

THTR 470: Sketch Comedy for Theatre

2 Units

Fall 2019 Mon/Wed 12-1:50pm

Location: MCC 107

Instructor: Kirstin Eggers

Office: MCC 214

Office Hours: By appointment please schedule via email.

Email: kqeggers@usc.edu

Phone: (c) 323.898.7388 emergencies only, email preferred.

Course Description

"The duty of comedy is to correct men by amusing them." – Molière

In this experiential writing and performance workshop course, students will explore and develop their unique comedic voices via the creation of comedic sketches, through the entire process from idea generation, to writing, revision, rehearsal, and finally production and performance of a fully realized sketch comedy show, with an emphasis on creative collaboration and ensemble building.

Learning Objectives

Throughout this course, students will work to identify their own comedic viewpoints through the medium of sketch comedic explorations of concepts, characters and situations. Students will learn sketch writing structure through the study of prominent existing sketches, and techniques for sketch performance and original character creation. Students are expected to generate a high volume of comedic concepts and written material to serve their own creative exploration, and their own work ethic and writing practice. Students are also expected to serve the needs of the group, and work toward building a true comedy ensemble.

Although we will be working toward a final workshop presentation, this course is focused on process over product you are not expected to be funny 100% of the time, or even 10% of the time. You are expected to be brave, be open-minded, and stretch out of your comfort zone to explore and strengthen your own unique comedic voice.

"I'm not funny. What I am is brave." – Lucille Ball

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

You will receive handouts and/or web links throughout the course that you are expected to read and discuss, but there is no predetermined required reading list.

Recommended Reading:

- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *Live from New York: An Uncensored History of SNL* by Shales & Miller
- *Why Not Me* by Mindy Kaling
- *Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy* by Judd Apatow
- *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* by Issa Rae
- *Poking A Dead Frog* by Mike Sacks

Required Viewing:

- Please watch *Saturday Night Live* weekly throughout the semester.

- You will also be called upon to watch and analyze existing produced sketches. Current/recent television sketch shows include *Saturday Night Live*, *A Black Lady Sketch Show*, *I Think You Should Leave with Tim Robinson*, *Baroness Von Sketch Show*, *Alternatino*, *Goatface*, *Netflix Presents: The Characters*, *Key & Peele*, *Inside Amy Schumer*, *Portlandia*, *Kroll Show*, etc. Historical sketch shows include *The Carol Burnett Show*, *Chappelle's Show*, *The Kids In The Hall*, *Mr. Show*, various Tracey Ullman, *MADtv*, *In Living Color*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, etc.

Recommended Viewing/Watching/Listening:

- Attend a live sketch comedy show – suggested comedy theaters include Groundlings, UCB, The Second City LA, among others.
- Watch internet-based sketches – sites include College Humor and Funny or Die, among others.
- Comedy-centered podcasts such as *WTF with Marc Maron*, *Comedy Bang Bang*, *Spontaneanation*, etc.

"Comedy is here to bring joy to the world, whether you want to hear the curse words or not." – Kenan Thompson

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Class attendance and participation is crucial for your success in this class. There are no excused absences for any reason – an absence is an absence. If you do find yourself missing class, you must follow up with me or classmates to keep up to date.

Though attendance is not the sole aspect of your participation grade, please be aware that missing more than 15% of classes, or being late for more than 25% of classes, or a combination thereof, will automatically lower your final grade in this course.

This class demands a high volume of **written material**, and will include extensive meeting with writing and performance partners outside of class. All written sketch material **MUST** be printed out ahead of time, with a copy for each cast member. If you have a sketch, but it is not printed, it will not be considered for the day, and will affect pitch presence points. Sketches should never be read off phones or other devices.

In writing sketches at the “pitch” level (fully written sketches), a scriptwriting program is recommended for your ease, but it is not necessary. Final Draft is the industry standard, and available for purchase, but Celtx also does the job and is a free download. WriterDuet is also recommended for co-writing.

You will keep a **Comedy Notebook** throughout the course. This will be your personal notebook in which you record observations and ideas, but will be reviewed periodically to confirm participation. Specific notebook assignments will be announced in class. You should have daily interaction with your notebook, and it should attend every class with you.

The volume of pitched sketches will be graded on a curve, based on the total number of sketches created by the class. Consistent interaction with Pitch (submitting written sketches, both originals and rewrites) is necessary for your success in this class.

Wholehearted participation in the **final workshop presentation**, and corresponding rehearsals, is mandatory. The final workshop presentation is scheduled for Thursday, December 5. You must be present and participating from 6-10pm (at a minimum). The final tech/dress rehearsal will be Wednesday, December 4. You must be present and participating from 6-10pm (at a minimum). These dates and times are locked with no exceptions. There will also be additional outside rehearsal, with some flexibility to individual schedules.

You are also expected to take on additional production duties, such as tech coordination, music compilation, costuming and prop mastery, publicity, set-up and strike, etc. Specific production assignments will be determined later in the semester.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Ensemble Work/Participation (presence, focus, attitude, willingness)	15	15
Family Member Monologue	5	5
Stranger Monologue	5	5
Sketch Analysis	5	5
Comedy Notebook (inc. ideas)	5	5
Midterm (franchise character sketch co-write and presentation)	15	15
Pitch Presence	25	25
Final Workshop Show (Professionalism, attitude, competence, readiness)	25	25
TOTAL	100	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

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

- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W (November 15).
- I am happy to discuss your work and/or grade with you at any time.

Assignment Submission Policy

Unless otherwise specified, all assignments will be shared/presented in class – physical or electronic documents do not need to be submitted, although hardcopies of scripts must be used for presentations.

