

THTR 470: Sketch Comedy for Theatre
2 Units
Fall 2020 — Mondays & Wednesdays — 12-1:50pm
Location: Zoom Room (access via Blackboard)

Instructor: Kirstin Eggers
Zoom Office: <https://usc.zoom.us/my/kirstin.sda>
Office Hours: By appointment — schedule via email.
Email: kqeggers@usc.edu
USC Slack: @Kirstin Eggers

Course Description

*"Humor is laughing at what you haven't got
when you ought to have it." —Langston Hughes*

*"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 own comedic viewpoints through the medium of sketch — comedic explorations of concepts, characters and situations — through the entire process, from idea generation, to writing, revision, rehearsal, and finally production and performance of a fully realized online sketch comedy show, with an emphasis on creative collaboration and ensemble building.

Students will 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 will also serve the needs of the group, and work toward building a true comedy ensemble — a mainstay of comedy success.

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 openminded, 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

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Apply successful ensemble/partnership techniques
2. Develop written and performed material with emphasis on personal comedic voice
3. Construct original specific characters
4. Identify sketch types, sketch formats, and comedy forms
5. Generate consistent/high volumes of creative material
6. Create every aspect of an original sketch comedy show

Course Notes

Most classes must be attended live, due to the collaborative, experiential, and performative nature of comedy. There will also be some weeks with asynchronous learning in lieu of class.

Communication

Please email me at kqeggers@usc.edu any time with questions or concerns. Emails will generally be returned within 48 hours on weekdays. I can also meet with you via my Zoom personal meeting room. After the University incorporates Slack, that may be an acceptable way to get in touch with me as well.

I also ask that the class as a whole have a communication group, platform of your choice, so you can easily get in touch with each other.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Students will use Zoom with Audio and Video. To fully engage with all in-class activities, Video On and Unmuted are necessary settings. However, students may use virtual backgrounds, and earphones or headsets to improve audio quality.

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 (among many others). WriterDuet is also recommended for co-writing.

Your midterm project will be filmed and edited — you will need simple filming and editing devices (smartphone).

It is highly likely you will want to print sketches at times — please be prepared with printing capability.

USC Technology Rental Program

If you need resources to successfully participate in your classes, such as a laptop or internet hotspot, you may be eligible for the university's equipment rental program. To apply, please submit an application at studentbasicneeds.usc.edu.

USC Technology Support Links

Zoom information for students: keep-teaching.usc.edu/tools/zoom/
Blackboard help for students: studentblackboardhelp.usc.edu
Software available to USC Campus: software.usc.edu

"When you laugh, it like massages all of your organs, and it's just like lighting you up and I think it's so dope. Even if I don't want you to laugh and you laugh, I'm like, 'Well, at least they laughing, I'm healing them!'" — Tiffany Haddish

Required Readings

Students may be given pdfs and/or links throughout the semester which they are expected to read and retain for discussion. All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Required Viewing

- Please watch Saturday Night Live weekly throughout the semester.
- You will 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*, *Astronomy Club*, *The Iliza Shlesinger Sketch Show*, *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.

Supplemental Readings

- *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

Supplemental Viewing/Watching/Listening

- Attend a live online sketch comedy show, or recorded sketch comedy show.
- Watch internet-based sketches — sites include College Humor and Funny or Die, among others. Instagram and TikTok are also great sources of modern comedic character work.
- Comedy-centered podcasts such as *WTF with Marc Maron*, *2 Dope Queens*, *Comedy Bang Bang*, etc.

"My goal is really to just make people laugh with integrity, like, with something that I still find funny." — Ali Wong

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Below is a general overview of the assignments. A detailed assignment description will be posted on Blackboard with ample time for each assignment.

Ensemble in-class activities — Class attendance and participation is crucial for your success in this class. There will be live writing, improvising and performing during synchronous class periods, and viewing, analyzing and studying during asynchronous class periods. You will also serve as the actors and writers FOR your teammates, so your presence is vital. Essentially, we are building a comedy troupe and every member is key.

