

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 482 STAND-UP 2: Honing Your Act
Spring 2019 –Fridays–10am to 12:50pm
Location: MCC 111

Instructor: Wayne Federman
Office:
Office Hours: By Appointment
Contact Info: waynefed@usc.edu

Course Description and Overview

This course, a follow-up to THTR 474, will primarily focus on techniques for creating new comedy material and onstage performance strategies. Other topics covered include: road gigs, bar gigs, open mics, college tours, mainstream vs. alternative, creating a five-minute late-night TV set, writing for other comedians, how to be an "opening act", rejection and stage fright, becoming a headliner, Sound Exchange, podcasting, merchandise, social media, late-night and award show joke writing, getting a manager/agent, and comedy festivals. We will also examine the history of modern stand-up. Plus various professional guest speakers.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, the student will have specific techniques for creating material, a comprehensive intro into the world of professional stand-up, the ability to recognize various comedic devices, a greater understanding of the history of stand-up, and - hopefully - a more polished and effective stand-up routine.

Proposed Objectives

- The importance of getting on stage
- Specificity: the key to great stand-up
- Economy of words: another key to great stand-up
- The crucial first 30-seconds
- The physical basics: microphone, stand, "the light", and the stool.
- Writing techniques
- Your persona
- Truthfulness
- Exaggeration
- Getting rid of "ahhs" and "umms"
- Dealing with stage fright
- Punching up?
- Recording your set/ Reviewing your set

- Dealing with rejection
- Giving the audience too much power
- Precise break-down of successful stand-up
- How to build an act: from 3 minutes to an hour
- Performing on television
- The infinite possibilities of the internet
- Various stand-up clips to be viewed and discussed in class
- Guest artist lectures with Q&A

• **Required Readings**

The 100 Jokes That Shaped Modern Comedy - Vulture Magazine (free online article)

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

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

Recommended readings, viewings, and materials

History of Standup - podcast

Marc Maron's WTF - podcast

Seriously Funny: The Rebel Comedians of the 1950s and 1960s - Gerald Nachman

Richard Pryor: Live in Concert (1979) warning: explicit - film

I Am Comic (2009) Documentary about stand-up. dir. Jordan Brady

Dying Laughing (2016) Documentary about stand-up. dir. Lloyd Stanton.

Jerry Before Seinfeld (2017) Netflix documentary about starting as a stand-up.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Exercises and Assignments

IMPORTANT NOTE: Grades are *not* dictated by the success of comedy presentations or Professor Federman's subjective opinion of talent or artistic preference.

Grades are dictated by

- Class participation
- Meeting all deadlines: reading, watching, writing, performing.
- Feedback on classmates comedy presentations.

Grading Points Breakdown:

• Week 1 in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 2 in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 3 in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 4 in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 5 in-class exercise, 1st paper due	10 points
• Week 6 in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 7 in-class exercise	5 points
• MID-TERM: TEST and/or ESSAY	10 points
• Week 9 in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 10 in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 11 in-class exercise, 2nd paper due	10 points
• Week 12 in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 13, in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 14, in-class exercise.....	5 points
• Week 15, in-class exercise.....	5 points
• FINAL: TEST and/or ESSAY	15 points

TOTAL

100 points (plus extra credit assignments)

Grading Scale:

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A 95-100, A- 90-94, B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82, C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72, D+ 67-69, D 63-66, D- 60-62, F 59 and below.

Further Grading Notes:

- If the GPA falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students with excellent/good attendance & class participation and toward the negative end of the scale for those with average/poor attendance & participation.
- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W. I will be happy to discuss your work at any time.
- **No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted**

Assignment Submission Policy

Written assignments will be collected at the beginning of each class.

Assignments for presentation will be performed during class.

ATTENDANCE:

Absences/Tardiness: *Attendance is weighted at no more than 15% as per University Guidelines*

Course Schedule:

WEEKLY CLASS CONTENT

(This timeline is subject to change depending on the dynamics, pace, and unpredictability of the creative process of performance classes. Plus guest lecturers may alter schedule.)

1 GETTING TO KNOW YOU.

Brief moment onstage to introduce yourself to each other. Class ground rules. Breaking “ands” and “ums.” What it means to be a professional. Microphone technique. *Assignment: for week 2/3: bring in short stand-up clip (audio or video) of comedian’s routine you admire.*

2 YOUR ACT / BREAKDOWN

Perform up to 2-minute original stand-up. “Stand-up Breakdown” - examination of successful comedians techniques.

3 YOUR ACT / BREAKDOWN

Perform up to 2-minute original stand-up. “Stand-up Breakdown part 2” - examination of successful comedians techniques.

4 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP HISTORY Part One

Perform up to 2 minute original stand-up. HISTORY OF STAND-UP LECTURE. Assignment for 1st paper

5 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP HISTORY Part two

Perform up to 2-minute original stand-up. Opening act. HISTORY OF STAND-UP LECTURE. Selection of topic for Mid-term paper. 1st paper due.

6 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP LECTURE

Write original routine based on presented topics. In-depth examination of joke styles (one liner, deadpan, stories, act-outs, characters).

7 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP LECTURE

Perform up to 3-minute original stand-up. Writing monologue/topical jokes. The road vs. in-town.

8 MID-TERM

Perform only topical jokes (monologue/weekend update) written over the last week. Creating your 5-minute Late Night Set. Mid-term assignment due.

9 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP LECTURE

Perform up to 3-minute original stand-up. Starting your own show vs open mics. *assignment: select paper #2 topic.*

10 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP LECTURE

Perform up to 3-minute original stand-up. Promoting yourself. Merchandise.

11 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP LECTURE

Perform up to 3-minute original stand-up. How to go from 3 minutes to 1 hour. Building a set for the road. 2nd paper due.

12 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP LECTURE

Perform up to 3-minute original stand-up. HISTORY OF STAND-UP. Podcasting and Sound Exchange.

13 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP LECTURE

Perform up to 4-minute original stand-up. Comedy festivals, working overseas, managers and agents.

14 YOUR ACT / STAND- UP LECTURE

Perform up to 5-minute original stand-up. Transitioning to professional comedian.

15 YOUR ACT / CLASS PARTY

Perform up to 5-minute original stand-up. Class party.

16 FINAL EXAM (time and date TBD)

Class Show

Possible Stand Up Comedy performance at a professional venue in Los Angeles. Date and location TBD. **NOT REQUIRED**

Additional Notes:

- *No food or drinks allowed in class.*
- *No email, cell phone, or texting during class - without specific permission.*
- *Recording of yourself is encouraged.*
- *Recording of ANY OTHER student is prohibitive.*
- *Recording of Professor is prohibited.*