component
- No electronic submission of presentation accepted, except video link requirement
- If you miss the Midterm, you lose 14 points, which will greatly impact your grade
- The policy for tardiness/leaving early (pg. 4) applies to the Midterm, as well

Final:

- The Final is a paper worth 14 points, due by the end of the 2-hour Final period, and should be two full pages, double-spaced, name on each page, and stapled.
- The Final may not be submitted electronically, it must be handed in.
- Printing problems happen during Finals week. Printing problems are not my problem, please plan ahead. No late papers or electronic submissions accepted.
- Not handing in a paper will result in a loss of 14 points, which will impact your grade.
- If you have a conflicting Final, there are options, but you must let me know about the conflict 2 weeks in advance of your Final.

Make-up options:

- If you miss an exercise, assignment or presentation, you may make up 8 points, total, by Friday, November 30th at 11:59pm.
- You may make up 8 points by doing an open mic or booked show, OFF CAMPUS ONLY.
- You may make up 6 points by doing an open mic or booked show on campus.
- You must audio record your set and photograph the space, video will count as both
- You must email both items AND a paragraph on the experience to the entire class, and me
- Technical/email/link issues will result in a loss of points, double check your submission
- You may make up 1 point by switching sections, if there is room available for you that day
- You may make up 2 points by watching a live stand up show and sending a picture and paragraph to the entire class, and me, via email
- Make-up points cannot take you over 100 points, 100 points is the maximum

Points Breakdown:

• Week 1, in-class improvised exercise	1 point
• Week 2, in-class improvised exercise	2 points
• Week 3, in-class write/get up exercise	5 points
• Week 4, 1 st assignment, Joke Styles	6 points
• Week 5, 2 nd assignment, 10 Jokes	11 points
• Week 6, 3 rd assignment, First Set	6 points
• MIDTERM: Critical Analysis, Established Comedian	14 points
• Week 8, in-class exercise, Crowd Work	5 points
• Week 9, 4 th assignment, Second Set	6 points
• Week 10, in-class exercise, Heckling	5 points
• Week 11, 5 th assignment: Clean Set	6 points
• Week 12, 6 th assignment: Polished Set, 1 st Show Rehearsal	7 points
• Week 13, 7 th assignment: Final Set, 2 nd Show Rehearsal	7 points
• Week 14, 8 th assignment: Plan of Attack, "Switch Sets"	5 points
• FINAL: Paper Due: Critical Analysis, Self	14 points
TOTAL	100 points

Grading Scale:

Excellent: A (4) = 100-96; A- (3.7) = 95-90

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80

Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: D (.7-1.3) = 60's

Fail: F (0) = 59 and below

Further Grading Notes:

- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W, November 9th. I will discuss your work at any time.

Assignment Submission Policy

This is a performance class, no electronic submissions of papers, presentations or exercises.

ATTENDANCE:

Absences:

Developing stand up material and style depends on consistent writing (usually as homework) and “getting up” (performing in class). Each class helps you build and refine material over time. **Be advised, no absences are excused in this class, regardless of reason. Points awarded for performing your stand up material in class/being an active, supportive audience member will be lost.** No percentage of a final grade may be based on attendance only so you must come to class prepared and ready to participate.

Tardiness/leaving early:

Everyone gets up each class. Names are picked “lottery” style. When you are late or leave early it is unprofessional, disruptive, and unsupportive. Committing to this class means being here from 6-8:50pm. **If you arrive after 6pm you will lose your participation point for the day. Students arriving late are put at the end of the lottery and may not get up, depending on time. I take the late people last, in the order they arrived. Students choosing to leave early lose their participation point and risk not getting picked before they have to leave. If you do not get up before you leave, you lose all the points for the day.** Be mindful of days that have more points, such as the 10 Jokes class and Midterm. I end class at 8:40pm to give homework. Everyone who comes to class on time and stays the duration will get up. Anyone who is late/leaving early may or may not get up, depending on time and running order. If you are not in class for the homework do not contact me, refer to your syllabus. Make the choice to be in class on time, and stay.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Text in **bold** indicates **assignment requiring preparation.**

WEEK

CLASS CONTENT

(This timeline is subject to change depending on the dynamics, pace and unpredictability of the creative process of any given class. Being in class ensures you are aware of any changes.)

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| 1 | Warm-up, introductions and discussion of syllabus (our contract)
Introduction to the tools of our trade: Mic, stand, recording device
A guide to the writing phases: Write, get up, record, evaluate, rewrite, get up
In-class improvised exercise and stage time |
| 2 | Stand up comedy as sword, shield or balm: Bravery in comedy
Class conversation and clips
In-class improvised exercise and stage time
How to write for stand up |
| 3 | Anger in comedy: Bend it, don't break it
Class conversation and clips
In-class writing exercise and stage time
<i>Homework: research assigned joke style to present in class 4</i>
<i>(One-Liner, physical, confessional, observational, political, etc.)</i> |