Character Monologues — You will write, rehearse, and perform a one minute monologue of a family member you know **VERY WELL**. Think of their catchphrases, physical and vocal qualities, how they carry themselves — how they walk, sit, stand, move. Your monologue should be very specific. Challenge yourself to be heightened but truthful. You will also write, rehearse, and perform two 30-second bit monologues of strangers and/or famous people. Think of their catchphrases, physical and vocal qualities, how they carry themselves — how they walk, sit, stand, move. Challenge yourself to be heightened but truthful.

Sketch Analysis — You will post on Blackboard two links to filmed sketches that speak to you in some way. You will tell us why (helping to identify comedic voice), as well as the sketch type, and format breakdown. You will also respond to classmates' sketch analyses. (Asynchronous classwork)

Comedy Notebook — You will keep a Comedy Notebook (format of your choice) 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.

Midterm Franchise Character Film — Your midterm will be a filmed character sketch/monologue. You will develop it with a co-creator.

Pitch Presence — Pitch implies the submission/presentation of fully written sketches as we work toward our workshop show, for notes and rewrites. 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 is necessary for your success in this class.

Final Workshop Show — Wholehearted participation in the **final workshop show**, and corresponding rehearsals, is mandatory. The final workshop show is scheduled for the evening of Wednesday, November 11, but because we are not beholden to a theatre, we may decide exact date/time as a class. There may be rehearsal outside of class time.

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

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade
Ensemble in-class activities (presence, focus, attitude, willingness)	15
Character Monologues (Family Member/Stranger/Famous)— written and performed	10
Sketch Analysis (self-post and responses)	5
Comedy Notebook Completion (inc. ideas)	5
Midterm (franchise character sketch co-write and film)	20
Pitch Presence	20
Final Workshop Show (Professionalism, attitude, competence, readiness, involvement)	25
TOTAL	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	

Assignment Submission Policy

Written sketches or performance assignments do not need to be posted on Blackboard unless otherwise specified, but you must be ready to share the writing in class (if applicable).

Sketch analysis work will be done on Blackboard posts and/or threads, and should not be late. Points will be removed for lateness.

Grades will generally be posted to Blackboard within a week.

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.

Attendance

Being absent, late, or leaving early disturbs the important ensemble nature of this class. You will miss in-class activity points for any missed class, and miss out on writing pairings, and castings.

Classroom Norms

- Please keep attention on the class, not on phones, other internet, other beings in your house, etc. This is to encourage your focus, mindfulness, and respect to the ensemble.
- Please wear clothing in which you can move freely and comfortably. Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. Hats are generally discouraged.
- Please reserve break-time activities for before and after class. Depending on the day's flow, we may or may not take an official break in the hour and fifty minutes of class — you should be prepared to stay active in the class, both as performer and audience.
- Please don't eat or chew gum during class.
- Please stay upright unless the scene/activity calls for otherwise.
- Be honest with yourself about how and where you will do your best learning, and commit to it.

Zoom Etiquette

- You must have Video on, unless the scene/activity calls for otherwise.
- Try to choose a setting that is not backlit — we need to see you.
- Please keep the Zoom chat quiet during scenes/activities.
- You will generally be asked to stay UNmuted during class, unless you have ambient noise you can't control.
- Having a quiet, private place in which to have class is the most important Zoom setting there is! Preferably with a little space to move around. Comedy can get wild, so set yourself up for success by not having distractions or an audience.

Synchronous session recording notice

All synchronous class sessions will be recorded and provided to all students asynchronously.

Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B): Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

What happens in class, stays in class!

Course Evaluation

Learning Experience Evaluations will be completed before or during the last class session, via the link USC provides.

