

**Instructor: Judith Shelton**

**Office: MCC 112**

**Office Hours: 5-5:50pm Weds. by appointment only**

**Contact Info: [judiths@usc.edu](mailto:judiths@usc.edu) - Monday-Thursday  
626.390.3678 - Wednesdays (via text)**

### **Course Description and Overview**

This course continues where THTR 474 left off, getting up in class and performing over and over to create longer, more effective sets. We will also engage in the non-performing, but just as important, work of the comic by actively pitching, producing and promoting our own stand up show.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the course, the student will have additional writing tools and techniques, as well as hosting and headlining experience throughout the semester. We will move from studying the “classic” comics to the comics of today, writing for them and each other as we explore other career opportunities for comics, such as punch up, writing for late-night and awards shows, etc. Students will leave with a greater understanding of what other work is possible, where to head next in their comedy careers and, hopefully, an additional 5-7 minutes of material.

### **Proposed Objectives**

- Revisit and refine the skills we learned in Intro to Stand Up
- Develop additional jokes, bits, chunks, sets
- Find comfort in the silences, calm in the conflict
- Develop material via pitch sessions and the “Writer’s Room”
- Learn to write for other comics and perform material from other comics
- Experience script “punch up” in collaboration with a USC SCA screenwriter or similar
- Create material for specific events and themes
- Participate in constant, constructive evaluation of work
- “Try on” other points of view and personae
- Flesh out the characters in our act and bring them to life
- View and discuss the history, style and contributions of contemporary comics
- Map a personal care plan, focusing on mental health and longevity in the business
- Take confident control of our careers
- Produce a show (hopefully on campus) in which to showcase our work

### **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

*How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying* by Carol Leifer (Audiobook recommended)  
*Comedy Writing for Late-Night TV* by Joe Toplyn

Various stand up clips to be viewed and discussed in class

The Jackie and Laurie Show, Podcast, with Jackie Kashian and Laurie Kilmartin

Put Your Hands Together, Podcast, with Cameron Esposito and Rhea Butcher

Two Dope Queens, Podcast, with Phoebe Robinson and Jessica Williams

The History of Stand Up, Podcast, with Wayne Federman and Andrew Steven

## **Recommended Reading**

*Daily Rituals: How Artists Work* by Mason Currey

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

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

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

## **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, Daily Comic Breakdown, 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 parse feedback and improve over time
- If a student misses an exercise, breakdown or assignment, student has missed their opportunity to perform (stage time) and will lose points which will impact their grade
- Be advised: missing the breakdown, as assigned, will result in a loss of 4 points

### **Presentations:**

- All presentations are given in class, no electronic submissions accepted
- If a student misses a presentation or the show, student will lose valuable points

### **Midterm and Show:**

- The Midterm is worth 10 points, the Show is worth 8 points
- The Midterm is presented in class with no paper component
- No electronic submission of Midterm or Show accepted
- Missing the Midterm, or Show, will greatly impact your grade
- The policy for tardiness/leaving early (pg. 4) applies to the Midterm and Show, 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.
- You may make up 8 points by doing a booked show, OFF CAMPUS ONLY.
- You may make up 4 points by doing a mic OFF CAMPUS ONLY.
- You may make up 4 points by *observing the speakers* in Wayne’s class, Fridays, 10am-12:50pm, MCC 111 and sending a picture and a full paragraph to the entire class, and me, via email. Date and times TBD.
- 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 2 points by *observing* Wayne’s class, and sending a picture and a full paragraph to the entire class, and me, via email
- You may make up 2 points by watching a live stand up show or mic and sending a picture and full 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 points
• Week 2, 1 <sup>st</sup> assignment: First Set	6 points
• Week 3, 2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment: 8 topical jokes	8 points
• Week 4, in-class exercise, Characters	4 points
• Week 5, 4 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Writer’s Room - Pitching	4 points
• Week 6, 5 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Second Set	6 points
• MIDTERM: Comedy in The Style Of	10 points
• Week 8, in-class exercise, Taboo Bucket	4 points
• Week 9, 6 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Third Set	6 points
• Week 10, 7 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Writer’s Room - Punch Up	7 points
• Week 11, in-class exercise, Awards Show	5 points
• Week 12, 6 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Fourth Set	6 points
• Week 13, 7 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Head Writer	7 points
• Week 14, 8 <sup>th</sup> assignment: Final Set, Show Rehearsal	8 points
• Week 15, **SHOW**April 24 <sup>th</sup> **	8 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. No late work accepted under any circumstance.