Additional Policies

When in class, you must be focused, and mentally, physically and emotionally present. Cell phones and other electronic devices often impede this. Devices should be put away completely unless you are called upon to use it (e.g. watching videos for reference). You should never have devices out during any lecture/lesson/rehearsal/feedback session, or when watching others perform in any way. For certain in-class work, you may use a laptop if you prefer to write on it. Unauthorized device attention may affect your participation points.

Please wear clothing and shoes in which you can move freely and comfortably. Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way, whether by unwanted exposure or physical limitations. Shoes should be closed-toed and stay on your feet – no flip-flops. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. If you must wear a hat, it must not obscure your face in any way.

Please reserve break-time activities for before and after class. We do not take an official break in the hour and fifty minutes of class – you should be prepared to stay in the room. In the event of an emergency, observe respectful theatre rules of being discrete and respectful to your fellow actors.

Food or drink is not allowed in SDA classrooms, water excepted. Absolutely no gum.

Please help restore studio classroom to neutral at the end of each class.

“To make comedy, maybe you just have to work hard and be funny.” – Tina Fey

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Please note: due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure will change to accommodate the needs of individuals and the ensemble. You will be informed of any changes as much as possible.

Classes may begin with warm-ups, depending on the nature of the day's work.

Week/ Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
1. Mon Aug 26	Welcome/introductions/ syllabus review. Intro to sketch via improv. Intro to Comedy Notebook. Discussion: comedy boundaries and modern comedy.		DUE WEDNESDAY: Write a 1 minute monologue of a family member you know VERY WELL. Think of how they walk, sit, stand, move, talk specificity is key. Comedy Notebook Assignment.
1. Wed Aug 28	Family monologues performed and explored.	DUE TODAY: Write and perform a 1 minute monologue of a family member you know VERY WELL.	DUE WEDNESDAY: Observe a stranger for at least 10 minutes (set your timer!). Get close and far. Write a 1 minute monologue playing that stranger what is happening to them that day? Be specific. The funny is in the details. Comedy Notebook Assignment.
2. Mon Sept 2	LABOR DAY NO CLASS		
2. Wed Sept 4	Stranger monologues performed and explored. Begin sketch types.	DUE TODAY: Write and perform a 1 minute monologue playing the observed stranger.	DUE WEDNESDAY: Find and send web link to designated collector of two of your favorite sketches. Comedy Notebook Assignment.
3. Mon Sept 9	In-class monologue writing. Sketch types, continued.		Comedy Notebook Assignment sketch type ideas 1 & 2.
3. Wed Sept 11	In-class writing/ improvising. Sketch types, continued.	DUE TODAY: Bring in (send) web links of two of your favorite sketches. Analyze and present structure/format.	Comedy Notebook Assignment sketch type ideas 3 & 4.

4. Mon Sept 16	In-class writing/ improvising. Sketch writing overview.		Comedy Notebook Assignment sketch type ideas 5 & 6.
4. Wed Sept 18	Sketch idea speed dating. Paired writing practice.	DUE TODAY: 30+ sketch ideas, as expressed in Comedy Notebook.	DUE MONDAY: Franchise character idea and presentation favorite and a back-up.
5. Mon Sept 23	Franchise characters writers room. Begin supported co-writes for franchise characters.	DUE TODAY: Franchise character idea and presentation favorite and a back-up.	DUE MONDAY: Full written drafts of franchise character co- write (your own character AND head writer). Printed with copy for each cast member.
5. Wed Sept 25	Supported co-writes for franchise characters, continued.		
6. Mon Sept 30	Midterm sketch rehearsal.	DUE TODAY: Full written drafts of franchise character co- write (your own character AND head writer). Printed with copy for each cast member.	
6. Wed Oct 2	Midterm sketch rehearsal, continued.		Rehearse Midterm Sketches independently. All midterm sketch presentations must be off-book.
7. Mon Oct 7	MIDTERM Part 1: presentation of franchise character sketches, written/rehearsed outside of class. Notes.	DUE TODAY: Midterm “practice show.” All sketches rehearsed and performed (as scheduled).	
7. Wed Oct 9	MIDTERM Part 2: presentation of franchise character sketches, written/rehearsed outside of class. Notes.	DUE TODAY: Midterm “practice show.” All sketches rehearsed and performed (as scheduled).	Begin sketch writing for pitch!
8. Mon Oct 14	Midterm reflection. Review pitch formatting. Begin pitch.	Sketches written, copies printed and given to cast, presented for feedback/rewriting.	Sketch writing for pitch!
8-12. Wed Oct 16 - Mon Nov 11	Pitch.	Sketches written, copies printed and given to cast, presented for feedback/rewriting.	Sketch writing for pitch!

12. Wed Nov 13	Pitch/rehearse for show. Assign auxiliary roles. Narrow down for show.		
13 - 14. Mon Nov 18 - Nov 25	Pitch/rehearse for show.		
14. Wed Nov 27	THANKSGIVING BREAK NO CLASS		
15. Mon Dec 2	Rehearse for show. All tech final collection.		
15. Wed Dec 4	12pm REHEARSE 6pm TECH/DRESS REHEARSAL	All sketches off book and rehearsed. All costumes/props secured and approved. All tech aspects ready. Show order confirmed.	Prep for show.
15. Thu Dec 5	FINAL SHOW 7:30PM in McClintock Theatre (calltime TBA)		
FINAL	Fri Dec 13 @ 11am: POST-MORTEM		

"Work hard, be kind, and amazing things will happen." Conan O'Brien

EXTRA-CURRICULAR COMMITMENTS AND ISPs

Should you choose to participate in any extra-curricular project, such as an Independent Student Production, the SDA administration and faculty will not make allowances or exceptions for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

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. 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.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. 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

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

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

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