

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 482 Stand Up 2: Becoming A Pro
Spring 2020 Monday Evening 6pm to 8:50pm
Location: MCC 111
Prerequisite: THTR 474

Instructor: Professor Wayne Federman
Office:
Office Hours: By Appointment
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Course Description and Overview

Stand Up 2: Becoming A Pro is geared towards students who plan to pursue stand-up comedy professionally and 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, roast jokes/strategies, podcasting, NACA, social media, late-night joke writing, award show writing, getting a manager/agent, and comedy festivals.

Stand Up 2 will also explore the history of modern stand-up from Bob Hope to Dave Chappelle.

Past Stand Up 2 guest speakers have included: Sarah Tiana, Margaret Cho, Judd Apatow, Jeff Ross, Brent Forrester, Fahim Anwar, and Beth Stelling.

Learning Objectives

1. To obtain specific techniques for creating material.
2. To understand and recognize various comedic devices.
3. To develop a more polished and effective stand-up routine.
4. To understand both the challenges and opportunities of professional stand-up comedy.
5. To gain a greater understanding of the history of stand-up.

Topics and Lectures

- 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.
- Recording your set/ Reviewing your set
- Writing techniques
- Your persona
- Truthfulness
- Exaggeration
- Getting rid of “ahhs” and “umms”
- Dealing with stage fright
- Punching up?
- 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
- Plus guest artist lectures with Q&A

• **Required Readings**

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

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

Recommended readings, viewings, and materials

The History of Standup Podcast - w/ Wayne Federman and Andrew Stevens

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 either 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.

Class ground rules. Brief moment onstage to introduce yourself to each other. 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

“Stand-up Breakdown” - examination of successful comedians techniques.

3 YOUR ACT / BREAKDOWN

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

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 a 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 4-minute original stand-up. Transitioning to professional comedian.

15 YOUR ACT

Perform original stand-up.

16 FINAL EXAM (time and date TBD)

Class Show

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

Additional Notes:

- *Recording of yourself is encouraged.*
- *Please arrive promptly. Arriving late is unprofessional and disturbs the class.*
- *Please ensure that you are prepared for the class and are in a fit state (mentally, emotionally, physically) to contribute.*
- *Recording of ANY OTHER student is prohibitive.*
- *No drinks or food are allowed in class.*
- *There will be two restroom breaks per class.*
- *No email, cell phone, or texting - without specific permission.*
- *Tablets and laptops are acceptable but if you are found on irrelevant websites during class I will ask you to switch to taking notes on paper.*
- *Recording of Professor Federman is prohibited.*