“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 are asked to remain flexible, and 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 17	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.
	Wed Aug 19	Family monologues performed and explored.	Write and perform a 1 minute monologue of a family member you know VERY WELL.	DUE MONDAY: Observe two strangers or two famous people (or mix & match). Write a 30 second monologue playing each — what is happening to them that day? Be specific. The funny is in the details. Comedy Notebook Assignment.
2	Mon Aug 24	Stranger monologues performed and explored.	Write and perform two 30 second monologues (bits) playing a stranger or famous person.	Comedy Notebook Assignment.
	Wed Aug 26	In-class writing/improvising.		View and Engage Asynchronous Learning – Sketch Types Part 1. Comedy Notebook Assignment.
3	Mon Aug 31	ASYNCHRONOUS (no Live Class — see Blackboard) – Sketch Types Part 1.		Respond to Sketch Types on Blackboard by Wednesday. Comedy Notebook Assignment — sketch type ideas.
	Wed Sep 2	In-class writing/improvising.	Sketch type responses on Blackboard.	View and Engage Asynchronous Learning – Sketch Types Part 2. Comedy Notebook Assignment.
4	Mon Sep 7	LABOR DAY — NO CLASS		
	Wed Sep 9	ASYNCHRONOUS (no Live Class — see Blackboard) – Sketch Types Part 2.		Respond to Sketch Types on Blackboard by Monday. Comedy Notebook Assignment — sketch type ideas.

Week	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
5	Mon Sep 14	In-class writing/improvising. Sketch Structure.	Sketch type responses on Blackboard.	View and Engage Asynchronous Learning – Personal Sketch Analysis.
	Wed Sep 16	ASYNCHRONOUS (no Live Class — see Blackboard) – Personal Sketch Analysis.	Post Personal Sketch Analysis (share 2 sketches that speak to you, why they do, type, structure).	Comedy Notebook Assignment.
6	Mon Sep 21	Sketch idea speed dating. Paired writing practice.	View and Engage Asynchronous Learning – Personal Sketch Analysis RESPONSES. 30+ sketch ideas, as expressed in Comedy Notebook.	Write a practice sketch! Paired. Franchise character ideas.
	Wed Sep 23	See sketch first drafts. Franchise characters writers' room. Begin supported co-writes for franchise characters.	Present first draft of practice sketches. Franchise character idea and presentation — favorite and a back-up.	First drafts of franchise character sketch/monologue co-writes (your own character AND head writer).
7	Mon Sep 28	Midterm filmed character sketch PITCH.	Full written first drafts of franchise character sketch/monologue co-write (your own character AND head writer).	Film footage of franchise character sketch/monologue. Post to Blackboard for feedback.
	Wed Sep 30	ASYNCHRONOUS (no Live Class — see Blackboard) – post filmed footage of character, give feedback to each other.	Post filmed footage of character, give feedback to each other, on Blackboard.	Final edit of filmed Midterm character sketch/monologue.
8	Mon Oct 5	MIDTERM: Presentation of franchise character sketches/monologues, film festival-style! Notes.		Sketch writing for pitch!
	Wed Oct 7	Midterm reflection. Review pitch formatting. Begin pitch.		Sketch writing for pitch!
9	Mon Oct 12 & Wed Oct 14	Pitch.		Sketch writing for pitch!
10	Mon Oct 19 & Wed Oct 21	Pitch.		Sketch writing for pitch!
11	Mon Oct 26 & Wed Oct 28	Pitch. (Last chance!)		Sketch writing for pitch!
12	Mon Nov 2	Rehearse for show. Assign auxiliary roles. Narrow down for show.		Show prep.
	Wed Nov 4	Rehearse for show.		Show prep.
13	Mon Nov 9	REHEARSE. All tech final collection.		Show prep.

Week	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
	Wed Nov 11	12pm TECH/DRESS REHEARSAL 7pm SHOW! (subject to change)	Fully ready for show! Off-book, costumes, sets, props, audience, etc.	
FINAL	FRIDAY NOV 20 — 11am-1pm	POST-MORTEM		Happy Almost-End-of-2020?

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

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, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

213-740-0776 dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention

213-821-4710 campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC

213-740-2101 diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency

UPC: 213-740-4321 – 24/7 on call dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime.

USC Department of Public Safety

UPC: 213-740-6000 – 24/7 on call dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health

213-740-9355 – 24/7 on call studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255 – 24/7 on call suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP)

213-740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)

213-740-5086 equity.usc.edu

Title IX – 213-821-8298 titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment

213-740-5086 or 213-821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.