

**Instructor: Judith Shelton**

**Office: MCC 112**

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

**Contact Info: [judiths@usc.edu](mailto: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 (Audiobook encouraged)

*Born Standing Up: A Comic's Life* by Steve Martin (Audiobook encouraged)

*The Comedians: Drunks, Thieves, Scoundrels and the History of American Comedy* by Klyph Nesteroff (Audiobook available)

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 10 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 10 points, which will impact your grade.

**Make-up options:**

- If you miss an exercise, assignment or presentation, you may make up 8 points, total, by Friday, April 26<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm. I will check the time stamp.
- 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 via the specific class email chain I will create
- 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	1 point
• Week 3, in-class write/get up exercise	5 points
• Week 4, 1 <sup>st</sup> assignment, Joke Styles	6 points
• Week 5, 2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment, 10 Jokes	11 points
• Week 6, 3 <sup>rd</sup> assignment, First Set	6 points
• MIDTERM: Critical Analysis, Established Comedian	14 points
• Week 8, in-class exercise, Crowd Work	5 points
• Week 9, 4 <sup>th</sup> assignment, Second Set	6 points
• Week 10, in-class exercise, Heckling	5 points
• Week 11, 5 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Headlines/Topical	6 points
• Week 12, 6 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Clean Set	6 points
• Week 13, 7 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Polished Set, 1 <sup>st</sup> Show Rehearsal	7 points
• Week 14, 8 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Final Set, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Show Rehearsal	7 points
• Week 15, 9 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Plan of Attack, "Switch Sets"	4 points
• FINAL: Paper Due: Critical Analysis, Self	10 points
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100 points</b>

**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, April 5th. 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.**

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>CLASS CONTENT</b>
	<i>(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.)</i>
<b>1</b>	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
<b>2</b>	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
<b>3</b>	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 (One-Liner, physical, confessional, observational, political, etc.)</i>

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>CLASS CONTENT (cont.)</b>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>First assignment* - Joke Styles</b>  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>
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Second assignment* - 10 Jokes</b>  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>
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Third assignment* - First Set</b>  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>
<b>7</b>	<p><b>Midterm* - Critical Analysis of Established Comic</b>  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>
<b>8</b>	<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>
<b>9</b>	<p><b>Fourth assignment* - Second Set</b>  Students present second set, 2-3 minutes  May include new material  <i>Homework: study examples of heckling for discussion in class 10</i>  <i>Evaluate and re-write second set, polished set due class 13</i></p>
<b>10</b>	<p>Performance technique: Heckling  Survival skills that lead to confidence and flexibility  In-class discussion, exercise and stage time  <i>Homework: bring in 3 minutes of topical material to present in class 11</i></p>
<b>11</b>	<p><b>Fifth assignment* - “Headlines/Topical” Set</b>  Please bring in 3 minutes of material inspired by current news headlines, cultural events, or pop culture  <i>Homework: bring in clean 3-minute set to present in class 12</i></p>
<b>12</b>	<p><b>Sixth assignment* - “Clean” Set</b>  Network television, certain shows and venues require clean material  Students present 2-3 minutes of clean material  <i>Homework: bring in 3-minute polished set to present in class 13</i></p>

WEEK	CLASS CONTENT (cont.)
13	<p><b>Seventh assignment* - “Polished” Set, First Rehearsal with Hosts</b></p> <p>Students debut their first attempt at a 3.5-minute polished comedy set Must choose from material presented in classes 1-12 <i>Homework: continue adjusting and improving set for final rehearsal in class 14</i> <i>Begin to study your assigned student for the “switch sets” class 15</i></p>
14	<p><b>Eighth assignment* - “Final” Set, Second Rehearsal with Hosts</b></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>
15	<p><b>Ninth assignment* - Plan of Attack and Switch Sets</b></p> <p>Students discuss how they plan to use their stand up skills going forward Present 90-second “Switch Sets” <i>Homework: write self-assessment paper due before end of your Final period</i></p>
16	<p><b>Final*- Critical Analysis, Self – Paper Due</b></p> <p><i>Friday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7-9pm, MCC 112 (room subject to change)</i> 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 rehearsals (class 13 and 14) to participate in the show  
You must be at both rehearsals (class 13 and 14) to host the show  
You may sign up for one show: Monday, April 22, 6:30-8pm (6pm call time)  
Tuesday, April 23, 6:30-8pm (6pm call time)  
Thursday, April 25, 6:30-8pm (6pm call time)

### **KEY DATES:**

Friday, January 25: Last day to add/drop this class without a “W”/select “P/NP” or Audit  
Friday, February 22: Last day to change “P/NP” to letter grade  
Sunday – Sunday, March 10-17: Spring Recess, no classes  
Friday, April 5: Last day to drop this class with a mark of “W”  
Friday, April 26: Spring semester classes end  
Saturday – Tuesday, April 27-30: Study days  
Wednesday – Wednesday, May 1-8: Final exams  
Friday, May 10: Commencement

### **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)**

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### 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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). 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>.

### 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 for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### 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. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

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### Support Systems:

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)