WEEK	CLASS CONTENT (cont.)
4	<p>First assignment* - Joke Styles Present assigned joke style given in class 3, in 3 minutes Definition, history, use, classic example, and write/deliver 3 original examples <i>Homework: bring in 10 of your own jokes, any style, due class 5</i></p>
5	<p>Second assignment* - 10 Jokes Students perform 10 of their own jokes, any style, in 3 minutes Plus, Individuality: Point of View and Stage Persona Clips and discussion on the use of rhythm, timing, wit, physicality and themes Individual student POV and persona will be explored in class 6 <i>Homework: work on first set due class 6</i></p>
6	<p>Third assignment* - First Set Students bring in 2 minutes of best “bits” from weeks 1-5, creating a “set” Assessment of each student’s POV and stage persona <i>Homework: receive comic and work on Midterm presentation due class 7</i> <i>Evaluate and re-write first set, second set due class 9</i></p>
7	<p>Midterm* - Critical Analysis of Established Comic No phones allowed on stage during presentation, notecards OK Presentation focusing on your assigned comedian, analyzing and critiquing their material, influences, point of view, persona, work habits, career, legacy, etc. <i>Homework: study examples of crowd work for discussion in class 8</i></p>
8	<p>Performance technique: Crowd Work and Improvising Survival skills that lead to confidence and flexibility In-class discussion, exercise and stage time <i>Homework: bring in second set due class 9</i></p>
9	<p>Fourth assignment* - Second Set Students present second set, 2-3 minutes May include new material <i>Homework: study examples of heckling for discussion in class 11</i> <i>Evaluate and re-write second set, polished set due class 12</i></p>
10	<p>Performance technique: Heckling Survival skills that lead to confidence and flexibility In-class discussion, exercise and stage time <i>Homework: bring in clean 3-minute set to present in class 11</i></p>
11	<p>Fifth assignment* - “Clean” Set Network television, certain shows and charity benefits require clean material Students present 2-3 minutes of clean material <i>Homework: bring in 3-minute polished set to present in class 12</i></p>
12	<p>Sixth assignment* - “Polished” Set, First Rehearsal with Hosts Students debut their first attempt at a 3-minute polished comedy set Must choose from material presented in classes 1-11 <i>Homework: continue adjusting and improving set for final rehearsal in class 13</i> <i>Begin to study your assigned student for the “switch up” class 14</i></p>

WEEK	CLASS CONTENT (cont.)
13	<p>Seventh assignment* - "Final" Set, Second Rehearsal with Hosts</p> <p>The routine returns in an advanced form, receiving feedback and notes Emphasis on beginning and ending, handling "mistakes", costume, etc. <i>Homework: Outline Plan of Attack, and prepare 90-second student "switch up"</i></p>
14	<p>Eighth assignment* - Plan of Attack and Switch Sets</p> <p>Students discuss how they plan to use their stand up skills going forward Present 90-second "Switch Up" Class conversation and clips, time permitting <i>Homework: write self-assessment paper due during Final</i></p>
15	<p>Final*- Critical Analysis, Self - Paper Due</p> <p><i>Friday, December 7th, 7-9pm, MCC 111 (room subject to change)</i></p> <p>Written paper due, self-assessing the student's overall progress through the class; including personal challenges, strengths, weaknesses and victories Two pages, double-spaced, name on each page, and stapled No emailed or late papers accepted</p>

Class Show Dates

USC Stand Up Comedy Showcases are at Westside Comedy Theater in Santa Monica
You must be at one of the two rehearsal classes to participate in the show

You may sign up for one show:

Monday, November 26, 6:30-8pm (6pm call time)

Tuesday, November 27, 6:30-8pm (6pm call time)

Thursday, November 29, 6:30-8pm (6pm call time)

KEY DATES:

Monday, August 20: Fall semester classes begin

Friday, September 7: Last day to add/drop this class without a "W" or to select "P/NP"

Friday, October 5: Last day to change "P/NP" to letter grade

Friday, November 9: Last day to drop this class with a mark of "W"

Wednesday – Sunday, November 21-25: Thanksgiving Recess, no classes

Friday, November 30: Fall semester classes end

Saturday – Tuesday, December 1-4: Study days

Wednesday – Wednesday, December 5-12: Final exams

Wednesday, December 12: Fall semester ends

December 13-January 6, 2019: Winter Recess

Additional Notes:

- ***Except for water, no food or drinks are allowed in class at any time.***

Welcome to Introduction to Stand Up Comedy, dear students! It is a joy and privilege to get to know each of you through our collaborative and creative exploration and especially, your jokes. Let's do good work, endeavor to know ourselves better, risk a little, support each other, make lasting friendships, and laugh through it all!

Judith Shelton (Jude)

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the Department of Public Safety <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Title IX

Harassment, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence, and stalking are not tolerated by the university. All faculty and most staff are considered Responsible Employees by the university and must forward all information they receive about these types of situations to the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for assisting students with supportive accommodations, including academic accommodations, as well as investigating these incidents if the reporting student wants an investigation. If you need academic accommodations you may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly (titleix@usc.edu or [213-821-8298](tel:213-821-8298)) without sharing any personal information with me. If you would like to speak with a confidential counselor, Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) provides 24/7 confidential support for students ([213-740-4900](tel:213-740-4900); press 0 after hours).

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, (www.usc.edu/scampus or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.