## **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 6pm to 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 8 Topical 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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|----------|---|
| <b>1</b> | Review of syllabus (our contract)<br>Introduction and discussion of personal goals for the class<br>In-class improvised exercise and stage time<br>Assignment of clip presentation/hosting days for each student<br><i>Homework: 2-minute set, due class 2</i>                    |
| <b>2</b> | <b>First assignment* - First Set</b><br>Students perform first 2-minute set.<br>Student #1 presents first comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic<br>Plus, brainstorming about the show, creating list of tasks<br><i>Homework: 10 Headlines/Topical Jokes, due class 3</i> |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Second assignment* - 10 Topical Jokes</b><br>Please bring in 3 minutes of material inspired by news headlines, cultural events and pop culture within the last 5 days. 3 minutes max.<br>Student #2 presents their comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic               |

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>CLASS CONTENT, cont.</b>
<b>4</b>	Characters in comedy In-class discussion, exercise and stage time Student #3 presents their comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic <i>Homework: bring in 3 jokes you need help with, due class 5</i>
<b>5</b>	<b>Fourth assignment* - Writer's Room: Pitching</b> Students break into smaller groups and pitch on each other's jokes Writing session followed by stage time Student #4 presents their comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic <i>Homework: work on second set, due class 6</i>
<b>6</b>	<b>Fifth assignment* - Second Set</b> Students bring in 3 minutes of best "bits" from weeks 1-5, creating a "set" Students isolate an area in their own work that needs improvement Student #5 presents their comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic <i>Homework: receive comic and work on Midterm set due class 7</i> <i>Evaluate and re-write second set, third set due class 9</i>
<b>7</b>	<b>Midterm* - Comedy in the Style of</b> In class 6, students isolated an area in their own work that needs improvement. In class 7, students present a 3 to 4-minute comedy set inspired by the point of view and persona of a comic that embodies that strength. We are not writing for them, but using their style to lead us into new territory, previously uncharted as an artist, creating new and fearless material
<b>8</b>	Taboo Bucket. Can anything be funny? Let's find out! In-class discussion, exercise and stage time Student #6 presents their comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic <i>Homework: bring in third set due class 9</i>
<b>9</b>	<b>Sixth assignment* - Third Set</b> Students present third set, 4 minutes May include new material Student #7 presents their comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic <i>Homework: bring in a scene from a screenplay that could use some better jokes</i>
<b>10</b>	<b>Seventh assignment* - Writer's Room: Punch Up of selected screenplays</b> In-class discussion, break into smaller groups Student #8 presents their comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic
<b>11</b>	Awards Show banter We pick an Awards show and groups of two write 2, 2-minute clean joke segments Student #9 presents their comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic <i>Homework: bring in 5-minute set to present in class 12</i>
<b>12</b>	<b>Sixth assignment* - Fourth Set</b> Students perform a 5-minute comedy set Must choose from material presented in classes 1-11 Student #10 presents their comic, leads breakdown of clips/hosts the mic <i>Homework: receive comic you are writing for and get them 3-minutes of material, by Monday morning at 10am, to present in class 13</i> <i>Continue adjusting and improving set for final rehearsal in class 14</i>

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>CLASS CONTENT, cont.</b>
<b>13</b>	<p><b>Seventh assignment* - Head Writer</b>            Students “tailor” and perform material written for them, 3 minutes max.            Students #11 &amp; 12 present their comics, lead breakdown/split hosting duties  <i>Homework: bring in 5-7-minute final set to present in class 14</i>  <i>Begin to write your paper, due by the end of the Final</i></p>
<b>14</b>	<p><b>Eighth assignment* - “Final” Set, Show Rehearsal with Hosts</b>            Students rehearse final 5 to 7-minute set            Students #13 &amp; 14 present their comics, lead breakdown/split hosting duties  <i>Homework: Get your show set ready! 5-7 minutes</i></p>
<b>15</b>	<p><b>Ninth assignment* - SHOW!</b>  <i>Homework: write self-assessment paper due before end of your Final period</i></p>
<b>16</b>	<p><b>Final*- Critical Analysis, Self – Paper Due</b>  <i>Wednesday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 7-9pm, MCC 112 (room subject to change)</i>            Here we are again! Written paper due, self-assessing the student’s overall progress through the class; comparing Intro to Stand Up and Stand Up 2, detailing new insights, personal challenges, and victories. Please include a personal care plan, thoughts on how to guard your mental and physical well-being in order to support your joy and longevity in the business            Two full pages, double-spaced, name on each page, and stapled            No emailed or late papers accepted</p>

**Class Show, Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>**

Together, you will conceive, find and secure the location, produce, promote and perform a class show during our regular class period. Where? How? Comics devote a good portion of their time finding ways to perform. Being a good “hustler” will get you far in comedy, get creative!

**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 back, dear students, and thank you for working with me once again!  
 Together we’ll take the next step in our journey,**

**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/ssu](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssu)

*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)